

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**Reasons for Millennial Teachers'  
Attrition – Phenomenological  
approach**

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## **Abstract**

The generation currently flooding the world of employment is Generation Y, or in the language of research – Millennials. Israeli research defines them as being born between the years 1980 - 1995 (Almog & Almog, 2015). This generation's unique characteristics lead to a prominent phenomenon of job turnovers among young people.

In the field of education, both in Israel and around the world, there is widespread concern about teachers' attrition and the factors leading to it. Most of the research deals with attrition in the first five years since the dropout rate in these years is relatively high. However, no in-depth research has yet been conducted on the question of the unique causes of attrition of Generation Y teachers, characterizing it and carrying out the processes required to prevent it. This study attempts to answer exactly these questions - **what causes dropout of Generation Y teachers? What characterizes the attrition process? What are the expectations of millennial teachers from the school, that meeting them can lead to retention?**

The study is a qualitative study, whose main research tool is a semi-structured interview. The study interviewed 15 former teachers who were teachers for two to six years. The interviews focused on the phenomenology approach. After the interviews, coding and defining key categories were used to find the main reasons for attrition.

The findings of the interviews show a recurring pattern of the attrition process, which was named "the aspiring teacher syndrome". This model presents a process of several steps that was repeated in interviews:

- **Background in education** – The majority of teachers came with a background in education that gave them experience, a sense of security in their abilities, and knowledge on employment alternatives.
- **Enthusiastic entry into teaching** – The beginning of their work was characterized by a sense of mission and a desire for a meaningful experience within the system, while the receiving management recognized the potential in their abilities and enthusiasm.
- **The entrance into teaching "in high gear"** - From observing the potential and abilities of the teachers, the school brought the teachers in at high gear, while presenting various difficulties and challenges (classroom education, subject coordinators, placement in difficult classes, multiple subjects, et cetera).
- **Unsettling situation: balance of power:** From the difficulty that emerges in the process of beginning teaching, teachers went into an unsettled situation where they internally evaluate the balance of powers they experience in the workplace, with the question being to stay in it or not. Three types of forces acted on the teachers: pushing factors - various aspects within the teaching experience that push the teacher out of the education system; Pulling factors - various aspects, personal or occupational, that pull the teacher out of the education system; Inhibitive factors - various aspects within the teaching experience that inhibit the process of leaving and encourage staying.
- **Disruption of balance:** At some point there was a change that disrupted the balance, such that the forces pushing and pulling the teacher out of the system overcame the inhibiting forces that encourage staying.

• **Dropout and occupation in other kinds of education** - Most of the interviewees moved to another job in the educational-social field, i.e. a place with similar value that provides a better response to their needs.

As part of understanding of the model, the pushing, pulling and inhibitive factors within the unsettled situation were analyzed. Among the pushing factors found, a major issue was the issue of heavy loads and demands. It also violates the WLB, due to work taking over personal time, as well as emotional and mental resources.

More on the pushing factors, several issues arose about communication and relationships within the school. A major difficulty experienced by many of the teachers was in team relations and teamwork, that didn't meet their expectations for sharing and partnership. Another pushing factor was the principal-teacher relationship, where teachers experienced an aggressive and forceful discourse and bureaucratic management. In addition, most teachers experienced a lack of appreciation or invisibility. Their expectation is for a relationship based on trust, which recognizes the teacher's abilities and possible contribution. Another gap in the relationship concerned support and mentoring, with most teachers not experiencing significant mentoring processes, or mentoring not tailored to individual needs, contrary to their expectations for orderly, adaptable, and non-judgmental mentoring.

Another area in which pushing factors appeared was the area of employment conditions. Most teachers addressed the issue of salary and the need to raise it; not necessarily as a pushing force for dropout, but as a tool to establish appreciation and prestige of the profession and to recruit quality staff. On the other hand, most

teachers found significant difficulties with the bureaucracy and technical preoccupation on the matter. They noted the schools' disengagement from the issue.

An additional area that has been described as a pushing factor is related to identity and meaning. Several teachers indicated that they felt a lack of meaning in their work. Furthermore, the teachers noted the difficulty created in a situation of a mismatch in values between them and the school on various issues.

The main inhibitive factor found is the relationship with the students, noted to be mostly positive by the interviewees. Beside this factor, there were other personal or bureaucratic issues that served the inhibitory. The pulling factors that arose were changes in personal status, other job offers and a desire for self-fulfillment in other fields (arts and academia).

Along with the factors that emerged as part of the model, other possible inhibiting factors emerged, which were formulated from the image of the ideal place of employment presented by the interviewees. Teachers expressed an expectation for investment in professional development within the workplace, through goal setting, planned and regular training, and constant feedback. In addition, there is an expectation for transparency of the development possibilities within the school. Teachers also expect their workplace to allow for initiative and self-expression, and to have room for creation and influence. In the field of employment conditions, teachers expect work that has occupational flexibility. The teachers also stated they want to work with a high-quality workforce around them. They therefore offer actions to improve the workforce. These factors in fact give rise to an alternative model for the aspiring teacher. In this model, when a teacher comes to school with a similar profile, his or her planned entry into the system is made. Thus, the unstable

phase is carried out in a managed manner, and a maximized response is given to the needs of the teacher.

In the discussion chapter, a comparison was performed between the various factors that appeared in this research and the characteristics of Generation Y presented in previous studies. Most of the issues mentioned by the interviewees do indeed fit the definitions of Generation Y and its expectations from the world of employment as the study defines them.

In addition, the discussion redistributed the different expectations according to spheres of influence: issues that are in the school's sphere of influence and issues that are in the national policy's sphere of influence. The conclusion that emerges is that most of the issues are under the control of the school's management staff, who can wisely plan and guide the culture to produce a work environment better suited to Generation Y and its needs. More specifically, schools are required to plan and regulate the process of absorbing and mentoring new millennial teachers. The emphasis should be on load reduction, a customized and orderly mentoring process, the initiated creation of a space for self-expression and impact, and construction of the new teacher's relationships in school. Furthermore, a broader model is proposed at the level of national policy for changing the method of employment for internships year, which similarly addresses the needs of the millennials as they emerged from the study.

Recommendations that arose for the level of the Ministry of Education and national policy were to conduct an examination of the employment processes of young teachers and plan an optimal absorption process and control over its implementation in the field. For school principals, a change in the perception of responsibility for the retention of young teachers was recommended, followed by

the construction and execution of optimal absorption, mentoring and management processes according to the needs of Gen-Y. For the level of young teachers, it was recommended to examine deeply the valuable and professional suitability for the first school they enter, as well as to take proactive actions to reduce the load until greater systemic changes in the subject will occur. The recommendations for further research are to conduct similar studies to validate the results of the study, and to try to replicate it and its conclusions in other areas of the public sector. Another recommendation for the study is to build a quantitative index from the factors that emerged in the study findings.