Generation Z's Expectations from Coaching

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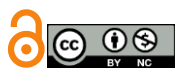*** Corresponding author email address**: alizadehsani@umz.ac.ir

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study examines the expectations and motivations of Generation Z students toward life coaching, highlighting the growing importance of understanding how this cohort interacts with life coaching.

Methods and Materials: Employing an applied qualitative design within an interpretive paradigm, the research drew on semi-structured interviews with 20 students from the University of Kirkuk, Iraq. Data were analyzed thematically, following systematic coding procedures until theoretical saturation was reached.

Findings: The findings revealed seventeen shaping students' expectations from coaching: Coaching Approach (personalized guidance), Communication Skills (active listening, constructive feedback, effective communication), Goal Orientation (measurable goals, transparent evaluation), Skill Development (enhancing capabilities, expertise transfer), Emotional Support (motivation, empathy, psychological safety), Professional Attitude (ethics, accountability, flexibility), Problem-Solving Capacity (practical decision-making skills), and Resource Facilitation (access to tools and networks).

Conclusion: The study contributes to the literature on coaching and generational learning by highlighting the culturally grounded expectations of Iraqi students. Practically, the findings suggest that coaches and educational institutions should adopt tailored, ethically sound, and goal-focused approaches to enhance engagement and effectiveness when working with Generation Z.

Keywords: *Coaching, Life Coaching, Generation Z, Iraq*

1   Introduction

Generation Z, commonly defined as those born from the mid-1990s to early 2010s, represents a cohort shaped by unique sociocultural, technological, and economic influences distinguishing them from previous generations. Scholars emphasize that this generation has distinct characteristics, expectations, and values, influencing their approaches to education, career, and personal development, making them a pivotal focus for emerging fields such as life coaching (Al-Twal et al., 2025; Csobanka, 2016; George, 2024; Wajdi et al., 2024). As the first true digital natives, Generation Z demonstrates heightened proficiency with technology and social media, which in turn shapes their learning preferences, communication styles, and consumption behaviors, including their engagement with

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coaching services (Baykal, 2020; Hammad, 2025). Moreover, Generation Z is noted for its pragmatic yet socially conscious mindset, with a strong desire for authenticity, personalized experiences, and ethical responsibility in both personal and professional domains (Banda, 2025; Narojczyk & Nowak, 2024; Parsakia, Rostami, Saadati, et al., 2023).

Concurrently, the life coaching industry has burgeoned into a significant global market, reflecting increased awareness of mental health, well-being, and personal development. Recent market analyses project a rapid expansion in the coaching market size, driven largely by the demand from younger generations, including Generation Z, who seek guidance to navigate the complexities of modern life (Luisa, 2025). Life coaching differentiates itself from traditional therapy by focusing on goal attainment, empowerment, and skill-building rather than pathology, although the boundaries can sometimes overlap, highlighting the importance of clarity in coaching roles and client expectations (Aboujaoude, 2020). The growing body of research supports the efficacy of life coaching interventions in improving psychological well-being, motivation, and resilience, especially among young adults, underscoring its relevance for Generation Z populations facing unprecedented social and economic challenges (Aboalshamat et al., 2020; Ebner et al., 2018; Grant, 2003).

A key factor in the successful delivery of coaching services is market segmentation and client profiling, which enables coaches and organizations to tailor their approaches according to clients' unique needs and expectations. Contemporary marketing practice stresses the importance of segmentation strategies that acknowledge generational differences, cultural contexts, and consumer behavior patterns for optimizing engagement and outcomes (Arsova & Temjanovski, 2019; Lindroos, 2023; Wu & Pan, 2009). In this vein, customer profiling leveraging advanced techniques like machine learning is emerging as a powerful tool to enhance marketing strategies and client retention in coaching businesses (Álvarez González, 2024). Such approaches align with the digital fluency and data-centric attitudes prevalent in Generation Z, facilitating more personalized and interactive coaching experiences (Daoud et al., 2023).

