

# Intergenerational Communication among Faculty and Students in Higher Education

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**Abstract** This research illustrates the dynamics of intergenerational communication between faculty and students in a Philippine university. Adopting a contextualized age-period-cohort model (APC), this multiple case study involves four cases of multigenerational faculty interactions with students. Faculty cases were first selected through purposeful maximal sampling before student participants were selected. Semi-structured individual interviews, online communication analysis and qualitative surveys were used to obtain an in-depth understanding of the IG communication in each case, with emphasis on their purpose for communication, encoding and decoding of the messages. Within-case analyses provided rich description of each case and cross-case analysis generated lessons across cases. Findings show that age, cohort, and period, influence the online learning communications. Faculty and students are consciously adjusting their communication styles to what they perceive to be “acceptable” to convey meaning. However, perceptions of what is acceptable could be based on faulty assumptions. The paper recommends a shift from “student diversity” to “education diversity” to capture the full dynamics of generational diversity in the academe.

*Keywords: generation, higher education, intergenerational, multiple case study*

## **Introduction**

Two of the important contexts in present-day education are intergenerational diversity (IG) and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) developments. They have changed education in many ways by presenting new directions and spaces for learning. Intergenerational diversity as a reality today presents opportunities and challenges (Boysen, Daste, & Northern, 2016; Lofgren et al., 2013; Polat & Kazak, 2014;). This reality is further heightened as the pandemic forces education to shift to online modes (Sun, Tang, & Zuo, 2020). IG diversity opens opportunities for intergenerational learning, or IGL (Novotný & Brücknerová, 2016; Polat & Kazak, 2015). Nonetheless, it also presents challenges in that the diversity in perspectives, styles of interaction and work could lead to conflicts (Tay, 2011).

IG diversity has also been observed in communication styles (White et al., 2018) and online practices (Tamme & Siibak, 2012). For instance, citing Boyd's work, Swist et al. (2015) explained how young people and adults have different experiences with privacy. Where the older generations believe that everything is private unless they opt to make it public, the younger generation believes that everything is potentially public. Hence, they must choose to make things private.

With the present situation in education where multigenerational higher education faculty and students are forced to engage in communication through online platforms, IG communication styles have the potential to complicate the learning environment in online platforms, which is already fraught with so many challenges due to some limitations in

available cues, leading to misunderstandings (Dickinson, 2017; Edwards, 2017).

Hence, an understanding of IG diversity in online communication practices is imperative. While there is already a plethora of local and foreign studies that scrutinize IG diversity (Delelis et al., 2018; Geeraerts et al., 2018; Tengco-Pacquing et al., 2019), much of this literature tends to focus on a single effect of IG diversity. However, according to the Pew Research Center (2015) and Alwin and McCammon (2003), various effects are actually at play in IG diversity. Differences among generations are influenced by the overlapping and interacting effects of age, period, and cohort (APC). Age pertains to a person's place in the life cycle. Period pertains to the social, political, technological, medical and economic events that have a lasting impact on all generations. Finally, cohort refers to groups that share identity due to the influence of significant events during the impressionable years of their lives.

Cohort is among the most popular layers of IG diversity that are being highlighted in existing IG literature. However, most of these studies were situated in a foreign context, adopting mainstream cohort labels. This is in spite of the differences of Filipino contexts (Bongco, 2020) not only in terms of social, economic, and political events, but also in terms of culture (Macapagal et al., 2013). In fact, the findings of Salvosa and Hechanova (2020) and Bongco (2020) show that there are no Baby Boomers or Generation X in the Filipino generations, which could be due to culture, particularly, the Filipinos' strong family values.

Locally, there is already a large body of literature identifying generational differences in styles, with a focus on age effects (Librero, 2020; Ota et al., 2007). Furthermore, the period effect of the postmodern world on teacher's authority in education suggests that it is no longer clear who holds the

authority in the classrooms (Lü & Hu, 2021). However, it is not clear how this period effect interacts with the Filipino values of obedience and respect for the elders (age effect).

These gaps in the literature highlight the need for a contextualized understanding of IG diversity in order to develop a context and research-based interventions to promote inclusive IG online learning communications. This is particularly crucial now that flexible learning is here to stay, as there will be no going back to the full traditional mode of delivering higher education in the Philippines, according to the Commission on Higher Education Chairman, J. Prospero De Vera III (Hernando-Malipot, 2021).

