



## EXPERIENCES OF MILLENNIAL TEACHERS IN THE ACADEME: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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### Abstract

The entrance of millennial teachers changed the academe's workplace demographic metabolism, and is accompanied with varied experiences. This study aimed to have an in-depth understanding of the essence of the experiences of these millennial teachers in a phenomenological perspective. Transcendental Phenomenology was employed and facilitated with semi-structured interviews to 13 faculties from 5 different higher education institutions. Thematic Data Analysis revealed 6 emergent themes that capture their experiences, namely: Instructional Rigors and Ancillary Functions; Expectations and Ageism; Relationship and Sociality; Attributes and Advantages; Sense of Purpose and Responsibility; and, Learning and Self-development. Recommendations to help advance the public's understanding of their experiences and to aid a smoother workplace integration were also explicated.

**Keywords:** Millennials Teachers, Ancillary functions, Expectations and Ageism, Self-development, Experiences in theAcademe

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### 1. Introduction

Millennial Generation is the most talked about and largest generational cohort in history. They are flourishing the workplace (Uytico, 2020) and are predicted to comprise 75% of the workforce by 2025 (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). They are the latest generation to join the workforce (Ezpinosa, 2012), and have caused changes in workplace demographic metabolism. Ezpinosa (2012) highlighted the monumental changing of the guard that is happening in today's organizations due to demographic metabolism. The Baby Boomer

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Generation is beginning to retire while their predecessor (Builder) is almost completely out of the workforce. Gen X is hitting stride of inheriting organizational mantle, and the millennials (the newest addition) are bursting into the workforce.

In the field of Education, millennial teachers start to dominate most schools in the Philippines during this age of technology (Lacdo-O et al. (2018), and that includes the university/academe. Millennials are highly educated, willing to learn, technologically advanced, and socially conscious—all traits important for the making of a great teacher (Layton, 2015). Many have been said about this controversial generation. *Millennials*, born between 1981 and 1994/6, are described as people whose world is driven by technology, as information and social networking at their fingertips are their way of life (Spiegel, 2013). Generational analysis characterizing the millennial workers indicated that these cohorts are accused by employers and older colleagues of being the most-entitled, irresponsible and immature workers (Solomon, 2008). If Millennials do not receive constant affirmation or if the job is not fun or rewarding, abandonment of their positions is common (Hartman, 2014). Moreover, millennial teachers are said to be relaxed performing in a collaborative environment while integrating technology in their teachings. Laine (2007), as cited in Greenbaum (2009), described the millennial generation as “incompatible with a stagnant education system that can be painfully isolating and uninspiring”

As the millennials start to penetrate the much higher, complex, and advance set-up of an academe, myriad of experiences may accompany their work life, and which may yet to be described on general organizational data of millennials work assimilation experiences in available literatures. In this study, *Academe* is operationally defined as the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) which include colleges and universities. In the Philippines, pursuant to Republic Act 7722, HEIs are recognized not just a generator of knowledge, but also a major agent of economic growth, Research and Development Laboratory, and a mechanism through which the nation builds its human capital. HEIs are expected to be platforms of research and development, innovation and extension in pursuits of social and economic development. This nature of an academe’s mandate opens a wide and dynamic array of work experiences to its member, and perhaps to the newest arrival to the workplace, the millennial teachers.

Available imperative generational studies focus more on the experiences of the general population of millennials, characterizing a multigenerational workforce, rethinking leadership and innovative strategies to deal with millennials, attrition of millennials, and millennial learning and working styles, to mention some. The researcher desires to broaden the dialogue by contributing discussion on the experiences of millennial teachers as they assimilate to academe’s work life. It is in this context that this inquiry would like to have an in-depth understanding of the essence of experiences distinct to these millennial workers who are teachers in the academe. Transcendental Phenomenology will be employed as this methodology provides logical, systematic and coherent design elements that lead to essential description of their experiences. Hence, the researchers intend to describe their experiences in order to provide evidenced-based recommendations to advance school administrators’ understanding of this emerging issue and how workplace environment and practices affect the millennial teachers and vice-versa.

