
Analyzing The Role of English Pop Culture in Shaping Students' Language Learning Motivation

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Abstrak : Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis peran budaya populer berbahasa Inggris dalam membentuk motivasi belajar bahasa Inggris pada siswa. Budaya populer yang meliputi musik, film, serial televisi, dan media sosial merupakan bagian dari budaya populer yang berkembang pesat dan memengaruhi gaya hidup serta kebiasaan generasi muda (Storey, 2018). Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui observasi mendalam dan wawancara dengan siswa sekolah menengah, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa paparan budaya populer Inggris meningkatkan minat siswa dalam mempelajari bahasa tersebut. Namun, masalah juga ditemukan dalam lingkungan belajar seperti kurangnya integrasi media populer dalam materi pengajaran dan terbatasnya dukungan dari staf pengajar. Tujuan utama penelitian ini adalah untuk memahami bagaimana unsur-unsur budaya populer dapat digunakan secara positif dalam mendukung proses pembelajaran bahasa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan kontekstual berdasarkan minat siswa dapat menjadi strategi yang efektif untuk meningkatkan motivasi belajar bahasa.

Kata Kunci: Budaya Populer Inggris, Pembelajaran, Motivasi

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the role of English-language pop culture in shaping the motivation to learn English in students. Pop culture, which includes music, movies, television series, and social media, is part of popular culture that is growing rapidly and influencing the lifestyles and habits of the younger generation (Storey, 2018). Using qualitative methods through in-depth observation and interviews with high school students, the study found that exposure to British pop culture increased students' interest in learning the language. However, problems were also found in the learning environment such as the lack of integration of popular media in teaching materials and limited support from teaching staff. The main objective of this study is to understand how elements of pop culture can be used positively in supporting the language learning process. The results of the study show that a contextual approach based on students' interests can be an effective strategy to increase motivation to learn languages.

Keywords: English Pop Culture, Learning, Motivation

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INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English is a very crucial skill. English not only functions as a tool of international communication but also as a bridge for access to various kinds of educational, technological, and cultural resources. Based on Rohana's (2018) opinion, English is a global language used to interact in various fields and aspects of people's lives at the International Level.

The process of communication with this language includes various activities such as reading letters, reading reports, writing, listening and speaking (Sukardi 2020)

One of the most interesting phenomena in English learning is the influence of popular culture (pop culture) on students' learning motivation. Popular culture refers to everything that is accepted and consumed by the wider community at a given period. Pop culture encompasses a wide variety of media forms, such as movies, music, television series, video games, and memes that are often an integral part of students' daily lives. Popular culture offers a more enjoyable way of learning; popular culture is relevant compared to traditional methods. Popular media can introduce students to vocabulary, idioms, and everyday expressions that are often used in real communication. In addition, through constant interaction with popular culture, students can understand the cultural context behind the use of the language, thereby improving their ability to use English comprehensively.

Gardner (1985) stated that motivation is the main factor that affects the success of language learning. Students who are exposed to English-speaking pop culture tend to have a much greater interest in learning because they are able to relate that learning to things they really like and recognize in their daily lives. The data shows students are engaging with pop culture elements. For example, an English song or movie can increase motivation to learn. According to research by Palittin et al. (2019), approximately 40% of students admit that support from social environments, including pop culture, contributes to their motivation to learn English. This shows that when students feel connected to the learning material through the medium they enjoy, they are more motivated to learn and actively participate in the learning process. Previous studies have shown a positive correlation between pop culture use and motivation to learn English. Research by Placer et al. (2024) found that students who are intensively exposed to pop culture media, such as film, music, and social media, tend to have higher integrative and instrumental motivation in learning English. This suggests that elements of popular culture can serve as an effective motivational tool in the context of education.

One way pop culture increases motivation is by providing students with a relevant and engaging learning context. For example, interactions with K-pop content have been shown to encourage Generation Z to be more active in learning English, as they are exposed to English-language song lyrics and interactions with K-pop idols who use English in everyday communication (Baez-Arroyo, 2022). Thus, pop culture is not only a source of entertainment but also an effective medium of learning.