The purpose of the present study is to provide an in-depth description of IG communication among diverse cases of multigenerational higher education learners and faculty to provide a contextualized understanding of Filipino generations. Specifically, it aims to describe IG online communication in terms of purpose for communication, encoding of the message and decoding of the message. In the midst of generational stereotypes due to the overgeneralization of findings from IG studies, this study models the application of the contextualized age-period-cohort (APC) for a more grounded understanding of generations in different cultures. This contextualized understanding is crucial for educational systems across the globe to develop generationally inclusive programs that are truly anchored in the realities of their own generations.

### **Framework of the Study**

This intergenerational diversity study is anchored on Strauss and Howe's (2007) theorizing of the Generational Diagonal, Alwin and McCammon's (2003) Intergenerational Differences, and the Pew Research Center's (2015) Age-

Period-Cohort (APC) Model for intergenerational diversity. Strauss and Howe go beyond Mannheim's description of generation's focus on cohorts to suggest that generational characteristics are the result of era and age. Similarly, Alwin and McCammon (2003) described IG differences as the result of age and cohort effects. The Pew Research Center took it further by looking at IG diversity as an influence of the overlapping and interacting effects of age, period, and cohort effects (APC).

However, as McCrindle (2014) claims, there would still be variations among generations due to different factors. This could be brought about by varied contexts, which could influence how a group within one generation experienced a defining event of that generation. This calls for caution against overgeneralizing findings.

As such, this study looks at IG diversity as a result of the overlapping and interacting effects of the participants' APC. In relation to the context of the Filipino generations, local cohort categories were used based on the findings of Salvosa and Hechanova (2020) and Bongco (2020).

This study specifically classifies age generations using Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development (e.g., young adult, middle-aged and late adult). Cohort generations were identified using the terms political generation, and millennial and Gen Z technology generations. This is in consideration of the findings and analysis of Salvosa and Hechanova (2020), the Pew Research Center (2015), and Bongco (2020). Specifically, generations are those who were born in 1982 or earlier. This cohort is a combination of the mainstream categories of Baby Boomers and Gen X. No distinction between the Boomers and Gen X was identified in local literature due to contextual factors such as family values. Meanwhile, the Millennial-technology generation was born between 1983-1996. Generation Z- technology was

born in 1997 and later. Finally, the period takes into account the educational realities amid the pandemic in the academic year 2020-2021, which is characterized by the use of online learning modalities for learning delivery.

## **Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative multiple case study. The design offers strong and reliable evidence, and allows the researchers to have a deeper understanding of the topic under study (Brink, 2018). The study focuses on the multigenerational faculty and students at HEI in the Philippines.

### **Cases Selection**

Purposeful maximal sampling was employed in the selection of cases to provide the maximum variation of IG diversity in the academe. The four cases are as follows:

*Case 1:* Online communications between male, young adult Millennial (technology generation) faculty and Gen Z students

*Case 2:* Online communications between female, middle-aged Millennial (technology generation) faculty and Gen Z students

*Case 3:* Online communications between female, older adult (political generation) faculty and Millennial and Gen Z students

*Case 4:* Online communications between male, middle (political generation) faculty and Millennial and Gen Z students

Originally, the intention of the case selection was focused on the cohort-based generations and sex of the

participants. Nonetheless, the actual cases that were identified reflected diversity in terms of age, thus adding a layer of generation for more meaningful analysis.

## **Participants and Inclusion Criteria**

Participant selection was done through the social network to ensure anonymity and voluntary participation. The identification of faculty for each case was the primary consideration in recruitment. Once the faculty for each case had been identified, they were asked for a list of classes that they were teaching. They did not recommend the student participants for the study to ensure student anonymity and avoid possible relational conflicts.

