

## Teaching English to Generation Z students (New concept of young learners)

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**Comment [J1]:** ARIAL, SIZE 11; MAX  
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### Abstract

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Although the teaching of the English at elementary schools, the so-called English for Young Learners (EYL), in Indonesia was formally introduced since 1994, it is believed that the achievement is still far from being satisfactory. In fact, many studies which investigated the area of the teaching English to young learners had indicated that there is no consistent support between the policy and implementation. All of them had tried to find out what factors affecting the ineffectiveness of the teaching. The finding showed that in general the schools did not develop the curriculum appropriately, design teaching methodology properly, empower trained and experienced teachers, allocate instruction time sufficiently, and cater the students totally. Just knowing the factors is not enough; they need a solution. Albert Einstein who says, "the formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution." needs to be taken into account. Since young learners today belong to the group of Generation Z who think and behave differently than those from preceding generations, the solution offered should be appropriate for their needs and wants. Understanding the new generations of students and the way they learn is the key for starting changes required in education. In this article, therefore, the writer wants to address the information for EYL professionals about the nature of Gen Z and presenting possible teaching strategies designed to engage this generation in the English classroom.

**Keywords:** generation Z, young learners

**Comment [J3]:** LOWERCASE, MAX  
10 WORDS

### Introduction

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Conceptually speaking the teaching of English for young learners (EYL) today is considered to be a complex activity in primary education which often result unsatisfied learning outcome. As commented by Saukah (2009) while decisions to teach English to elementary school pupils have been made as a local content, the concept is still not very clear to many people because the decision seems to be based more on fashion or prestige than on real needs of the students. Moreover; the requirements for teachers to be able to teach English well at this level are seldom discussed in public forum (Musthafa, 2010). As a result, their knowledge about this important issue is very limited that finally affects on the effectiveness of their teaching practice in terms the learning outcome. When the claim that teaching EYL is unsuccessful it makes the Indonesian government plan to drop the English subject from the curriculum for Indonesia elementary schools. English will no longer be a subject taught in elementary schools. They argued that the omission aimed to give ample time for the students to master the Indonesian language first before diving into foreign languages (Afifah, 2012).

Regardless the above polemical issue, discussing English for young learners is still challenging as long as it is correlated to the good principles of teaching EYL. There are important links between what and how children are taught, and what they learn. Within the ZPD the richer and the broader the language experience is provided for children, the more they likely to learn (Camerron, 2001). Hence; teachers' knowledge and their beliefs about what is important to teach, how students learn, and how to manage student behavior and

meet external demands is very important. Teachers' daily experiences in their practice context also shape their understandings and their understandings shape their experiences.

It is important to know that most of today's young learners in primary school are Millennial; the name refers to those born since 2000. They often are categorized into generation Z (Gen Z) and called *digital natives*. They are comfortable with technology, and are often more proficient with it than their teachers are. They have different attitudes and aptitudes to their predecessors. Their outlook is sometimes called the "information-age mindset", and is characterized by the ability to multitask; and a belief that computers are not technology, and that the Internet is an essential part of life. They also use mobile phones and SMS extensively. They have never known life without computers and the Internet, and therefore see information technology as an integral part of their lives. It is not uncommon to see news reports on the increasing time that children are spending in front of computer screens at home (Reilly, 2012). To accommodate these potencies, it is essential for the teacher to implement new and emerging strategies in order to keep pace with the needs of the techno-hungry and techno-savvy Millennial and Generation-Z students. It becomes clear that teachers have been making effort to use technology in the classroom, but to be more successful and effective, preparation and support are needed.

Understanding the new generations of students and the way they learn is the key for starting changes required in giving instruction of English to Gen Z students. Therefore; the writer view the importance to present new concepts related to knowledge and learning, bringing new ideas to help teachers to reach digital generation of the students' needs and expectation.

## A. Young Learners as Generation Z

In defining the notion of young learner as generation Z, there are two points to be the basic assumption should be taken into account. Firstly, Lancaster and Stillman (2002) in Reilly (2012) provide a historical perspective of Gen Z by dividing the last 70 years into four distinct generations.

