SCRUTINIZING THE IMPACT OF POPULAR CULTURE ON GENERATION Z'S ENGLISH

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Abstract. The present study aimed to investigate the influence of popular culture on Generation Z and their English proficiency. The research method was qualitative, and the participants were ten young people categorized as Generation Z. The participants were recruited purposely. There were two research questions: a) How does Generation Z view popular culture? b) How do widespread popular cultures impact Generation Z's English? The data analyzed were the participants' verbal responses, recorded by the researcher. The findings suggest that the influence of popular culture on social media among Generation Z was substantial. For instance, the generation was found to actively participate in listening to songs, watching movies, or creating their own cultures. Generation Z's English was also found to have improved due to exposure to popular culture on social media. Additionally, participants noted that consuming content in English helped them expand their vocabulary, understand different accents, and gain confidence in using the language. These results highlight the role of media-driven culture in informal language learning.

Keywords: Popular Culture, Generation Z, English Skills.

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Abstrak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pengaruh budaya populer terhadap Generasi Z dan kemampuan bahasa Inggris mereka. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah kualitatif, dengan sepuluh orang peserta yang dikategorikan sebagai Generasi Z. Peserta dipilih secara purposive. Terdapat dua pertanyaan penelitian: a) Bagaimana pandangan Generasi Z terhadap budaya populer? b) Bagaimana budaya populer yang tersebar luas memengaruhi kemampuan bahasa Inggris Generasi Z? Data yang dianalisis berasal dari respons verbal peserta yang direkam oleh peneliti. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pengaruh budaya populer di media sosial terhadap Generasi Z cukup besar. Misalnya, generasi ini secara aktif terlibat dalam mendengarkan lagu, menonton film, atau menciptakan budaya mereka sendiri. Kemampuan bahasa Inggris Generasi Z juga diketahui meningkat akibat paparan budaya populer di media sosial. Selain itu, para peserta menyatakan bahwa mengonsumsi konten berbahasa Inggris membantu mereka memperluas kosakata, memahami berbagai aksen, dan meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dalam menggunakan bahasa tersebut. Hasil ini menyoroti peran budaya berbasis media dalam pembelajaran bahasa secara informal.

Kata Kunci: Budaya Populer, Generasi Z, Kemampuan Bahasa Ingrris.

INTRODUCTION

Popular culture is rapidly circulating globally (Law, 2022). This is due to the rapid development of digital platforms, particularly social media (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Admittedly, social media and the internet have become increasingly popular, transforming the way people communicate, connect, and interact globally, thereby leading to the creation of what is often referred to as popular culture (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Popular culture is commonly known as a unique representation of specific, stylish ways of life, including entertainment, language, and fashion (Storey, 2021).

Generation Z, the demographic group born between 1997 and 2012, is at the centre of this transformation (Dimock, 2019). As digital natives, they have grown up with the internet and various digital technologies since childhood (Prensky, 2001). This generation not only consumes popular culture but also actively engages in its creation and dissemination through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter

(Leung, 2021; Ontario Creates, 2022). Furthermore, their interaction with global content, including the English language, has a profound impact on their worldview (Baker, 2015).

As a global language, English often functions as a gateway to access and interact with popular media (Crystal, 2003). From song lyrics and video games to memes and online discussions, English is widely used by Generation Z in both passive and active forms of communication (Baker & Jenkins, 2021). Given these factors, it is imperative to explore how Generation Z perceives popular culture and the impact of their engagement with English-centred global media on their English proficiency and usage. Understanding this relationship can provide valuable insights into language development in the digital age, especially in environments where English is a foreign or second language. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How does Generation Z view popular culture?
2. How do widespread popular cultures impact Generation Z's English?

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Generation Z

Generation Z (Gen Z) was born between 1997 and 2012. This generation is familiar with digital technology, having grown up with the internet, smartphones, and social media. Gen Z has been using digital tools for school, entertainment, and communication from a young age. They are often referred to as "digital natives" because using technology is a natural part of their everyday lives.

Unlike previous generations, Gen Z spends a significant amount of time online. They use platforms like YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat to watch videos, follow trends, talk to friends, and learn new things. As such, they are very adept at using technology and quickly adapt to new digital platforms and apps. "Generation Z refers to those born after 1995 who have grown up with access to digital technology and social media, distinguishing them from previous generations in their media habits and social behaviors."(Turner, 2015)

Gen Z also has a distinct approach to learning. They do not just learn in the classroom. Many learn by watching short videos, reading online, or listening to music and podcasts. It makes learning more flexible and fun for them. They also enjoy learning through games, online discussions, and social media, which shows that Gen Z prefers an

interactive and fast-paced learning style. Additionally, Gen Z is more open to diverse cultures. They follow international influencers, watch movies and series from other countries, and listen to music in different languages, especially English. It makes them more familiar with the English language. They often hear English words and phrases in the content they enjoy, and over time, they start using English in their conversations and writing, even without formal lessons.