Student participants were selected using the following inclusion criteria: (1) they were enrolled in a course under the selected faculty; and (2) they belonged to a different cohort in relation to the faculty. Due to criteria number 2, Cases 1 and 2 only had Gen Z students, and Cases 3 and 4 had Millennial and Gen Z student participants. This captures the dynamics of communication when there is an IG difference between faculty and students. A total of 36 faculty and students participated in the study, as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Summary of Participants per Case and Sex*

Case	Faculty		Students		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Case 1	1	0	4	4	9
Case 2	0	1	4	4	9
Case 3	0	1	4	4	9
Case 4	1	0	4	4	9
TOTAL	2	2	16	16	36

## **Data Gathering**

Qualitative data were gathered through three data sources: (1) semi-structured interviews; (2) online communication analysis; and (3) a qualitative survey questionnaire. All instruments used for data gathering were validated through expert validation and pilot testing. The relevance of guide questions was established through expert validation involving eight professionals in the fields of research, higher education and psychology. Meanwhile, clarity, level of difficulty and administration requirements were checked through pilot testing.

Semi-structured interviews with 20 participants were facilitated in order to get a glimpse of how the participants make sense of their experiences in online learning communications. The main part of the interview (after establishing rapport and preliminaries) ran for an average of 32 minutes and 8 seconds.

Meanwhile, to observe the actual exchange among the students and faculty across generations, the study analyzed the participants' online communications. This was done by requesting screenshots of the participants' online communication with the other parties during the first four months of the Second Semester of Academic Year 2020-2021 (January- April 2022). This period covers communications using any online tool, such as Messenger or email, that the participants are willing to share. A total of 39 screenshots were accepted for further analysis after initial screening.

Finally, an open-ended qualitative questionnaire was developed to further confirm and clarify the initial findings from the interview and online communications analysis. Questions were provided in English and Filipino for ease of understanding.



## Validation and Data Analysis

To establish the truthfulness of the data gathered through interviews, member-checking of transcripts was facilitated prior to further data analysis. To minimize the risk of losing meaning in translation due to varied styles of language use (Devlin, 2018; White et al., 2017), transcripts were analyzed verbatim (Filipino-English). Initial coding generated 77 open descriptive codes, such as canceling generational differences and being cautious. Through categorization, these codes were grouped into five categories, including challenges, medium, behaviors, encoding and strategies. The significance of each of the codes and categories varied for each case. An emphasis was placed on within-case analysis to provide an in-depth illustration of IG communication in each of the cases. Nonetheless, cross-case analysis provided encompassing lessons learned. Finally, the whole analysis applied the APC model for IG diversity, which recognizes that IG diversity is the result of the overlapping and interacting effects of age, period, and local cohort.

**Table 2**

*Cross-case Analysis through Coding*

Code	Categories	Themes
Cancelling Generation Differences	Challenges	Generational Distance as an advantage and disadvantage
Exhausting Technology Skills		
Limitations	Behavior	<i>Bigger generational gap could make understanding more difficult due to differences. However, students tend to be given more consideration for</i>
Unmet Expectations		
Responsive		
Supportive to students	Encoding	<i>online communication lapses of older faculty. They have higher expectations from younger faculty, whom they believe to be more adept at using technology.</i>
Instruction		
Giving consideration	Strategies	
Respectful		
Setting of Expectations		
Student teaches faculty		

Access Issues Feeling of No Control Frames of Reference Insufficient response Misunderstanding No Response Uncertainty Accidental issues Need for virtual presence	Challenges	More manageable issues  <i>IG communication issues on online platforms are less severe because all parties consider that failure might be due to technology or their generational gaps, rather than actual behavior.</i>
Interactions Repeated explanations Group support	Behavior	
Different words Short and impersonal	Encoding	
Cooling down Initiating Dialogue Consultation Asking peers Seeking feedback Non-verbal cues Research Reflection Negotiation of meaning	Strategies	
Delayed Responses Timing Levels of expertise	Challenges	Adjustment of Generational Styles  <i>All parties are conscious of their differences and willing to make adjustments in terms of media to and communication styles.</i>
Email GC Google Classroom Messenger Video Conferencing Apl SMS SNS	Medium	
Mediation Attempt to overcome generation gaps Confidence in Communication Cautious	Behavior	

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Do not interrupt mode  
Message Flood  
Making suggestions  
Privacy  
Nurturing  
Persistence

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Adjustment                      Encoding

Formal  
Like reaction  
Ease of understanding  
Heart react  
Familiarity  
English  
Filipino  
Emojis  
Full Info  
Variation in  
communication style  
and spelling alterations  
Casual

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Compromise                      Strategies

Learns from child  
Pakikiramdam  
Conflict avoidance

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## Findings

This multiple case study is an attempt to describe the IG diversity in online communications among higher education faculty and students. The succeeding paragraphs illustrate the IG communication among multigenerational participants in each case.

