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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 adept in using social media and have a preference of newer conventions. However, in order to address the challenge of these Gen Z students English, their inclination towards old school tropes was utilised, as this research study endeavours to teach them English through the first three seasons of a classic British sitcom Mind Your Language (MYL) of the 1970s. A group of fifty Gen Z undergrad university students in a classroom was studied. They were shown the pilot episode in the classroom, the other episodes and/or clips were watched outside the classroom, and the students were also tasked to read about the sitcom, its main characters, and dialogues from online resources. Then they were given four different types of tasks on listening, vocabulary, and speaking. After a seventeen-day experiment, it was reported through a mixed-method analysis that students had performed far better in listening and vocabulary. Their speaking skills are yet to be developed. Speaking is a mastery of all the other skills and as stated and they are unable to perform successfully due to lack of confidence 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 the classroom.

Keywords: Gen Z, Mind Your Language, Classic British sitcom, pedagogical experiment, media-based language education.

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1. Introduction

English language education has always been challenging across generations especially for non-native users of English. 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 in schools, colleges and universities, and many of the older Gen Z are working and have started a family. 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 a 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 and 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 EFL 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. The sitcom highlights the comic situations and miscommunications that arise from the distinct sociolinguistic orientations of the teacher, the students, and other characters, including the principal, the cleaning and the canteen staff at the college. From a pedagogical

perspective, the sitcom offers insights into various English accents, interlanguage features of ESL learners, and both cross-cultural and intercultural interactions.

1. Problem Statement

Audiovisual media has been recognised as an effective tool in English language education worldwide. While Gen Z students are typically exposed to and inspired by contemporary digital resources, the educational potential of classic media remains largely unexplored in classroom contexts. *MYL*, the 1970s' sitcom, centered on pedagogic narratives, multicultural classroom communications and diverse cast, features idiomatic terms, authentic dialogues and various accents, that can benefit English language learners. However, its dated cultural stereotypical representations may or may not be aligned with modern norms. The challenge lies in bridging the generational and cultural gap between vintage media and Gen Z university students through classroom instructions and determining whether and to what extent such an educative resource promotes linguistic competence and social learning through humor and entertainment.

Hence, the study, is conducted to explore how and what Gen Z university students learn English from the approach to media-based language education, specifically with the help of the TV sitcom *MYL*.

2.1 Research Questions:

The study seeks to address the following questions:

- In what ways does *MYL* facilitate Gen Z university students in English language acquisition?
- What language features, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking are effectively developed through engagement with the sitcom?

2.2 Research Objectives

The study aims to:

- Examine the role of *MYL* in supporting English language learning among Gen Z university students.

- Identify specific language skills, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking, that are enhanced through exposure to the sitcom.

2. 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) emphasises that the use of real-life texts, media, contexts and tasks enhances students' risk-taking abilities and engages them to learn more comfortably and effactually. 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 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 increase 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.

3.1 Research Gap

Although related studies have demonstrated the pedagogical value of media materials in second language education, most have focused on the use of contemporary content in Western contexts. There is limited empirical research on how nostalgic or retro TV shows can be employed as instructional tools in non-Western settings, particularly in South-Asia including Bangladesh. This gap is noteworthy given Gen Z's predisposition toward nostalgic media. Furthermore, no prior pedagogical experiments till to date have explored the use of *MYL* as a resource for enabling Bangladeshi Gen Z university students to develop language aptitude and sociocultural competence.

3. Methodology

To obtain validated results, the researcher employed a mixed-method approach to data collection and analysis. The quantitative method was adopted to determine students' performance statistics and frequency rates related to the assigned tasks. Meanwhile, the qualitative content analysis was applied to interpret the recurring linguistic patterns in students' responses, providing a nuanced insight into their language use.

4.1 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.

4.2 Participants

A total of fifty Gen Z university students, aged 18 to 20, participated in the research. Twenty-five students enrolled in the second semester of the department of Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) and the other twenty-five in the third semester of the department of English, studying in the English language course entitled "Listening and Speaking", were the active participants whose performances were systematically evaluated for the research. The researcher being the instructor of this course had easier access to these students allowing her to collect and compare data effectively. It is worth mentioning that both departments received identical experimental lessons and activities with the researcher delivering her instructions in a similar style for both English and CSE students.

