Effective Strategies in Learning English for Generation Z in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

Educational transformation in the digital era demands learning strategies that can meet the needs of Generation Z students who have critical, collaborative, and technologically literate characteristics. This study aims to examine digital, collaborative, and contextual-based English learning strategies that are relevant in improving the communicative skills of Generation Z students. The method used is a literature study, by reviewing the results of previous studies related to the use of digital media, collaborative approaches, and contextual learning in English teaching. The results of the study indicate that the use of digital platforms such as Quizziz, YouTube, and Wordwall can increase student motivation and learning engagement, while role-play methods, group discussions, and project-based learning are effective in fostering students' self-confidence, creativity, and active speaking and writing skills. In conclusion, learning strategies that integrate digital, collaborative, and contextual approaches are very suitable for the characteristics of Generation Z and can create a meaningful, interactive, and enjoyable English learning process in madrasas..

Keywords: *generation Z; digital learning; collaborative strategies; contextual learning; communicative skills.*

INTRODUCTION

Rapid developments, particularly in information and communication technology, have had a significant impact on the world of education, including the learning of foreign languages such as English. In this context, Generation Z those born between 1997 and 2012 has unique characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations. They grew up and developed alongside advances in digital technology, so their learning style tends to be fast-paced, visual, multitasking, and highly connected to the virtual world. Therefore, conventional learning approaches are no longer fully effective for this generation, including at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), the lower secondary level of Islamic education in Indonesia.

On the one hand, English is an essential skill in facing global challenges, especially in the era of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, which demand mastery of foreign languages and digital literacy as basic competencies for the 21st century. However, on the other hand, many students still experience difficulties in understanding and mastering English. This is caused by various factors, ranging from limited learning media relevant to the characteristics of Gen Z, low learning

motivation, to less than optimal learning strategies used by teachers. Therefore, adaptive, innovative learning strategies are needed that are in accordance with the characteristics of Generation Z students so that learning objectives can be achieved optimally. English teachers are required to be able to develop learning approaches that not only emphasize the cognitive aspect alone, but also involve affective and psychomotor aspects relevant to the digital world familiar to Gen Z students. Technology-based learning strategies, collaborative learning, and interactive digital media such as videos, educational games, and online platforms are considered to be effective solutions. Husna (2024) Therefore, this study aims to examine in depth the English learning strategies implemented by teachers and their effectiveness in improving the learning outcomes of Generation Z students.

Learning strategy is a comprehensive approach that includes planning, implementation, and evaluation of the teaching and learning process with the aim of achieving optimal learning outcomes (Djalal, 2017). According to Warsita (2009), learning strategies encompass the methods, techniques, and media used to systematically deliver material to students. In the context of English learning, effective strategies must accommodate the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while still considering student characteristics. Learning strategies tailored to the characteristics of Generation Z are becoming increasingly important because this generation tends to be more responsive to visual and audio stimuli, as well as practical and digital learning.

The characteristics of Generation Z in the world of education have been studied by many experts, one of which is (Rusli et al., 2024) which explains that Gen Z prefers fast, flexible, and hands-on problem-solving learning. They also feel more comfortable interacting through digital media than in person, so teachers need to design learning activities that utilize technological devices such as smartphones, tablets, and interactive learning apps. Therefore, integrating digital technologies such as the use of a Learning Management System (LMS), social media, learning videos, and app-based interactive quizzes is highly recommended to support the effectiveness of learning strategies.

In relation to English language learning, the theory of the communicative approach (Communicative Language Teaching/CLT) remains highly relevant, as it emphasizes the importance of the ability to use English functionally in real-life situations. Furthermore, this approach also prioritizes collaboration-based activities, projects, and problem-solving—all of which align with Gen Z learning preferences. Learning strategies that combine CLT principles with the use of digital technology will produce a more contextual and relevant approach for Generation Z students.

A number of previous studies support the importance of adapting English learning strategies to the characteristics of Generation Z. Research by TOYIB (2024), shows that the use of interactive media based on mobile applications such as Kahoot! and Quizziz significantly increases student motivation and participation in English learning at the junior high school/Islamic junior high school level. Meanwhile, research from Saptaria & Sopiah (2022) found that a flipped classroom approach based on video learning significantly improved Gen Z students' learning outcomes,

particularly in listening and speaking skills. These two findings indicate that technology-based learning is highly needed and relevant for today's learners.

