



Strategies for developing emotional intelligence in Generation Z students in higher education in Ho Chi Minh City

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in the personal and professional development of individuals, and it has become increasingly important in the current educational landscape. Generation Z students, born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, have unique characteristics and experiences that necessitate tailored strategies for developing their emotional intelligence in higher education settings. This abstract explores effective strategies for fostering emotional intelligence among Generation Z students in higher education. Firstly, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment is vital for promoting emotional intelligence. Higher education institutions should prioritize cultivating a sense of belonging and psychological safety, providing students with opportunities to express their emotions, thoughts, and concerns freely. Incorporating cooperative learning activities, peer mentoring programs, and inclusive classroom discussions can enhance empathy, active listening, and conflict resolution skills. Secondly, integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum can be an effective strategy. By explicitly teaching emotional literacy, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills, educators can equip Generation Z students with the necessary tools to navigate their emotions effectively. Incorporating SEL into various disciplines, such as through case studies, role-playing exercises, and reflective writing assignments, can reinforce emotional intelligence development across diverse academic subjects. Thirdly, leveraging technology as a tool for emotional intelligence development is crucial for Generation Z students. Educational platforms and applications can offer interactive resources, virtual simulations, and gamified experiences that engage students and encourage self-reflection. Additionally, digital tools can provide students with real-time feedback, self-assessment opportunities, and personalized learning experiences, enhancing their emotional intelligence competencies. Furthermore, fostering interpersonal connections and promoting face-to-face interactions are essential strategies in developing emotional intelligence. Generation Z students, often referred to as digital natives, may benefit from initiatives that encourage offline socialization, such as group projects, community engagement, and extracurricular activities. By fostering meaningful relationships, students can develop empathy, communication skills, and conflict resolution abilities. Lastly, educators and higher education institutions should prioritize their own emotional intelligence development. Modeling emotionally intelligent behaviors, practicing self-care, and demonstrating empathy towards students can create an environment conducive to emotional intelligence growth. Faculty training programs and professional development workshops can equip educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to support the emotional well-being and development of Generation Z students effectively.

Keywords: education, emotional intelligence, well-being, student

1. Introduction

Understanding the object of our actions through careful examination is even more crucial than anything else. Just as you would want to develop your emotional regulation skills, you must first understand yourself. Who are you? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Are you more inclined towards reason or emotion? These are questions that require answers. By recognizing ourselves, we gain insight into our needs and learn how to conduct ourselves. For instance, if you have a quick temper, acknowledging this fact enables you to find ways to control yourself before reaching the breaking point. Maintaining psychological balance: Emotional management skills help maintain stable moods in daily life. By positively handling our emotions, we avoid being overwhelmed by negativity, allowing our souls to remain comfortable, relaxed, and capable of making sound decisions. Improving mental health: Emotional management skills reduce the risk of falling into negative emotional states such as anxiety, stress, or depression. [1] This is beneficial for overall mental well-being and helps maintain a healthy mindset. Building positive social relationships: Emotional management skills help us understand and appropriately respond to the emotions of others. This creates a positive and supportive communication environment, fostering good and trustworthy relationships with those around us. Enhancing work performance: In a professional setting, emotional management skills reduce stress, increase focus, and improve problem-solving abilities. By being able to regulate our emotions, we can work more efficiently, achieve goals, and maintain a positive mindset in our work.