Coaching Generation Z clients, however, presents specific challenges and opportunities due in part to their unique psychological makeup, value systems, and communication preferences. Studies in sports and professional coaching highlight how coaches' expectations and the coaching climate can significantly influence youth development and psychological outcomes, calling for adaptive coaching styles that resonate with Generation Z's collaborative, feedback-oriented style (Gould et al., 2020; Horn et al., 2001; Landman et al., 2024). In educational and organizational contexts, Generation Z demands coaching methods that integrate technological tools for virtual collaboration, flexibility, and real-time feedback, reflecting their seamless blending of online and offline worlds (Anderson et al., 2024; Tee et al., 2022). Furthermore, ethical considerations and social responsibility are increasingly pivotal in coaching frameworks targeting Generation Z, who are attuned to integrity and social impact in their decision-making processes (Banda, 2025).

Despite burgeoning interest, there remains a gap in research exploring the lived experiences, expectations, and cultural nuances of Generation Z in non-Western environments, particularly within Middle Eastern contexts such as Iraq. Most extant coaching literature and marketing analyses originate from Western or multinational perspectives, potentially limiting their applicability and resonance with local Generation Z cohorts, whose societal, educational, and familial structures differ substantially. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing coaching interventions that are culturally sensitive, relevant, and efficacious (Hysa, 2016; Parsakia, Rostami, Darbani, et al., 2023; Świerkosz-Hołysz, 2016).

This study seeks to contribute original insights into the expectations and motivations of Generation Z university students regarding life coaching within the Iraqi context.

2   Methods and Materials

This study is an applied study, conducted within an interpretive paradigm, and employs a qualitative research design. This design was deemed appropriate, as the study aimed to explore and understand the expectations, motivations, and lived experiences of Generation Z students in relation to coaching, rather than to test predetermined hypotheses.

The study population comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students at the University of Kirkuk. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with the sampling process guided by the principle of theoretical saturation. A total of 20 participants were interviewed, at which point no new concepts were emerging, and saturation was considered achieved. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the participants.

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Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, a method suitable for capturing in-depth insights while allowing flexibility to probe participants' perspectives. The interview protocol was developed based on a review of the relevant literature and consultation with domain experts. Interviews were conducted between January and October 2024, each lasting an average of 65 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Several strategies were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study:

Credibility was ensured through member checking, whereby selected findings were shared with participants to validate the accuracy of interpretations.

Dependability and confirmability were reinforced through peer review, as three interview transcripts were independently coded by another researcher familiar with the subject matter. Discrepancies were discussed until consensus was achieved. An external audit was conducted by the primary supervisor, who reviewed the coding scheme and provided feedback for refinement.

To further strengthen reliability, inter-coder agreement was assessed using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. Two independent researchers coded the full set of interview transcripts using MAXQDA software. The resulting Cohen's Kappa value was 0.76, which exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.60, indicating substantial agreement between coders.

Finally, construct validity was enhanced by submitting the final coding framework to review by a third academic expert in marketing, ensuring conceptual alignment and analytical robustness.

Table 1

Characteristics of research participants

No.	Gender	Age	Department
1	Male	21	Accounting
2	Male	23	Accounting
3	Male	22	Accounting
4	Male	22	Management
5	Male	20	Management
6	Female	22	Accounting
7	Female	22	Accounting
8	Female	24	Management
9	Female	21	Marketing
10	Female	٢٢	Engineering
11	Male	23	Engineering
12	Male	21	Engineering
13	Male	23	Law
14	Male	23	Law
15	Male	21	Marketing
16	Male	23	Marketing
17	Female	22	Marketing
18	Male	22	Computer Science
19	Female	23	Engineering
20	Female	21	Computer Science

The analysis of the interview data was carried out using Thematic Analysis (TA), a flexible and widely used method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. In this approach, the data were systematically reviewed and coded to capture recurring ideas and meaningful segments. These initial codes were then examined and compared to highlight commonalities and differences across the dataset.

