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Cross-generational comparative analysis of educators communication patterns: A case study at SMPN 2 Selat, Karangasem, Bali

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the comparative communication patterns of Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z teachers in the context of Natural Science (IPA) instruction at SMPN 2 Selat, Karangasem, Bali. The presence of multiple generations in school environments creates distinct communication dynamics that influence the effectiveness of classroom interactions and students' learning experiences. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documents. The analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal significant generational differences in verbal and nonverbal communication, technology use, and teacher-student interaction styles. Generation X teachers exhibit formal, structured, and authoritative communication with a limited integration of digital media. Generation Y teachers employ a more balanced, interactive, and expressive communication approach, supported by the moderate use of technology. Meanwhile, Generation Z teachers demonstrate highly dynamic, informal, and technology-intensive communication styles that foster horizontal and student-centered interaction. These differences reflect the influence of generational characteristics on instructional communication and indicate that cross-generational diversity enriches pedagogical practices rather than hindering them. This study contributes to educational communication research by offering empirical insights into how generational identity shapes communication behavior in classroom settings, particularly in nonurban schools. The findings also have practical implications for designing teacher professional development programs that accommodate generational differences in communicative competencies.

Keywords: comparative analysis; cross-generational; communication patterns; SMPN 2 Selat; educators

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

The development of the educational sphere today is characterized by the presence of multiple generations within school environments. In a single institution, it is common to find educators from various age ranges and generational backgrounds ranging from Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), to Generation Z, while students are predominantly from Generation Z, with the emergence of Generation Alpha beginning to appear. Each generation possesses distinct communication characteristics (Giles, 2025), including differences in speaking styles, technology use, and approaches to building relationships with students. These differences may create a communication gap that affects the learning process.

Communication is the core of the teaching–learning process (Zam, 2021), particularly in Natural Science (IPA) education, which requires two-way interaction between teachers and students to construct conceptual understanding. In the context of modern education, the effectiveness of learning is not determined solely by mastery of subject matter, but also by the teacher's ability to communicate clearly, engagingly, and in ways that align with the characteristics of learners (Mea, 2024). Effective communication patterns facilitate students' comprehension of abstract scientific concepts, foster curiosity, and encourage the development of critical-thinking skills. Thus, teachers' communication styles are a strategic component in determining learning success.

The presence of educators from multiple generations in secondary schools demonstrates noticeable differences in communication patterns during the classroom instruction. Generation X teachers generally emphasize discipline and structure; Generation Y teachers tend to be communicative and open to collaboration; and Generation Z teachers are more expressive and highly dependent on digital technologies in their interactions. These differences create variations in communication patterns that influence teacher–student relationships and the effectiveness of instructional delivery in the classroom.

Differences in cross-generational communication patterns can be analyzed from several theoretical perspectives. Communication Style Theory (Norton, 1983) explains how individuals express themselves through unique verbal and non-verbal behaviors. Interpersonal Communication Theory (Devito, 2013) emphasizes the importance of two-way interaction in building meaning and interpersonal relationships between teachers and their students. Generational Communication Theory (Strauss & Howe, 1991) provides insight into how social, cultural, and historical conditions shape the thinking patterns and communication styles of each generation. Collectively, these theories form a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the dynamics of cross-generational communication in educational settings, particularly in secondary schools.

Previous research by Lestari and Yulianita (2025), entitled *GAP Generation: Differences in Perspectives and Communication Styles*, shows that each generation demonstrates significant differences in communication behavior. Generation X tends to value face-to-face and formal communication, whereas Generations Y and Z prefer digital communication that is informal and flexible (Lestari & Yulianita, 2025). Unlike that study, the present research focuses on comparing communication patterns among teachers from Generations X, Y, and Z when interacting with students, most of whom belong to Generation Z, with a small number representing Generation Alpha.

Another study conducted by Wijaya and Naryoso (2017) explored interpersonal communication across generations in dealing with children's academic stress (Wijaya & Naryoso, 2017). Their findings suggest that one way to improve academic achievement is through face-to-face interpersonal communication and the development of emotional intimacy between educators and students. Such communication patterns are crucial for understanding students' emotions and fostering openness between teachers and learners.

Although the issue of cross-generational communication has become increasingly relevant in the digital era, comparative studies specifically examining teachers' communication patterns across generations at the secondary school level remain limited, especially in non-urban schools. Existing studies generally focus more on the role of educational technology or students' learning motivation, rather than on teachers' cross-generational communication behaviors. Moreover, earlier research has not examined the comparison

of communication patterns in depth using analytical lenses from the aforementioned communication theories.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze and compare the communication patterns of Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z teachers during the learning process at SMPN 2 Selat, Karangasem, Bali. This study is expected to offer empirical contributions to educational communication scholarship and enrich the literature on cross-generational communication dynamics in school environments.