### **Case 1: Online Learning Communications of Male Young Adult Millennial (Technology Generation) Faculty with Generation Z Students**

In terms of purpose, the faculty's main reason for engaging in online communications with students is to give instructions about tasks and activities. Meanwhile, the students' initially

thought that it would be easy for them to communicate with the young adult, Millennial faculty. Students tried to engage in non-course related and less formal conversations with the faculty. However, because the faculty established that he intended to maintain professional communications, the students followed his lead and limited their communications with the faculty to making suggestions about course work, clarifying information or instructions and airing concerns. As 1B lamented. *“Actually, ironic nga po kung sasabihin. Kasi kung sasabihin si Sir no example na po kasi siyang bata dun sa faculty. Siya po yung sana yung nakakausap namin kahit casual lang po na kwentuhan ganiyan pero hindi po ganun yung case. So expected niya po kasi pormal.* (It is a little ironic. Sir 1 is close in age. Yet he expects us to always be formal. We only answer his questions. We only give him the responses that he expects.). Students’ attempt to communicate with the young adult Millennial faculty using their own styles of communication is indicative that they see group differences with the faculty as insignificant until the faculty gives emphasis to them. The clarification of expectations by the young faculty still elicits a feeling of discontent among the students, who appear to expect closer bonds with him as compared to the older faculty.

Of the four cases, the young adult Millennial faculty used the widest range of tools to connect with the students. It is observed that most of the tools that he adopted support asynchronous communications. Nonetheless, students still find his communication attempts lacking because his Gen Z students crave more synchronous communication through video conferences.

The male Millennial faculty member maintains a formal tone in his communications with students. Their formal communication usually pertains to the use of the English language. He also uses thumbs up or heart reactions to the students’ messages. Nonetheless, it is evident that the

content of the communication by the faculty also displays consideration and concern for students. For instance, in the screenshot of the conversation with 1E, he offered to mediate with an evaluator on the students' behalf. Furthermore, he expressed concern for the students who offered to redo their webinar and tried to offer easier alternatives for them (1H). Nonetheless, this content of concern and support appears to be overshadowed by the student's intimidation over the use of formal language and English through which the messages were conveyed. Evidently, this is a complication caused by the online communication medium. Due to the absence of other cues to interpret the tone of the message, the students are likely to find short e-mails from the faculty as cold and uncaring.

Meanwhile, because the students are cautious of misunderstandings, they follow the lead of the faculty in using respectful and formal communications. Students tend to believe that formal English is the safest form of language to minimize misunderstandings. Participant 1A said, "*Mostly po in English po yung language ko. (I mostly use English.)*" These were also observed in the choice of language of students in the online communication analysis. A sample of observed communication from P3A is provided:

*Dec 9 at 10:20 am*

*Professor: Online tayo maya 1pm (We will meet online later at 1 PM)*

*Participant: Noted mam*

Moreover, students are considerate of the timing of their communications to show recognition of the faculty's personal lives.

The faculty also engages in introspection. He takes the initiative to seek feedback from random students. When

students air concerns about communication, he consults colleagues and reflects on his communication practices. In misunderstandings, faculty takes the time to cool down and process information through introspection and consultation before continuing with the communication act. This way, he would not have to interact with students when he is at the height of his emotions.

Meanwhile, the Gen Z students adjust their communication to the expectations in Case 1. They admit that they find it hard to read the meaning behind the tone. Participant 1A said, “*Medyo mahirap pong idetermine yung tone niya...* (It is difficult to determine his tone.)” In such cases, students turn to their peers for help or do personal research to decode the message. Asking the faculty is not the first course of action. In misunderstandings, the students’ most common recourse is to introspect.