2. Literature review

Individual emotions serve as a fundamental motivation for human actions regardless of their pursuits. Emotions can also inspire individuals with creative ideas and choices. Emotional life is a domain where individuals can demonstrate their capabilities. According to Carroll E. Izard, a leading psychologist in emotion research, emotions form the main motivational system for humans. Emotions hold extraordinary significance in personal activities and should not be considered as opposites of intelligence. Rather, emotions themselves represent a higher level of intelligence. [2] In the late 20th century, emotional research gained increasing attention worldwide, particularly in educational institutions. The development of students' character and personality is closely related to emotions and self-emotional management. In our country, the focus has mainly been on studying emotional intelligence, yielding noteworthy results. These results shed light on theoretical issues, as well as adapting assessment methods and investigating the current level of emotional intelligence development among students. [6] The formation and development of emotional control skills and expressive skills for adolescents, aimed at fostering harmonious and advantageous personality development, have received limited research attention. Lewis's research focuses on changes during the early stages of emotional development, specifically in two main groups of emotions: basic emotions and self-conscious emotions. Basic emotions emerge within the first six months of life, while self-conscious emotions appear around 1.5 to 2 years old (Lewis, 2002). Studies on infants' emotional communication and emotions exhibit various degrees of intensity. For example, research on "crying" by Klein and Marshall (1992), studies on "laughter" by Emde, Gaensbauer, and Harmon (1976) as well as Lewis, Hitchcock, and Sullivan (2004), and investigations into "fear" by Emde, Gaensbauer, and Harmon (1976) have revealed intriguing findings about the emotions of newborns. For instance, behaviorist John Watson (1928) suggested that parents' excessive responsiveness to their crying infants could inadvertently reinforce and increase the frequency of crying in infants, treating it as a form of reward.

3. Research Methodology

In this study, two primary methods were employed: theoretical research method and observational method. Theoretical research method involves examining and analyzing existing theories, concepts, and published research related to child development and emotions. Theoretical research helps establish a knowledge foundation and theoretical framework for the study, providing concepts and ideas to understand and explain phenomena in the research field. Observational method, on the other hand, entails observing and recording the behavior and expressions of children in real-life situations. In the study of children's emotions, direct observation of emotional expressions such as crying, laughter, or fear can provide valuable information about children's development and expression of emotions. Observational methods can be implemented through audio or video recording systems, or through direct visual monitoring. By combining theoretical research method and observational method, this study can build a robust theoretical framework based on previous research and simultaneously gather direct data from observing children to validate and supplement existing knowledge.

4. Research result and discussion

During college years, it is extremely important for every young individual to manage their emotions effectively. Not doing so can negatively impact our relationships with others, and at times, it can leave us feeling trapped in a whirlwind of overwhelming emotions. Below are some results on how current generation Z's emotional management is affected.

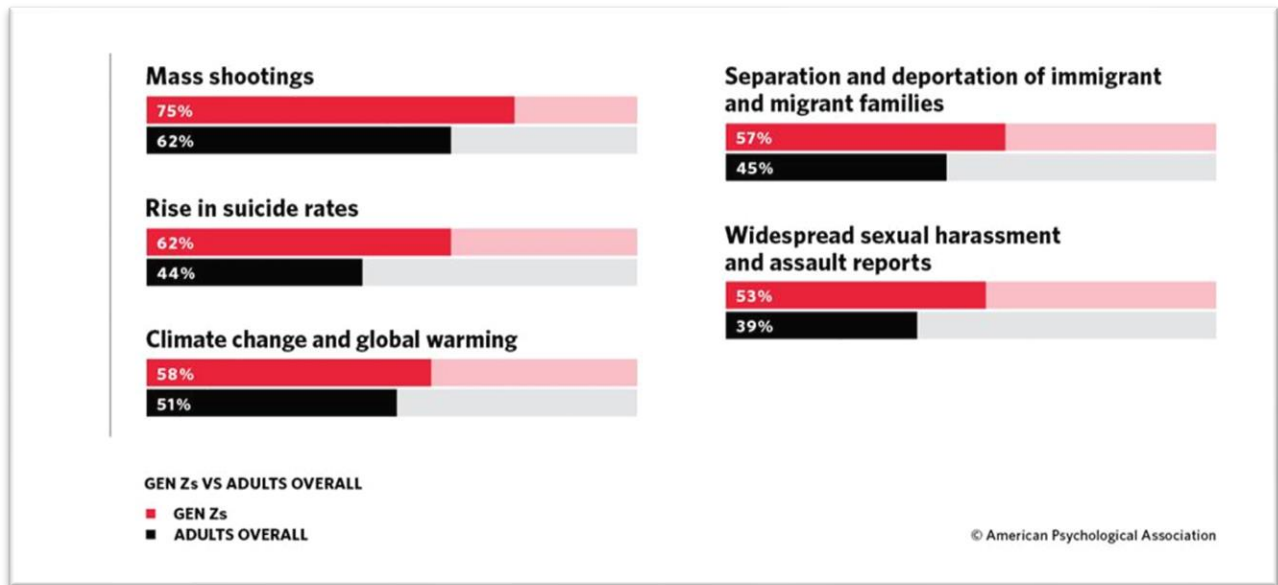


Figure 1. Feeling stressed by issues in the national news
Source: American Psychological Association (2018)