In the next phase, related codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected significant patterns in participants' experiences and perspectives. Each theme was refined by reviewing the data extracts, ensuring internal coherence and distinctiveness from other themes. Finally, the themes were defined, named, and integrated into a coherent narrative that addressed the research questions and provided deeper insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

3   Findings and Results

Based on the coding of concepts, the table below was extracted. Open coding is an analytical process through which codes, concepts, and categories are identified, along with their features, dimensions, and relationships within the data. This process involves three main steps. First, initial codes are identified to facilitate an in-depth review of the sources and information related to the research. These codes are then organized into concepts, which are subsequently classified into broader categories. The results of coding the interviews led to the identification of 17 concepts, which are shown in Table 3.

Table 2

Coding Generation Z's expectations from life coaching

Sentences	Sub-categories	Frequency	Percentage
Coaching must be customized to each student's individual characteristics, preferences, and goals.	Personalized Approach	10	5.1%
Coaches should listen attentively and acknowledge students' perspectives.	Active listening	16	8.1%
Constructive and timely feedback is vital for improvement and growth.	Constructive Feedback	10	5.1%
Clear and effective communication is essential for building relationships.	Effective Communication Skills	14	7.1%
Students expect coaches to help them set clear, realistic, and measurable goals.	Setting goals and making them measurable	17	8.6%
Transparency in performance and results evaluation strengthens trust in the coaching process.	Clarifying results, performance, and response	5	2.5%
Coaching should help learners build new competencies and broaden their knowledge.	Enhancing capabilities and knowledge	3	1.5%
Coaches must possess subject-matter expertise to enhance credibility.	Expertise and Knowledge	11	5.6%
Students value encouragement and motivational support to sustain effort in challenges.	Providing support and Motivation	21	10.6%
A safe and trusting environment is crucial for effective coaching engagement.	Confidence and safety	10	5.1%
Students value empathy and understanding in the coaching relationship.	Empathy	23	11.6%
The ethical responsibility of coaches ensures trust and professionalism.	Commitment to ethics principles	9	4.5%
Adaptability and openness are key expectations from coaches.	Open-mindedness and Flexibility	17	8.6%
Both coaches and students must take responsibility for commitments and outcomes.	Accountability	13	6.6%
Students expect coaches to guide them in tackling challenges with practical solutions.	Problem-Solving Skills	2	1%
Coaches should connect students with tools, information, and opportunities.	Providing access to resources	8	4%
coaches should help to enhance broader competencies necessary for academic, career, and personal advancement	Skill Development	9	4.5%

4   Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored the expectations and motivations of Generation Z university students in Iraq toward life coaching, revealing critical insights into coaching approaches, communication preferences, goal orientation, skill development needs, emotional support, and professional ethics. The findings demonstrate that Generation Z individuals prioritize personalized, empathetic, and goal-driven coaching experiences, reflecting their distinct generational characteristics and the evolving market dynamics of coaching.

The prominence of personalized guidance in coaching approach aligns with the literature emphasizing the need for tailored coaching practices that resonate with individual client traits and aspirations (Aboalshamat et al., 2020; Cox et al., 2023). As Generation Z is characterized by valuing authenticity and customization, their expectation for coaching that adapts to their unique contexts mirrors broader trends in consumer behavior and service personalization (Al-

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Twal et al., 2025; Baykal, 2020; George, 2024). Furthermore, this cohort's affinity for clear, transparent communication and constructive feedback supports findings by Anderson et al. (2024) that effective communication and active listening are fundamental for successful virtual and face-to-face coaching, particularly for digitally native clients (Anderson et al., 2024). The emphasis on communication skills in coaching resonates also with Cronin and Allen's (2018) insights linking positive coaching climates to enhanced life skills and psychological well-being, crucial for Generation Z's holistic development (Cronin & Allen, 2018).