### **Case 2: Online Learning Communications of Female Middle-aged Millennial (Technology Generation) Faculty with Generation Z Students**

The primary purpose of the faculty’s engagement in online communication is to respond to students’ queries and concerns. Meanwhile, students’ purposes for communicating with the faculty include the need to clarify information or instructions, air concerns, or make suggestions. It was also observed that some students are officially identified as serving as mediators for the general class’ concerns.

The faculty’s accommodation of the needs and concerns of students is very much observed in the data from faculty and students across sources. The faculty uses a variety of tools to communicate with students. She is confident in her communication with the students because her kid familiarize her with the needs and styles of the new generation. The most remarkable characteristic of her online communication, however, is the nurturing quality that conveys concern and

support for the students. She addressed them as “anak (child)” (2B, 2C, 2F, 2G). She is also generous in using emoticons in her messages and using heart and like reactions.

Due to the nurturing style of online communications of the faculty and their familiarity with her in-person, students are more comfortable communicating with her. Nonetheless, students still have uncertainties and maintain caution in communications. They adjust and send respectful messages, which could be formal or casual. Because the faculty herself uses emoticons, students also feel free to use the same in encoding their messages. They also employ minimal spelling alterations and varied reaction buttons. Students share that the use of these emoticons is important for them because they find it difficult to convey emotion in online messages (P 2C). Sometimes, if they are uncertain, they will use emoticons to diffuse the atmosphere in online communications.

Because most of the communications initiated by students were aimed at seeking clarifications or airing concerns, the faculty’s response is anticipated. Nonetheless, students sometimes get delayed responses. This could be due, however, to the unfamiliar words, which the faculty admits require her to pause for a while to process the information better. Similarly, faculty also get delayed responses in online communications. She expressed frustration over the students’ silence during video conference meetings. Nonetheless, their messages come later (after the synchronous session) in the form of chats. This is in spite of the students’ high level of comfort with the faculty and their recognition of the effect of their online presence on boosting the confidence of their faculty (2B).

In decoding the messages, the faculty conducts research and seeks compromise with students for better understanding. During misunderstandings, her recourse is to reflect on her communication act. The online platform

also provides the advantage of giving her time to cool down, so she would not have to reply to the student at the height of emotion.

Meanwhile, students appear to find it easier to decode the meaning of the middle-aged Millennial faculty because emoticons and synchronous sessions give them more non-verbal cues. Even when it is often perceived as unacceptable in formal communications, this could be seen as a possible alternative to the missing body language, facial expressions, and hand gestures that students typically use to interpret messages in face to face classrooms.

### **Case 3: Online Learning Communications of Female Old-Aged Political Generation Faculty with Generation Z Students**

Older adult political generation faculty's purposes for communicating with students include giving instructions, responding to queries and clarifying misunderstandings. Meanwhile, students communicate with faculty to air concerns, clarify information and make suggestions.

The faculty also uses a variety of online communication tools. She believes that having a child who belongs to this generation helps her communicate better with the students. She shares that she uses a variety of styles of communication as may be required by the communicative act. Her chat messages follow casual, short, and impersonal languages that are to the point in answering students' questions and giving instructions. In synchronous communications, she prefers not to be disrupted during her discussions. In asynchronous communications, however, students observe delays in the responses of the faculty (3C).

Meanwhile, students have some uncertainty about encoding messages for the faculty. Hence, they are cautious



about maintaining respectful communication. They also make conscious efforts to learn the styles that are acceptable to the faculty. Students are careful to make sure that they consider the timing of their communications (2C). Students also ensure that their communication provides full information and is written for ease of understanding. All these adjustments taken by the students to encode their messages in a respectful manner are indicative of the high respect obligation of the Filipino young adults to the older generations.

In spite of the efforts taken by both parties to adjust communication to bridge IG gaps, miscommunications still happen. For instance, she was offended by the tone of the student, which sounded demanding she, however, chooses not to address these misunderstandings at the height of her emotions. She takes time to cool down before initiating dialogue with students to negotiate meaning or clarify misunderstandings. Because the faculty would not want to deal with the student in her anger, the online environment gives her the chance to be selective in self-presentation which helps avoid further misunderstandings.

Meanwhile, students appreciate that the camera of the faculty is turned on during synchronous sessions because non-verbal cues are sent (3C). This opportunity to see the faculty through the camera gives the students some non-verbal cues vital for the interpretation of the messages.