1. *The Baby Boomer generation* (1946– 1964). This large generation was due to the many soldiers who returned home after World War II and started families. More people were born in this twenty-year period than at any other time in United States history.
2. *Generation X* (1965–1980). This generation was much smaller than the Boomer generation. Gen Xers have been generally characterized as hard working, independent, and skeptical.
3. *Generation Y* (1981–1999). This generation came into being during the last two decades of the 20th century. Its members are identified as confident and technologically advanced, and they come with a sense of entitlement.
4. *Generation Z* (2000–present). This name refers to those born since 2000, a group that has received little attention in the literature thus far.

However, Terzioglu (2013) has a little different perception on the concept of generation Z. In his opinion generation Z (also known as generation m, the net generation, or the internet generation) is a common name in the US and other western nations for the people born from the early to mid 1990s to present. They have been born and raised after the cold war era and the fall of the Soviet Union. Members of generation Z are typically the children of generation X; their parents may also include the youngest baby boomers as well as the oldest members of generation Y other common terms

Secondly, in the context of the Indonesian school system there is a speculation about where generation Z begins. Looking at the age classification proposed by Lancaster and Stillman

(2002) it can be predicted that the oldest members of Generation Z are this year's elementary school students. When the concept of generation is directed to primary school level, the group of the generation Z belongs to young learners' category.

According to Scott and Ytreberg (1990) young learners are between five and ten or eleven years old. In addition, they divide the children into two main groups- the five to seven years old and the eight to ten years old. We are assuming that the five to seven year olds are all at level one, the beginner stage. The eight to ten years olds may also be beginners but they may have been learning the foreign language for some time. In Indonesian context, however, the category of young learner is referred to the National System of Education Act No.20/2003 item (1) of Article 6. All Indonesian citizens between seven to fifteen years old are obliged to enter the basic education. Students who are between seven to twelve are classified into elementary school level. For treating students of each level appropriately, teacher at this level require to know the characteristics of young learners as the group of generation Z.

## **B. The Characteristics and Learning Style of Generation Z**

Much has been written about describing the characteristics and learning style of the Generation Z to show who they are and how they differ from the former generations. Knowing them well will affect the students' ways of learning.

### **a. The Characteristics of Generation Z**

Barcelon (2010) identifies generations Y and Z have both been growing to maturity in the age of the computer. Both have embraced the opportunities provided by an explosion in technology which has created the environment for much of their learning and development. Therefore, the details of the characteristics of generation Z can be identified as follows:

*Tech Savvy.* Members of Generation Z have never known life without personal computers, mobile phones, gaming systems, MP3 players and the Internet. They are true "digital natives," comfortable with e-mail, texting and computer applications. They are also able to grasp and master advances in technology more quickly than previous generations. Unfortunately, technology has also contributed to this generation's lack of interest in playing outdoors, resulting in a sedentary lifestyle that may lead to obesity.

*Social.* Social networking sites and instant messaging were common as Generation Z grew up, so they have little concern for privacy and no problem sharing even the most intimate details of their lives with virtual strangers. Cell phones, instant messages and e-mail make communication immediate. As a result, a member of Generation Z is very collaborative and creative. When they get to be working age, they will change the workplace dramatically in terms of style and expectations.

*Multitasking.* Generation Z is so comfortable with technology, it stands to reason they are also born multitaskers. They can text, read, watch, talk and eat all at the same time, a talent that stuns adults. Any answer they need to find, any news they need to know and any person they need to talk to is just a click away. With all of these answers and information so easy to access. With this preference toward multitasking comes a dark side, which mental health experts are calling "acquired attention deficit disorder." While they are able to complete many tasks at once, each task gets divided attention, and the generation is losing the ability to focus and analyze more lengthy, complex information.

*Speedy.* A short attention span, perhaps brought on by the tendency to multitask, also requires information to be delivered in rapid, short bursts if it is to be understood. Generation Z thrives on instant gratification. With this has made us harder to teach, so teachers turn to more technologically advanced forms of teaching. We're all adapting to this new form of life alongside technology, because society isn't going to go backwards. We've come so far and now people need to cope with these advantages, while still keeping our work ethic in check. With developing technology we have lost the patience and work ethic that older generations had. Now the next step is finding a way for both of these to coexist.

They have all grown up with technology, playing video games, computer games and having any kind of movie at our finger tips, so it would make sense that here and now we're more accustomed to and educated in technology. Therefore, it has been clear enough for the teachers to understand that the characteristics of generation Z is much more different from the proceedings generation. In the teaching, teachers should hold principle that young children do not come to the language classroom empty handed. They bring with them an all ready well establish set of instinct and characteristic which will help them to learn language better ( Halliwell,1992).

