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TEACHING ENGLISH TO GEN Z: NEW APPROACHES AND EXPECTATIONS

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT:
	This article examines the challenges and opportunities of teaching English to Generation Z students, highlighting their unique learning preferences, technological fluency, and desire for autonomy. It discusses how modern educators must adapt from traditional knowledge dispensers to facilitators and managers of dynamic learning environments that combine personal interaction with digital tools. The article emphasizes the importance of creating student-centered, interactive, and technology-enhanced lessons that foster independent learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and authentic communication. By understanding Gen Z characteristics and integrating innovative teaching strategies, English teachers can effectively engage students and prepare them for academic and professional success in a rapidly evolving, knowledge-driven world.

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Introduction

The rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of digital media have significantly transformed the way young people learn and communicate. Generation Z, typically defined as individuals born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, has grown up in a highly connected, fast-paced, and visually oriented world. As a result, their learning preferences, expectations, and cognitive styles differ considerably from those of previous generations. In the context of English language teaching, traditional teacher-centered approaches are often no longer sufficient to engage Gen Z learners effectively. This generation expects interactive, technology-integrated, and meaningful learning experiences that reflect real-life communication and global contexts. Therefore, understanding Gen Z characteristics and adopting innovative teaching approaches have become essential for educators seeking to meet modern educational demands and enhance language acquisition outcomes.

"...Self-confident, extremely social, technologically sophisticated, action bent, goal oriented, service or civic minded, and accustomed to functioning as part of a team. On the flip side, they are also impatient, demanding, stressed out, sheltered, brand oriented, materialistic, and self-centered" [2; p11] Yeah, these words are intended for students. These contrasting qualities significantly shape how today's students engage with education, as they tend to favor dynamic, interactive learning environments over traditional, passive classroom settings. Their strong reliance on digital tools allows them to multitask and access information instantly, yet it also contributes to shorter attention spans and a preference for quick, visible results. Consequently, modern students often expect immediate feedback, clear instructions, and learning activities that feel relevant to real-life situations and future careers. Although their self-centered tendencies and materialistic outlook may pose challenges, these traits can be redirected into motivation and ambition when learning goals are clearly defined. With appropriate guidance, encouragement, and innovative teaching strategies, today's students have the potential to become highly effective learners, collaborative leaders, and socially responsible global citizens.

Due to the Internet, there are really no boundaries in knowledge and skills for students. These conditions opened opportunities for self-education and continuous professional development [2; p185]. As a result, learners can easily access online courses, academic resources, video lectures, and interactive platforms beyond the traditional classroom. This access encourages greater learner autonomy, critical thinking, and lifelong learning habits.

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In English language education, digital tools such as mobile applications, podcasts, and online communities provide authentic exposure to real-life communication and cultural diversity. Consequently, students expect teachers to act more as facilitators and guides rather than the sole source of knowledge. However, learners must develop digital literacy skills to critically evaluate information and avoid misinformation. When effectively integrated, internet-based learning significantly enhances students' motivation, engagement, and academic achievement.

Literature review:

Gen Z students flourish in any learning environment where they can flex their aptitude for self-reliance and their ability to self-educate. Predisposed to learning and conducting research, they are prepared to make their own decisions based on that research [3; p6]. This independence is shaped by constant access to digital resources, allowing learners to explore topics at their own pace. Consequently, traditional teacher-centered classrooms often fail to meet their expectations, as Gen Z learners value autonomy and active participation. In English language teaching, students respond more positively to project-based and inquiry-based activities. When teachers support independent research and critical thinking, learners become more motivated and confident in authentic English use. Therefore, flexible learning environments that promote self-directed learning are essential for Gen Z students' academic engagement and success.

The role of teachers seems to be shifting from preprogrammed knowledge dispensers to instead managers of student learning and the learning environment [8; p6]. Teachers now guide and support learners rather than simply deliver content. They design flexible and engaging learning environments that encourage active participation. The best teachers plan their courses carefully, designing activities and projects with the goal of encouraging students to learn on their own… [1; p114]. Acting as mentors, teachers provide guidance while allowing student autonomy. This balance of structure and flexibility supports motivation and effective learning.

