

Gen Z University Students and the 1970s' British Sitcom, *Mind Your Language*: A Pedagogical Experiment

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ABSTRACT

Bangladeshi Generation Z (Gen Z) students, most of whom are university-goers, are the proud pioneers of the radical movement of July-August 2024. They could achieve such height because of their mental strength, smartness in using social media and preference of older traditions to newer conventions. Nevertheless, the challenge is still there to teach these adults English. Hence, on understanding their inclination towards old school morals, the researcher endeavors to teach them English through the first three seasons of an old British sitcom, *Mind Your Language* (MYL), of the 1970s. A group of fifty Gen Z undergrad university students in a classroom was experimented. They were shown the pilot episode in the classroom, the other episodes and/or clips were told to watch outside classroom and also tasked to thoroughly read about the sitcom, its main characters and dialogues from online resources. Then they were given four different types of tasks on listening, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar including speaking. After a seventeen-day experiment, it was reported through a mixed-method analysis that students have resulted far better in listening, vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Nonetheless, their speaking skills are yet to be developed. Speaking itself is a mastery of all the other skills as stated and they are unable to perform successfully due to nervousness for public speaking. In a nutshell, the study shows that pedagogies should be revolved and evolved; newer tools and tasks need to be planned and executed for a more impactful and enjoyable learning environment both inside and outside classrooms.

Introduction

English language education has always been challenging from generation to generation to the non-native users of English all around the world. Educators apply and develop a range of methods and materials for teaching authentic and practical English. Nowadays, Generation Z (Gen Z) comprise the highest population of students. Gen Z, also known as Zoomers, are the demographic cohort succeeding Gen Y or Millennials and preceding Gen Alpha (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.). Gen Z are the people born between 1997 and 2012; their age range currently as for 2025 is from 13 to 28, and thereby are in their teens and 20s (Villegas, 2025). Most of Gen Z are students of schools, colleges and universities; while many of the older Gen Z are with occupations and/or families. Gen Z are called digital natives because they are the first generation growing up with the use of internet on a daily basis as a part of their life (The Campus Agency, n.d.). The avid users of social media and technology (Nuttal, 2025), Gen Z have wider scope to learn English and other academic and non-academic subjects from multiple sources.

The researcher selects a particular British TV sitcom, *Mind Your Language* (MYL) with the intention of exploring how a native TV show, despite its outdated cultural elements, could serve as an effective and relevant teaching tool for Gen Z university students today. MYL is a British sitcom that premiered on ITV, UK in 1977, produced by London Weekend Television, directed by Stuart Allen; has basically three seasons telecast in 1977, 1978 & 1979 respectively (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.). The sitcom is about adult education in an evening college in London where a group of foreign immigrants mostly from around Europe and Asia learn ESL from a native English

teacher. It hilariously presents the problems faced by both the tutor teaching and the pupils learning English due to linguistic, religious, ethnic and social differences. Hence, the study, is conducted to show how and to what extent Gen Z university students learn English from the approach to media-based language education, with the help of the TV sitcom, *MYL*.

Literature Review

In order to create a productive learning atmosphere, teachers need to adopt approaches and techniques that cultivate students' level of creativity, involvement and authenticity. Nunan (2003) emphasizes that the use of real-life texts, media, contexts and tasks enhances students' risk-taking abilities and engages them to learn more comfortably and effectually. Similarly, Harmer (2007) mentions the significance of variety and personal involvement in lessons promoting dynamic learning. Scrivener (2011) also advocates highly engaging teaching practices to develop students through challenging and creative participation.

In the light of these teaching principles, acculturation, accommodation and assimilation theories of second language acquisition lay emphasis on the role of cultural integration in language learning (James, 2009). Acculturation, through acceptance of the target culture, fosters authenticity. Accommodation, referring to adaptation of both target and ethnic culture, expands contextual comprehension. Assimilation may accelerate target language learning through abandonment of ethnic culture. However, these concepts validate the requirement of cultural incorporation using practical materials and media in target language education.

