

DIGITAL GENERATION AND TOURISM: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION AND THE LABOR MARKET FOR GENERATION Z IN UZBEKISTAN

Rustamov Otabek Akbarovich

“Ipak yo‘li” turizm va madaniy meros xalqaro universiteti

marketing va qabul bo‘limi boshlig‘i

e-mail: otabekrustamov934@gmail.com

Telefon:90-287-22-87

<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0075-0834>

Abstract

The article examines the role of Generation Z in Uzbekistan’s tourism and cultural heritage sector. It analyzes Gen Z’s characteristics as digital natives who prioritize authenticity, flexibility, work-life balance, and visual content. The author highlights the gap between traditional education and Gen Z’s needs, proposing practical reforms including digital technologies (VR/AR), dual education, storytelling, and digital marketing skills. The paper stresses that human creativity and emotional intelligence remain irreplaceable in tourism.

Keywords: Generation Z, tourism education, Uzbekistan, cultural heritage, educational reform, digital natives, work-life balance, digital marketing.

Introduction

Аннотация:

Статья рассматривает роль поколения Z в сфере туризма и культурного наследия Узбекистана. Анализируются особенности Gen Z как цифровых аборигенов, ценящих аутентичность, гибкость, баланс работы и жизни. Автор показывает несоответствие традиционного образования нуждам молодежи и предлагает реформы: внедрение VR/AR, дуальное обучение, сторителлинг и цифровой маркетинг. Подчеркивается незаменимость человеческих качеств в туризме.

Ключевые слова: Поколение Z, туризм и образование, Узбекистан, культурное наследие, реформа образования, цифровые аборигены, баланс работы и жизни

Annotatsiya

Maqolada O‘zbekiston turizmi va madaniy merosida Z avlodining o‘rni tahlil qilinadi. Z avlodining raqamli avlod sifatidagi xususiyatlari (autentiklik, moslashuvchanlik, ish-hayot muvozanati) ko‘rib chiqiladi. An’anaviy ta’lim va Z avlod talablari o‘rtasidagi farq ko‘rsatilib, amaliy islohotlar (VR/AR, dual ta’lim, stori-telling, raqamli marketing) taklif etiladi. Insoniy iliqlik va ijodkorlik turizmدا o‘rnini bosa olmasligi ta’kidlanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Z avlod, turizm ta’limi, O‘zbekiston, madaniy meros, ta’lim islohoti, raqamli avlod, ish-hayot muvozanati



I am amazed by the approach of Generation Z to global issues such as climate change and social inequality. They are not only talking about the problem, but also using the opportunities of the digital world to demand real change. This generation can change the world for the better."

Bill Gates (founder of Microsoft).

As our esteemed President Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev noted: "We will build a new Uzbekistan, the foundation of the third Renaissance, on the basis of science, intellectual potential and high spirituality."

Artificial intelligence can show you the Registan Square in Samarkand in 3D format, but it can never welcome a guest with Uzbek hospitality. He cannot feel the smell of Samarkand bread, the meaning in the patterns of Bukhara carpets, the historical breath on the walls of Khiva. Visitors come to Uzbekistan not just to see, but to feel, to awaken their emotions. Only you - living people - can do this. Preserving and promoting cultural heritage is not just a job, it is national pride and human connection. Being a professional guide in the tourism industry, providing high-quality service in hotels and restaurants, organizing cultural events, introducing Uzbekistan to the world through digital marketing - all this requires human warmth, creativity and empathy. Artificial intelligence can be an assistant here, but can never be a leader.

Generation Z is entering today's job market, and this generation has its own unique strengths and weaknesses in today's global job market. Who is this Generation Z, what kind of generation is it?

Generation Z (Generation Z or Gen Z for short) is a generation that includes people born between approximately 1997 and 2012. They are currently experiencing the period of adolescence and early adulthood (approximately 14 to 29 years old).

Representatives of this generation have unique characteristics that clearly distinguish them from previous generations (for example, Millennials). To better understand Generation Z, their main characteristics can be divided into several groups:

Generation Z is the first generation to be born and raised in a world where the internet, smartphones, and social media already exist.