This study aims to have an in-depth understanding and description of the millennial teachers' experiences in the academe. Specifically, common themes will be extracted through this major research question: *What is it like to be a millennial teacher in an academe?*

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

This qualitative research employed the use of transcendental phenomenology. It is a design for acquiring and collecting data that explicates the essence of the human experience. This philosophical approach to qualitative research methodology seeks to understand human experiences and is grounded in the concept of setting aside all preconceived ideas to see phenomena through unclouded glasses, thereby allowing the true meaning of phenomena to naturally emerge with and within their own identity (Moustakas, 1994). Since the researcher aimed to uncover the experiences of Millennial teachers who are members of the academe, and data will be generated directly from the participants' experiences, transcendental phenomenology is deemed suitable for the study.

### 2.2. Setting and Participants

In this study, the term Academe is operationally defined as Higher Education Institution, which include colleges or universities, may it be public or private. Hence, the study's participants are coming from various HEIs. Six different HEIs (5 universities and 1 State College) were the institutional affiliations of the informants of the study.

The participants were purposively selected using the following criteria: a.) He/she is a faculty member of a Higher Education Institution during the time of this study; b.) He/she is a millennial (born on the years 1981- 1996); c.) He/she may be contacted using mobile/cellular phone; d.) He/she is willing to participate and provide honest responses.

Those with less than six months of experience and/or stay in the academe were excluded in the study, since it is understood that this is a critical period of adjustment, and prevailing emotions may affect the shared experience. Further, the participants were considered for withdrawal of consent when they no longer wish to remain in the study. With the inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 13 informants qualified and participated in the study.

In this study, the use of the purposive sampling technique allowed the researcher to have a deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses. It is considered a non-random technique, where the researchers set out the people who can and are willing to provide the information under knowledge or experience (Bernard, 2002). Moreover, the researcher used the data saturation technique as the basis for deciding the number of informants to be interviewed. Urquhart (2013) describes saturation as the point in coding when you find that no new codes occur in the data. It determines when there is adequate data

from a study to develop a robust and valid understanding of the study phenomenon. Data was saturated at Participant 11.

### *2.3. Instruments*

In phenomenological research, the researcher is the main instrument. Because of this, the researcher's knowledge on the philosophical approach is an important component of supporting the credibility of qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). The researcher immersed herself with phenomenological philosophy and the research method to ensure that all aspects of the study are conducted according to the philosophical perspective of phenomenology (Bevan, 2014). Since the researcher is also a millennial teacher, personal biases may influence the study. Hence, a continuous reflexive journaling and bracketing was done.

The researcher conducted in-depth phenomenological interviews. Interview Guide was developed. The researcher recorded field notes about each interview and maintained a reflexive journal with information about ongoing bracketing, details about interview scheduling and logistics, details about the rationale for decisions regarding the study, and any additional insights (Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

### *2.4. Data Collection*

To gain insights into the experiences of these millennial teachers, the researcher employed phenomenological interview procedures. An augmented form called an online interview will be administered. It is an accepted research method conducted using communication mediated by computers (Salmons, 2014). Proper protocol in gathering data was also observed. Electronic and/or printed Informed Consent Form were provided to all the participants. Electronic consents were sent through Messenger and email. The consent specified that their participation is strictly voluntary and the augmented interview will be recorded. Interviews were conducted through modality that is mutually agreeable to both researcher and participant. The researcher prepared the virtual platform preferred by the participants (e.g. Google Meet, zoom, Messenger, Skype, or just voice call). Each interview lasted between 45-60 minutes. Research information were kept in locked files at all times. Only the researcher has access to the information gathered. Member checking were also done. Participants were informed that follow-up interviews may be requested when necessary.

### *2.5. Data Analysis*

To analyze the data gathered, the Colaizzi's (1978) descriptive phenomenological method was employed. This method consists of seven steps. First informants' descriptions of the experiences were read in order to acquire a sense of the whole. Transcription of responses were done accurately and objectively. After that, significant statements were extracted. Meanings were formulated from the significant statements. Formulated meanings were organized into themes. Themes were integrated into an exhaustive description. The exhaustive description was analyzed to formulate the essential structure of the phenomenon. And finally

for validation, the informants evaluated the result of the analysis, if it means the same as their original experiences of teaching in the academe as millennials.