Students try to make sense of messages that are difficult to understand by consulting their peers or faculty or researching them on their own. If more explanation is needed, 3H waits for synchronous sessions. In misunderstandings, students engage in reflections to verify whether the failure was due to their part in the process. It is remarkable, however, that students are appreciative of the efforts of the older faculty, whom they believe to be having more difficulty adjusting to the present learning delivery (3A, 3C).

#### **Case 4: Online Learning Communications of Male Middle-Aged Political Generation Faculty with Generation Z Students**

Faculty communicates with the students to give instructions or to answer student concerns and questions. Meanwhile, students' purposes for communicating with faculty include making suggestions, airing concern, and clarifying information.

He uses a variety of tools to communicate. He admits that he makes a conscious effort to learn more about online communication tools. This determination of the older faculty to learn the online tools could be one of the reasons for the diminishing technology knowledge gap between the old and the younger generation (Tamme & Siibak, 2012).

Communication beyond official office hours is also observed in the faculty's written messages through chats (4A GenZ, 4D Millennial). The faculty is nurturing with the students and shifts from formal to casual and nurturing communications, addressing students as "anak" or child (4, 4B). He frequently uses a thumbs up reply to students' messages. It is also interesting how the professor uses spelling alterations in his written messages. Nonetheless, students stick to formal spelling conventions in their replies to his messages.

Students are cautious when communicating with the faculty and make it a point to communicate respectfully. Due to the faculty's instructions, they stick to formal spelling conventions in spite of the faculty's switches. They also phrase their communications for ease of understanding. Heart reactions are used in the faculty's messages. Nonetheless, because the faculty does not use emoticons, students are also hesitant to use them when communicating with him.

In decoding, the faculty makes conscious efforts to adjust to the communications of the students' generation through constant consultation with their Gen Z children. Nonetheless, due to differences in levels of understanding, miscommunications still happen (4A).

Meanwhile, students are quite considerate and empathetic towards the faculty, although their communications get delayed or no responses at all. They tend to give consideration to the faculty and simply adjust by asking their questions during the synchronous sessions to get immediate responses. Further, while thumbs up appears to be a mere style of communication by the faculty, students tend to interpret this reply as an expression of the faculty's disinterest in the communication process. Participant 4F shared, "Often, I am likezoned. I just opt to ask or find other ways to learn."

## **Discussion**

Lessons learned from four IG online learning communications among faculty and students were summarized into three themes. These are: (1) adjustment of generational styles; (2) generational distance as an advantage and disadvantage; and (3) more manageable misunderstandings.

### **Adjustment of Generational Styles**

Participants have certain styles for online communication. For instance, Gen Z prefers the use of emoticons and chat messaging, thrives in flood messaging, and expects instant responses. Meanwhile, the political generation faculty uses thumbs up as okay and makes delayed responses. These varied styles are consistent with literature findings (Delvin, 2018; Mupinga et al., 2006; Salvosa & Hechanova, 2020; White et al., 2018). Nonetheless, as they interact with each other, generations adjust these styles to what they

perceive to be acceptable for effective communication. Faculty, regardless of age and cohort, adjust to the younger generations by using varied tools. Similarly, younger generations adjust their language to what is acceptable to the faculty to avoid misunderstandings. However, their assumptions of what is acceptable for the other generation may be based on actual observations or *pakikiramdam* (*sensing*), or stereotype beliefs.

The use of *pakikiramdam* is vital to determining what is acceptable and what is not. However, looking at Filipino social relations, it could be said that the use of *pakikiramdam* to adjust styles of communication is both a necessity (for effective communication) and an expectation, for its absence as a Filipino virtue is typically frowned upon (Librero, 2020).

While faculty report regulation of online communication styles, students exert more effort in adjustment. This could be because seniority (whether biological or social) is expected as part of the Filipino culture (Librero, 2020) or because misunderstandings could have more severe consequences for students. This could also be because the faculty's role that makes him/her the figure of authority who sets the standards. While recent literature claims that in the postmodern era, it is no longer clear who holds the authority (Lü & Hu, 2021), it is quite evident from the data that students are submitting to the set standards of the faculty (Bongco et al., 2023).