## **b. Learning styles of Generation Z**

As there are many changes that the technology brings to today's learners, it will effect on the formation of students learning style. The followings are the learning style of generation Z students in which the English teachers should understand to educate them appropriately.

*1. Learn from Experimentation.* They prefer learning by doing rather than being told what to do or reading static books. These students are able to intuitively use a variety of IT devices & browse the Internet. They like to tinker with the up-to-date electronic gadgets, such as iPods, MP3 players, and cell phones. These students like that because they can touch and play with these devices. They also like to explore the Internet to learn something new, to make new friends, to make your own photo album, or to learn a new tool for blogging and more. They enjoy learning through self-discovery and taking the initiative to learn new tools.

*2. Prefer visual learning.* Due to the prevalence of technology in their lives as they developed, the Net Generation feels comfortable in the media-rich environment, surrounded by different kinds of digital devices such as computers, LCD projectors, PDAs, iPods, MP4 and iPhones. Living in this multimedia environment, the Net generations exposes themselves to the interactive computer games and movies, whether they are at home or at school. TV and computers provide rich visual effects which have resulted in them becoming more accustomed to receiving input in this mode. When the Net Generation looks for information online, not only will they try different search engines (like Google and Yahoo), but they also search for interactive materials from YouTube.com.

*3. Like to work in groups.* The Net Generation enjoys working on teams with peers, using collaborative tools like Google Apps. In general, these students are more likely to prefer learning in a supportive environment with teamwork. An activity, such as a Wiki project that can be undertaken with their instructors and peers is probably preferred by the Net Generation more than an individual assignment. This learning characteristic fits Vygotsky's zone of proximal growth theory. The Net Generations like to build up their learning by working with peers, because the slower learners are supported by the fast learners, and they learn by scaffolding the knowledge from each other. If learning is taken as to be an individual task without support from peers, more students will be left behind. As a result, the Net Generation fits Vygotsky's scaffolding theory, because most of them like to work in groups with their classmates. They gain confidence and support when cooperating with peers, and

they scaffold knowledge together. Learning is not only for the individual. There is nothing to be ashamed of if you do not understand when you first learn something new; rather, they like to share their experiences in groups. Google has developed many innovative applications to create a good working environment for these learners.

4. *Have short attention spans and multi-task well.* The media-rich environment that the Net Generation has become accustomed to appears to have shortened their attention span. If you ask them to work on the same thing for hours, it would probably overwhelm or frustrate them. They will probably enjoy the activities more if they can get several things done simultaneously, because they can usually shift attention rapidly from one task to another. They are generally able to multi-task better than their parents and can split their attention between different activities. Thus, an instructor should not be surprised by seeing a student listening to music, surfing the Internet, and talking to friends on the phone while doing homework. These diverse activities are all part of the Net Generations' daily lives.

5. *Edutainment.* The word "Edutainment" is a combination of two words: education and entertainment, which refers to educational entertainment or entertaining education. Content of product provides user with specific skills development or reinforcement learning within an entertainment setting. Think about what happen when education is combined with entertainment. According to Wikipedia, "Edutainment typically seeks to instruct or socialize its audience by embedding lessons in some familiar form of entertainment: television programs, computer and video games, films, music, websites, multimedia software, etc." Compared to the older generations' perspectives towards education, the Net Generation believes that learning has nothing to do with teachers' authority. Instead, learning is considered interactive and involves fun activities. They prefer teachers infusing games and activities into the curricula.

### **C. Good Teacher of English for Generation Z**

Quoting Sandars and Morrison (2007) in (Reilly, 2012), the main barrier to implementing such teaching is likely to be not the learners but the educators; there seems reluctance among many educators to move away from traditional teaching methods. A radical departure from a system that has worked well for a very long time is difficult to change.

Some teachers might object to this call to change. It is probably fair to say that many prefer to stay on their current course because it is familiar and has reaped some benefits. This attitude is unfortunate because for learning to occur, teachers need to update their teaching strategies. They need to adopt more technology-based tasks, include visual content, and provide the opportunity to be physically active in the classroom. If students are not given ample opportunities to practice and receive feedback, then the classroom experience wanes in comparison with learners' personal lives. The relationship between teacher and student becomes more tenuous, and student interest in learning drops. 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.