Social Media

Social media has become a powerful tool for disseminating popular culture and shaping how Generation Z uses the English language. Platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Twitter allow people to share ideas, trends, and communication styles quickly and widely. Many of these trends—such as hashtags, memes, and viral challenges —start in Western countries and then spread to other parts of the world. As a result, young people worldwide, including in Indonesia, are exposed to new forms of English almost every day. That includes internet slang, abbreviations, emojis, and informal expressions, which have become part of how Gen Z communicates online (Sugiarto & Arif, 2024; Doshi et al., 2024)

The impact of social media on English is not just about vocabulary or grammar. It also affects how young people see themselves and express their identity. For many members of Gen Z, using English on social media shows that they are part of a global online community. Also, it helps them feel connected to others worldwide who share their interests in music, fashion, entertainment and technology. Thus, language becomes more than just a communication tool - it becomes part of who they are (Rothoni, 2019; Sugiarto & Arif, 2024).

The Role of English as a Global Language

English has become the world's most widely spoken second language and functions as a global lingua franca. Crystal (2003) explains that the global dominance of English is due to its use in international business, education, diplomacy, and the internet. The importance of English in global communication influences how it is learned and perceived by non-native speakers. In many societies, including Indonesia, English is

viewed as a means of achieving upward mobility, academic success, and global connectivity.

Digital platforms reinforce the role of English in daily life. From music lyrics to YouTube videos, online games, and social media captions, English is deeply embedded in the digital experiences of young people worldwide. This organic exposure helps young people acquire English skills outside formal education settings.

Popular Culture

Popular culture, also known as pop culture, refers to the mainstream cultural products and activities that are widely enjoyed by many people. That includes music, movies, TV shows, internet memes, fashion styles, and other types of entertainment. According to Storey (2021), popular culture is shaped by the media and usually indicates what people like, want, and value. In recent years, pop culture has become a vital source of informal learning, particularly for young people. They can learn new things, such as language and cultural expressions, outside of school simply by interacting with popular media. In addition, the influence of pop culture has been amplified by the rise of digital technology.

The internet, smartphones, and social media platforms make it easy for young people to access pop culture content worldwide. Much of this content is available in English, including K-pop songs with English lyrics, Hollywood movies, anime with English subtitles or voiceovers, and popular social media trends. By seeing, hearing, and even directly participating in these activities, children are often exposed to English in a quick, fun, and natural way. It helps them improve their vocabulary, pronunciation, and understanding of English usage in real-life situations. In this way, pop culture is not only entertaining but also plays a role in helping Generation Z learn the language..

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative research. This research is qualitative as it is narrative, descriptive, interpretive, and critical without any numerical analysis. Qualitative research gives relaxation for the researcher's predisposition as Cresswell (2003) The researchers conducted qualitative study since the they wished to understand the nature of the phenomenon which occurred during the study. Besides, the researchers

also wished to elicit the responses of the generation Z regarding their perceptions of popular cultures and its impact to their English.

In addition to primary data, the researcher included insights from 10 previous studies that relate to the influence of pop culture, social media, and English learning among Generation Z. These studies help validate the data collected from interviews and support the conclusions.

Participants

The object of this study is the influence of popular culture from social media on Generation Z's English proficiency and perception. In this research, the focus is on how digital content, such as songs, movies, memes, influencers, and online trends, shapes the way Gen Z individuals learn and use English in their daily lives. These elements of pop culture, which are mostly spread through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and X (Twitter) are considered the core materials that influence the participants' exposure to and engagement with the English language.

In addition to the object of study, the subject of study (participants) in this research consists of 10 Participant who belong to Generation Z, born between 1997-2012. These participants were selected based on their active engagement with social media and popular culture, which made them suitable for this research topic. The full list of participants is included in the table below:

No	Initials	Year of Birth	Generation
1	A	2002	Generation Z
2	M	2008	Generation Z
3	L	2003	Generation Z
4	D	2004	Generation Z
5	C	2004	Generation Z
6	H	2003	Generation Z
7	M	2003	Generation Z

8	N	2004	Generation Z
9	R	2004	Generation Z
10	S	2003	Generation Z

All participants are active users of social media and regularly consume English-language content, making them ideal for the purpose of this study.