4.3 Instruments

To examine students' English language skills four tasks were planned, focusing on listening, grammar and pronunciation, vocabulary, and speaking. The teacher prepared a listening worksheet and gave clear oral instructions for evaluating pronunciation and grammar, vocabulary and finally speaking.

4.4 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 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 was accomplished. Students were asked to complete the task consisting

of a total of ten short questions and gap-filling activities (see Appendix I) while watching and listening to the first part of Season 1, Episode 4 without subtitles. The answer sheets were preserved, and the answers were calculated in percentage.

On the third day the researcher instructed students to individually watch short clips of *MYL* on their cell phones before completing the task for that day. They were told to find out and correct as many pronunciation and grammatical errors as they were able to from the sitcom characters and dialogues. Afterwards, their oral performances in pronunciation and written performances in grammar were documented, and the most frequently occurring responses, as determined through calculative analysis, were presented as shortlists.

Continuing into the fourth day, students were instructed to provide definitions and construct original instructions sentences with ten new words and phrases they have learned from *MYL*. During the task, some students continued to watch the sitcom clips individually and consulted online resources for assistance. However, their written responses were again collected, summarised and analysed statistically.

Before the final speaking task was conducted on the fifth and sixth days, students were provided with necessary guidelines in the previous classes. The speaking task involved each student to a role-play a particular pupil character of *MYL*, identifying and rectifying that pupil's linguistic errors. The individual oral presentations were recorded on a mobile phone. Subsequently, their presentations were graded based on the accuracy of their error detection and the quality of the role-playing performance.

4. Analyses

Students' written responses to the first task (listening) were evaluated using percentage-based calculations, whereas responses to the second (pronunciation and grammar), third (vocabulary), and final tasks (speaking), were rated and analysed by interpreting the content of the responses.

5. Results

The researcher designed several instructional activities, and the students' performances on these tasks were carefully and critically assessed.

6.1 Listening

Five short questions including five gap-filling exercises on the selected video clip of *MYL* were compiled into a worksheet for students to answer in brief (see Appendix I). Figure 1 and Figure 2 illustrate the separate success rate of responses provided by the English and CSE student groups. The lowest success rate, 60 percent, was recorded for one response to a question by the English students. In contrast, the CSE students, demonstrated greater performance with higher success rates ranging from 72 to 100 percent across all responses to the questions indicating to have greater listening aptitude than the English students. Although students might have prepared themselves through watching the sitcom clips and episodes prior to the class, it was generally assumed that they have stronger listening skills than their other language abilities.
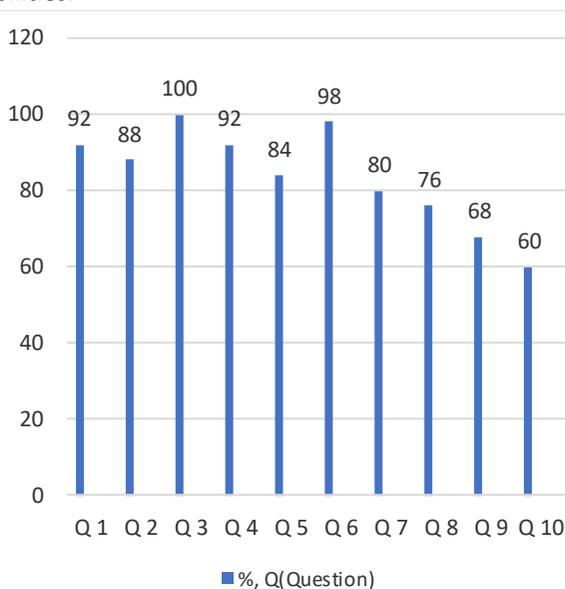