1. Digital Natives

- They cannot imagine a world without a computer or smartphone.
- They absorb information very quickly and are able to multitask.
- Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are not only their source of entertainment, but also their main source of knowledge and news.

2. Authenticity and Freedom-Seekers

- This generation quickly notices artificiality, fake marketing, and "pretense."
- They expect authenticity from brands and people.
- Personal freedom, freedom of expression, and individuality are very important to them. They don't want to be like everyone else.



3. Realists

- Generation Z grew up in a time of global crises, pandemics, and economic hardship. Because of this:
- They take a more realistic view of life and finances.
- They strive to become independent and earn money early. Many prefer freelance, startups, or remote work to traditional 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. jobs.

4. Mental Health

- They are a generation that is not afraid to express their emotions openly.
- They notice "burnout" or stress in time and prioritize their mental health.
- They do not want work or study to harm their personal life and health (they strictly adhere to the Work-Life Balance).

5. They prefer visual information

Generation Z prefers short and concise visual information to long texts. Their attention span is much shorter - an average of 8 seconds. If a video or text does not attract them in the first few seconds, they will skip it.

This begs the question, is this Generation Z able to adapt to the job market? If this generation is unable to adapt to the job market today, what is the problem?

The adaptation of Generation Z to today's labor market is a complex and two-way process. On the one hand, they are bringing completely new values and demands to the labor market, and on the other hand, the traditional work system (old corporate culture) is failing to meet their needs. There are several key factors that make it difficult for Generation Z to find their place in traditional workplaces and companies:

✚ **Work-Life Balance:** The overtime or constant pressure that is common in traditional workplaces does not suit Generation Z. They recognize burnout early and prioritize their personal life and mental health. If the workplace is detrimental to their health, they will easily leave.

✚ **Strict Hierarchy:** The old boss-subordinate relationship, rigid orders, and bureaucracy are alien to this generation. They want freedom of expression, equality, and open communication with their superiors (horizontal management) in the workplace.

✚ **Don't accept fakery and "fake news":** Generation Z expects authenticity from brands and companies. If a company says it values its employees in its mission but actually puts pressure on them, Generation Z will quickly notice this and will not want to stay in such an environment.

✚ **Monotony and slow pace:** They are a "digital native" generation that processes information very quickly. The long meetings, slow decision-making processes, and repetitive tasks of the corporate world do not suit their short attention span.

The fact that Generation Z is "unable to adapt" to today's job market is not a sign of incompetence, but rather a sign of dissatisfaction with outdated working conditions. They want to be valued and empowered partners, rather than a blindly obedient workforce.

Today, companies that want to harness the potential of Generation Z are having to change their work styles, introduce flexible schedules, and ensure employee peace of mind.

To successfully prepare Generation Z for the labor market, the higher education system must



abandon traditional academic approaches and move to a more dynamic, practical and digital format. Taking into account the specific characteristics of this generation (short attention span, dependence on technology, a tendency to practice and a desire for freedom), it is advisable to organize the educational process in universities based on the following strategies:

Generation Z gets bored easily in long, ineffective lectures.

Short and concise content: Lectures should be broken down into small blocks (15-20 minute intensive modules) followed by practical discussions or interactive assignments.

Visual materials: Infographics, short videos, case studies, and presentations should be more integrated into the teaching process.

For this generation, the question **"How will this knowledge help me earn money in the future?"** is paramount.

University and business cooperation:

✓ It is necessary to directly connect theoretical knowledge with the production or service sector (for example, hotels, IT companies, travel agencies).

Project approach:

- ✓ Instead of a term paper or thesis, students should be given the opportunity to defend startup projects or practical cases that can be solutions to real business problems.
- ✓ Paperwork and strict restrictions seem incomprehensible to a generation born in a digital environment.

Blended Learning:

- ✓ Leaving lectures for independent learning via online platforms (LMS, Moodle, Coursera, etc.), university classes should be focused only on live communication, seminars and teamwork.

Artificial Intelligence and Digital Tools:

- ✓ Students should be taught to work with artificial intelligence (AI), data analytics (Data Analytics) and modern professional programs (e.g. Excel, PMS systems, CRM) as a mandatory element in the course.

