

TEACHING ENGLISH TO GENERATION Z: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide insight to teachers/lecturers into the potential challenges and opportunities of teaching English to generation Z. Generation Z, or those born in the year 1996, are the future hope of a country, including Indonesia. Being born in this digital era makes them unique. Teaching English to them is, therefore, quite challenging. However, with the challenges, come the opportunities. An observation to 100 undergraduate students was undergone in the quest. The results show that this generation have shorter focus span, so at times, it is better for teachers/lecturers to prepare a concise summary than a long explanation. Besides, they love innovation. On this ground, teachers/lecturers might want to change their traditional way of teaching to the modern one. This is in line with the uniqueness of this generation, namely the generation that is technologically advanced. With the skills to operate the devices they have, they can access information anytime from anywhere, so learning English becomes easier and more practical. Moreover, English is almost a second language for them, since they encounter it almost every day. With this in mind, teachers/lecturers can promote a fun yet meaningful English class, for instance by using authentic materials and real-life settings.

Keywords: *gen z, teaching English, challenges and opportunities, authentic materials, real-life settings*

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk memberikan wawasan kepada guru/dosen tentang potensi tantangan dan peluang dari pembelajaran bahasa Inggris pada generasi Z. Generasi Z, atau mereka yang lahir pada tahun 1996, merupakan harapan masa depan suatu negara, termasuk Indonesia. Terlahir pada era digital seperti saat ini membuat mereka unik. Pembelajaran bahasa Inggris pada mereka, oleh karenanya, menjadi menantang. Namun, bersama tantangan itu, ada peluang yang menyertai. Sebuah observasi terhadap 100 mahasiswa dilakukan untuk mengungkap hal tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa generasi ini memiliki rentang fokus yang lebih pendek, sehingga ada baiknya guru/dosen menyiapkan ringkasan daripada penjelasan yang panjang. Selain itu, mereka menyukai inovasi. Oleh karena itu, ada baiknya guru/dosen mengubah cara mengajar tradisional menjadi lebih modern. Hal ini sejalan dengan keunikan yang dimiliki generasi ini, yaitu generasi yang berteknologi maju. Dengan keterampilan mengoperasikan perangkat yang dimilikinya, mereka dapat mengakses informasi kapan saja dan dari mana saja, sehingga belajar bahasa Inggris menjadi lebih mudah dan praktis. Apalagi bahasa Inggris saat ini hampir menyerupai bahasa kedua bagi mereka, karena mereka menjumpainya hampir setiap hari. Dengan pemikiran ini, para guru/dosen dapat mempromosikan kelas Bahasa Inggris yang menyenangkan namun penuh makna, misalnya dengan menggunakan materi pembelajaran autentik dan kegiatan yang nyata.

Kata Kunci: generasi z, pembelajaran bahasa inggris, tantangan dan peluang, materi pembelajaran autentik, kegiatan yang nyata

INTRODUCTION

Teachers and lecturers, in this case those of English, may have been familiar with teaching to Millennials, and abundant research studies have been done and unlimited papers on the topic have been written. However, the world is now dominated by the next generation with different characteristics and way of thinking, the what-so-called “generation Z” (Dolot, 2018) (Moore et al., 2017). Therefore, this paper aims to provide insight to English language teachers and lecturers into the potential challenges and opportunities of teaching English to generation Z.

Also referred as “Net Generation, iGen” (Patch, 2018) and “post millennial generation” (Christine & Ienneke, 2020), and “Homeland Generation” (Carter, 2018), the name itself refers to those who were born in the year 1996; a generation that arrives after Millennial (Gaidhani et al., 2019). Being born in this era, they have unique characteristics which are different from their predecessors, which, if used properly, can create a meaningful teaching and learning process. However, not all teachers and lecturers seem to take this into account. The inability to adjust to the condition is a serious disadvantage that may lead to cases where their English classes do not meet their expectations.

This phenomenon then raises the question: what challenges might teachers and lecturers who teach generation Z face in their English classes? What opportunities can English teachers and lecturers take advantage of to make the teaching and learning process fun yet meaningful to them? The answer to the first question together with alternative

solutions to the latter are elaborated in the following sections.