As a boundary of the study, this research focuses solely on Natural Science (IPA) teachers representing the three generations X, Y, and Z. Teachers from other subject areas were not included, thereby ensuring that the findings specifically reflect differences in cross-generational communication patterns within the context of Natural Science instruction at the junior secondary school level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The successful delivery of learning materials greatly depends on the effectiveness of communication between teachers and students, making communication the core of the educational process. Educational communication does not merely involve one-way transmission of information but also includes two-way interaction that allows for a shared understanding between educators and learners (Mulyana, 2017). Teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge; they also act as communicators who manage messages, symbols, and behaviors to create meaningful learning environments and encourage students' active engagement in the learning process.

2.1. Communication Style Theory

The communication style theory developed by Norton (1983) posits that each individual has certain tendencies to convey messages and interact with others (Norton, 1983). Communication style reflects a combination of verbal, nonverbal, and emotional behaviors used by individuals during interactions (Mardati et al., 2025). Norton identified several dimensions of communication style, including dominant, dramatic, friendly, relaxed, attentive, precise, animated, and open (Solaja et al., 2016). Each style describes how individuals adjust to specific communication situations.

In the context of teaching, this theory helps explain how teachers adjust their communication styles based on their personal characteristics and the needs of their students (Kristiyanti & Muhyadi, 2015). For example, teachers with a friendly style tend to build rapport more easily, whereas those with a precise style are more focused on clarity and message structure. Thus, this theory serves as a conceptual basis for identifying and comparing the communication patterns used by teachers from Generations X, Y, and Z throughout the instructional process, especially in Natural Science (IPA) classes, which demand clarity, accuracy, and active student involvement.

2.2. Interpersonal Communication Theory

According to Devito (2013), interpersonal communication is the process of sending and receiving messages between two or more individuals who mutually influence one another (Devito, 2013). This process encompasses verbal elements (words, sentences, language) and nonverbal aspects (facial expressions, intonation, gestures, eye contact) that together construct meaning during interactions (Puspita, 2022). Interpersonal communication is dynamic and contextual, as its meaning is shaped by the relationships among interactants.

In educational settings, interpersonal communication theory is used to analyze how teachers from different generations interact with students during the teaching–learning process. The theory explains how generational differences may affect warmth, closeness, and communication effectiveness based on student responses, engagement, and motivation (Wijaya & Naryoso, 2017). Effective interpersonal communication influences student participation, creates a positive classroom climate, and strengthens emotional bonds that support academic success (Devito, 2013; Wijaya & Naryoso, 2017).

2.3. Generational Communication Theory

Strauss and Howe (1991) introduced the concept of social generations shaped by historical, cultural, and technological experiences during formative years (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Each generation develops distinct values, mindsets, and communication styles. Their general characteristics are as follows (Putra, 2016): (a) Generation X (born 1965–1980): responsible, hardworking, and inclined toward formal, direct communication; (b) Generation Y or Millennials (born 1981–1996): adaptive to change, collaborative, open to technological innovation, and more flexible in their communication patterns; (c) Generation Z (born 1997–2012): digital natives, visual learners, and accustomed to short, fast, technology-based communication.

Generational communication theory helps explain why individuals from different generations exhibit distinct communication patterns (Hatzir & Segev, 2023; Mehra & Nickerson, 2019). For instance, teachers from Generation X may prefer lectures and structured communication, whereas Generation Z teachers are more likely to integrate interactive technologies such as learning applications and digital media into their classroom practices. These differences reflect variations in not only communication techniques but also generational values, work culture, and expectations regarding modern, collaborative, and technology-driven learning environments.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach combined with a comparative research design. The qualitative method was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of meanings, contexts, and the dynamics of cross-generational communication patterns as they naturally occur in classroom interactions (Sugiyono & Lestari, 2021). Meanwhile, the comparative design allows the researcher to systematically examine differences in communication characteristics displayed by teachers from Generations X, Y, and Z within real instructional settings (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Selat, located in Selat District, Karangasem Regency, Bali Province. The site was selected through purposive sampling because the school employs educators from multiple age groups representing three generational categories: Generation X, Generation Y (Millennials), and Generation Z who are actively involved in the learning process. The study focuses specifically on Natural Science (IPA) teachers, as this subject requires intensive communicative interaction to explain abstract scientific concepts.