On the other hand, studies by Azri & Raniyah (2024), private schools in Yogyakarta emphasized that the main obstacles to implementing innovative strategies lie in the lack of teacher training and adequate technological facilities in the school environment. Therefore, the success of learning strategies depends not only on the model or approach used, but also on the readiness of human resources and infrastructure support. Therefore, further studies are needed to explore how schools like Negeri 1 implement learning strategies tailored to Generation Z, and the supporting and inhibiting factors.

Based on the background, theoretical review, and previous studies described above, this study aims to identify English language learning strategies used by teachers in dealing with Generation Z students; analyze the effectiveness of these strategies in increasing student engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes. This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions in the development of more adaptive and contextual learning strategies in madrasah-level education. Furthermore, the results of this study are also expected to serve as a reference for English teachers in educational institutions in designing learning that is not only enjoyable and relevant, but also effective in developing students' English language competencies in accordance with the demands of the 21st century. In the context of national education policy, the findings of this study are also expected to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes differentiated learning, character building, and technology integration. Thus, English language learning strategies for Generation Z are not only a methodological innovation, but also part of a larger educational transformation towards Indonesia Emas 2045.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative approach with a literature review. This study aims to explore and analyze various relevant scientific literature sources to understand effective English language learning strategies for addressing the characteristics of Generation Z in madrasah environments. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to develop theoretical and conceptual understanding of previous research findings without having to collect data directly in the field. Through a literature review, researchers can compile a comprehensive synthesis of various existing research results and identify gaps that still require further investigation.

The data sources in this study consisted of accredited national and international journal articles, academic books, proceedings, dissertations, and official documents from relevant educational institutions. The selected literature must meet certain criteria, covering topics related to English language learning, Generation Z, madrasah education, 21st-century learning, or technology integration in learning. The literature used must also come from credible sources, be available in full-text form, and be accessible through scientific databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, DOAJ, Scopus, or official university repositories.

The data collection process was conducted through a systematic search using keywords relevant to the research focus, including "English teaching strategies," "Generation Z learners," "Islamic schools education," and "digital learning in madrasas." The researcher also employed a snowballing technique, which involves tracking down important references from previously discovered primary literature. All literature sources were then classified based on their main theme, year of publication, and level of relevance to the research objectives. To support effective literature management and citation, the researcher utilized tools such as Mendeley and Zotero.

In the analysis process, the researcher applied thematic content analysis techniques. Each literature was reviewed to identify the research objectives, methodological approaches, findings, and their contributions to the issue of English language learning among Generation Z. The results of the review were then grouped into several main themes, such as the characteristics of Generation Z in the learning context, innovative English teaching strategies, technology integration in learning in madrasas, and Islamic value-based learning models. The patterns of findings that emerged were then arranged in narrative and tabular form to facilitate the process of interpretation and drawing conclusions.

The primary instrument in this study was the researcher herself, who actively conducted a review and critical analysis of the collected literature. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the study results, the researcher used a systematic literature review sheet as a guide in identifying important elements from each reference. The validation process was carried out through repeated readings, triangulation of themes, and critical selection of the sources used to avoid bias and ensure that only truly relevant literature was analyzed further.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Digital Based Learning Strategies Increase Gen Z Student Engagement

Literature studies show that the implementation of digital-based learning strategies has a significant impact on increasing the engagement and motivation of Generation Z students, particularly in English language learning in madrasah environments. Generation Z is known to be highly familiar with digital technology, making learning approaches that integrate interactive digital media highly relevant and contextual. Several previous studies Amahoroe (2025) and Rohman & Khaliza (2024) emphasized that platforms like Quizziz, Wordwall, Google Forms, and educational videos from YouTube can create a more lively, competitive, and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Using these media allows students to become not just recipients of information but also active participants in the learning process.