Figure 1: English students' success rate of responses in the listening worksheet
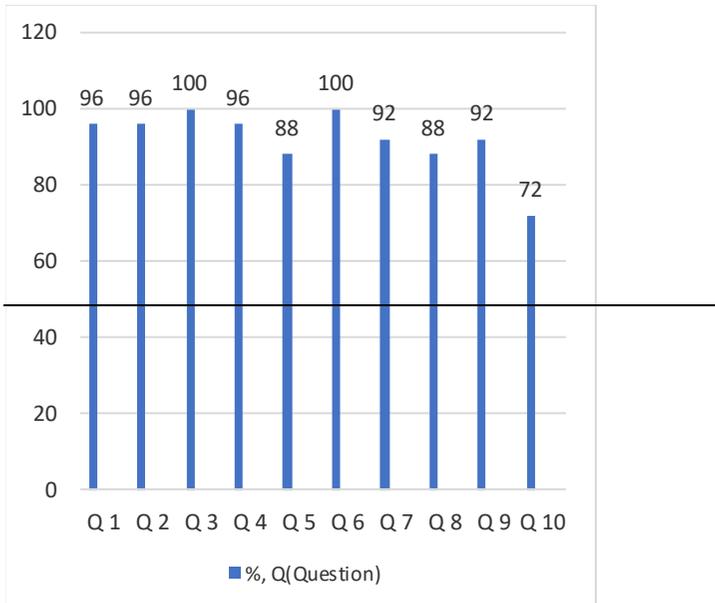
Figure 2: CSE students' success rate of responses in the listening worksheet

6.2 Pronunciation and Grammar

As mentioned earlier, students were asked to watch clips from MYL independently and detect as well as amend the pronunciation and grammar errors made by the characters in the series. As a result, they identified several mistakes and revised the grammatical errors. The most common types of errors and their corresponding corrections have been summarised, highlighting the comparative performances of English and CSE students, in the tables below (see Table 1 and Table 2). Notably, the English students were more successful in detecting and correcting pronunciation errors than the CSE students, whereas both groups demonstrated relatively similar rate of success in identifying and rectifying grammatical mistakes.

Table 1: Summary of the pronunciation responses

Errors identified	Errors exemplified	Success rate of English students' responses	Success rate of CSE students' responses
'w' vs. 'v' sounds	'wet' as 'vet'; 'welcome' as 'velcome'	68%	56%
'r' vs. 'l' sounds	'orange' as 'olange'; 'England' as 'Engrand'	88%	80%
vowels vs. aspirants	'okay' as 'hokay'; 'embassy' as 'hembassy'	72%	60%
short vs. long vowels	'ship' as 'sheep'; 'fit' as 'feet'	84%	72%
monophthongs vs. diphthongs	'hoping' as 'hopping'; 'bacon: /beɪkən/' as /bækɒn/	80%	64%
minimal pairs &/or homophones	'vowel' as 'bowel'; 'bad' as 'bed'	68%	48%
adding 'o' to every word	'wait' as 'waito', 'English' as 'Englisho'	100%	96%

Table 2: Summary of the grammatical responses

Errors identified	Errors exemplified	Success rate of English students' responses	Success rate of CSE students' responses
missing auxiliaries	'I been watching a nice movie yesterday.' (I was	100%	100%

	watching…)		
	'You confusing me what to say.' (You are confusing…)	100%	100%
incorrect verbs and/or tenses	'Every bodies is understand everything I speak. (Everybody understands…)	96%	92%
	'He was a man who be very strong.' (…who was very…)	100%	100%
confusion of articles	'I'm coming here to be learning the English.' (…learning English)	48%	52%
	'I have _____ small gift for you.' (a)	76%	80%
improper order of words	'I here come to English learn.' (…come here to learn English)	100%	100%
	'Can we learn if you tell us not?' (…you don't tell…)	96%	92%
omitted prepositions	'I went to meet my family _____ Birmingham.' (at)	72%	80%
	'_____ the end the hero of the movie dies, very tragic!' (In)	80%	72%

6.3 Vocabulary

Students were instructed to write the meanings and create their own sentences using at least ten newly learned vocabulary from *MYL*. Table 3 and Table 4 outline the wordlist, comprising idiomatic expressions, figures of speech and phrasal verbs, learned by English and CSE students, respectively, along with their corresponding meanings and constructed example sentences. Though they revisited the sitcom clips, accessed online materials and engaged in peer discussion, they were ultimately successful in producing sentences that were both grammatically and contextually accurate. Both English and CSE students learned to use individual words and figures of speech at a relatively similar rate, while CSE students displayed strength in phrasal verbs and English students excelled in idiomatic phrases.

