



Teaching Gen-Z at SMP N Langga Payung, Indonesia: What are the Teachers' Preferences of Using Media in Their English Language Teaching?

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ABSTRACT

The students of Gen-Z have a preference to study with their gadgets then with their teachers; it raises some challenges for the teacher. Language teaching media is very helpful to give the solutions. This study explores the teachers' preferences to use media in teaching the Gen-Z students at SMPN 1 Langga Payung, North Sumatera, Indonesia, in English language teaching. It is explored with a descriptive qualitative method; data were accumulated from English teachers and students through observations and interviews, and analyzed qualitatively with data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Two primary factors were found in this study: 1) the media used and 2) the challenges. The results show that teachers used audio media (songs, YouTube), visual media (textbooks, PowerPoint), and audio-visual media (videos, Word wall) to make it suitable to the Gen Z learning styles; and the students showed interest and highly motivated. However, the challenges came, such as poor internet access, limited digital skills, and students' distractions. The study concludes that teachers should use appropriate media to support effective and interactive English teaching and learning for Gen Z students. The media used in English language teaching can be more variative and selective; and it needs further study to explore more, especially the digital media or tools that can be used appropriately to the students in rural areas of study.

Keywords: English Language Teaching; Teaching Media; Z-Generation; Digital Tools; Learning Styles.

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INTRODUCTION

The integration of media into learning activities has become increasingly significant, especially in the context of today's digital world. The use of media is not merely an instructional aid; rather, it plays a central role in shaping an engaging, effective, and student-centered learning environment. In the English language classroom, media can

enhance students' motivation, support concept understanding, stimulate critical thinking, and encourage interactive participation (Sardiman et al., 2021). For teachers, media serve to make abstract concepts more concrete and meaningful, while for students, they provide access to information in ways that suit diverse learning styles and preferences.

According to Mahmud (2021), learning media are any tools, materials, or technological resources that help convey messages and instructional content to students. They include conventional tools such as books and posters as well as modern media such as animations, videos, e-learning platforms, and games. Effective use of media enables the teacher to communicate ideas more clearly and helps students engage more actively in the learning process (Smaldino et al., 2014). In addition, technology and media play the role of supporting the learning process; additionally, if it is supported for students and they are used to support teaching presentations. It is clear that media and technology can support the learning process and will have impact on the learning result. So, the media is necessary to allow the teaching and learning process be comprehensive.

In addition, the use of varied media supports key educational theories, such as constructivism and multiple intelligences. Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through active engagement with their environment (Joyce et al., 1992; Patil & Kudte, 2017). This means that learning becomes meaningful when students explore, question, and relate new information to what they already know. In line with this, the use of media such as interactive videos, games, or digital storytelling can enhance students' involvement and ownership of the learning process. Moreover, Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Hajhashemi, 2016; Richards, J. C. and Rodgers, 2014; Richards, 2001) highlights the importance of addressing students' individual strengths, such as linguistic, visual-spatial, musical, or bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Media help facilitate differentiated instruction that caters to these diverse intelligences.

In the context of 21st-century education, especially during globalization and the digital transformation, the function of media becomes more prominent. For Generation Z (Gen Z) learners, who grew up in a world full of technology, the old way of teaching with just blackboards and textbooks is no longer enough. These students are highly familiar with cellphones, social media, video platforms, and digital applications. Consequently, it is essential to synchronize pedagogical methods with the digital behaviors and learning preferences of Generation Z students (Nicholas, 2020; Shorey et al., 2021). In this sense, media are not just supplementary but form the core of an innovative instructional strategy.

The importance of using effective media in English language learning also stems from the multidimensional nature of English skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—which require various approaches to practice and mastery. For instance, in teaching listening, teachers can use audio materials or English podcasts; in speaking, videos and role-playing can help improve pronunciation and fluency (Mustikawati, 2013; Rahayuningsih et al., 2021). Then, reading comprehension can be enhanced through visual-rich materials, while writing skills can be nurtured using image-based prompts or storytelling applications (Abdel-Hack & Helwa, 2014; Aprianto & Fheriyawati, 2020; Wulansari et al., 2024). Not only in learning, the students of Gen-Z also preferred to choose online ways over offline ways in the way of teachers evaluate them. It seems from some previous findings (Abdulrazzaq & Abdellatif, 2023; Fitriah et al., 2020; Harida & Nasution, 2024). The Gen-Z students are the students who like to choose the easiest way to access, so, in examination or test, they like to use online ways because it is easiest accessibility. By these results, it is known that the digital learning media, methods, or strategies are also good for English language teaching in teaching the young generation.