The literature also highlights that the use of visual and audio media has a positive impact on students' absorption of English learning materials. For example, a study by Wati et al., (2025) found that students grasped sentence structure and vocabulary more quickly when presented through English videos than through

conventional oral explanations. The dominant visual-auditory learning style among Generation Z requires teachers to design contextual and engaging learning. When instruction fails to address their learning style preferences, student engagement tends to decline, even leading to boredom.

Furthermore, several studies have emphasized the importance of the relevance of learning materials to students' daily lives. A study by Janah (2025) and Azzahra & Prasetyo (2024), studies show that students are more enthusiastic about learning that incorporates the digital world they're familiar with, such as watching videos, accessing learning apps, or taking interactive quizzes. This makes the learning process feel lighter and more enjoyable, thus encouraging increased interest in subjects previously considered difficult, such as English. Digital strategies are also considered capable of bridging limited reading interest by providing materials in more engaging and easier-to-understand audio-visual formats.

The emotional connection between teachers and students is also an important aspect reflected in the literature. When teachers use digital media that students are familiar with, a more supportive learning environment is created. As explained in a study by Marfuah (2024), students feel more valued when teachers demonstrate an understanding of their world. This fosters emotional closeness, which is crucial for creating a positive learning climate. Teachers are also seen as capable of acting as creative and adaptive facilitators in delivering material, not simply as transmitters of information.

However, several studies have also noted challenges in implementing digital strategies in madrasas, particularly related to limited infrastructure. A study by Sesmiarni (2025), studies show that barriers such as limited internet access, a lack of personal devices for students, and low digital literacy among teachers are major obstacles to optimizing digital learning. Therefore, it is crucial for educational institutions to provide support in the form of technology training, strengthening network infrastructure, and providing adequate learning tools. However, several studies also show that collaboration between students can help overcome these limitations, creating a supportive learning culture.

Based on the findings from various literature analyses, it can be concluded that digital-based English learning is highly aligned with the characteristics and needs of Generation Z in madrasah environments. This strategy is not only effective in increasing engagement and motivation to learn, but also adapts to their more visual, interactive, and digital-native learning styles. The success of this strategy depends heavily on teachers' readiness to design engaging and meaningful learning activities, as well as institutional support to ensure adequate access to technology. With the right integration of digital strategies, English learning in madrasahs has great potential to become more adaptive, relevant, and enjoyable for Generation Z students.

Collaborative and Contextual Approaches Improve Students' Communicative Skills

Collaborative and contextual English learning strategies have become one of the increasingly recommended approaches in 21st-century education, especially in dealing

with the unique characteristics of generation Z. This generation is known to have an active, participatory learning style and tends to prefer learning experiences that are relevant to real life. Aswita et al., (2022), In this context, English teachers apply various active methods such as role play, group discussions, and project-based learning to create an interactive and meaningful learning environment. These strategies are proven to align with the findings. Winata & Hasanah (2021) which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in the cognitive development of students.

In a collaborative approach, learning is no longer teacher-centered, but rather focuses on active student participation (student-centered learning). This aligns with constructivism theory, which views students as subjects who construct their own knowledge through experience and interaction with their environment. According to Arafah et al., (2023), activities such as food ordering simulations or creating English vlogs reflect forms of experiential learning that place students in authentic situations. Research by Reswari et al., (2025), research on project-based learning shows that student engagement increases significantly when they work in teams and complete tasks that require creativity and communication.

Furthermore, a contextual approach brings learning closer to the realities of students' lives. Through relevant themes such as hobbies, social media, or favorite foods, teachers create a space for students to learn English in familiar situations. This aligns with the principles of contextual learning according to Mahbubi & Sa'diyah (2025), which states that students will more easily understand and internalize material if it is presented in a meaningful context. Research by(Fausiah & Fausiah, 2003)also supports that contextual strategies are able to increase students' interest and motivation in learning, especially in foreign language learning.

In line with this, various previous studies have also shown the effectiveness of collaborative and contextual approaches in improving English language skills. For example, research by Fauziah & Efendi (2024) found that junior high school students who participated in project-based learning showed significant improvements in speaking and writing skills. Meanwhile, research by Yulianeta et al., (2024), Research shows that the use of role-playing can increase students' confidence in using English orally. This strengthens the argument that learning involving real-life interactions and group work not only trains language skills but also develops social competencies essential for a globalized world.