Hockly (2010), therefore, proposes some steps to how the teacher can cater to the Generation Z learners more effectively and bring their technology in my classroom. The first step is to start bringing some simple Web technologies into your classroom. Teachers could set up a class blog, for example. This is one of the simplest technologies to use with students, and an excellent place for a teacher to start. Of course they first need to set up a blog yourself, to ensure that they know how to do it, and they also need to think about what

they might use your class blog for. Find out more about Web tools, and how other teachers are using them already with foreign language students. Join a free online teacher development group such as the *Webheads* <[www.webheads.info](http://www.webheads.info)> and take a look at the fantastic ICT projects they are doing. Get some training and attend seminars and conference talks about new technologies -- there are plenty of free *online* conferences and webinars in our field for them to attend.

## D. Educating Generation Z students

Traditional methods of teaching saw children taught rote fashion in a group. However, times change and technology advances, resulting in the fact that the traditional style, which was very effective in its time, is no longer adequate for today's (and tomorrow's) students. Today's children are accustomed to a fast-paced world. It could be said that learners today are incredibly comfortable with technology and are willing to use technology in any way e.g. communicate through the mobile phone or text/multimedia messages, download music from the internet etc. as a consequence, children reflect this trend and concentration can easily lapse when mental stimulation is inadequate. They need individualized attention. Therefore, teachers need to respond successfully to that change in learning by adapting their teaching styles. Accordingly, here Terzioglu (2013) proposes some tasks that these learners might prefer:

- Include '*Find Someone Who...*' in your lessons. This will **increase their attention span** as learners need to be stimulated all the time.
- Bring **movies** into the class and ask learners to take and share notes.
- Integrate pictures, sounds, and video into all activities. In addition, they are **multi-taskers**, they can listen, draw and speak at the same time.
- Let them record and upload their presentations, reports on YouTube and establish an online communication by bringing different cultures and countries together.
- Allow them to access tech-sophisticated online sites and create their own posters and drawings.
- Integrate **entertainment & games** in order to maximize participation.

Simpson (2013) stated Young learners born between Generation Y and Z have grown up with technology that helps them engage with a constant flow of information and data. Yet the constant question from early 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers is, 'How can we adopt technology in our classes in a meaningful way that facilitates learning?' This is a good question we should ask whenever we use tech in our teaching, but it's easily answered if we leverage the ways our learners are already interacting daily with technology. Here are five ideas that might help.

### Don't be afraid of technology

Although YLs are most commonly described as tech *savvy*, I have trouble with this term as I feel it poorly depicts their true interactions with technology. What I have come to understand is that our young learners are actually *tech comfy*, rather than *tech savvy*. Realizing this, we can overcome our own fears of technology and adopt the tools they already use to facilitate learning.

### Teach proper search skills

By 2006 about 90% of young Westerners used Internet search engines. It's now virtually 100% with an *ease-of-use mentality* at the heart of this phenomenon. While *Gen Y-ers* still recognize the value of physical libraries, such facilities fail to live up to their expectations of speed and convenience. This high comfort level, however, fosters a false sense of ability: young learners often overestimate their skills in finding and – especially – in evaluating

online information. So, one of the first things we must do as teachers is offer guidance in how to use search engines effectively. Fortunately, there are resources such as this infographic to help us achieve this.

### **Use visuals more effectively**

In many cases, technology is enabling us to meet teaching aims in ways we could only imagine in the past. Whereas we used to search through our possessions for meaningful realia to elicit language in class, we can now use online visuals. Infographics like Nik Peachey's Infographic Tools (a great starting point) and YouTube video clips shouldn't be considered as *the new alternative to reading*, though, as they are not an adequate replacement for the development of reading skills. However, they are a great way of stimulating interest and activating schemata.

### **Leverage technology to give feedback**

Those few lines of red scribbled notes on a learner's writing homework have never been adequate feedback; this is one aspect of teaching that has been greatly enhanced with tech tools. *Gen Z-ers* have grown up receiving instant feedback on their performance, so they can feel let down if we don't give them the same level of response to their learning. Using audio recording tool Audacity or something like Class Dojo allows us to record thousands of words of feedback in the time it used to take to write two or three sentences.