Table 3: English students' list of vocabulary responses

Vocabulary	Meanings	Sentences	Rate of responses
Fete	A public function held outdoors	Our spring fete is a joyous occasion at our university.	40%
		In the spring fete of my school/college, I used to enjoy with my friends.	40%
		We must arrange more cultural fetes at our university.	20%
Nuisance	A person or a thing causing disturbance	It's a nuisance when electricians work during our class time.	24%
		The roads near our campus are a nuisance.	44%

		My roommate is/roommates are a nuisance when I try hard to study.	32%
Centenarian	One who is a hundred years old or more	My grandfather/grandmother was a centenarian.	64%
		The news featured a centenarian who lived for two hundred years.	36%
Au pair	A young foreign female hired for household chores or baby-sitting	In our country, people don't usually have au pairs.	12%
		Anna is an au pair from Germany.	20%
		Danielle is a French au pair.	24%
		Their au pair helps with cooking and cleaning as well.	44%
Chalk and cheese	Completely incompatible	My older/younger brother/sister and I are like chalk and cheese.	60%
		Living in the city is chalk and cheese compared to living in the village.	8%
		We are like chalk and cheese_ we have nothing in common.	32%
As deaf as a post	Having bad hearing	The old man/woman was as deaf as a post.	64%
		Now in his/her nineties, my grandfather/grandmother is now as deaf as a post.	36%

As blind as a bat	Having very bad eyesight	My best friend is as blind as bat during the night.	44%
		Without glasses, I/my grandfather/my grandmother is as blind as bat.	56%
Fate worse than death	A terrible experience	The July-August experience was a fate worse than death.	68%
		Life as a private university student feels like a fate worse than death.	32%
Sell a pup/dummy	To deceive someone	My dress/shirt was torn within a month; I was sold a dummy by the shopkeeper.	40%
		The car/bike looked fine but the engine failed in three days; I was sold a pup.	60%
Push off	To leave quickly and abruptly	The arrogant man/lady pushed off our sight without a word.	36%
		After classes, they push off quickly for home.	28%
		Let's push off before it gets dark.	36%

Table 4: CSE students' list of vocabulary responses

Vocabulary	Meanings	Sentences	Rate of responses
Nuisance	A person or a thing causing disturbance	The noise from the construction site is a real nuisance.	20%

		Working on a malfunctioning computer in the laboratory is a big nuisance.	32%
		Traffic jams cause a lot of nuisance in our country.	48%
Colloquialism	Use of informal words for speaking	Colloquialism is used in everyday speech.	48%
		We should avoid colloquialism in academic writing.	52%
Chauffeur	A personal driver	I wish I had a car and a chauffeur to drive it.	20%
		He hired a cab and a chauffeur to drive him to the five-star hotel.	44%
		The chauffer knows all the best routes in the city.	36%
Au pair	A young foreign female hired for household chores or baby-sitting	It's uncommon to see male au pairs in the Subcontinent.	20%
		Being an au pair creates opportunities for both earning and learning.	20%
		My roommate worked as an au pair in Italy/Spain/Greece.	32%
		Good au pairs don't stay strangers for long_ they become family members.	28%
Toilet water	A liquid perfume	The shop sells perfumes and toilet water.	28%
		Toilet water is lighter than perfume.	28%
		A bottle of toilet water	

		would make a great birthday gift for my friend.	44%
Chalk and cheese	Completely incompatible	We are friends, but our personalities are like chalk and cheese.	36%
		My twin brother/sister and I are like chalk and cheese, we are completely different.	36%
		English Literature and CSE are like chalk and cheese_ two very different courses.	28%
As deaf as a post	Having bad hearing	My old grandfather/grandmother is as deaf as a post and needs a hearing aid.	58%
		The man/He pretended to be as deaf as a post and didn't answer any of my questions.	42%
Fate worse than death	A terrible experience	Being trapped in Aynaghor was a fate worse than death for the prisoners.	64%
		Losing his/her eyesight felt like a fate worse than death to him/her.	36%
Get to the point	To state the main idea directly and specifically	Don't beat around the bush, get to the point.	16%
		We must get to the point clearly in the presentation.	32%
		I don't have time; please, get to the point.	52%
Mind own	To stop	Everyone minds his or her	

business	interfering	own business in corporate jobs.	20%
		Please, mind your own business and leave me alone.	44%
		They were arguing, so I minded my own business.	36%