Gen Z is exposed to news quickly and easily through social media platforms and mobile applications. This creates the ability to receive information constantly and incessantly, while also leading to information overload. The rapid dissemination of news in the digital world can make it difficult to determine the reliability of the information. News is sometimes distorted, unverified, or biased. This can cause confusion, anxiety, and difficulty in accurately assessing and understanding the situation. News often focuses on negative events, conflicts, and terrorism. Constant exposure to worrisome and stressful news can lead to psychological distress, fear, and anxiety. Gen Z is concerned about social issues such as climate change, social violence, inequality, and discrimination. These issues often appear in the news and can cause worry and unstable mental states.

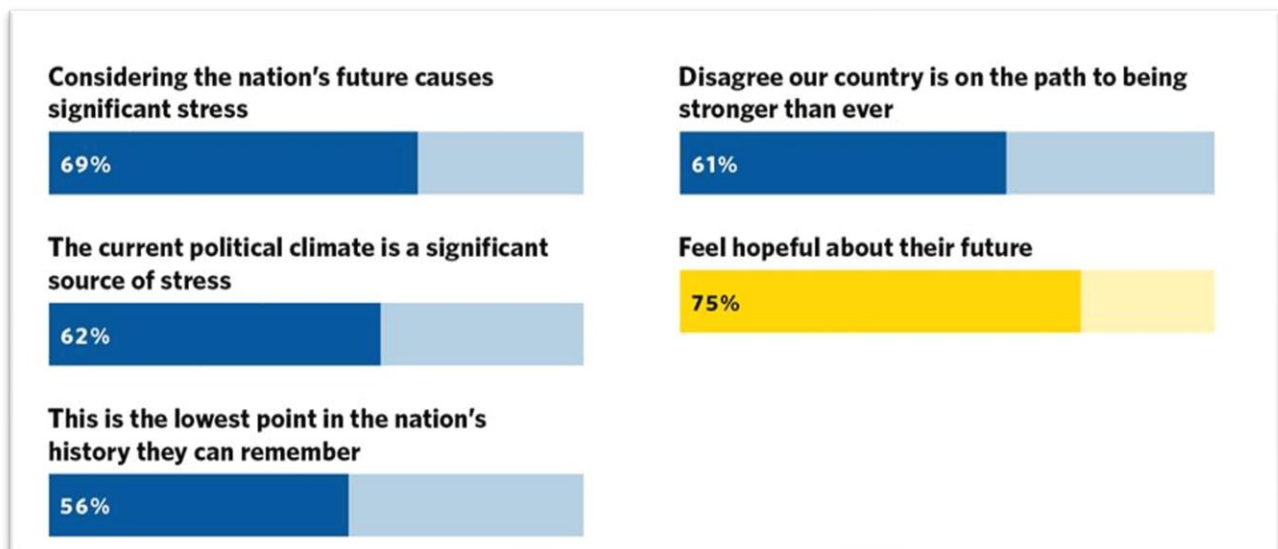
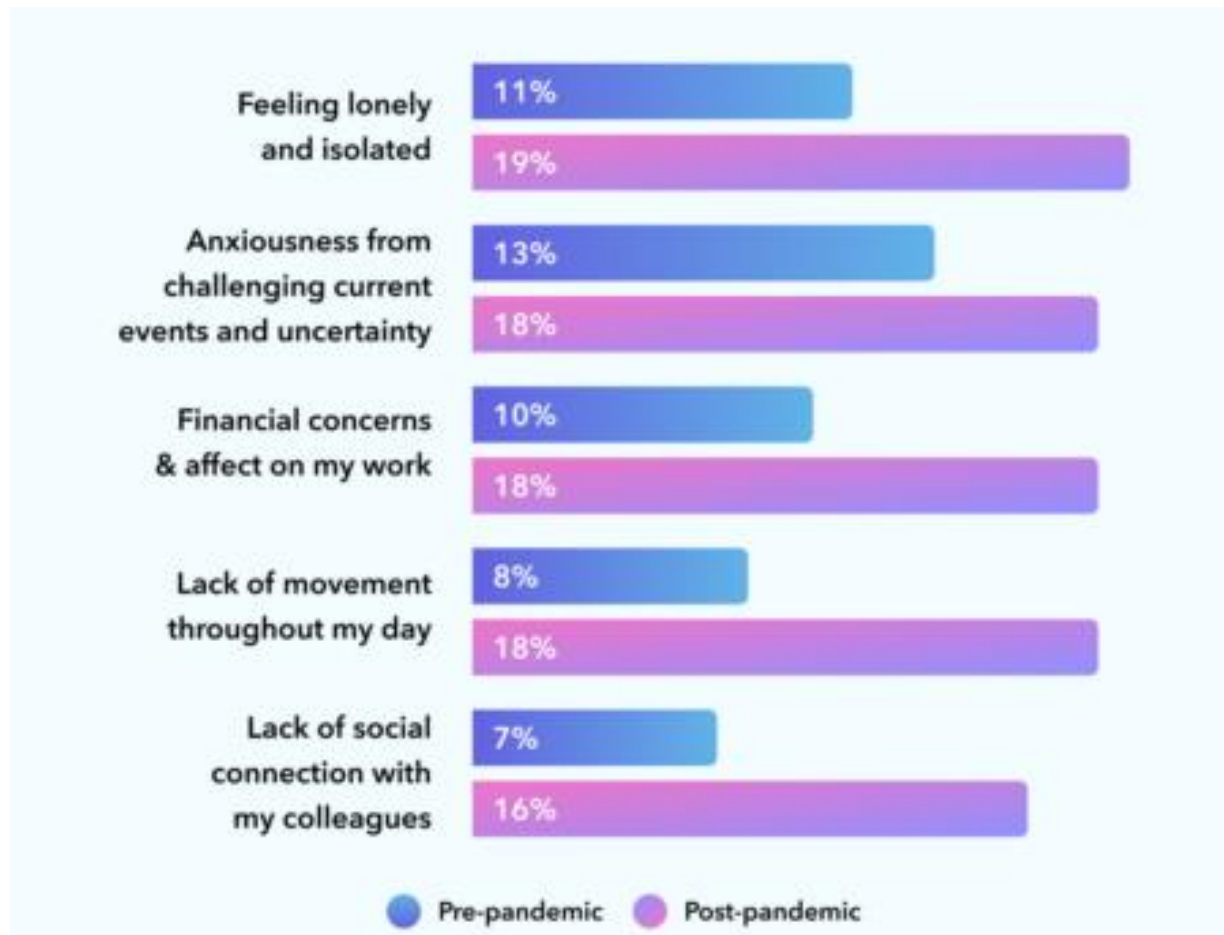


Figure 2. Americans stressed about the present but hopeful for the future
Source: American Psychological Association (2018)

Gen Z Americans are currently experiencing a significant amount of stress in relation to the present situation. There are several factors contributing to this stress, including economic uncertainty, political divisions, social issues, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have had a profound impact on the mental well-being of Gen Z individuals, leading to feelings of anxiety and concern about their current circumstances. However, despite these stressors, there is also a strong sense of hope for the future among Gen Z Americans. [3] This generation is known for its resilience and determination to create positive change. They are actively engaged in advocating for various social issues such as climate change, racial justice, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights. Gen Z individuals are using their voices, leveraging social media platforms, participating in

protests, and engaging in activism to drive change and shape a better future. Moreover, Gen Z Americans are hopeful about the potential for technological advancements and innovation to address societal challenges. They recognize the power of technology in bringing about positive transformations in various areas, including healthcare, education, and environmental sustainability. While the present circumstances may be stressful, Gen Z Americans maintain a sense of optimism and hope for the future. They believe in their ability to make a difference and are actively working towards creating a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society.