Studies have shown that cultural integration, an aspect of language aptitude, is facilitated through media-based education, particularly TV programs. Rodgers and Webb (2011) found that students' frequent exposure to popular TV series even without subtitles contributes positively to vocabulary acquisition. Wang (2012) stated that TV dramas are the most preferred genus of independent English language learning covering a range of realistic and communicative contexts. Besides, developing communication skills and cultural competence, TV shows increases learner motivation by offering entertainment that advances autonomous learning as well (Alm, 2013).

The research is grounded in the notion that Gen Z demonstrates a pronounced sense of nostalgia in media consumption, with preferences for watching old movies, shows and commercials. Turner (2022) confirms that Gen Z exhibit a strong tendency towards nostalgic content, while Harlow (2023) reports that 50 percent of Gen Z respondents favor such element. This nostalgic inclination might be influenced by their lived experiences during global and social commotions, for instance, the Covid-19 pandemic, and for Bangladeshi Gen Z the July Uprising of 2024. These events may have shaped their psychological forwarding self-awareness and sense of communal connectivity (Sedikides et al., 2015). In view of this nostalgic orientation, the classic sitcom, *MYL*, has been selected as the focal media material.

Methodology

To obtain validated results, the researcher employed a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis. The quantitative method was applied to confirm the statistical data on students' performance in the given tasks. Meanwhile, the qualitative method was employed to assess the quality of students' task responses.

Setting

The research was conducted on the private university where the researcher works. Classrooms were the sole setup for providing teacher's instructions and recording students' performances. Though students might have prepared themselves outside classes, the results they produced in the classes have only been considered.

Participants

A total of fifty Gen Z university students participated in the research. Twenty-five students enrolled in the second semester of the department of Computer Science and Engineering and the other twenty-five in the third semester of the department of English learning the English course entitled "Listening and Speaking" were the active participants whose performances were systematically evaluated for the research.

Instruments

To examine students' English language skills four tasks were designed focusing on listening, grammar and pronunciation, vocabulary and idioms, and speaking. The teacher prepared a worksheet on listening and provided clear oral and written instructions on evaluating the other skills.

Procedure

Data collection took seventeen days. In this period, there were six classes, and each class encompassed eighty minutes. On the first day, the researcher introduced *MYL* and made her students watch its pilot episode inside the classroom together with peers and her using technical assistance. Following the show, they were instructed to study its characters and various language aspects for further classes. On the second day, the first task on listening consisting of a few short questions and gap-filling activities were given to them, and their answer sheets were preserved.

On the third day the researcher had students watch short clips of *MYL* before completing the task for that day. They were told to find out and correct as many grammatical and pronunciation errors as they are able to from the sitcom characters and dialogues. Afterwards, their oral and written performances were recorded. The fourth day instructions to students counted in giving meanings and making sentences on their own with several new words and phrases they have learned from *MYL*. During the task, some students were individually watching the sitcom clips and taking online help. However, their written responses were again preserved. Before the final speaking task was conducted on the fifth and sixth days, students were provided with necessary guidelines in previous classes. The speaking task involved students' role-play on a particular pupil character of *MYL*, identifying and rectifying that pupil's linguistic errors. The individual oral presentations were recorded on a mobile phone.

Analyses

For the first and final tasks, the students were graded and their grades were calculated in terms of percentage. As for the second and third tasks students' answers were decoded in view of the focal answers responded.

Results

The researcher outlined several activities for the students and the latter's performances on those activities were carefully and critically assessed.

Listening

Five short questions including five gap-filling exercises on an audio clip of *MYL* were set for students to answer in brief. 77 percent of students have answered seven to nine questions accurately where none were able to provide all correct answers (See Figure 1). Although students might have prepared themselves through watching the sitcom clips and episodes prior to the class, it was assumed that they have better listening skills.

