The English Proficiency Paradox: Why Non-native Generation Z have Speaking and Writing Difficulties Despite Digital Fluency

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Article Info	Abstract
	Generation Z in Indonesia includes individuals born between 1997 and 2012, with a population of approximately 75 million, or 27% of the total population. Generation Z spend most of their time playing social media, they are closely related to the media as technology develops in their generation. They are known as 'digital natives', they are highly connected to technology and digital interaction and are highly sensitive to social and environmental issues. Undeniably, social media is very much a part of Gen Z's lives. About 80% of them use social media, and 70% of them use social media as a way to get information and the latest news. Through social media, Gen Z in Indonesia is also familiar with the English language. They sometimes interact in English and receive content in English. But what is very unfortunate is that many of them still use English passively. This means that they only understand when reading and listening, but struggle when speaking and writing. In Indonesia, social media started to develop in the early 2000s with the first platform called Friendster. Since then, the use of social media has continued to grow with the launch of Facebook and Twitter in the mid-2000s. The use of social media will grow to 170 million users by 2021. At that time, applications such as Instagram and TikTok began to appear, which are now widely used by Generation Z. As the years go by, the development of social media, especially in Indonesia, is increasing. The use of English in social media interaction is increasing as many teenagers use social media. This is because platforms such as Instagram encourage users to use abbreviations and acronyms in English. In addition, more and more foreign content can be consumed by Indonesians. Social media also tends to have an informal language style, often using slang and popular phrases. Overall, the increased use of English on social media reflects globalization trends and the need to communicate effectively in the digital age. Despite the heavy use of English, Gen Zers still often struggle to communicate directly in English. When it comes to everyday conversation, few young people in Indonesia can use English. In EF Education First's 2022 English Proficiency Index report, Indonesia ranks 81st out of 111 countries surveyed. In Indonesia, the most tested subjects are reading and writing, as well as tense and grammar. But in the world of work, what is needed is the ability to argue, how to communicate with foreigners, and how to use their skills to build new products or ideas. So it's the speaking and listening skills that are really needed and important to communicate. There are also many young people who understand English, but are not brave enough to speak it. That's because they're afraid of being judged, especially in terms of grammar.

Abstrak

Generasi Z di Indonesia mencakup individu yang lahir antara tahun 1997 dan 2012, dengan populasi sekitar 75 juta orang, atau 27% dari total populasi. Generasi Z menghabiskan sebagian besar waktu mereka bermain di media sosial, mereka sangat terkait dengan media karena teknologi berkembang di generasi mereka. Mereka dikenal sebagai 'digital natives', sangat terhubung dengan teknologi dan interaksi digital, serta sangat peka terhadap isu-isu sosial dan lingkungan. Tak bisa dipungkiri, media sosial sangat erat dengan kehidupan Generasi Z. Sekitar 80% dari mereka menggunakan media sosial, dan 70% di antaranya menggunakannya sebagai cara untuk mendapatkan informasi dan berita terbaru. Melalui media sosial, Generasi Z di Indonesia juga akrab dengan bahasa Inggris. Mereka kadang-kadang berinteraksi dalam bahasa Inggris dan menerima konten dalam bahasa Inggris. Namun, sangat disayangkan bahwa banyak dari mereka masih menggunakan bahasa Inggris secara pasif. Ini berarti mereka hanya memahami ketika membaca dan mendengarkan, tetapi kesulitan dalam berbicara dan menulis. Di Indonesia, media sosial mulai berkembang pada awal 2000-an dengan platform pertama yang disebut Friendster. Sejak saat itu, penggunaan media sosial terus meningkat dengan peluncuran Facebook dan Twitter pada pertengahan 2000-an. Penggunaan media sosial akan tumbuh hingga 170 juta pengguna pada tahun 2021. Saat itu, aplikasi seperti Instagram dan TikTok mulai muncul, yang sekarang banyak digunakan oleh Generasi Z. Seiring berjalannya waktu, perkembangan media sosial, terutama di Indonesia, semakin meningkat. Penggunaan bahasa Inggris dalam interaksi media sosial semakin meningkat karena banyak remaja menggunakan media sosial. Hal ini disebabkan oleh platform seperti Instagram yang mendorong pengguna untuk menggunakan singkatan dan akronim dalam bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, semakin banyak konten asing yang dapat dikonsumsi oleh orang Indonesia. Media sosial juga cenderung memiliki gaya bahasa informal, sering menggunakan bahasa slang dan frasa populer. Secara keseluruhan, peningkatan penggunaan bahasa Inggris di media sosial mencerminkan tren globalisasi dan kebutuhan untuk berkomunikasi secara efektif di era digital. Meskipun penggunaan bahasa Inggris sangat banyak, Generasi Z masih sering kesulitan berkomunikasi langsung dalam bahasa Inggris. Dalam percakapan sehari-hari, sedikit anak muda di Indonesia yang mampu menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Dalam laporan English Proficiency Index 2022 dari EF Education First, Indonesia menempati peringkat ke-81 dari 111 negara yang disurvei. Di Indonesia, mata pelajaran yang paling banyak diuji adalah membaca dan menulis, serta tenses dan tata bahasa. Namun di dunia kerja, yang dibutuhkan adalah kemampuan untuk berargumen, cara berkomunikasi dengan orang asing, dan bagaimana menggunakan keterampilan mereka untuk membangun produk atau ide baru. Jadi, kemampuan berbicara dan mendengarkan yang benar-benar dibutuhkan dan penting untuk berkomunikasi. Ada juga banyak anak muda yang memahami bahasa Inggris, tetapi tidak cukup berani untuk berbicara. Itu karena mereka takut dihakimi, terutama dalam hal tata bahasa.