Figure 3. Growing challenges post-pandemic



Source: US General population survey conducted by calm (2022)

Gen Z is entering the workforce during a period of economic instability. The pandemic has resulted in job losses, reduced opportunities, and financial difficulties. Gen Z individuals may face challenges in finding stable employment and establishing their careers. The pandemic has taken a toll on the mental well-being of many Gen Z individuals. The isolation, disruption of routines, and increased stress have contributed to higher rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Access to mental health support and resources is crucial for addressing these challenges. Gen Z students have experienced significant disruptions to their education due to school closures, remote learning challenges, and the transition to online education. Catching up on missed learning opportunities and adapting to new educational models can pose challenges for this generation. Gen Z, known for their strong social connections and reliance on technology, faced significant disruptions to their social lives during the pandemic. Rebuilding and maintaining social connections, developing interpersonal skills, and adapting to changing social dynamics may be ongoing challenges.

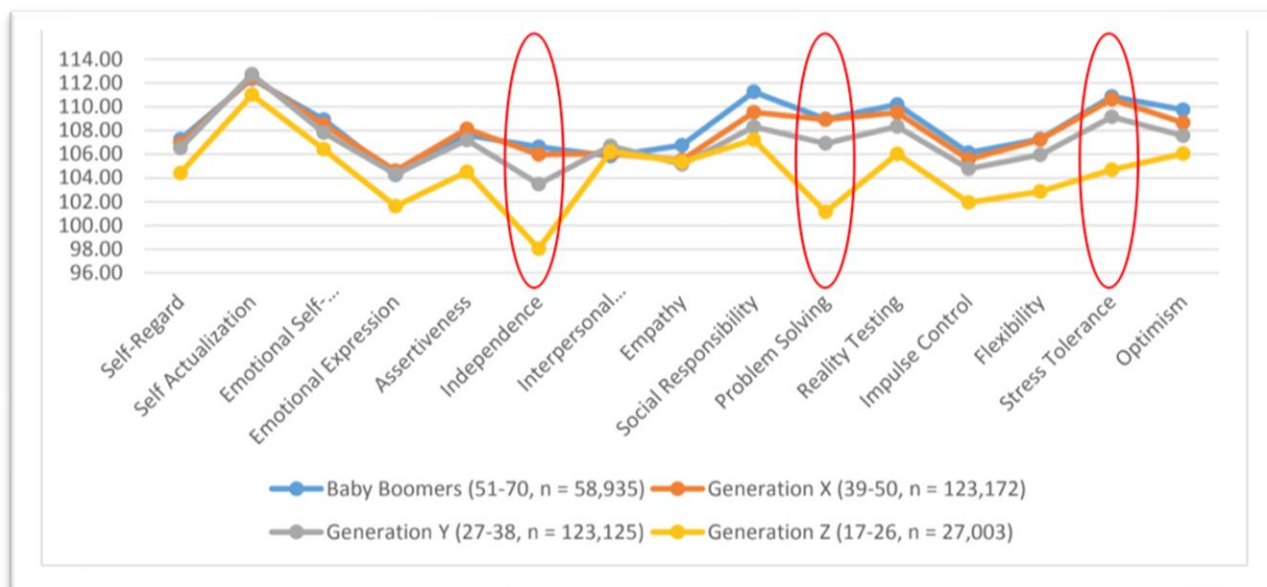


Figure 4. EQ Competencies by generation
Source: Multi – Health Systems (2022)

Emotional intelligence (EQ) competencies can vary across different generations due to various factors such as cultural upbringing, societal influences, and technological advancements. While it's important to note that individuals within each generation can display a wide range of EQ competencies. Generation Z, born in the digital age, has developed strong digital and technological skills, enabling them to excel in digital communication and emotional expression online. They have faced distinctive challenges like economic instability and global crises, which have likely cultivated resilience and adaptability in handling their emotions. Moreover, Generation Z typically possesses a global mindset and a strong commitment to social justice, placing emphasis on inclusivity and equality. These values contribute to their heightened empathy and social awareness. It's important to note that these observations are not absolute, as individuals within Generation Z may exhibit a range of emotional intelligence competencies.