6.4 Speaking

Following the researcher's instruction in the preceding classes, each student selected one pupil character from *MYL* and role-played as that character. During the two-minute delivery, the student identified the character's linguistic errors and provided appropriate corrections. Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate the performance outcomes of English and CSE students, respectively. Among the English students, only 32 percent of English students were able to role-play successfully, while 48 percent could manage to discuss the errors. CSE students performed marginally better, with 36 percent demonstrating convincing role-playing skills and 52 percent effectively addressing the errors. Findings indicate that despite having time to rehearse at home, students struggled with stress, anxiety or nervousness, that affected both their memorization and delivery. Overall, the results reveal that their speaking skills require substantial improvement.
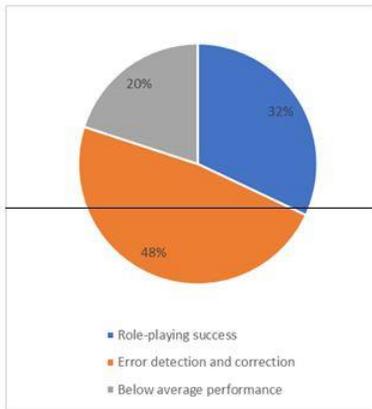
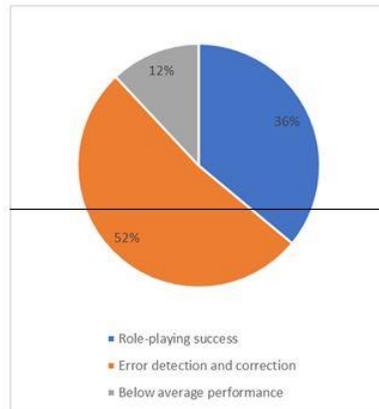Figure 3: English students' performance rate on the speaking task

Figure 4: CSE students' performance rate on the speaking task

7   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 competence. Moreover, students' connection to the timeless

sitcom provides evidence 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.

8 Conclusion

The pedagogical experiment explored the relationship between university students and media-based education through *MYL*, concentrating on its impact on Gen Z's language acquisition. It depicts predominantly positive impacts of media-based learning on language reception along with some noticeable inadequacies in language processing and presentation. Students from both the English and CSE departments showed advancements in listening and speaking skills, adopted standard accents, revisited grammatical rules and acquired new terminology, each in their own distinct ways. Most participants enjoyed the old British sitcom during instructional sessions and class activities. Many were able to relate

themselves to its content. Findings imply that with a properly structured lesson plan and guidance from well-equipped supervisors *MYL* could be regarded as a prospective media material for assisting Gen Z in learning English through its light-hearted themes, versatile characters and abundant examples of rich linguistic features.

9 Limitations

Although the primary objectives are achieved, the time constraints and the task strategy restrictions might have contributed to the fractional failure. The sample size was limited to fifty students from only two departments, that might not reflect the full range of perspectives of the wider Gen Z university community. Additionally, the experiment was conducted within a seventeen-day period, which may not have been sufficient for learners from diverse social and educational backgrounds to master all language skills, especially speaking. It is also possible that alternative instructional designs and activity sets implemented by the teacher could have yielded better student performances.

10 Implications

Despite certain setbacks, most notably the lack of significant improvement in speaking skills, the present pedagogical experimentation indicates that integrating *MYL* into language classrooms can successfully enhance listening comprehension, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary, along with cultural awareness among Gen Z university students. The findings highlight the necessity of regularly adapting and updating teaching methodologies to meet the emerging needs of digitally smart learners. Future research could build on this approach by incorporating more diverse media resources to further develop students' reading, writing, and conversational abilities. Given Gen Z learners' technological efficiency, educators should aim to maintain

a balanced blend of traditional and modern instructional techniques, ensuring that students become both linguistically proficient and socially competent.

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Appendix

Appendix I: Listening Worksheet

Listen and watch the clip and answer the following questions.

1. Why do some students decide to talk to Sid?

2.   What was actually Sid speaking in?

_____

3.   On the day's class, Mr. Brown is going to talk about _____.

4.   On which sound should Su Li keep on practicing?

_____

5.   According to the clip, a 'flower' is worn at weddings, and 'flour' is used to make:

_____

6.   Jamila confuses 'carrot' with 'horse and _____'.

7.   What does Juan answer when he is asked to identify milk?

_____

8.   Where do we get milk according to Mr. Brown and Juan respectively?

_____

9.   According to the show, bacon comes from a _____.

10. Mr. Brown tells that it is time his students put their _____ of learning.