Although Gen Z is technically advanced, they may struggle with interpersonal communication, empathy, and teamwork. The following areas should be included in the curriculum:

Communication and Negotiation:

The culture of communicating effectively with customers and managers.

Emotional Intelligence:

The skills to manage stress and burnout in the workplace.

Critical Thinking:

The ability to analyze and extract the most relevant and relevant information from a stream of information.

Generation Z does not accept authoritarian leaders or teachers. For them, a teacher should be a Mentor (guide), not an order-giver.

Create an environment of free expression in classes.

Help students develop their personal brand and draw an individual educational trajectory based on their interests.



Systemic solution: Universities must not only be institutions that award degrees to students, but also serve as "Practical Hubs" that quickly adapt them to real changes in the labor market. Only then will Generation Z graduates become ready-made specialists demanded by the market, not job seekers.

Today, a kind of "clash of civilizations" is being observed between the higher education system of Uzbekistan and the students of Generation Z.

The traditional, age-old educational system cannot fully meet the demands of young people who have grown up in a digital world, who love speed and freedom.

Below is a systematic analysis of these problems and the requirements for the new generation of teachers who can solve them.

I. What problems does Generation Z face in today's education system in Uzbekistan?

Too much theory and paperwork (too little practice):

Uzbek universities still have a high proportion of academic lectures, writing summaries, and paper-based reports. Generation Z, on the other hand, is looking for practice, for answers to the question "how do I need this knowledge to make money or do a project?" A system based on dry memorization discourages them from education.

Authoritarian management and hierarchy:

In many places, the outdated approach of "whatever the teacher says is right" and "the student just needs to listen" is still preserved. Generation Z, on the other hand, is naturally a supporter of horizontal communication (equality). They want to freely express their opinions and argue in class. A pressured or commanding attitude arouses in them a feeling of aggression or complete disinterest.

Digital Divide:

While students can access all the information in seconds thanks to artificial intelligence (AI), short videos, and digital platforms, some teachers still teach from 10-15 year old slides or books, which devalues the value of the lesson. Students cannot accept a teacher who understands technology worse than them as an "expert."

Lack of Flexibility (Compulsory Attendance and Rigid Patterns):

Generation Z seeks to become independent early, working freelance or on projects while studying. The strict 8:30 AM attendance system at universities and the limited creative freedom force them to choose between studying or working (often choosing practical experience and money).

II. What kind of teachers do we need to save the system?

To teach Generation Z, we need not just a scientist who knows his subject, but a completely new corps of teachers. Today's education requires teachers with the following qualities:

Facilitator and Mentor: Information is crammed onto the Internet, so today the teacher is not the only source of knowledge. The new teacher should be a mentor who shows the student how to extract the right information from the ocean of information (Critical thinking) and how to apply it to life.



"Digital-savvy" (Technologically literate): It is necessary to be a teacher who can use artificial intelligence (ChatGPT, Midjourney, etc.), professional programs, digital trends, and organize the lesson interactively (on platforms such as Kahoot, Miro).

Practitioner: Not just sitting in the auditorium, but people who have their own projects in the real market, who are integrated into business or academic circles, and who have international experience can be real "authorities" for Generation Z.

A teacher with high emotional intelligence (EQ): We need teachers who understand the psychological state of young people, who can listen to them, who do not punish them for mistakes, but rather motivate them.

III. How to select personnel and how to solve this problem?

Universities should radically change the policy of selecting and attracting teachers:

Emphasize practical experience rather than academic title:

It is necessary to simplify the system of attracting young specialists who have shown real results in the market, and personnel who have studied abroad (even without an academic title), not only because they have a diploma or academic title (PhD, DSc).

Change the pedagogical skills scenario (KPI system):

When selecting teachers, it is necessary to test not only the text of the lecture, but also how interactively they can conduct classes, and the culture of communication with students. Anonymous assessment of teachers by students (Feedback) should be one of the main factors determining whether a teacher will stay at the university or not.

Continuous "Up-skilling" courses for teachers:

Current professors need practical retraining in modern case study methodology, mentoring skills, and the use of digital technologies, not just for formality and formality. Tourism and cultural heritage is not just about memorizing dry information, but also about the art of lively communication, emotions and high-level service (hospitality). In order to train Generation Z representatives as competent personnel in this field, the education system must also be radically transformed, breaking away from traditional molds and adapting to their nature.