5. Recommendation

Learning how to use appropriate language to motivate, encourage, or provide feedback to others is an essential skill in developing emotional management. When faced with disagreements or anger, it's easy learning how to use appropriate language to motivate, encourage, or provide constructive feedback to others is one of the necessary ways to cultivate emotional management skills. During moments of disagreement or anger, it is common for harsh words to slip out as a means of protecting one's own opinions and self-esteem. However, straightforward criticism, derogatory remarks, or dismissing the other person's opinions are not effective solutions. Choosing polite and constructive language can leave a better impression and maintain harmonious relationships. Lack of self-confidence is also one of the factors that lead to negative thinking. When you are dissatisfied with what you have, you may easily feel unjustifiably frustrated and struggle to control your emotions. [4] Having self-awareness and confidence can reduce the influence of external opinions and make you more optimistic and energetically positive. According to the study by Heiy and Cheavens, engaging in self-soothing activities can help reduce feelings of sadness and anger resulting from negative experiences. Indeed, emotions should not be suppressed, and it's important to find healthy ways to release them. Engaging in gentle activities can help alleviate the burden on your thoughts and emotions. You can dedicate more time to yourself by engaging in activities such as painting, exercising, or simply indulging in delicious food and nice clothing. Practicing yoga or meditation can also help calm your mind. [7] Alternatively, you can choose to spend time with friends and family. Sharing your emotions with people who understand and are willing to listen can help alleviate pent-up feelings. Gen Z often faces significant academic pressure and career decisions in a competitive world. High academic performance expectations, uncertainty about the future, early "shaping" and high expectations from Gen X parents can lead to stress, depression, and anxiety about the future. Gen Z is facing pressure from a more demanding social environment than ever before. Exposure to social media and the media increases comparisons, leading to feelings of inadequacy and pressure to meet societal standards. [5] This unhealthy comparison can result in stress, anxiety, and low self-esteem among Gen Z. Gen Z lives in a rapidly changing society and faces serious environmental issues. Concerns about climate change, global discipline, violence, and social inequality can cause worry, distress, and feelings of sadness in the younger generation. Understanding the factors that impact the mental health of Gen Z is crucial. We need to provide support and utilize education, psychology, and other support measures to help Gen Z overcome these challenges and develop a healthy mindset. By creating a supportive

environment and accompanying Gen Z on their journey, we can help address mental health issues and lay the foundation for a better future for the younger generation. For parents with children in this age group, it's important to understand and listen more, empathize, and avoid placing excessive pressure. Be a supportive companion for your child through the ups and downs of their developmental journey. Adult figures, including parents, guardians, and relatives, can play a crucial role in building positive role models. By demonstrating support, active listening, and companionship, they can inspire and help Gen Z develop emotional management skills and build self-confidence. [8] Teachers and schools can also play a significant role in constructing positive role models. By creating a supportive learning environment that encourages participation and respects diversity, teachers and schools can inspire Gen Z and aid them in developing emotional and social skills. Community leaders, such as social activists, philanthropists, and influential individuals within the community, can become positive role models for Gen Z. By demonstrating volunteerism, respecting diversity, and building a community focused on fairness and sustainability, they can encourage Gen Z to engage in social activities and develop social consciousness.

6. Conclusion

Developing emotional intelligence among Generation Z students in higher education requires a multifaceted approach. By creating a supportive environment, integrating social-emotional learning into the curriculum, leveraging technology, fostering interpersonal connections, and prioritizing educator's own emotional intelligence development, higher education institutions can empower Generation Z students with the necessary emotional intelligence skills to thrive personally and professionally.

Conflict of interests

None

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