Kata kunci: Generasi Z, Bahasa Inggris Reseptif, Kesulitan Bahasa Pasif

INTRODUCTION

Generation Z in Indonesia includes individuals born between 1997 and 2012, with a population of approximately 75 million, or 27% of the total population. Known as 'digital natives', they are highly connected to technology and social media, and are highly sensitive to social and environmental issues. Undeniably, social media is very much a part of Gen Z's lives. About 80% of them use social media, and 70% of them use social media as a way to get information and the latest news. Through social media, Gen Z in Indonesia is also familiar with the English language. They sometimes interact in English and receive content in English. But what is very unfortunate is that many of them still use English passively. This means that they only understand when reading and listening, but struggle when speaking and writing.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researchers used a mixed methods approach. According to Sugiyono (2015), mixed methods research combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of a research problem. Furthermore, Creswell in Sugiyono (2015) stated, "a mixed methods design is useful when one of the quantitative or qualitative approach by itself is inadequate to best understand a research problem, or the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research can provide the best understanding." This approach allows the researchers to capitalize on the strengths of both methods to gain deeper insights into Generation Z's English proficiency in speaking and writing.
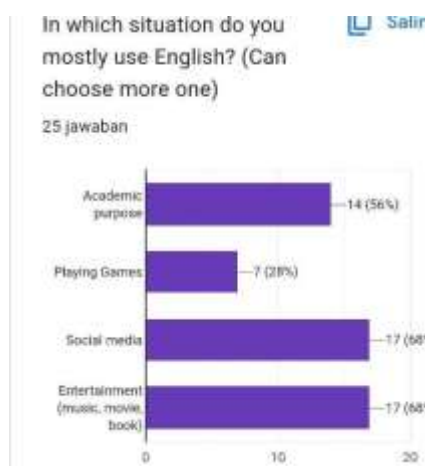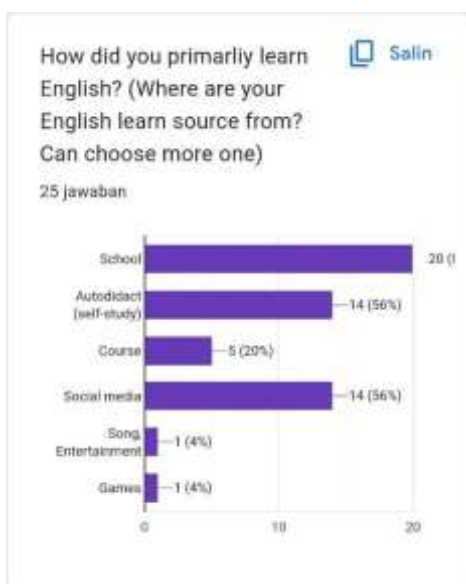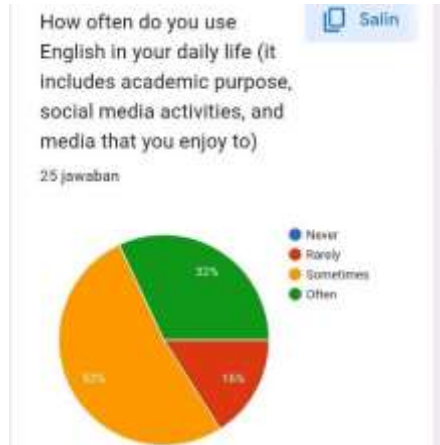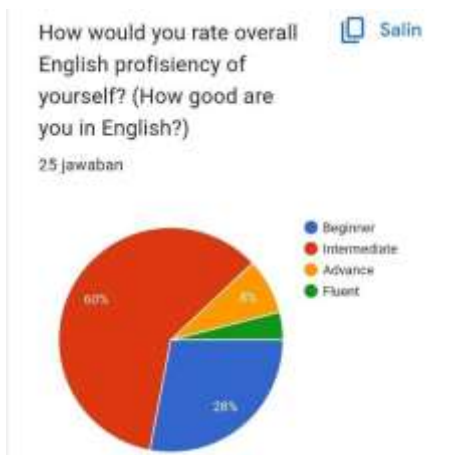
There are two main models in mixed methods research: sequential model and concurrent model. The sequential model is further divided into two types: sequential explanatory and sequential exploratory. This study employs the sequential explanatory model. According to Creswell in Sugiyono (2015), "explanatory strategy in mixed methods research is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative data in the first phase, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the second phase, which builds upon the results of the initial quantitative data." Therefore, in this study, the researchers first collected and analyzed quantitative data, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to provide additional insights and support for the initial quantitative findings.