Generation Z learners, often referred to as digital natives, exhibit a strong reliance on interactive and visually rich media in the English language learning process—a phenomenon particularly evident on platforms like Instagram and YouTube, which enhance engagement through multimedia formats (Lubis & Siregar, 2025; Nur et al., 2023). In Indonesia, the rapid advancement of digital technology and widespread access to online resources have prompted educators to incorporate such media into English instruction, aiming to foster learner autonomy and pedagogical innovation (Hidayat et al., 2022). Despite this growing trend, the degree to which teachers prefer certain types of media and how these preferences impact instructional effectiveness remains underexplored in the context of lower-secondary schools such as SMP N Langga Payung.

Additionally, teachers faced varying levels of readiness and challenges in integrating digital tools, underscoring the need to investigate their media preferences to ensure alignment with Gen-Z learners' digital literacies (Febriani & Afriani, 2025; Mukhlisa et al., 2025). This study addresses that gap by examining which media formats English teachers at SMP N Langga Payung prefer and how these preferences align with the learning styles of Gen-Z students.

In the case of SMPN 1 Langga Payung, the researcher observed that English teachers had started incorporating media into their teaching practices. Preliminary

discussions with teachers such as Harahap and Nasution revealed that while media such as videos, flashcards, and games were used, students often became distracted or lacked consistent motivation. Moreover, the different learning preferences of students posed a challenge to teachers in ensuring that the media used were effective for all learners. These challenges show the importance of selecting appropriate media and adjusting instructional approaches to suit the learning context.

Therefore, this research is crucial to investigate the actual use of learning media in the classroom, especially in teaching English to Gen Z students. The aim is to identify the types of media commonly used, assess their effectiveness, and explore the challenges encountered by both teachers and students. By doing so, the research is expected to provide insights and recommendations for more innovative, relevant, and effective English teaching strategies in secondary schools.

METHOD

Method of the study

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method aimed at describing the use of language learning media in teaching English for Generation Z students at Grade VIII of SMPN 1 Langga Payung. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the real conditions and perspectives of both teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. It is to understand phenomena in a natural setting with the aim of making sense of or interpreting the meanings participants bring to them. The descriptive nature of this method helps provide a comprehensive and systematic understanding of how learning media are utilized and the challenges encountered in the classroom context.

Sources of the Data

Two English teachers were selected as the sources of this research; they are Mrs. DN who teaches class VIII-1, and Mrs. SH who teaches class VIII-2. Then, from a total of 138 eighth-grade students, the researcher selected 10 students as participants—five from class VIII-1 and five from VIII-2. The selection was done purposively, based on the students' active participation and experience with various types of English learning media, such as YouTube videos, digital audio, PowerPoint presentations, and interactive platforms like Wordwall.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

To gather the necessary data, the researcher used two main instruments: observation and interview. The observation sheet used to see how the teachers used

different types of media in their English teaching. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with both teachers and students to explore more deeply the types of learning media used, the teachers' reasons for choosing particular media, and the challenges experienced in their implementation.

To analyze the collected data, the researcher used the interactive model of data analysis developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher applied a credibility technique known as member checking.