However, challenges remain in integrating pop culture into the formal curriculum. Many educators are still hesitant to take advantage of these elements due to the lack of clear pedagogical guidance and concerns about the relevance of the teaching material. In addition, many teachers rely more on textbooks that are monotonous and less attractive to students. This leads to a lack of students' interest in learning in depth, as Cheung (2001) expresses, that traditional methods that focus on grammatical structure often fail to create a genuine interest in learning English.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the application between the use of pop culture elements and students' learning motivation in English. This research focuses on how pop culture media, such as film, music and digital platforms can increase students' integrative and instrumental motivation in learning English. Facing the challenges faced by many educators, such

as the lack of clear pedagogical guidance and concerns about the relevance of teaching materials, the journal seeks to offer insights that can assist teachers in integrating pop culture elements into the curriculum. This is important considering that many teachers still rely on monotonous textbooks, which are often unable to create students' interest in learning English (Cheung, 2001). By showing how pop culture can be an engaging and relevant source of learning, this research hopes to encourage more educators to utilize popular media in their teaching.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method to explore how English-language pop culture influences students' motivation to learn the language. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to collect in-depth data and understand students' perspectives holistically. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with students in the neighborhood with a variety of different school backgrounds to get a clearer picture of the influence of pop culture on their motivation to learn.

There are primary data and secondary data that are very important in this study. The primary data in this study consisted of interviews with students, where they shared their experiences and views on how pop culture elements such as music, movies, and social media motivate them in learning English. Meanwhile, the secondary data in this study includes related literature that discusses the relationship between pop culture and language learning. This can include articles, books, and previous research that explains theories of learning motivation as well as the influence of media on education. This secondary data serves to support the analysis and provide a stronger theoretical framework for the research findings.

Data analysis was carried out with a qualitative descriptive approach, where the researcher categorized and interpreted the data based on the themes that emerged from interviews and observations. This process involves data reduction to extract relevant information and present it in an understandable form, so that the results of the research can provide meaningful insights into the role of pop culture in motivating students to learn English.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze how English-language pop culture plays a role in students' learning motivation. The data was collected through in-depth interviews with five students from different schools at the High School Level who have an interest in pop culture such as English-language music, movies, series, and social media. The following researchers list the results of the interviews that the researcher has obtained:

Table 1. Question 1

Question	Answer	Name
What made you interested in learning English?	I started to like learning English since I often watched Marvel movies and listened to songs by Ed Sheeran. It's so cool to be able to understand it without subtitles.	Rafi
	I want to understand the lyrics of my favorite songs in English without translating them.	Sinta
	I am very interested in learning English because I have an Idol abroad, so I am very interested in learning English, so that later I can go abroad and meet my Idol	Dika
	I am interested in learning English because I really want to work abroad	Ayu
	I want to be able to speak English because I like to listen to western songs and watch western movies, I want to understand vocabulary and pronunciation as well as western actors	Aldis

Table 2. Question 2

Question	Answer	Name
Do you feel that pop culture has an effect on your English skills?	Yes. I used to have a hard time understanding listening, but after watching Korean dramas in English and watching YouTube, now it's easier to grasp what it means.	Rafi
	Yes, the more I listen to music and watch movies in English, the more vocabulary I have in English	Sinta
	Yes, I often communicate with my social media friends who are international and they use English, which helps me improve my English vocabulary.	Dika
	Yes, the more I watch movies and dramas that use English, the better I become at practicing in the real world in speaking English	Ayu
	Yes, music makes me better at English because it is easy to memorize and remember the notes, so I can improve my English skills by playing western music	Aldis

Table 3. Question 3

Question	Answer	Name
Are you more enthusiastic about learning English, because of pop culture?	Yes, learning English is not boring. For example, when I listen to a song or play an online game, I want to know what the words mean.	Rafi
	Very! Because pop culture is related to daily life, so I feel that learning English is not rigid. I became diligent in opening a dictionary or Google Translate every time I found a new word from a movie or song	Sinta
	Yes, because I feel there are immediate benefits to learning English. For example, if I understand movie dialogues or song lyrics, it feels satisfying and it makes me motivated to keep learning.	Dika
	Yes, I feel like I am learning without being forced. Watching series and playing games in English makes me excited to learn so that I can understand and interact as well	Ayu
	Clear! Pop culture makes English feel more alive. I practice listening and speaking more often because I often listen to and imitate the way my favorite artists speak	Aldis