METHOD

Every research has to comprise an “explicit, disciplined, systematic (planned, ordered, and public) approach to find out most appropriate results” (Haradhan, 2018). To obtain data, this study employed a qualitative approach, namely an observation of 100 undergraduate students who belong to generation Z. The study was undergone in an English class for half a semester. The data were then analyzed and reported qualitatively.

Qualitative research, in this case was done by doing observation, is widely used by researchers, including those doing research in educational field. Many suggest this because if used appropriately, this method may offer more precise data than the other one, for instance, self-report method (Gall et al., 2003). This method was chosen because this was believed to be the most suitable one for this research study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are elaborated as follows. Firstly, generation Z have shorter focus span. This might be an effect of their massive exposure to e-learning, webinars, smart boards, as well as smartphones (Nicholas, 2020). Therefore, unlike the previous generation who can sit quietly during the class, they might find it boring to listen to long and monotonous lectures. Given that they might prefer having a live and active discussion or answering questions, teachers and lecturers can help providing questions to answer or problems to solve.

Secondly, they were born and grown up with new technology and easy access to the Internet that differs them from the previous generations of students. In this difficult time caused by the pandemic, unlike their teachers or lecturers that find it challenging to open the applications to start online classes or to upload materials to online storage, they might experience no difficulties in operating their gadgets to join the classes and access learning materials online. They are not regarded as “Digital Natives” (Studies & Demir, 2021) for no reason; it is because they possess the ability to master advanced technology more quickly than previous generations (Harmanto, 2012). In other words, we, teachers and lecturers, need to aid ourselves by learning those things and including innovations in our way of teaching, because we need to change it to accommodate their skills and interests (Poláková & Klímová, 2019). Some learning activities using the virtual classroom such as webinars or debates might be interesting to them.

Thirdly, it is not unsafe to say that for this generation, English is almost a second language for them, since they encounter it almost every day. Songs they listen to, internet contents they enjoy on daily basis, and social media statuses they post are in English. Given that assessing information on digital platforms is part of this generation’s daily life, their vocabulary is enriched (Lutfiani, 2018). Also, it is not a surprising phenomenon to have some friends from across the globe and to start communicating with them using English, because the technology has connected them (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). Teachers could see this as an opportunity to make use of authentic materials and real-life settings to teach English. Social media, if used properly, can be an effective tool to learn English (Zam Zam Al Arif, 2019).

Making use of the devices and platforms that the students are familiar

with is a solution that meets their needs and wants. An example of this is instructing the students to look for the latest news from another country and describe it to the class using English. A real-life setting task can be having a conversation with their foreign friends. Another alternative is to post a picture with an English caption and commenting on each other’s posts in English. They will find these activities challenging yet fun and meaningful to improve their skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the author concluded that it is evidence that the newest generation, generation Z, possess unique characteristics that make them different from any other generation. Some characteristics that identify them are having shorter attention span, digitally advanced and loving innovations, and familiar with English. This uniqueness requires acceptance and understanding of English teachers and lecturers if they want to make the teaching and learning meaningful.

Comprehending the needs and wants of the students, teachers and lecturers can then start designing their course. Some steps can be done, starting from doing needs analysis to comprehend their learning needs and wants to developing courses which are fun, digital-based, and meaningful. Based on this, the author suggested that if needed, teachers and lecturers develop their own teaching materials and activities that best meet the needs and wants of the students. In brief, it may take some painstaking effort to teach generation Z, but if done right, it can pay off.

Future research is needed to investigate more about teaching English to generation Z. thus, the author also wants to make recommendation to other researchers sharing the similar interest on the field to

cover a wider scope of study, for instance how the learning materials are developed based on a needs analysis towards the generation and how some factors such as gender and economic background affect their characteristics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude and appreciation to all participants of the study for the participation. I also wish to thank the other researchers who share the same interest and have conducted similar studies on the field whose work has been invaluable throughout this study.

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