The research took place from August to November 2025, covering preparation, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. The research subjects consisted of Natural Science teachers representing Generations X, Y, and Z, while the object of the study is the communication patterns manifested during the learning process, including verbal, nonverbal, and digital communication behaviors.

3.1. Research Subjects

The subjects of this study consist of three Natural Science teachers representing three different generational categories: (1) Generation X Teachers born between 1965 and 1980; (2) Generation Y (Millennials) – Teachers born between 1981 and 1996; (3) Generation Z Teachers born between 1997 and 2012.

These teachers were selected because they actively teach Natural Science and represent generational diversity within the school environment. Students taught by these teachers most of whom are from Generation Z and the emerging Generation Alpha also contributed insight related to teacher–student communication patterns.

3.2. Research Instruments

Three primary instruments were used to collect data: (a) Observation Sheets. Used to observe teachers' communication styles, instructional behaviors, and interactions with students during classroom learning activities (b) Interview Guidelines. Structured to explore teachers' perceptions, strategies, and personal experiences related to communication during instructional delivery; (c) Documentation. Includes

lesson plans, photographs of classroom activities, and institutional data that support the analysis of communication patterns.

These instruments help ensure that the data obtained are comprehensive and accurately describe the communication behaviors exhibited by each teacher during the learning process.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were gathered through: In-depth interviews, Participatory classroom observations, Documentation analysis. These three methods provided a holistic understanding of generational differences in communication patterns.

3.4. Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes the following stages (Miles et al., 2014): (1) Data Collection. Researchers gathered data through interviews, observations, and documentation of classroom learning activities; (2) Data Reduction. Filtering, selecting, and organizing relevant data to focus on key aspects of teachers' communication patterns across generations; (3) Data Presentation. Organizing data in descriptive form, including narrative descriptions, tables, and analysis categories to facilitate interpretation; (4) Conclusion Drawing/Verification. Generating conclusions based on patterns and relationships discovered during data analysis.

The analysis process was conducted continuously from the beginning of data collection until stable and meaningful patterns were identified. All data from various sources were interpreted to discover the main themes describing similarities and differences in communication styles across generations of teachers (Rahman & Astriani, 2023). Data validity was enhanced through source triangulation to ensure that findings were consistent with empirical realities in the field.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

SMP Negeri 2 Selat is one of the junior high schools located in Selat District, Karangasem Regency, Bali Province. The school has a total of 791 students and 34 educators with diverse age backgrounds and teaching experiences. Among the teaching staff, there are representatives of three generational groups: a) Generation X (born 1965–1980), consisting of senior teachers with an average teaching experience of more than 20 years; b) Generation Y or Millennials (born 1981–1996), consisting of mid-career teachers with strong adaptability to technology and collaborative learning methods; and c) Generation Z (born 1997–2012), consisting of young, digital-native teachers who frequently utilize emerging technology-based learning platforms. This generational diversity creates dynamic communication patterns within the teaching–learning process, particularly in Natural Science (IPA) instruction.

Data were obtained through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers, and documentation of learning activities. The findings are presented across three main aspects: verbal communication, nonverbal communication, and digital communication (Mardati et al., 2025).

First, Verbal Communication Patterns. Generation X teachers tend to use instructive and formal communication, characterized by relatively structured and standardized language. Generation Y adopts a participatory and dialogic approach, encouraging two-way interaction. Meanwhile, Generation Z uses a more relaxed and interactive communication style, often incorporating popular expressions or light humor to maintain students' attention (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Interaction Between a Generation X Teacher and Students

Source: Research Documentation (2025)

Second, Nonverbal Communication Patterns. Generation X teachers display more conservative gestures and facial expressions, accompanied by strong emotional control. Generation Y demonstrates open gestures, consistent eye contact, and friendly expressions. In contrast, Generation Z teachers are highly expressive, frequently using body movements, emojis when interacting through WhatsApp Groups or private messages, and visual symbols in PowerPoint (PPT) presentations to reinforce their messages.