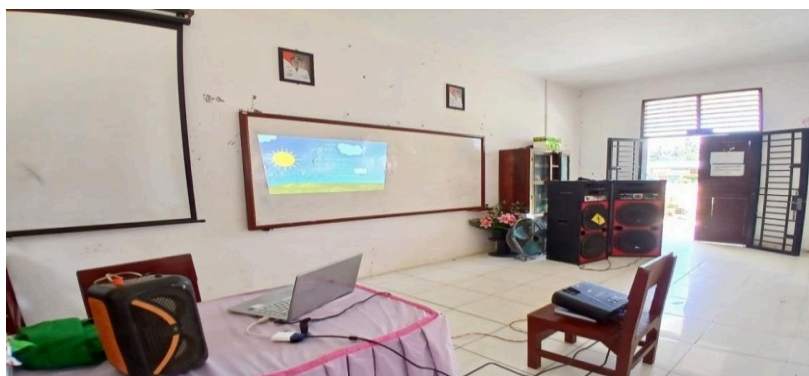
In conclusion, the research methodology used in this study provided a systematic and credible approach to investigating how English learning media are used to teach Generation Z students and what challenges are encountered in their application. The combination of observation, interviews, and systematic data analysis ensured the validity and depth of the findings

FINDING

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the language teaching and learning media used in teaching English to Generation Z students at Grade VIII of SMPN 1 Langga Payung. Data were collected through two classroom observations and interviews with teachers and students.

Language Teaching Media Used

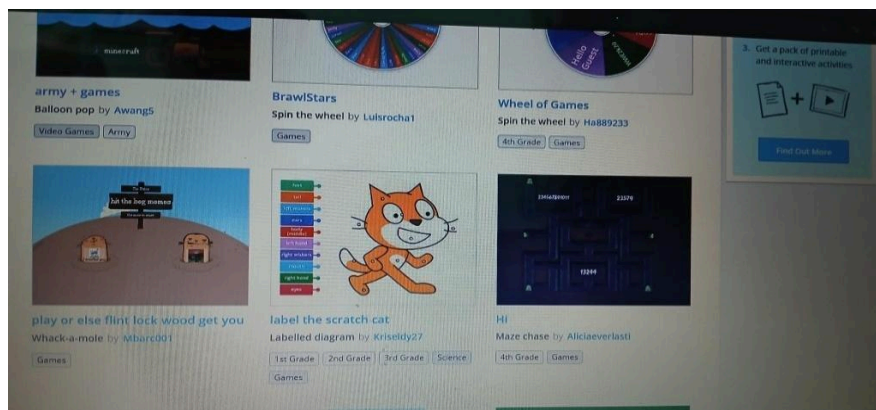
The researcher observed two English teachers: Mrs. DN (class VIII-1) and Mrs. SH (class VIII-2). Both teachers used various types of media in their teaching, grouped into three categories: audio media, visual media, and audio-visual media. The teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Langga Payung used such kinds of learning media. The teachers saw used audio media; it can be seen on the following picture:



Picture 1. The Use of English Song as Learning Media

In this case, they used a song as the learning media to teach the students about vocabulary and pronunciation. They made their students listen to the English songs when learning.

Another media that the teachers used is wordwall, as seen in the following picture;



Picture 2. The use of wordwall as Learning Media

Mrs. DN used English songs from YouTube played through speakers to help students practice listening and pronunciation. Mrs. SH used speakers to support digital games like Wordwall, which include audio feedback and instructions.

Not only using audio media, the teachers also used visual media, it is PowerPoint presentation and realia (real objects, like fruits or stationery). It is to support students to learn vocabulary. Mrs. DN mainly used textbooks as visual learning aids to reinforce reading and vocabulary. Mrs. SH used PowerPoint presentations and realia (real objects like fruits or stationery) to make vocabulary learning more concrete and engaging. Beside, they also used audio-visual media, such as YouTube via in-focus. Mrs. DN played YouTube videos via an InFocus projector and speakers, showing conversations and songs to illustrate pronunciation and language use. Mrs. SH combined PowerPoint slides with Wordwall games, both projected through infocus, creating an interactive and systematic learning experience. In summary, both teachers adjusted their media to suit Generation Z learners who prefer interactive, technology-based lessons combining sound and visuals.

Teachers teach the students of their generation with their own way and style. It is useful to support a good environment in the teaching and learning process. It will help the teachers to handle the students in their learning in order to help them engage in their learning.