Instruments

An instrument is a tool used to elicit data during research (Ukmawati, Sudarmin, Salmia, 2023). In the present study, the researchers employed semi-structured interviews to facilitate the collection of verbal responses from participants in a more natural manner. The researchers asked open-ended questions and provided space for participants to express their thoughts in detail. These answers were used as primary data for analysis.

Sources of Data and Data Analysis

Sources of data are things or verbal responses that the researchers obtained during the interview. The term data refers to the kinds of information researchers obtain about their research. (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Furthermore, the data analyzed are those that are only relevant to the study's focus or relevant to the research questions.

Data Collection Procedure

1. Preparing interview questions

    The researcher designed a set of questions focused on how participants engage with popular culture and how it affects their English language development.

2. Selecting participants

    The researcher used purposive sampling to select 10 participants from Generation Z who are active social media users and exposed to English-language pop culture.

3. Conducting interviews

    Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant, either in person or online. Each interview lasted around 3 to 4 minutes.

4. Transcribing data

All interview responses were transcribed word for word to ensure accuracy in analysis.

5. Thematic analysis

The transcribed data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The researcher identified recurring patterns, ideas, and keywords that were grouped into themes relevant to the research questions (Creswell).

6. Comparing with previous studies

To strengthen the analysis, the researcher used 10 previous studies as supporting evidence. These studies helped confirm or contrast the participants' experiences with existing academic findings.

7. Drawing conclusions

Based on the themes and comparisons, the researcher formulated conclusions that directly address the two research questions..

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

Results

Generation Z's View of Popular Culture and The Potential Impacts on Their English

Generation Z's views on popular culture	The impact of popular culture on Generation Z's English
1. Do you keep up with pop culture? **A:** Yes, I try to keep up with pop culture, primarily through social media like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. **M:** Yes, I followed it. **L:** Yes, I do. I follow many trends, especially on social media like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. **D:** Yes, I keep up with pop culture, mainly through social media and streaming platforms. **C:** Yes, I followed it.	1. Do you keep up with pop culture? **A:** Yes, I try to keep up with pop culture, primarily through social media like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. **M:** Yes, I followed it. **L:** Yes, I do. I follow many trends, especially on social media like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube. **D:** Yes, I keep up with pop culture, mainly through social media and streaming platforms. **C:** Yes, I followed it.

H: Yes, I keep up with popular culture.

M: Yes, I do.
N: Yes, I follow
R: Yes, I keep up with popular culture.

S: Yes, sometimes I look after the pop culture either in social media like TikTok or Instagram.

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2. What do you think about pop culture on the internet?

A: Pop culture on the internet is spread fast, but also very entertaining and influential. For me, pop culture helps me stay updated with current trends globally.

M: I thought it was interesting.
L: I think it spreads fast and brings people together, but sometimes it can be overwhelming or superficial.

D: I see pop culture on the internet as very dynamic and influencing many aspects of life, including speech styles and trends.

C: I think there are positive parts but there are negative parts too.

H: In my opinion, we as Gen Z are no strangers to social media or the internet. There are so many platforms that we can easily access such as Instagram, TikTok, X (Twitter) and from there we can easily be influenced by popular culture from these platforms.

M: It spreads quickly and influences many people.

N: I would say that since I am a person who goes online a lot, I do follow the trends.

R: I think that in today's internet era, popular culture has a huge influence, especially in English, because now many people can speak English just by hearing or seeing it.

S: I think by the time it's more unique and more interesting from I see right now.

3. Do you think English is widely used on the internet/social media?

A: Yes absolutely. Because English is a global language, so it is used by most of the people all around the world.

M: Yes, it is.
L: Definitely. Most viral content, captions, and even comments are in English, even if the creator isn't from an English-speaking country.

D: Yes, English is used very frequently on the internet and social media and is even the main language on many platforms.

C: Yes, it is widely used.
H: Yes, very much and it can be said that most probably especially for international popular culture.

M: Yes, English is the main language used online.

N: Yes, a lot. Apart from keeping up with the trends, I can also meet people from abroad, and I can use English because it is a universal language.

R: Yes, many people use English on social media or the internet.

S: Yes, sometimes I do look some content using English rather than Indonesian.

4. What social media programs, events, or activities do you follow?

A: I followed and watched some content, mainly on YouTube and X (Twitter). Like, content about music, movies, learning languages, and the geography of some countries in the world.

M: Vlogs and games.

L: I follow online concerts, fan meetings, live streams, and big events like the Met Gala or Coachella.

D: I follow entertainment programs, education, podcasts, and content creator accounts that often cover interesting topics.

C: Maybe K-pop, podcasts, or dramas.

H: There is nothing that I follow deeply; it's more about my social media algorithm.