They like to observe others accomplish tasks prior to application. This approach demonstrates their tendency to search for information through video [6; p3]. Gen Z students frequently use platforms such as YouTube and educational streaming services to watch tutorials and demonstrations before practicing independently. This visual learning style helps them understand concepts faster and apply skills with greater confidence. Therefore, teachers should integrate multimedia resources and guided demonstrations into lessons.

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Encouraging discussion and analysis of observed content further develops critical thinking. Overall, video-based learning increases engagement and supports effective skill acquisition among Gen Z learners.

English teachers and administrators must ask themselves how to combine most effectively the value of personal interaction with the glittery attraction of the digital world [7; p5]. Achieving this balance requires integrating technology in ways that support learning without replacing essential human interaction. Digital tools can increase engagement and provide authentic language practice, while face-to-face communication remains vital for collaboration and social skill development. Therefore, lessons should be carefully designed to blend online and offline activities meaningfully. Administrators support this process by offering training and resources for effective implementation. When technology and personal interaction are thoughtfully combined, students experience deeper engagement and more effective language learning.

Method:

This study was conducted during a four-month teaching internship at a secondary school No12, located in Taylak district, where English lessons were regularly observed and partially practiced. Throughout the internship period, systematic classroom observation was used as the main research method to analyze learners' behavior, attention span, and engagement during English lessons. Special attention was given to students belonging to Generation Z, as they demonstrated learning characteristics different from previous generations. There is a stark difference in the preferred learning styles, skills, and interests of the Gen-Z compared to the previous generations [8; p3]. During the observation process, noticeable changes were identified in students' attention and (interest), especially during traditional teaching methods. Learners showed low motivation when teachers used long explanations or continuous teacher-centered speaking. In addition, students expressed dissatisfaction with writing long texts or copying extensive information from the board. Many learners frequently used their mobile phones during the lesson instead of listening actively to the teacher. These observations highlighted the need to reconsider traditional instructional approaches for teaching English to Gen Z learners.

Based on the observed challenges, the technology-based teaching method was selected and applied during the internship period. This method focused on integrating digital devices and virtual learning tools into English lessons to match students' interests and learning preferences. Mobile phones, online platforms, and interactive digital materials were used as

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learning tools rather than distractions. Activities such as online quizzes, educational videos, digital presentations, and language-learning applications were implemented during lessons. The method aimed to increase students' engagement by reducing long explanations and replacing them with visual and interactive content. Lessons were designed to be student-centered, allowing learners to actively participate through technology-supported tasks.

During my internship, I had the opportunity to explore and learn various digital technologies deeply in order to teach Gen Z students more effectively. 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 [8; p11]. By understanding how these technologies function and how students interact with them, I was able to design lessons that were more engaging and aligned with their learning preferences. I realized that mastering digital tools not only improves lesson delivery but also increases my confidence in guiding students through interactive and technology-supported activities. Through practical application, I observed how incorporating these tools could transform classroom dynamics and enhance students' attention and motivation. Overall, this experience emphasized that continuous learning and adaptation are essential for teachers to meet the evolving demands of modern learners and to create a meaningful, student-centered learning environment.

Result and discussion:

Through the application of the technology method, I observed that presenting lessons with digital presentations significantly increased students' attention and engagement. When I explained topics using slides with images and videos on the monitor, learners showed strong interest and listened more attentively than during traditional explanations. Visual content appeared to capture their focus immediately, making abstract concepts easier to understand. Students responded positively to multimedia elements, often asking questions and commenting on the content displayed. This indicated that Gen Z learners are highly motivated by interactive and visually rich teaching materials. Consequently, lessons became more dynamic, with students actively following the teacher rather than passively receiving information. I realized that using visual aids effectively can transform their learning experience by connecting explanations with concrete and appealing examples.

After explaining the lesson content, I avoided giving only traditional textbook exercises and instead used online games such as Kahoot and Bamboozle to reinforce the material. These games were team-based and online, which motivated students to participate

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enthusiastically in order to achieve the highest scores. The competitive element of the games encouraged collaboration, discussion, and peer support, while simultaneously allowing learners to consolidate their knowledge in an enjoyable way. Students demonstrated a willingness to engage fully in the activities because they could play using their mobile phones without feeling restricted. As a result, the reinforcement of lesson content became more effective than conventional worksheets, and students retained knowledge more readily. This experience showed that gamification and interactive tools can significantly enhance motivation, participation, and comprehension. Therefore, technology-mediated games proved to be a powerful strategy for combining learning with entertainment for Gen Z learners.