Third, Digital Communication Patterns. Generation X uses digital media minimally, generally limited to PowerPoint and school WhatsApp Groups. Generation Y combines digital and conventional media for example, using Canva to design contemporary learning materials and Quizizz to create more engaging quizzes. Meanwhile, Generation Z fully integrates technology by using short viral videos, interactive platforms, and social media. This approach increases student engagement and enthusiasm, as the learning material is connected to trending topics popular in society. See [Table 1](#)

Table 1. Comparison of Communication Patterns Across Generations

Communication Aspect	Generation X	Generation Y (Millennials)	Generation Z
Verbal	Formal, instructive, task oriented	Dialogic, communicative, adaptive	Relaxed, interactive, uses popular expressions
Nonverbal	Limited gestures, controlled expressions	Open, friendly, strong eye contact	Expressive, dynamic, rich in visual symbols
Digital	Uses basic media (PowerPoint, WhatsApp Group)	Combines online learning technologies	Fully integrates creative digital media (short videos, interactive platforms)
Teacher–Student Relationship	Maintains distance	Collaborative	Flexible, peer-like learning relationship
Student Response	Obedient but tends to be passive	Actively engaged and participative	Responsive but easily distracted

Source: Author's Analysis (2025)

4.1. Analysis Based on Communication Style Theory

The findings of this study indicate that Generation X teachers predominantly exhibit precise and dominant communication styles, whereas Generation Y teachers tend to demonstrate friendly and attentive styles. Meanwhile, Generation Z teachers show a tendency toward animated and open communication styles. According to [Norton's \(1983\)](#) Communication Style Theory, these differences arise because individuals develop communication behavior patterns that align with their values, experiences,

and social environment. In the educational context, these styles are reflected in how teachers deliver lessons, manage classrooms, and respond to students during the learning process (Norton, 1983).

Generation X teachers demonstrate precise and dominant tendencies because they are accustomed to discipline-oriented approaches and maintaining classroom order. This is reflected in the statement of a Generation X teacher during an interview: “In my class, I pay very close attention to student discipline. If a student does not complete their assignment, I ask them to leave the classroom so they learn to take responsibility.” This statement illustrates a firm communication style focused on situational control. The dominant style is also visible when teachers actively direct class discussions and ensure that students follow instructions accurately. Such an approach aligns with Generation X’s values, which emphasize responsibility, assertiveness, and professionalism.



Figure 2. Interaction Between a Generation Y (Millennial) Teacher and Students

Source: Research Documentation (2025)

Generation Y teachers display friendly and attentive communication styles, which are prominent in their interpersonal interactions with students (Figure 2). They tend to be empathetic and strive to understand students’ varying abilities and interests. One Generation Y teacher explained: “I realize that not all students excel in science. Some may prefer or perform better in other subjects, so I try to guide them and adjust my teaching methods.” This quotation illustrates Generation Y’s effort to build positive emotional connections with students. The friendly style helps create a warm and collaborative learning atmosphere, while the attentive style demonstrates their concern for students’ needs and characteristics.

Meanwhile, Generation Z teachers exhibit animated and open communication styles. They tend to be expressive, actively use technology, and are receptive to students’ opinions. As one Generation Z teacher stated: “We must make use of technology especially now that we have AI (artificial intelligence). We should use it and provide space for students to express and create. For me, they should argue first; we can correct what’s right or wrong together later.” The animated style is reflected in their expressiveness and enthusiasm during instruction, while the open style shows their receptiveness to new ideas and active student participation. Generation Z teachers frequently use digital media, videos, and interactive platforms as communication and instructional tools. With this communication style, they create a more participatory learning environment that aligns with the characteristics of digital-native students.

4.2. Analysis Based on Interpersonal Communication Theory

Generation X teachers tend to rely on one-way information delivery, emphasizing discipline and structured learning. In contrast, Generation Y and Generation Z teachers are more inclined to build participatory and collaborative communication, viewing the learning process as a dialogic space where teachers and students construct shared understanding. This two-way interaction encourages active student

engagement, enhances learning motivation, and strengthens emotional bonds between teachers and learners.

Effective communication involves empathy, openness, and feedback between the communicator and the receiver (Devito, 2013). In the context of classroom learning, a teacher's ability to demonstrate empathy and provide constructive feedback helps students feel valued and heard, increasing their enthusiasm toward the subject. Teachers from Generations Y and Z tend to apply these principles more consistently than Generation X teachers, as they are generally more open to change, flexible in adapting their strategies, and more sensitive to students' emotional needs. Therefore, the application of dialogic and open interpersonal communication patterns by Generation Y and Z teachers contributes significantly to creating a more interactive, reflective, and student-centered learning environment.

4.3. Analysis Based on Generational Communication Theory

Differences in teachers' communication patterns at SMPN 2 Selat align with Generational Communication Theory proposed by Strauss and Howe (1991), which posits that communication characteristics are shaped by the social, cultural, and technological experiences of each generation (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Generation X teachers born in the pre-digital era and accustomed to more stable and hierarchical environments tend to adopt formal, structured communication styles that emphasize authority in learning. They view communication as a means of maintaining classroom order and discipline, consistent with the values of hard work and responsibility embedded in their generation (Putra, 2016). This pattern is evident in their tendency to provide clear instructions, control class discussions, and expect responses that adhere to classroom norms.