M: I follow beauty content, music, and trending challenges.

N: No, but I usually watch movies that are trending.

R: Not many, but I mostly follow personal accounts of celebrities or influencers.

S: Sometimes did I follow like music, or memes like that.

5. Is it beauty content, random short videos, or something else?

A: Mostly random short videos, memes, music-related content and sometimes about lifestyle or educational videos.

M: Mostly short random videos.

L: Mostly random short videos, memes, and sometimes lifestyle or fashion content.

D: The content I watch varies from random short videos, educational content, to light entertainment.

C: Everything, beauty content, short videos and others.

H: I am personally interested in beauty content.

M: Mostly beauty content and random short videos.

N: Movies

R: What I see is more content about music.

S: Mix, because I am, depends on my fyp (for you page) like in TikTok or something like that.

6. Is the content or activity in English?

A: Yes. A lot of the content that I watch is in English, especially when it comes from international creators or is about global culture trends.

M: Some use full English, but some combine it with Indonesian.

L: Yes, most of the content I watch is in English or has English subtitles.

D: Yes, most of the content is in English, either fully or mixed.

C: So, what I usually watch is in a mixture of English and Indonesian.

H: From what I mentioned earlier, no, but for general content such as self-development and others, yes, they use English.

M: Yes, many are in English.
N: Yes, using English.
R: The content I see is mostly in English.
S: Yes, mostly that I watch are mostly in English language rather than Indonesian.

7. Do you think pop culture can affect your English improvement? **A:** Yes. It has helped me improve my English skills. **M:** Yes, it affects the improvement of my English. **L:** Yes, for sure. Watching and listening to English content helps me understand how native speakers use the language. **D:** I think pop culture helps me become more familiar with English in a natural and fun way. **C:** Yes	7. Do you think pop culture can affect your English improvement? **A:** Yes. It has helped me improve my English skills. **M:** Yes, it affects the improvement of my English. **L:** Yes, for sure. Watching and listening to English content helps me understand how native speakers use the language. **D:** I think pop culture helps me become more familiar with English in a natural and fun way. **C:** Yes

H: I personally think it has an effect because when we learn a language we see from what we watch or hear so it will be very influential.

M: Yes, it helps me learn new words and expressions.

N: Yes, very influential.

R: Yes, I think popular culture has a great and positive influence on improving my English. I started listening to English content since junior high school.

S: Yes, I think because there are new words or how they pronounce it, it's made me learns new words and how to pronounce it.

8. What aspects do you feel are affected (Pronouns, grammar, or vocabulary)?

A: I think vocabulary, like it has increased my vocabulary list knowledge.

M: Pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

L: Vocabulary and sentence structure are the most. Also, I learned how slang and informal expressions work.

D: I feel most affected in the vocabulary and listening aspects, as I am often exposed to new words.

C: I feel significantly influenced in terms of pronunciation and vocabulary.

H: Vocabulary

M: Vocabulary and pronunciation.
N: Overall
R: I think all aspects are important starting from pronouns grammar or vocabulary, because pronouns are so that we know how to pronounce and can be understood by our interlocutors, if for grammar so that my interlocutors can understand my grammar, and for vocabulary it is how we can express what we want to mean with English which is not our first language.

S: I think by their pronouns and sometimes their vocabulary.

9. And specifically, how has it affected your English skills?

A: It has made my spoken and written English more natural. It makes it easier to write in English, even though I still use a translation machine occasionally. I also understand more current slang expressions.

M: So specifically, I got to know a lot of new words and how to pronounce them. for example, for pronunciation I can see from the content how they pronounce it, and I can imitate it and for vocabulary I learned words that might be new to me or that I didn't even know before.

L: I have become more confident in speaking and understanding casual conversations. I also pick up idioms and trending phrases easily.

D: Exposure to English content makes me understand new

vocabulary and sentence structures in real contexts faster.

C: Specifically, when I watch or read the content, I imitate and follow the vocabulary that I just learned.

H: If I am interested in learning a language, for example, from small things like vocabulary, for example, I just found a new word that I think is interesting, I will note it down and learn it.

M: I've learned how to pronounce words better and use them in context.

N: So, it improves my English skills, such as adding new vocabulary, practicing pronunciation, and when watching movies, I try not to use subtitles to practice my English skills.

R: Specifically, it is very influential for me in learning or improving my English skills.

S: I think is really affected in my English skills because mostly I learn from the content that i usually watch like the music, shorts and so on.

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10. What elements of popular culture do you think have the most influence on your English language development or skills? (Music (song lyrics), Movies, or Memes, etc.)

A: For me, it is a mix of music, movies, and memes. Especially movies, it helps me understand the tone of conversation, and memes, which introduced me to informal English that can be used for jokes.