Collaborative and contextual learning also provides space for the development of soft skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. In projects like creating presentations or vlogs, students are trained to design messages, choose the right words, and systematically organize scripts. This demonstrates the link with Bloom's revised taxonomy. Atmojo et al., (2023) emphasizes the importance of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) in the learning process. Generation Z students, accustomed to multitasking and technology, benefit greatly from this strategy because they are actively engaged, both cognitively and emotionally.

Thus, from the existing literature review, it can be concluded that collaborative and contextual English learning strategies are highly suitable for the needs and

characteristics of Generation Z. The implementation of this strategy has proven effective in increasing students' motivation, communication skills, and active participation in the learning process. The success of this strategy is also supported by the role of teachers as creative and adaptive facilitators to students' needs, as well as by a learning environment that supports collaboration and creativity. Therefore, this approach is worth recommending for wider adoption in other madrasahs.

Discussion
Digital-Based Learning Strategies Increase Gen Z Student Engagement

Digital-based learning strategies have been shown to have a strong influence on increasing the engagement of Generation Z students, particularly in madrasas. In this context, Generation Z is understood as a group of students who have been familiar with gadgets, the internet, and various digital platforms from an early age. according to Rosyida et al., (2020), learning is adapted to a digital environment that is familiar to them, students' emotional and cognitive engagement increases significantly. The results of literature studies as presented by Rahmania et al., (2023), shows that the use of interactive platforms such as Quizziz or Wordwall can transform the learning atmosphere into a competitive yet enjoyable one. This supports the theory of learning motivation from Nurishlah et al., (2023) which states that learning that provides space for autonomy, competence, and connectedness will encourage intrinsic student involvement.

When compared with previous research conducted in public schools, the findings in madrasas confirm that students in religious environments continue to demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm for digital approaches. This aligns with the findings of Adedo & Deriwanto (2024), which highlights that students' religious backgrounds are not a barrier to technology adoption as long as the content remains contextual and valuable. In fact, the literature indicates that educational videos or digital teaching materials containing religious values have a more positive impact on madrasah students' learning motivation. This comparison demonstrates that digital strategies are flexible and adaptable to the local madrasah context, without diminishing the essence of character and values education.

In terms of learning theory, the application of digital media supports the principles of cognitive and constructivist theories. Cognitive theory states that students absorb information more optimally when the material is presented in a structured and visual manner (Wahidin, 2025). This is supported by studies of Pujiono et al., (2024), which found that using video in English learning accelerated vocabulary and sentence structure comprehension. From a constructivist perspective, students' active engagement in online quizzes or video-based assignments encourages them to construct knowledge through hands-on experience. Compared with traditional learning strategies, digital approaches provide more space for students to learn at their own pace and interests, thereby increasing retention and participation.

However, the challenges of implementing digital strategies in madrasas cannot be ignored. Unlike urban schools with complete facilities, many madrasas in rural

areas still face limitations in technological devices and adequate internet connections. The study results of Chotimah et al., (2025), shows that low teacher digital literacy and lack of training are serious obstacles to optimizing digital strategies. This is an important consideration for policymakers to support teacher capacity development and technology infrastructure in madrasas. Compared with studies conducted in advanced schools, these findings emphasize the need for inclusive digital learning strategies that adapt to local constraints. Therefore, technology integration in learning must be accompanied by policies that support an equitable digital ecosystem.

Collaborative and Contextual Approaches Improve Students' Communicative Skills

Collaborative and contextual learning strategies play a crucial role in shaping students' communicative skills, especially among Generation Z, who tend to be active, open, and enjoy challenges. Based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, social interaction is central to language development, and collaborative approaches provide ample space for students to learn through conversation, discussion, and group work (Kurniati, 2025). Study by Harahap (2024), reinforces that project-based and role-play English learning improves students' confidence and fluency in speaking. This is particularly relevant in the madrasah context, where conventional learning often focuses on memorization and written exams, but leaves little room for active language practice.