Conversely, Generation Y or Millennial teachers display communication tendencies that are more open, collaborative, and adaptive to change. Growing up during the transition toward the digital era, they are capable of integrating face-to-face communication with digital media as tools for interacting with students. This generation also places greater emphasis on emotional aspects and empathy in communication, creating egalitarian learning environments that encourage student participation (Hatzir & Segev, 2023).

Meanwhile, Generation Z teachers exhibit highly interactive, visual, and technology-based communication patterns. As digital natives, they consider the use of social media, learning applications, and digital platforms not as supplementary tools but as integral components of daily communication (Wijaya & Naryoso, 2017). They are more open to new ideas, encourage students to express their opinions freely, and use language that is more relaxed and contextual. This communication style reflects Generation Z's values, which prioritize speed, authenticity, and connectivity in interactions (Juliano, 2015). Thus, differences in communication patterns among teacher generations are not merely variations in individual style but manifestations of broader cultural shifts influenced by technological developments and changes in social values across eras. See Figure 3



Figure 3. Interaction Between a Generation Z Teacher and Students

Source: Research Documentation (2025)

Overall, the findings indicate a shift in communication patterns from conventional to more digital and adaptive forms. Generation X plays a role in maintaining discipline and structure in the learning process, Generation Y serves as a bridge between traditional and digital approaches, and Generation Z promotes innovative, visual, and participatory learning practices.

This shift demonstrates that the diversity of communication styles among teachers is a strength that enables schools to develop dynamic and inclusive cross-generational collaborative learning models, as each generation contributes unique advantages. Three key findings emerge from this study. First, teachers' communication patterns at SMPN 2 Selat are strongly influenced by their generational backgrounds. Second, Generation Y teachers exhibit the most effective balance between traditional and digital approaches. Third, differences in communication styles across generations do not constitute obstacles but create opportunities to build a collaborative learning ecosystem that is relevant to the needs of today's students.

5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates clear generational differences in teachers' communication patterns, shaped by socio-historical experiences and technological exposure. Generation X teachers predominantly use *precise* and *dominant* communication styles that emphasize structure, discipline, and control of the learning process. Generation Y teachers balance traditional and digital approaches through *friendly* and *attentive* communication, fostering empathetic and dialogic classroom interactions. Generation Z teachers employ *animated* and *open* communication characterized by expressiveness, technological fluency, and high student engagement.

Using Communication Style Theory, the findings reveal that these generational variations affect message clarity, classroom atmosphere, and pedagogical effectiveness. Interpersonal Communication Theory highlights that Generation Y and Z teachers are more capable of facilitating two-way communication that supports empathy, constructive feedback, and active student participation. Generational Communication Theory further confirms that communication differences are rooted in the cultural and technological environments that shaped each cohort.

Overall, the study indicates a shift from conventional, teacher-centered communication toward more digital, adaptive, and student-centered practices. Rather than posing constraints, generational diversity constitutes a strategic resource for schools. Each generation contributes distinct strengths: Generation X provides structure, Generation Y bridges traditional and modern pedagogies, and Generation Z drives technological innovation.

Theoretically, this research advances scholarly understanding of cross-generational communication in educational settings and enriches the literature on communication dynamics in secondary schools. Practically, the findings offer a foundation for designing communication strategies and pedagogical training that integrate the strengths of each generation to enhance instructional effectiveness in the digital era.

Ethical Approval

This study received ethical permission from SMPN 2 Selat, Karangasem, Bali, as the institution where the research was conducted. All procedures followed established ethical guidelines for social and educational research, including the protection of participant confidentiality and voluntary involvement.

Informed Consent Statement

All participants including teachers from Generations X, Y, and Z were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and scope of the research prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained voluntarily,

and all participants were assured that their identities would remain confidential and that the data would be used strictly for academic purposes.

Authors' Contributions

ARR contributed to conceptualization, writing the original draft, and validation. FA contributed to data collection, formal analysis, review, and editing.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest, whether financial, professional, or personal, that could have influenced the research process or its outcomes.

Data Availability Statement

The anonymized datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. The data may be shared publicly while ensuring the confidentiality of all participants.

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Fenysia Alfiana

Fenysia Alfiana is a Generation Z Natural Science (IPA) teacher at SMPN 2 Selat. Her professional experience as a digital-native educator contributes valuable empirical insights to studies on communication styles and pedagogical practices across generations. She actively integrates digital tools into science learning and supports research related to classroom communication behavior.

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