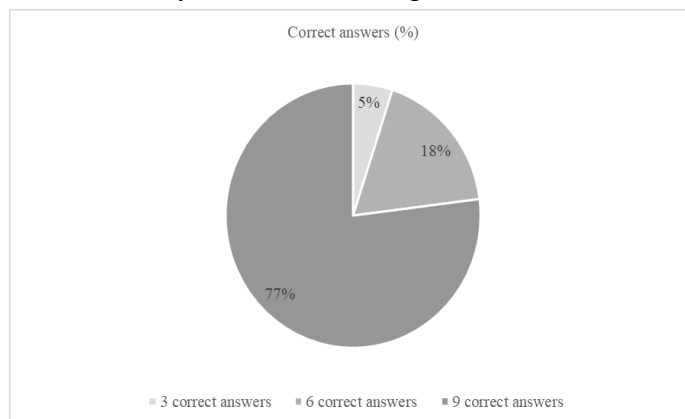


Figure 1: Responses on the Listening Task

Grammar and Pronunciation

The activities of finding out and revising the grammatical and pronunciation error were also provided to the students. In response, they pointed at several errors and edited the grammatical errors as shown in the tables below (see Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1: Pronunciation errors figured (shortlisted)

Errors	Examples
'w' vs. 'v' sounds	'wet' as 'vet'; 'welcome' as 'velcome'
'r' vs. 'l' sounds	'orange' as 'olange'; 'England' as 'Engrand'
vowels vs. aspirants	'okay' as 'hokay'; 'embassy' as 'hembassy'
short vs. long vowels	'ship' as 'sheep'; 'fit' as 'feet'
monophthongs vs. diphthongs	'hoping' as 'hopping'; 'bacon: /beikən/' as /bækən/
minimal pairs &/or homophones	'vowel' as 'bowel'; 'bad' as 'bed'
adding 'o' to every word	'wait' as 'waito'; 'English' as 'Englisko'

Table 2: Grammatical errors edited (shortlisted)

Errors	Examples
missing auxiliaries	'I been watching a nice movie yesterday.' (I have been...) 'You confusing me what to say.' (You are confusing...)
incorrect verbs and/or tenses	'Every bodies is understand everything I speak. (Everybody understands...) 'He was a man who be very strong.' (...who is very...)
confusion of articles	'I'm coming here to be learning the English.' (...learning English) 'I have small gift for you.' (a)
improper order of words	'I here come to English learn.' (...come here to learn English) 'Can we learn if you tell us not?' (...you don't tell...)
omitted prepositions	'I went to meet my family Birmingham.' (at) 'the end the hero of the movie dies, very tragic!' (in)

Vocabulary

Students were instructed to write the meanings and make their own sentences with the newly learned vocabulary including idioms and figures of speech from *MYL*. The following table (see Table 3) highlights the words and expressions they learned along with the meanings they provided and the sentences they commonly constructed.

Table 3: Vocabulary learned (shortlisted)

Vocabulary	Meanings	Sentences
Fete	A public function held outdoors	Our spring fete is a joyous occasion at our university.
Nuisance	A person or a thing causing disturbance	It's a nuisance when electricians work during our class time.
Centenarian	One who is a hundred years old or more	My grandfather was a centenarian. (Or) My grandmother was a centenarian.
Colloquialism	Use of informal words for speaking	Foreign students don't use colloquialism, they understand standard English.
Chauffer	A personal driver	I wish I had a car and a chauffeur to drive it.
Au pair	A young foreign female hired for household chores or baby-sitting	In our country, there is no system of keeping an au pair.
Toilet water	A liquid perfume	The shop sells perfumes and toilet water.
Chalk and cheese	Completely incompatible	My twin sibling and I are like chalk and cheese.
As deaf as a post	Having bad hearing	The old man was as deaf as a post.
As blind as a bat	Having very bad eyesight	My best friend is as blind as bat during the night.
Fate worse than death	A terrible experience	The July-August experience was a fate worse than death.
Sell a pup/dummy	To deceive someone	My clothes were torn within a month; I was sold a dummy by the shopkeeper.
Get to the point	To state the main idea directly and specifically	Don't beat around the bush, get to the point. (Or) We must get to the point clearly in the presentation.
Push off	To leave quickly and abruptly	The man pushed off our sight without a word.
Mind own business	To stop interfering	Everyone minds own business in corporate jobs.