### *2.6. Ethical Considerations*

Since there is human participation required in this study, all ethical guidelines on the data privacy act were followed. The researchers explained important details such as the objectives and methodology of the study to the participants who were millennial teachers coming from various academes. Informed Consent forms were given to the participants to signify who will voluntarily participate in the study. Research participants were oriented of their right to end the interview at any time or withdraw from the study at any point during this study. The names of the participants and the HEIs were not revealed to provide anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were assigned code names and any participant identifiers (e.g. names) were removed. The in-depth interviews conducted were facilitated with utmost care and they were informed that all proceedings are recorded.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

During the data collection, informants shared their feelings, experiences, views and reactions when asked with various questions about their work-life as millennials in the academe. From the recorded interviews, the researchers identified six themes that captures their experiences.

### ***Emergent Theme 1: Instructional Rigors and Ancillary Functions***

This theme emerged from informants' common accounts of adjustments and the necessity of relearning topics for college teaching. Dealing with early adult-learners and the need for a disciplinal knowledge transmission necessitated these millennial teachers to learn and re-learn discipline specific knowledge. With the role of higher education in preparing and advancing the nation's human capital, faculty members have to embrace the implied necessity of equipping college learners to the kind of discipline and field they are taking, and to further assure the competitiveness of these students when they enter the workforce. Hence, for millennials, being the newest arrival to the academe, and having spent comparatively shorter number of years in service, means they have to rapidly upgrade themselves to be able to participate to the knowledge economy in an academe.

Commonalities in participants' responses can be gleaned in statements like:

*"I am quiet shock " P.1*

*"It's very exhausting to relearn everything again" P.5*

*"There are a lot of things that I didn't learn from college and that I only learned when I was already teaching" P.5*

*"it is an extra challenge that I am teaching to prepare them to land a job. It is academically rigorous" P.6*

The sophisticated and advance expectation of the state towards the academe is evident in RA7722, “An act Creating the Commission on Higher Education” which stated that the knowledge economy characterizes higher education as major agent of economic growth, research and development, on top of being a generator of knowledge and educator of young minds. Hence, regardless of age, each member including the millennials should live-up its mandates and comply with the key functions of a university.

As shared by these millennial faculty, instructional functions aren’t the only roles they play. Works pertaining to research, extension and linkages, production, and complying with quality assurance requirement in the university served as ancillary functions that also describe the kind of life they have in the academe.

*“We have four-fold functions. We do instruction, research, extension and production. We have designated tasks to different committees’ ad student advisorship” P.7*

*“I find Quality Assurance works such as AACCCUP evaluations very challenging” P.10*

### ***Emergent Theme 2: Expectations and Ageism***

A wide exchange of conversations on generational topics involve the broad generalizations based on a few observations, beliefs and expectations towards a certain generation. Literature on generational research has tallied a good number of empirical data listing common experiences of stereotypes, age gaps and pre-conceived belief about millennials.

Millennials have earned a reputation characterized by some common stereotypes of being entitled, lazy, and over-praised, others are driven and using technology to help them advance every chance they can” (Wubbe, 2014, p. 17). Some responses of participant which employed the theme of expectations are the following:

*“Sometimes, they expect me to know something which I don’t know. And sometimes vice-versa” P.2*

*“I think others don’t necessarily put the trust on us Millennials because for them we are young” P.1*

Following the discussion of expectations towards millennials, a contrasting millennials’ positive qualities as one expectation was also shared.

*“I think their perception about me is that they expected me to be more knowledgeable with technology as a millennial” P.5*

This echoes what previous researches contest that “Millennials are technology literate and are very comfortable with the internet world, as they have grown up in an environment of technology and thus, are familiar with mobile phones, lap-top computers, real-time media, and communications” (Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). Experiences, views, feelings, and incidences relating to age also arise. Hence, the theme of ageism emerged. World Health Organization (2021) defined Ageism as stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards others or oneself based on age. Due to their young age,

compared to other general cohorts, expectations and stereotypes also were revealed from their responses such as:

*“Some students and colleagues thought they can take advantage of me easily because I am young” P.4*

*“I feel inferior and lack of experience” P.6*

The common age-related narratives shared by these millennial workers also resonates previous literatures. Caraher (2015) and Taylor (2014) explicated that millennials don't want to be judged by their ages but by the skill-sets and abilities they bring to the workplace.

### ***Emergent Theme 3: Relationship and Sociality***

The relational aspect of the academe's work-life also comprises a big part in these millennial teacher's assimilation to the academe. Working in the academe, as teachers, implicitly includes the need to be able to deal with the dynamics of the institution, particularly in dealing with generational differences.