The research was conducted at State University of Medan with a focus on Generation Z students enrolled in the English program. The population of this study includes 25 number of students from the English Department. Based on Arikunto's (2010) sampling method, "if the population is less than 100, it is better to take the entire population; if it is greater than 100, a sample size of 10-25% or more can be selected." In this study, the researchers sampled 25% of the total population, resulting in a sample size of 100 students. These students were randomly interviewed to represent the most of English learners in Generation Z, allowing for a one-step-ahead exploration of both speaking and writing proficiency within this group.

RESULT AND DISCUSSSION

1. Result

This study found several output data about how good the subjects, in this case Generation Z in English. This study engage 25 student as questionnaries in google form. The subjects assumed could represent all of student in English Departement of State University of Medan about their English proficiency. Here are output data that obtained by researchers:
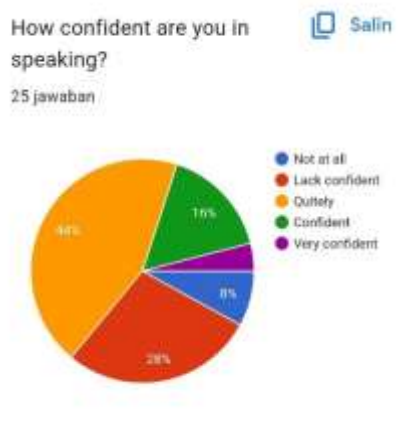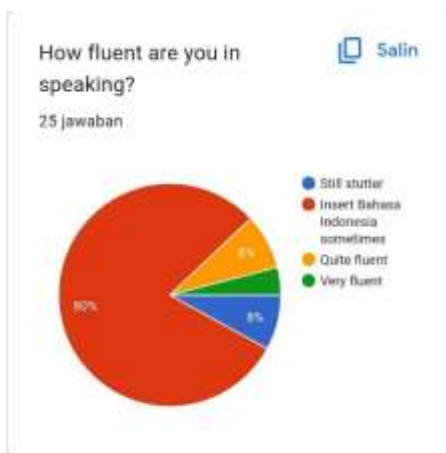
Based on data, researchers be able to conclude most of students (60%) are intermediately in English, due to the subjects are sometimes (52%) and often (32%) practicing English in their daily life, weather it is from social media activities, academic purpose, and media that their enjoy to. Data that served in bar diagram is allow questionnaries to chose more than one option to identify subject's possibilities way to learn English. As the result, researchers obtains the statement that students apart from academic purpose also from diverse way, whether it is from self-learning (56%), social media exposures (56%). It proves that Generation Z students are good in english because the exposures of digital literature.