### **Handle multitasking with care**

Recent research suggests that teenagers currently spend more than three hours a day connected to at least two tech gadgets — from a total of more than ten hours spent *plugged into* at least one. I've heard such statistics used to justify classroom multitasking, but I'm not convinced it's a great thing to encourage. The problem is — and Carnegie Mellon University research backs this up — that a young brain working on two tasks has much less overall brain activity than if they were focused on one task. It's doing less trying to do more. I'd suggest exercising great care dealing with multitasking in class, especially when doing something creative — which it's believed suffers the most from multitasking. If learners are looking up words in an online dictionary while doing another task, it's probably Ok. However, if creativity is your aim, keep multitasking to a minimum.

Anticipating the absence of technology in the classroom, [MiriamK](#), (2011) suggests that the teacher can use as an alternative way of giving instruction to the generation Z.

1. Focus on activity and interaction, rather than memorization and rules. The Total Physical Response method, in which students learn by doing, works well with little kids. For vocabulary, use real communication instead of repetitive reading or writing. For example, to review the word for "nurse," you could ask "What does a nurse do?" in the foreign language.
2. Collect foreign language material for young children. Language textbooks for older kids are usually too complex (and too boring) for youngsters. Skip these and use age-appropriate material that's relevant to children's lives. Instead of textbooks, try story books, poems, songs, comics, puppet shows, games and any other activity that uses language. You can also incorporate arts and crafts projects into your language teaching.
3. Interact in the foreign language. Using the foreign language for everyday activities brings it alive and teaches kids basic vocabulary in context. Mealtime, bath time and drive time all present learning opportunities. If you're teaching at home, start by saying a word or phrase in the child's mother tongue, then repeat it in the foreign language. Do

this for a month, and then switch to the foreign language followed by the native language. After a few weeks, you can use just the foreign language.

4. Find extra learning and cultural material. Help young children experience the culture of those who speak the language they're learning. Stories and movies about the lives and adventures of kids in other countries hold young children's attention well. Even if you don't understand the language, you can still get something out of the pictures and your child will be proud to explain things to you.
5. Introduce the children to native speakers. If you speak the language you are teaching with an accent, make sure your child talks to native speakers. Young children can learn a language with no foreign accent, but it gets a lot harder by around age 12. Children need to interact to develop a good accent, so try to find native speaking children they can play with.

## E. Conclusion and Recommendation

People in general realize generation Z students live and learn in a world of high technology with massive information-overload. Technology is very potential tool to serve the educational goals of developing the whole child, of serving the common good, of preparing our students for future employment, of developing a social conscience and a global consciousness, and of producing clear thinkers. How the technologies can contribute to all of this fully depend on the teachers' understanding of the world of generation Z which is different than previous generations. To bring different aspects together in meaningful ways, language teachers can benefit from the insights of the characteristics and learning style of Gen Z. Those characteristics relate to the abilities on their tech savvy, social, multitask, and speedy. The learning style refers to the students' preference. They learn from Experimentation, prefer visual learning, and like to work in groups, have short attention spans and multi-task well, and like edutainment. Mindful of these characteristics and learning style, English teachers need to do three things: (1) cater the Gen Z wants and needs (2) exploit the ways learners already use technology relevant to the learning context, and (3) find out the alternative teaching strategies that respond to the minimum technological availability. Finally, it is important to recommend that the teachers of Gen Z should **apply their strategies** enjoyable; supported; social oriented; meaningful; purposeful; and full of practice. As Confucius said I hear, and I forget. I see, and I remember. I do, and I understand.

### Subheading

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## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Bambang Harmanto** has been an English lecturer at the Teacher Training and Education Faculty of Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo since 2001. His master degree of English Education was gained from State University of Malang in 2002. He taught ESP in Muhammadiyah University of Malang from 1996 to 2000. At present, his teaching interests are English for Young Learners and Sociolinguistics. His publications concerning ESP teaching were *English for Nursing Academy* and *English for Governmental Sciences*. He was also active in conducting researches related to the teaching of English at Elementary Schools and other relevant topics funded either by the government or by his university. As a vice director of School Model of Muhammadiyah Primary School of Ponorogo, he is often involved in giving training and workshop such as *School- based Management*, *Student Active Learning*, *Achievement Motivation Training*, and *Character Building Strategies*.