With several generations working side by side inside an academe, there is an even greater need to understand generational differences to allow different generations to operate efficiently. Relationship with colleagues, and students was revealed as one aspect shared by millennial teachers when asked about how they integrate themselves to the culture of the academe.

It was commonly shared that in dealing with their colleagues, understanding and learning each other's differences is the key element. Participants responses are:

*“In fitting in, I cherish similarities and understanding differences and I also got to learn the things they are interested to and I can see that it actually works. I allow myself to open and to relate to them and be comfortable with them.” P.6*

*“In order to fit in our age gap, I need to understand their attitude and personality when it comes to working with them. By understanding them I was able to fit myself in the culture of the academe as it develops unity and avoid conflicts P.4*

Dealing with college students also have some advantageous aspects. The small age gap between millennial teachers and college students allows them to instantaneously build rapport. Participants shared that.

*“With my students, I can relate with them. I give trendy examples in my class, and connect with them in Social Media” P.5*

*I think as a young millennial teacher i can understand more the way this generation thinks, Therefore, I can provide them with the necessary things that could get their attention. P12*

Millennial teachers value relationship with the other members of the academe. They see building relationship as a way to build a confidence and they see it as an avenue where they could learn from. Having a positive and welcoming social environment served a big

advantage for a smooth and successful assimilation to the culture of the academe. The sociality and relational aspect of their work-life in the academe adds to their feeling of inclusion and being valued.

#### ***Emergent Theme 4: Attributes and Advantages***

Common attributes which served to be an advantage also emerged in the interview. These millennial teachers shared that one of the advantage they have is their technological skills. This goes parallel to what other generational studies say. Langford (2011), highlighted that millennial cohorts are accustomed to electronic gadgets; Zemke, et.al (2013) argued that millennials tend to enjoy global access to the internet, and they are benefited with emerging wireless communication, and are heavily engaged with social networking. Participants responded that:

*“Being capable of maximizing and optimizing the technology is one of the many flavors of being a millennial teacher.” P.6*

*“Being able to adjust/learn faster on new technologies (internet) which is the main platform in teaching students in this new normal way of living. P.11*

*“I can also help my colleagues with the technicalities, and it’s an edge in this time of the pandemic” P.6*

In today’s educational era characterized by the rapidly advancing technology; with the sudden shift to remote learning and online education; and with the heightened global demand for distance learning; the technological-savviness of these millennial teachers placed them on a greater advantage. This allowed them to participate actively in today’s educational delivery amidst the pandemic and it opens avenue for them to be more creative with instructional concerns. Moreover, Langford (2011) and Taylor (2014), were both on the same note that being technologically connected almost from birth can have far-reaching effects in school and at work for the futures of millennials. This unique millennial characteristic makes them very valuable in the workplace.

Another advantageous attributes these millennial teachers possess is resilience and flexibility. With the rapid upgradation of metrics for quality assurance in the academe, the ability to be flexible seemed roaring. Also, the generational differences and conflicts laudably demands a high level of resilience amongst the millennials, as the newest addition to the academe. Caraher (2015) stressed that millennials are more adaptive to change and upgrades in technology than other generations before them. Flexibility is also seen with schedules and work demands. Since most of the participants interviewed were still single, they have shared that being to work for longer work hours and stay later in the office, can be rendered with less hassle and worries. Hence, they can commit and serve more, especially in times of exigency of service. Participants shared that:

*“I work even with external and internal pressures. I would like to continually deliver despite and in spite of the battles within. This, I think, is one of the expression of a millennial worker” P.10*



*“I am a young worker I still don’t have my own family and so I can extend my work hours without hassle” P.5*

Being Young is also another attribute which has inherited them with many benefits, aside from the stereotypes discussed in Emergent theme 2. Being young, as they shared, may mean they have less experiences, but may also significantly mean they still have the luxury of time to develop themselves. The trends naturally existing in their generations allowed them contribute to the academe in their own fresh and creative way.

*“I am able to share fresh and new ideas”*

*“I introduce my colleagues to millennial stuffs. I bring something new to the table”*

*“Being a young faculty there are so many things that I need to learn but there is enough time for me to relearn everything” (J)*

### ***Emergent Theme 5: The sense of purpose and responsibility***

Being a member of the academe, having a job, earning their own salary, being able to repay to their parents and being able to contribute to the community are common accounts pushing through the emergent trend of Sense of Purpose and Responsibility.