Researchers found something interest in phenomenons which are going on era of massively digital exposures. The questionnaries who fill the google form indicate their English profisiency in the context to create an output, such as writing and speaking. There are data that observed by researchers:
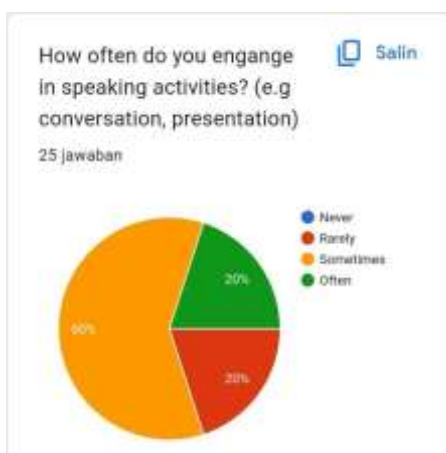
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Researchers also implement a research about student writing skills. The data that could present by researchers as follows:

Above diagrams indicate the questionnaries, in this context Generation Z are not good at speaking and writing despite they have a good English literacy. Based on data collected by researchers, Generation Z particularly non-native does not often enganged in speaking (60% of sometimes and 20% rarely) and writing (60% of sometimes and 24% of rarely). Therefore, students's speaking fluency is not good, 80% of students still insert Bahasa Indonesia when speaking. Half of student indicate that they are quite good in writing (48% of Quite good). However, other half of students also indicate they are not good in English (totalled by 48%). Students who are not good in English mostly not good at all and many of them depends to technonlogy such as Google Translate, Grammarly, Chat GPT, etc. All of these findings indicate most of Generation Z, particularly non-native have a good English literacy but could not create English output such as writing and speaking as good as their had in literacy.

2. The Rise of Digital Communication

In tandem with these technological developments, digital communication has emerged as a branch of industry and an academic field which emphasises data and information services in deploying a persuasive strategy for vested interests, in ways that do not resemble nor always identify with more traditional . Digital communications as a field is growing, as is an active corporate agenda to deregulate the Gen-Al industry so there is less not more oversight or scrutiny. 'communication' has been normatively established as a concept that contributes and nourishes individual agency in democracies, by providing a discursive space for political participation and enabling the percolation and circulation of ideas. Despite competing paradigmatic inflections, 'communication' as an idea has been seamlessly implanted into the vernacular, academic disciplinary fields, and industry and professional practice.

The impact of digital communication platforms such as social media, texting, and memes have significantly shaped the way Generation Z uses the English language. Generation Z is highly influenced by internet culture, creating new slang, abbreviations, and expressions that stem from platforms such as TikTok, Twitter (X), and Instagram. This generation favors informal language, often relying on acronyms, memes, and references to viral trends, which contributes to the rapid evolution of language. For example, terms like "on fleek" or "slay" emerge from meme culture and are quickly integrated into everyday conversation.

Informality in Online Communication Gen Z often uses casual language, slang, and abbreviations in their online interactions. This reflects their comfort with platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, where quick, informal exchanges are the norm. They might express themselves with emojis, GIFs, or memes, emphasizing brevity and visual elements.

Professionalism in Academic Writing that contrast, when it comes to academic or professional writing, Gen Z tends to adopt a more formal tone. They are generally taught to adhere to established conventions, including proper grammar, structure, and citation styles. However, there is still a noticeable gap, as some students may struggle with formal email etiquette and professional correspondence due to their predominant experience with casual online communication

Gen Z values collaboration and peer input in both settings. Online, they often seek community advice and engage in discussions with their peers. In academic settings, while they may respect traditional hierarchies, they still prefer a collaborative environment over rigid structures, expecting to engage in dialogue rather than simply receive instruction

3. Challenges in English Learning

English understanding must be emphasized for students as it has become an international language. Learning English is more difficult than Indonesian, in addition to understanding the meaning of the language itself, students must also be able to write and pronounce words in English according to the pronunciation of English itself, this complexity sometimes makes students or children learn English less. In the process of learning English, a student must have experienced an obstacle in learning. These obstacles can cause less than optimal learning outcomes for students. In addition, there are three language elements that play an important role In supporting the four skills, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (language structure), this is always an obstacle to learning English (Megawati,

2016). Pronunciation is very important in vocabulary development because it involves distinguishing between sounds that combine to form words. If a student is used to mispronouncing a word, there is a tendency for him to not be able to provide clear information (Sofiyanti, 2014). Vocabulary (vocabulary) the more vocabulary a student masters, the easier it is to learn English. Vocabulary in language learning, including English, is one of the important things to master (Herlina, 2015). Grammar (language structure) is the rule of arranging language elements into a patterned language. Each region has a different language structure, this affects students in learning English because they are previously used to their respective regional languages. Mastery of language structure will make it easier for students to learn English, especially in arranging words into a sentence.