### **Generational Distance as an Advantage and Disadvantage**

It is notable that the extent of generational distance could have advantages and disadvantages in online communications. While it is easier for students to communicate with younger faculty because of their similar styles and languages, the study found that where the generation gap is minimal, students have the tendency to see the gap as insignificant.

Considering the Asians' self-restriction when they observe group differences (Ota et al., 2007), this implies that they do not see much difference with the younger faculty. On the other hand, while it is more challenging for older faculty to interact with students due to bigger gaps, it could also serve as an advantage for them because students appear to be more considerate and empathetic towards older faculty members, whom they believe are having a harder time adjusting to this form of communication. For instance, Participant 4B said, "*Naintindihan ko naman po iyon kase po baka po busy sa ibang gawain.* (I understand because the teacher might be busy with something else.)" In spite of their expectations, they try to understand that the faculty might be busy with something else or unfamiliar with the tool. (Mupinga et al., 2006; Nambiar 2020).

### **More Manageable Misunderstandings**

While it is often assumed that online learners are fully autonomous learners, reality shows things differently. Online platforms of open communication cultivate better relationships between faculty and students (Gonzalez-Flor, 2020). Hence, students and faculty continuously engage in communication. However, the danger of miscommunication is always present. In the absence or limitations of cues for better interpretation of the messages and the existence of new features on the online platforms, encoding and decoding messages is always a complicated process. For instance, due to the limitations of available non-verbal cues for interpretation, some students might find short emails unfeeling (Dickinson 2017). Further, miscommunication due to the "tone" of the message was reported to be the root of two-thirds of the misunderstandings (Edwards, 2017). Even though emoticons could serve as an alternative (Dickinson, 2017, Edwards, 2017), the impression in the academe that their use is childish or unprofessional limits their use in online learning communications.

Nonetheless, even when miscommunication happens on the online platform, the consequences prove to be less severe because participants tend to reflect, recognizing that a lot of misunderstanding is rooted in the limitations of the platform and generational differences. For instance, online platforms allow an individual to plan his/her self-presentation which helps avoid misunderstandings. Further, the mode also compels them to consider the limitations of the channel used in communication, which compels them to give each other the benefit of the doubt (Edwards, 2017).

In synthesis, students' generational style of communication is not a reflection of their independent style (age, period and cohort). Findings show that as both parties consciously try to adjust for successful communication practices, the styles that emerge in IG communication are the result of interactions. It is the result of a student's adjusted style that interacts with the faculty's adjusted style of online communications. And these adjustments could be based on *pakikiramdam* or stereotyped assumptions about the other party. This implies that IG sensitivity must be supported by a contextualized understanding of IG diversity to achieve successful communications across generations.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study aims to give an in-depth description of IG communication among multigenerational higher education learners and faculty and model the use of the APC model. The study findings provide a local understanding of Filipino cohorts, which shall provide a more contextualized basis for education program initiatives addressed to Filipino generations of learners and educators.

Findings show that the styles of online communication of faculty and students are the result of the interaction of their

generational styles (age, period, and cohort). Parties adjust their styles to achieve successful communication through *pakikiramdam* or the use of assumptions about generations that may be correct or incorrect.

These findings have implications for education's perception of diversity, which usually focuses on student diversity alone. However, the findings of this study show that student diversity cannot be separated from the faculty, for their values and practices interact in education processes such as online communications. Specifically in terms of generation, even though students have their own styles, the actual styles that they bring into the learning situation are a product of the interaction of their and the faculty's IG diversity. Hence, an exclusive focus on student generational diversity might not capture the whole dynamics of diversity as they play out in the academe.

The limitation of the study is that it was conducted only at one public higher education institution in Bataan. Further, due to the interaction of age, period, and cohort in the study's conceptualization, findings apply only when all three layers of generation are true. Hence, caution must be taken in applying the findings of the study. It is recommended, however, that the study be replicated in urban and private HEIs to capture IG communication in these contexts.

Future research in online IG learning communication could also look into the changes in the period effect. The present study was contextualized during the time when online communication was the only means for students and faculty to communicate during the pandemic. As education shifts to a more blended use of online and in-person communication between generations of faculty and learners, the dynamics of online IG communication are also expected to change.



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