If we classify the skills of Generation Z by levels (Low / Medium / High), the psychological picture looks like this:

Skills and characteristics	Level of development	Comment
Digital Intelligence (DQ)	Good (High)	Technologies, AI, and rapid data processing.
Visual perception	Good (High)	Quickly master short video and graphic formats.
Emotional Intelligence (EQ)	Good (High)	The need for self-awareness, empathy, and mental stability.
Long-term focus	Low	Impatience with monotonous and boring lectures.
Obedience to hierarchy	Low	Rejecting authoritarian and command-based governance.



According to Deloitte's global surveys, the reasons why Gen Z adapts to and leaves the workplace are expressed in the following percentages: 75-80%

Free schedule supporters: Almost 77% of Gen Z employees prefer remote work, hybrid format or flexible work schedules to the traditional office mode from 9:00 to 18:00. 45-50%

Mental fatigue (Burnout): Almost 46% of representatives of this generation report feeling constant stress or mental fatigue due to high pressure and hierarchy at work or study. 70% and above - "Work-Life Balance": For more than 73% of respondents, the first criterion when choosing a job is maintaining a balance between personal and work life and attention to mental health. Over 60%

"Authenticity" Demand: Nearly 65% of Gen Zer's indicated they would leave a workplace immediately if they perceived corporate hypocrisy or fakery.

To effectively work with Generation Z students in the field of tourism and cultural heritage, it is necessary to introduce the following innovative approach and system:

Generation Z hates memorizing dry dates, historical facts, and long texts. They prefer visual and emotional information.

Storytelling: Instead of dry lectures when teaching cultural heritage sites, students should be taught the myths, human fates, and interesting events behind these sites through storytelling. In today's tourism, guides must not only be information providers, but also be good "storytellers."

VR/AR (Virtual and Augmented Reality): Digital technologies should be introduced into the teaching process. For example, a system should be established to analyze historical sites, archaeological finds, or museum exhibits using VR glasses without leaving the classroom. This will connect their technological interests to the lesson.

Tourism is worthless without practice. Generation Z wants to get an immediate answer to the question "where will I apply this knowledge?".

Hotel and Restaurant Management Systems (PMS): In addition to teaching students the theory, it is necessary to teach them to work with professional programs used in modern hotels (for example, Opera, Fidelio, r-Keeper) at the university itself, in a laboratory setting.

Dual education (Study and work compatibility): Students should spend 3 days a week receiving theoretical knowledge at the university, and the remaining 3 days directly conducting internships in prestigious hotels, travel agencies and museums. This way, they will graduate adapted to the labor market.

Generation Z is not indifferent to social responsibility and environmental issues. Therefore, they should be involved in active projects during the educational process.

Startup projects: Instead of writing a term paper or thesis, students should be tasked with developing and protecting "Smart Tourism" mobile applications that increase the tourist potential of regions, new eco-tourism destinations, or startup projects to preserve and protect cultural heritage.



Digital marketing (SMM and Content Creation): Today, tourism is unimaginable without social networks. Students should be taught the methodology of branding the cultural heritage of regions through short, creative visual content (Reels, Shorts) for TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube.

Although Generation Z is well-versed in technology, they may struggle with face-to-face communication with people from different cultures and crisis management.

Emotional intelligence and hospitality psychology: It is necessary to organize training that develops the ability to manage stress when working with tourists and to feel the needs of the client even without knowing the language (empathy).

International environment and foreign languages: It is necessary to create an environment where classes are held only in English or other foreign languages, and to form a system for establishing constant networking with foreign students and professors.

The best mentor for Generation Z is a practicing specialist with his own personal brand, who has achieved real success in the tourism industry.

It is necessary to involve managers of international hotel chains, foreign guide experts, and representatives of migration or tourism agencies as guest speakers in the lessons.

Teachers should not be those who give orders to students, but rather act as mentors who guide them in finding their place in the international tourism market and gaining experience abroad (MICE tourism, international exhibitions).

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