Writing assignments are important in developing the process of writing skills. However, student's opinions about the assignment are also important for its effectiveness. This is all because a perception must be based on several factors that cause their perceptions to differ even though the object is the same. Gibson et al. (2009) state that these factors are stereotypes, selectivity, needs, emotions and attitudes. M Perception is an individual's process of understanding their relationship with objects around the world. Students' perceptions are their personal interpretations of thoughts and beliefs that cannot be the same as each other. In the process of perception itself, people combine various sources of information optimally to achieve deterministic results, so that they behave according to their perceptions and understanding. If writing assignments in ACWE classes can help them to improve their writing skills, it means that stereotypes, selectivity, needs, emotions and attitudes of the object become positive for them.

Writing is one of skill that students should be mastered beside other skill such as listening, speaking and reading skill. Writing is a complex skill, because to be success in writing the st udent should be mastered complex grammar, they should have many vocabularies, conjunction, punctuation, spelling and mechanical in writing. Learning theories provides the foundation for the selection of instructional strategies. Here the major learning theories are discussed and selected examples of instructional design models are explained. The main objectives of this article is to present instructional design model for EFL students writing skill, Learning theory, and some previous instructional design model as theoretical evidence for design and delivery of instructional materials. In addition, this article provides a design for EFL writing skill material development.

4. Bridging the Gap: How Gen Z Can Improve

Educational reforms purposed to enhance English proficiency should focus on several situation, including the revision of curricula to emphasize formal speaking and writing skills. According to Van den Akker (2010), a curriculum is essentially a plan for learning, outlining what students should learn and what should be taught through the education system. Effective curriculum reform in English Language Teaching (ELT) would involve update of these plans to better prepare students for real-world communication challenges. This includes incorporating more public speaking courses and essay-writing practices, which provide structured opportunities for students to develop formal communication skills. Such reforms are not limited to instructional materials but also involve changes in teaching methodologies, classroom practices, and assessment methods (Saavedra and Steele, 2012). According to Fullan (2015), curriculum reforms can be complex and challenging to implement, as they often require a shift not only in teaching approaches but also in the underlying beliefs and

assumptions that educators hold about language teaching. By addressing these challenges and integrating reforms that promote formal communication skills, educational systems can better equip Generation Z to succeed in academic and professional contexts.

Improving their active-english proficiency, particularly in speaking and writing, Generation Z students can use various self-improvement strategies that benefit both traditional methods and modern technology. For speaking, students can begin by practicing in front of a mirror, which allows them to observe facial expressions of themselves and body language. So that they be able to enhancing their confidence. Engaging in regular conversations with friends helps to create a more interactive situations, allowing students to practice their speaking skills in a relaxed and casual setting. Besides it, watching native speakers on any platform such as YouTube, Tiktok, Instagram. Provides reference to correct pronunciation, intonation, and conversational nuances. To further practice, students can join English learning groups on platforms such as WhatsApp, Discord, etc where they can listen to explanations and participate in group discussions. They may also using language-learning apps available on smartphones, which allows to provide AI-based speaking practice, helping students improve pronunciation and conversational skills.

For writing skills, students can start by keeping a diary where they practice daily writing, incorporating new vocabulary and paying attention to correct grammar. Using tools like Grammarly helps them check for errors and improve their grammar in real time. Engaging in written communication through WhatsApp groups allows students to practice English in an informal situation, but productive manner. Furthermore, using text-based applications with AI helps simulate real-world conversations, pushing students to imply their writing skills in various contexts.

Lastly,This approach not only makes practice more engaging but also introduces them to casual and formal writing styles, improve their vocabulary and comprehension. Consistently implying these self-improvement strategies would help Generation Z students to build strong foundations in active-english, allows them to give a solution for their challenges in improving English profisiency.

CONCLUSION

The paper titled "The English Proficiency Paradox: Why Non-native Generation Z have Speaking and Writing Difficulties Despite Digital Fluency" examines the English language proficiency of Generation Z in Indonesia. It reveals a notable disparity between their receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). This paradox is particularly striking given that Generation Z is often perceived as digitally fluent, yet they struggle with essential communication skills.

Generation Z in Indonesia shows high proficiency in receptive skills, largely due to their extensive exposure to English through digital media. They consume vast amounts of English content via social media, streaming services, and online games, which enhances their listening and reading abilities. However, this exposure does not translate effectively into productive skills like speaking and writing. The informal nature of online communication often leads to a lack of understanding of formal grammar and structure, causing difficulties in more structured forms of communication.

In conclusion, while Generation Z demonstrates strong receptive English skills influenced by digital media, targeted educational strategies are essential to enhance their active language use, particularly in speaking and writing.

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