These millennial teachers shared that the high pressures of being a faculty in the academe is an addition to their sense of duty and responsibility. The expectations to prepare the students for work, and the other higher mandates of a university, gives them the desire to also better themselves as professionals.

*“Teaching as a millennial adds up to the sense of being responsible individual, especially as trusted to teach students” P.6*

*“It brings the sense of duty, that you are in the university because of the diverse work. We have the four-fold function” P.7*

Achieving a sense of purpose was also a common thread. It echoes what publish researchers say. Millennials feel a strong moral responsibility to make a difference in the communities in which they live and work (Taylor, 2014).

*“I know that I was able to teach my students some life lessons, and that’s the reason why I’m still here, because I see myself effective, and I feel that I am needed”*

Moreover, this desire to feel included, be seen, heard, be able to actualize their potentials, and to feel needed. This contributes to their sense of purpose and increases meaningfulness in work. Lancaster & Stillman, (2010) and Taylor (2014), both argued that Millennials want to be valued employees with the ability to make decisions which will help their organizations become successful.

*“I think the most rewarding is being recognize and being a great contributor of scientific knowledge through research in our academe.” P.4*

*“It’s very rewarding to earn my own salary even when I am still young because I am now able to provide for the family” P.1*

Further, millennials want to be part of a productive workforce that is making the world a better place to live (Caraher, 2015).

### ***Emergent Theme 6: Learning and Self-development***

One strong theme which emerged and is common to almost all of the participants is their accounts expressing their views associating academe to learning. The dynamic arrays of outcomes expected from academe, also immerse its members to varied work experiences aligned with its core functions and mandates. These also provided learning opportunities for millennials teachers.

When asked about their motivations for joining the academe, most of them shared that they find the academe as a good place to learn and enhance their skills.

*“I think the most rewarding is that I am able to learn new things. I think that learning is such a prestige. The academe for me is really an avenue for self-development and that for me is very much rewarding. Every time you learn something it feels like a graduation its grandeur and satisfying” P.7*

Learning and self-development does not only happen in the acquisition of much advance topics fitted for college disciplines. Learning experiences were also sought in engagement to other functions such as research and production.

*“You have an endless and infinity of self-development and learning in the academe. You can do all sorts of things, from teaching, to research it depends on you” P.8*

Learning and self-development also comes in moments when they observed their colleagues who belong to other generation group. Being able to work with other generations provided them a chance to learn from them, and their good practices, and mature in their work as professionals.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendation**

The experiences of these millennials who work in the academe parallels some findings from studies conducted to millennials in the business, industry and non-academic fields. Yet, it also revealed some experiences distinct to them. Hence, being a millennial teacher in academe is described to be:

*“An experience of continual learning, growth and self-development, tied with the need to cope with the advance knowledge mandate and ancillary functions in the academe, and the need to adjust with the generational dynamics of the organization. The significance of resilience, and flexibility to ply with generational stereotypes,*

*expectations and pressures is a felt need. And, relational advantage of small age gaps w/ students, in terms of understanding their psychology, interest and behaviors; the millennial's technological orientation are gained advantages. The advantage of time to learn and the likely profits of being young allowed these millennial teachers to contribute novel things to the table. Further, the wide-array of experience, the chance to participate in the knowledge economy and avenues of contributing to the society brings them the sense of purpose and responsibility. “*

As a starting point, the author recommends that institutional mechanisms allowing dynamic interactions of the different generational cohorts in the academe be provided. This will increase engagement and smooth integration of the millennials to the academe. This will also potentially address some common stereotypes and age-related concerns. Mentoring and Team-building activities may be considered and be enhanced.

Considering the finding that being in an academe gives these millennial teachers the sense of purpose, responsibility, and the satisfaction of being able to contribute to the society; administrators may conscientiously plan of ways to involve the millennial teachers to university programs/activities where they can actualize their potentials. This imply that administrators need to learn the dynamics, strengths and weaknesses of these millennials, so as to strategize the functions and works they could properly be assigned.

In the aspect of dealing with the instructional rigors and ancillary functions that these millennial teachers have to comply, universities and colleges may have to enhance their placement and orientation mechanisms to properly brief these millennial teachers with the varied tasks that may accompany their work-life experience. Provision of capacitating activities pertaining to other area functions and mandates of the university may be strengthened.

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