Speaking

Each student chose any one pupil character from *MYL* and acted like him/her, then spoke about the character's linguistic errors & provided corrections in two minute-time. 32 percent of students succeeded in the role-play, while 48 percent detected and corrected the errors (See Figure 2). Findings indicate that even after having time for practice at home, students were unable to reduce the stress, anxiety or nervousness levels and to heighten memorization degrees. Overall, their speaking skills require improvement.

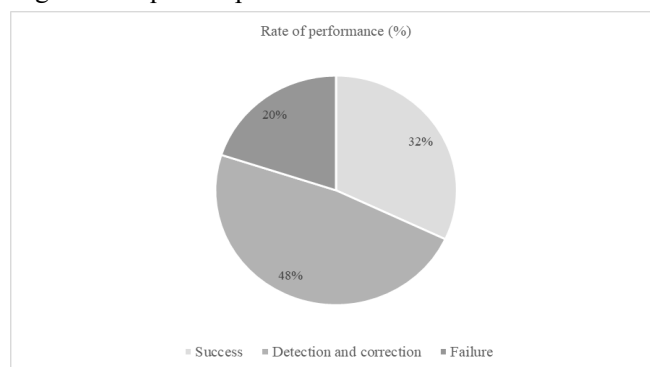


Figure 2: Rate of performance on the Speaking Task

Discussion

The research results illustrate that students performed better in listening, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary than in speaking. *MYL* significantly contributed to relatively effective learning among Gen Z university learners. The study validates the view that innovative, creative and challenging lessons facilitate and accelerate learning. Being adept digital learners, Gen Z notably responds to media-based language education, which activates their cognitive faculties. The study supports the findings of Wang (2012) and Alm (2013) that media is an effective means of language learning. In addition, it aligns with the pedagogical principles proposed by Nunan (2003), Harmer (2007) and Scrivener (2011) advocating for an inclusion of diverse materials and methods of learning, for instance, authentic texts and engaging tasks, to enhance learners' language competency. Moreover, students' connection to the timeless sitcom provides evidences to the studies of Turner (2022) and Harlow (2023) that nostalgic predisposition extends the learning process. The connectivity to the content, cast and characters of *MYL* is further reinforced by James (2009), who posits that cultural and linguistic accommodation remarkably heightens learners' comfort level and intrinsic motivation. However, the success rate of 32 percent in speaking skills indicates that students' affective filters manifested through stress, anxiety and nervousness were elevated. Speaking is a productive skill, integrating multiple skills of listening, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. The study infers that the limited time allocated to speaking during the final days of the experiment was insufficient to elicit stronger performances from students. In this regard, *MYL* failed to provide adequate motivational support and enhance students' speaking abilities. Hence, while media-based language education proves effective for teaching receptive skills, the development of productive speaking skills requires an amalgamation of comprehensive approaches, sustained practices and additional time allocation.

Conclusion

The pedagogical study explored the relationship between university students and media-based education through *MYL* on its impact on Gen Z's language acquisition. It depicts both positive impacts of media-based learning on language reception along with some noticeable inadequacies in language processing and presentation. Although the primary objectives are achieved, the time constraints and the task strategy limitations might have contributed to the fractional failure. Despite the setbacks, the experimentation promises avenues for further research for constructive consequences, suggestive of the importance of regularly adapting and updating pedagogic methodologies according to the emerging needs of the newer generations.

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