Language Learning Media Used by Students

Students from both classes reported actively using similar media as their teachers. Students appreciated audio media like English songs and video audio for improving vocabulary and pronunciation. Then, Visual media such as textbooks, PowerPoint slides, and realia helped them understand and remember new words better. The Audio-visual media, like YouTube videos and Wordwall games made learning fun and more understandable. Overall, the use of diverse media increased students' motivation, engagement, and comprehension. So far, what the teachers used is also what is their students used, because it is in the similar class and similar schools.

Below is the result of observation:

Table 1. Result of Observation

Subject	Media Used		
	Audio-Media	Visual-Media	Audio Visual-Media
Teacher 1	Teacher 1 uses speakers to play audio from YouTube videos, supporting students' listening practice.	Teacher 1 uses textbooks as a source of reading material and visual references for students.	Teacher 1 utilizes YouTube and infocus to display videos, combining audio and visual elements to capture students' attention and facilitate material comprehension.
Teacher 2	Teacher 2 uses speaker to play the wordwall.	Teacher 2 uses realia (real objects) to introduce vocabulary, PowerPoint (PPT) displayed through an infocus projector for material presentation, and the infocus projector itself as a visual projection tool.	Teacher 2 uses Wordwall, an interactive platform that combines visual and audio elements in the form of games and learning activities.

The Challenges on Using Learning Media

In this study, it is found that the teachers and the students had some problems in when they use the English teaching media in their teaching and learning process. Teachers faced several challenges when using media, they are:

1. Technical problems like power outages, speaker malfunctions, and unstable internet disrupted lessons.
2. Some students were unfamiliar with digital tools, needing extra guidance.

3. Keeping students focused was difficult; for example, students might pay more attention to video visuals than the lesson content.

Teachers responded by preparing backup plans and combining different types of media to accommodate various learning styles.

Students also experienced with some problems, such as:

1. Slow or unstable internet caused video buffering and interrupted learning.
2. Some videos or songs were too fast, making comprehension difficult.
3. Technical issues with projectors or unfamiliarity with applications like Wordwall hindered participation.
4. Sometimes, the classroom environment (e.g., lighting) or missing teaching aids (like realia) reduced lesson effectiveness.

Students' feedback highlights the importance of considering these obstacles to ensure smooth and effective media use in the classroom.

DISCUSSION

By the findings in this study, it is known that the teachers at SMP N 1 Langga Payung have tried to use various kinds of learning media; they have integrated the traditional media, such as printed books with the digital media, such as video from YouTube. The teachers used digital media to teach English to the students. Various kinds of digital media used, such as video from YouTube, Wordwall, visual projectors, and others. The students seemed interested and enthusiastic in learning. As known that the Gen-Z like to use digital aids rather than printed (Dheasari et al., 2024; Harida & Nasution, 2024; Segev-Raz & Ferziger, 2023). What is found in this research is similarly to what have been done by others; the digital media is useful for teaching Gen-Z students.

In addition, based on some studies, using technology upgrades students' abilities, raises motivation and interest, and also improves students' performance in English learning (Remizantseva & Ablyazov, 2019; Tafonao et al., 2020; Yudhakusuma, 2021). Various kinds of learning media used will be able to arise students' ability, comprehension, motivation, and others. The teachers need to increase their ability to use digital media, as known that their students, the Gen-Z. Media is important for supporting students to learn; it increases students' learning interest and motivation. Integrating visual and audio media also can be good alternative for students to learning, because it can help students to improve their listening and reading skills (Batlawi & Hamid, 2022; Ponto, 2024). Based on some studies

before, it has been proven that learning media is needed for learning, especially for English learning; and this study also showed that the students and teachers have used digital media in their language learning process; and it believes will increase their interest, motivation, and the achievement.

Unfortunately, although the teachers at SMP N 1 Langga Payung have used some kinds of English learning media, audio or visual media, digital or non-digital media, there are still many challenges that arise. They come from the teachers, such as technical problems, strange with the media, and concentration. To overcome this condition, the teachers must have the ability to combine both kinds of media, digital and non-digital media, so they can control their students. Teachers responded by preparing backup plans and combining different types of media to accommodate various learning styles. From the students' side, they find it difficult to comprehend the video from YouTube because it is too fast. The problem also faced when they need to review the lesson, not all the students have smartphones that can be used for watching YouTube. Problems came; and it needs a solution. One of the solutions, if it is in the learning process in the classroom, they can watch it in classical, because the teachers prepared in-focus and a laptop to support it.