Goal orientation emerged strongly from the interviews; participants favored measurable, transparent goal-setting and evaluation, demonstrating Generation Z's pragmatic and results-driven mindset (Al-Twal et al., 2025; Narojczyk & Nowak, 2024). This is consistent with Grant's (2003) findings that life coaching significantly facilitates goal attainment and mental health improvements, underscoring that Generation Z's focus on tangible outcomes aligns well with coaching efficacy principles (Grant, 2003). This cohort's preference for skill development, including enhancing capabilities and transferring expertise, concurs with Czinkota et al. (2021) and DiGirolamo (2015), who emphasize that coaching rooted in skill enhancement supports competitive advantage in dynamic environments (Czinkota et al., 2021; DiGirolamo, 2015). Moreover, these skill development priorities mirror findings by Gould et al. (2020) and Landman et al. (2024), who highlight the importance of coach-athlete relationships and adaptive coaching styles to foster talent and motivation in Generation Z individuals (Gould et al., 2020; Landman et al., 2024).

Emotional support was another pivotal theme, with students valuing motivation, empathy, and psychological safety from coaching relationships. This echoes Aboalshamat et al.'s (2020) evidence for the role of life coaching in reducing psychological distress through emotional and motivational support (Aboalshamat et al., 2020). The psychological safety aspect is critical for Generation Z, who experience heightened stress and mental health challenges and therefore seek coaching that provides reassurance and empowerment, as supported by Ebner et al. (2018) in their study on coaching as a stress-management intervention (Ebner et al., 2018). Additionally, ethical considerations and professionalism in coaching were prominent concerns, consistent with Banda's (2025) critical analysis emphasizing Generation Z's demand for integrity,

social responsibility, and accountability in educational and professional settings (Banda, 2025).

The nuanced client profiling and segmentation identified in this study are corroborated by marketing research that underscores the necessity of sophisticated segmentation strategies to engage Generation Z effectively (Arsova & Temjanovski, 2019; Lindroos, 2023; Wu & Pan, 2009). Álvarez González's (2024) exploration of leveraging machine learning for optimal client profiling underscores the potential for technology-enabled, data-driven marketing that resonates with Generation Z's digital orientation and preference for user-centric approaches (Álvarez González, 2024; Daoud et al., 2023). This dovetails with Baykal's (2020) observation of Generation Z's omnichannel experience expectations, requiring seamless integration of digital and offline interactions in service delivery (Baykal, 2020).

These results highlight the strategic importance of ethical, personalized, transparent, and technologically adept coaching to meet Generation Z's evolving expectations. They confirm that coaching for this generation must go beyond traditional paradigms, embracing innovation, empathy, and outcome orientation consistent with contemporary coaching scholarship and market trends (Aboujaoude, 2020; Cox et al., 2023; Grant, 2003). Coaching's role as a developmental, motivational, and therapeutic tool is acknowledged broadly, but Generation Z's distinct context demands continual research and adaptation (Aboalshamat et al., 2020; Ebner et al., 2018).

This study's qualitative design, while rich in contextual insights, limits the generalizability of findings across broader Generation Z populations or different cultural contexts. The sample size, restricted to university students in Iraq, may not capture the full diversity of Generation Z's experiences, particularly those outside the academic milieu or in other regions. Additionally, self-reported data may be influenced by social desirability or recall biases. The exclusion of quantitative measures also limits the ability to statistically validate the reported themes and their relative importance.

Future work should expand the scope and scale, incorporating mixed methods designs with larger, more diverse samples encompassing different geographic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how coaching expectations and outcomes evolve over time within Generation Z. Comparative studies across different generational cohorts and across different

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coaching models (e.g., life coaching versus career coaching) would help delineate unique versus universal coaching needs. Moreover, research exploring the integration of advanced technologies such as AI and machine learning in coaching delivery and marketing, particularly tailored to Generation Z's preferences, would be highly valuable.

Practitioners should prioritize developing coaching programs that are highly personalized, emphasizing active listening, transparent goal-setting, and measurable outcomes. Emotional support and the creation of psychologically safe environments are essential for Generation Z clients, requiring coaches to develop empathy and ethical professionalism. Integrating technology-enabled communication platforms and data-driven client profiling can enhance engagement and tailor services effectively. Organizations should invest in training coaches to understand Generation Z's unique characteristics, motivators, and challenges to ensure coaching effectiveness and client satisfaction. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of coaching strategies to align with evolving generational trends will be critical to sustaining relevance and impact.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Acknowledgments

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

In this research, ethical standards including obtaining informed consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality were observed.

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