I also organized online quizzes and assigned group-based tasks as homework to extend learning beyond the classroom. Students completed these quizzes with full commitment because they were motivated by the opportunity to earn top positions and recognition among peers. The accessibility of quizzes on mobile devices ensured that learners did not resist the tasks, unlike traditional homework that might feel tedious or boring. By conducting the quizzes and tasks in English, learners improved their vocabulary and practical language skills naturally while working collaboratively. Given that assessing information on digital platforms is part of this generation's daily life, their vocabulary is enriched [9; p10]. Moreover, these online activities fostered independent learning, critical thinking, and accountability within the group. Learners even began using social media and platforms like YouTube to explore supplementary materials, such as interesting lessons and tutorials, outside of class. Social media, if used properly, can be an effective tool to learn English [10; p224]. One example is to 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 [11; p3] This indicated that technology can extend learning beyond formal lessons and promote continuous engagement with the English language in authentic contexts.

Even when I used traditional exercises from the textbook, I enhanced their effectiveness by incorporating background music at a low volume during practice. The calm and pleasant music environment appeared to improve students' concentration, making exercises more engaging and enjoyable. Learners responded by completing tasks more efficiently and with higher accuracy than in silent or conventional classroom conditions. This demonstrated that even minor technological enhancements, when aligned with students' preferences, can

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positively affect learning outcomes. Combining digital tools, online resources, games, and subtle multimedia elements created a stimulating and motivating environment for language practice.

However, there are also negative effects of the virtual environment [12; p2] that were observed during the application of the technology method. Excessive reliance on digital tools sometimes reduced students' face-to-face communication and spontaneous speaking practice in the classroom. Some learners became overly focused on screens, which occasionally limited eye contact and direct interaction with peers and the teacher. In certain cases, students were more interested in the competitive aspects of online activities than in the learning objectives themselves. The frequent use of mobile devices also created the risk of distraction when learners struggled to maintain self-control. Additionally, not all students demonstrated equal digital literacy skills, which sometimes led to unequal participation and frustration. These challenges indicate that while technology enhances engagement, it must be carefully managed and balanced with traditional interaction to ensure effective and meaningful language learning.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, teaching English to Gen Z students requires a profound understanding of their unique characteristics, learning preferences, and technological fluency. This generation thrives on autonomy, interactive learning, and access to digital resources, which challenges educators to move beyond traditional teaching methods and adopt more flexible, student-centered approaches. During my internship, the application of the technology method demonstrated that integrating digital devices, multimedia presentations, and online interactive activities can significantly increase students' attention and engagement. When lessons included images, videos, and digital slides, students followed explanations more attentively and showed genuine interest in the material. Using online games such as Kahoot and Bamboozle, both individually and in groups, allowed learners to consolidate knowledge in a motivating and collaborative way, while quizzes and group homework tasks encouraged responsibility, teamwork, and enthusiasm for learning. Even traditional exercises became more effective when enhanced with minor digital innovations, such as background music, which helped students concentrate and enjoy the learning process. These observations confirmed that technology, when thoughtfully integrated, can transform classroom dynamics, making lessons more interactive, participatory, and aligned with students' preferences and skills.

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Furthermore, the experience highlighted the evolving role of teachers, who are no longer mere dispensers of knowledge but facilitators, mentors, and managers of learning environments that balance personal interaction with digital innovation. 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. Mastering digital technologies allows educators to create engaging activities, support autonomous learning, and provide meaningful feedback while encouraging collaboration and critical thinking. Additionally, technology can extend learning beyond the classroom, as students increasingly use mobile devices and online platforms, including social media and YouTube, to explore supplementary lessons and resources independently. By designing lessons that combine interactive presentations, games, online quizzes, and thoughtful guidance, teachers can enhance vocabulary acquisition, reinforce comprehension, and foster motivation while maintaining control of the classroom. Ultimately, the successful education of Gen Z learners depends on the synergy between human guidance, innovative digital tools, and authentic learning experiences, creating a dynamic environment in which students can develop autonomy, confidence, critical thinking, and the skills necessary to thrive in a knowledge-driven, globalized world.

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