Compared to passive, teacher-centered learning approaches, collaborative strategies provide more meaningful learning experiences. Study results of Maudi (2016), research on project-based learning shows that project assignments that require collaboration and problem-solving can improve students' communication and critical thinking skills. In an educational context, for example, the task of creating an English vlog provides students with the opportunity to integrate language with technological skills and creativity. This is highly suited to the multitasking, visual, and digital-native learning styles of Generation Z. Compared to students from previous generations, Gen Z students tend to be more responsive to authentic, challenging assignments that directly relate to their world.

In addition to the collaborative aspect, contextual learning has also been shown to strengthen students' communication skills. In this approach, teachers present English material in familiar themes such as food, music, or social media. This aligns with the principles of contextual teaching and learning (CTL) according to(Izzatunnisa et al., 2024), which states that learning will be more effective when it is linked to students' real lives. A study by Mahbubi & Sa'diyah (2025), this reinforces the fact that students are more motivated and understand the material more easily when context-based learning is used. Compared to strategies that are overly academic and abstract, contextual learning provides relevance, making students feel like English is part of everyday life, not just exam material.

However, some literature also reminds us that the effectiveness of collaborative and contextual strategies is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to design learning activities. Teachers must be able to act as facilitators, not just conveyors of

information. In research by Ummah et al., (2025), it was found that teachers trained in an active-participatory approach were more successful in improving students' communication skills. This comparison suggests that transforming the teacher's role is crucial to the success of this strategy. Therefore, ongoing training is needed for madrasah teachers to be able to design collaborative, contextually relevant, and adaptive learning activities to meet the needs of Generation Z. Otherwise, even good strategies will lose their effectiveness in classroom learning.

This literature review presents a novel approach to English teaching tailored to the characteristics and needs of Generation Z in madrasah environments, particularly at the elementary school level. The main novelty lies in the simultaneous integration of two strategic approaches: digital-based learning and a collaborative-contextual approach, in an effort to improve student engagement and communicative skills. While many previous studies have discussed the effectiveness of digital learning and collaborative learning separately, this study brings them together within a specific analytical framework for English learning in madrasahs, directly linking the digital-native characteristics of Generation Z students. This makes this study unique because it offers a more holistic and applicable combination of strategies for madrasahs transforming to face the digital education era. This study also provides a new contribution to the context of English education in madrasahs, which has so far received less attention in technology-based learning studies. By focusing on the madrasah context, which has its own challenges in terms of infrastructure, learning culture, and a religiously-inclined curriculum, this study offers practical insights that can be used as a reference for teachers and education administrators in designing more adaptive and relevant learning for Generation Z students.

However, this study has several limitations that require attention. First, because the approach used was a literature study, the data analyzed were sourced only from relevant previous studies. This limits the generalizability of the findings to actual practice in various madrasas, as not all madrasas have uniform technological conditions and readiness. These findings have not been validated through direct field research, thus requiring support from empirical studies to test the effectiveness of the recommended strategies. Second, another limitation lies in the scope of the available literature. Not all previous studies specifically focus on the context of madrasas and Generation Z students, so some of the findings used in the analysis may come from more general studies, such as those in public schools or higher education institutions. Therefore, interpretation of the results requires caution to ensure they remain relevant to the madrasah context and junior high school level. Third, this study did not thoroughly examine aspects of gender differences, students' socioeconomic backgrounds, and local cultural factors, which also influence the effectiveness of digital-based and collaborative learning strategies. These factors can influence student engagement and response to the implemented learning model. Therefore, further research with a field approach and more contextual analysis is needed to enrich and strengthen the findings in this study.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the literature study, it can be concluded that collaborative and contextual English learning strategies, combined with the use of digital technology, have proven effective in improving the communicative skills of Generation Z students. This approach encourages students to be more active, creative, and confident in using English through real-life activities such as role-play, group discussions, and project-based learning that are relevant to their daily lives. This strategy also aligns with the characteristics of Generation Z, who prefer interactive, experiential, and practically meaningful learning. Therefore, it is recommended that English teachers in madrasahs integrate collaborative and contextual approaches into their learning designs, and gradually utilize technology as a medium that supports the creation of an active, enjoyable, and adaptive learning environment to meet the needs of the times. In addition, madrasahs are also expected to provide support in the form of training, digital infrastructure, and policies that support learning innovation so that the English teaching process can take place effectively and sustainably in accordance with the development of the characteristics of today's students.

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