Related to the problems or challenges arise, it also happened with the students at SMK Al-Hasra (Khotibi & Hadi, 2022) that using YouTube in learning was also difficult because the condition of the students. The unstable connection of the internet is also one of the problems that not only teachers face but also students. It is almost become problems of learning using internet in Indonesia, because the connection of internet are not support all areas, such as in rural areas. One of the studies showed the related problems, it is about connectivity, software mall function, and others (Khotibi & Hadi, 2022; Masykuri & Basuki, 2022). So, it is not only the problem of the students or teachers in SMP Negeri 1 Langga Payung, but also from many areas or schools or even for university students. The teachers must be creative to make the language learning process are not in boringness situation; they need to use various kinds of media and several ways to solve the problems and to make the students comfortable.

Below are the figure out of the challenges happened when used the digital media.

Table 2. The Challenges of Using Media

No	Challenges of Using Media	
	Teachers	Students

1	Technical Problems, such as internet connectivity, unconnected speaker.	Technical problems, such as internet connectivity, and do not have a smartphone.
2	Needs extra time because unfamiliarity of the students with the media or tools	Difficult to understand the material from YouTube
3	To make students focus to the lesson.	Unfamiliar with the application of tools.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research data, the researcher applied the member checking technique, which is widely recognized in recent qualitative research as a credible method of validation. Member checking is a reflective process that confirms the accuracy and resonance of the data with participants' intended meanings. The researcher collected the data through observations and interviews with two English teachers at SMPN 1 Langga Payung. After conducting the classroom observations and analyzing the teachers' responses during the interviews, the researcher presented the interpreted findings to the teachers involved in the study.

To confirm the data, the researcher matched the observational data with the responses from the interview, especially focusing on how each teacher applied learning media in the classroom. To ensure alignment with actual classroom practices, the researcher asked the teachers to review and confirm the findings. Both teachers confirmed that the interpretations accurately represented their classroom experiences. This member validation process contributed significantly to the credibility and reliability of the findings and it also demonstrates good ethical research practice by giving participants a voice in the final interpretation of data. The result can be seen below:

Table 3. Data Credibility

No.	Teacher	Types of Media	Observation Result	Interviewed Result	Data Credibility
1.	Teacher 1(DN)	Audio	Speaker used to play audio and song from YouTube	Speaker used to play audio and song from YouTube	Matched
		Visual	Textbook	Textbook	Matched
		Audio-Visual	YouTube videos, Infocus	YouTube videos, Infocus	Matched
2.	Teacher 2(SH)	Audio	Speaker used during wordwall activities	Speaker mention used during wordwall activities	Matched
		Visual	PowerPoint via infocus, Realia	PowerPoint via infocus, Realia	Matched
		Audio-Visual	Wordwall includes sound and visuals, used via infocus and speaker	Wordwall	Matched

The table above demonstrates that the types of media used by both teachers were consistently mentioned during interviews and observed in classroom practices. To ensure the credibility of the findings, member checking was applied by presenting the interview data and interpretations back to the participants. The teachers confirmed that the information accurately reflected their actual teaching practice. This confirmation process supports the credibility of the research by validating that the data collected was truthful, clear, and acceptable to the participant involved.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings at SMPN 1 Langga Payung, it can be concluded that English teachers have effectively integrated various types of language learning media—audio, visual, and audio-visual—to meet the learning preferences of Generation Z students. These include YouTube, songs, videos, Wordwall, PowerPoint, realia, and textbooks. The use of these media supports students' engagement, motivation, and comprehension in English learning. However, challenges such as technical difficulties, internet instability, students' limited digital literacy, and classroom management issues also emerged during the implementation. Despite these obstacles, both teachers and students demonstrated adaptability and enthusiasm. The study highlights the importance of selecting appropriate, interactive, and flexible media to support effective English instruction, especially for digitally-oriented learners like Gen Z. It is still researchable which media is dominantly affect to the students' language ability; however in this study the researchers were not seen the students' language ability that affected by the media yet.

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