M: So, the most influential on my English skills are song lyrics, movie scripts and games because I like playing games.

L: Music and memes. Songs help with pronunciation and rhythm, while memes teach a lot of modern slang and humor.

D: Music and movies have the most influence because I consume them frequently, and they are easy to remember through lyrics and dialogue.

C: Music, movies, memes, and maybe because I like to play games, so from chat (text) in games.

H: All of them, because for movies I happen to like western movies and like to listen to songs too.

M: Music and short videos have the most significant influence.

N: Script movies and song lyrics.
R: I think the most influential in my English development or ability is music because I like listening to music.

S: Mostly music and memes because that's usually I watch in like TikTok or Instagram or other social media that I use.

11. Do you think the influence of popular culture has a positive impact on your English skills or not? If so, how?

A: Yes, it has a positive impact because using it makes learning languages more fun. I'm more

motivated to learn when I enjoy the content, rather than just relying on written materials or textbooks.

M: Yes, because popular culture has positively influenced me to learn and become more accustomed to the English accent.

L: Yes, it has a positive impact. It makes learning English fun and natural, because I'm not just studying—I'm enjoying the content and learning at the same time.

D: I think yes, because with this popular culture I can find out new vocabulary that I don't know so I know it and then I know the sentence structure in the context that before I didn't know what the structure was like, so I know it, so those are the positive things I get from popular culture.

C: Yes, because I can add insight into English, for example, slang or formal language.

H: I think it has a good impact, because I like to find out or learn new things.

M: Yes, because it makes learning English more fun and natural.

N: It has a very positive impact on me, because I can learn English easily and easily and happy because while watching movies or while listening to music, so learning is fun.

R: Yes, I think popular culture has a positive impact on my English skills. It helps me learn new vocabulary, understand how

native speakers talk, and improve my listening and speaking. Watching movies, listening to songs, or reading content in English makes learning fun and easier to remember. **S:** I think have positive impact like I talk before, like I can learn new words and how to pronounce it because sometimes how they pronounce it is different from the other contents so like that.	native speakers talk, and improve my listening and speaking. Watching movies, listening to songs, or reading content in English makes learning fun and easier to remember. **S:** I think have positive impact like I talk before, like I can learn new words and how to pronounce it because sometimes how they pronounce it is different from the other contents so like that.

Analysis

The View of Generation Z Toward Pop Culture

Based on the data, most Generation Z individuals interviewed were actively engaged in pop culture. They always get connected to the trend of popular culture. This finding is relevant to the previous studies. Fatimah and Rahma (2025) confirm that global influences, such as K-pop, Western movies, and fashion trends, affect how young Indonesians see themselves. Many of them admire and adopt styles from South Korea, the United States, and other countries.

The Impact of Popular Culture on Generation Z's English

Based on the data, most Generation Z individuals interviewed were highly influenced by popular culture in their use of English. This finding is relevant to the previous studies: For many young people, pop culture is a significant motivator for learning English. Whether they enjoy K-pop, anime, Western music, or popular movies, these forms of entertainment often include English, making the language feel fun and relevant. When fans of a K-pop group want to understand the lyrics or watch interviews without subtitles, they become more motivated to study the English language. The same happens when someone watches a Netflix show and wants to understand the jokes or conversations in their original form. In the study *"Analysis of K-Pop Trends on English Learning Motivation Among Gen-Z,"* Arifatuzzahra et al. (2024) found that pop culture encourages both enjoyment-based (intrinsic) and culture-based (integrative) motivation

to improve English. Learning English becomes more than just a school subject—it becomes a way to feel closer to one's favorite artists and be part of global fan communities.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

The present study aims to investigate the impact of popular culture on the English language skills of Generation Z. The findings suggest that Generation Z is actively engaging with popular culture, particularly through social media. Furthermore, the finding also indicates that they are influenced by popular culture, which in turn affects their English skills. Specifically, social media has been shown to improve their English, including their speaking skills, which is partially influenced by social media. In addition, the new vocabulary from social media has also enhanced their English skills. In summary, popular culture, as presented on social media, has a significant impact on the English skills of Generation Z. Furthermore, social media has also contributed to their exposure to popular culture, including music, movies, and memes.

Suggestion

Although the research has yielded some significant findings, the present study was conducted in a specific context and with a small number of participants. It means the result of the findings cannot be applied to a larger number. Additionally, the application of qualitative research should be limited to contextually relevant cases. Further study should be conducted in more varied backgrounds and with a larger number of respondents to enable generalization of the data, allowing for the adoption of both quantitative and mixed methods..

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