Table 4. Question 4

Question	Answer	Name
Do you think it's important for pop culture to learn English?	Important. Because it makes us exposed to English continuously, it becomes more natural. In fact, sometimes it is more effective than textbooks.	Rafi
	I think it's very important. Through pop culture like movies and songs, we can learn English in a more fun and boring way.	Sinta
	It's important, because it makes us more interested in learning. The problem is that learning from a movie or song doesn't feel like learning, but just goes into the brain	Dika
	Yes, it is very important. Because pop culture can be a motivation for us to learn on our own, for example when we want to understand the lyrics of songs or dialogues in movies.	Ayu
	It's very important. I often hear English from YouTube or podcasts, and it really helps my listening and pronunciation.	Aldis

Table 5. Question 5

Question	Answer	Name
Are there any aspects of pop culture that you find less helpful in learning?	Sometimes the slang or slang is too difficult to understand, so it makes it confusing. Not everything can be learned directly, especially if the context is not clear	Rafi
	Some of the content was too fast to speak, so I couldn't even catch the words. For example, in action films, I focus more on the scenes than the dialogue.	Sinta
	Sometimes the vocabulary used is not formal, so I am confused about whether this can be used at school or not. Especially if the words are rude, I have to ask the teacher first whether it is safe or not.	Dika
	Yes, for example, the content on TikTok or YouTube is sometimes too short or the context is not clear, so I don't know if it's a lesson or just entertainment.	Ayu
	Some songs are too poetic or metaphorical, so the meaning is difficult to understand. I had to figure out how to explain it before I understood what it meant.	Aldis

Through these interviews, it was found that pop culture has a significant impact on student motivation. The students felt that their experience of enjoying pop culture content helped them enrich their vocabulary, understand pronunciation naturally, and increase the desire to learn further. They also feel more motivated because they see the use of English in a real and engaging context. The analysis shows that students tend to have high integrative and instrumental motivation when exposed to English-speaking pop culture. Here are some key findings:

1. The influence of music and film

English-language music and movies are the main media that motivate students to learn English. Students report that song lyrics and dialogue in movies help them understand vocabulary and pronunciation better

2. The role of social media

Social media such as YouTube, and Instagram provide easy access to English content, which increases the frequency with which students are exposed to the language, encouraging them to imitate the speaking and grammar styles used by content creators.

3. Integrative motivation

Many students state that they are motivated to learn English in order to understand foreign cultures better and communicate with native speakers

4. Instrumental motivation

Some students revealed that English proficiency is considered important for future career opportunities

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that students' engagement with popular culture contributes to more relevant and engaging learning. Popular culture serves as a bridge that connects English to students' daily lives, so they see English not only as a subject matter, but also as a fun global means of communication.

This research shows that English-language pop culture, especially through music and movies, has a significant impact on students' motivation in learning English. These results are in line with previous research that indicates that pop culture, especially K-pop, is able to increase interest in learning languages among younger generations. For example, a study by Arifatuzzahra et al. (2024) emphasizes how the popularity of K-pop encourages Gen-Z to learn English through interaction with the content they enjoy on platforms like YouTube and TikTok. They found that the presence of song lyrics in English and subtitles helped students to better understand and engage with the language.

The study also revealed that pop culture that uses English has a significant impact on motivating students to learn English. These results are in line with a study conducted by Kusumaningrum (2019), which shows that exposure to English-language music, movies, and social media can increase students' interest and participation in the language learning process, thanks to a more authentic and fun approach. In the interviews conducted, the majority of participants revealed that they felt more motivated and interested when learning English through activities they enjoyed, such as watching movies, listening to songs, or playing online games. However, this study also highlights a new aspect, namely the role of pop culture as a source of contextual learning that can strengthen listening and pronunciation skills. Therefore, it can be concluded that English-speaking pop culture has not only served as mere entertainment but has also become an important element in the learning environment of students, contributing to increased motivation, language skills, and a more authentic learning experience. These findings emphasize the importance of an approach that focuses on students' interests and experiences in teaching English in the digital age.

DISCUSSION

The Use of English Pop Culture in Learning

This study shows that English-language **pop culture** plays a significant role in shaping students' motivation to learn the language. The implications of these findings are important for the development of teaching strategies that are relevant, adaptive, and appealing to today's generation of learners. The three main aspects discussed in this section include: the use of pop culture in learning, the strategy of integrating pop culture elements, and improving teachers' teaching skills. The results show that pop culture elements such as English-language songs, television series, movies, social media, and YouTube videos are in high demand by students and can be a powerful bridge in building connections between the target language and students' daily lives. The use of these elements in learning can:

- a. Increase students' active engagement and participation in the learning process: Research shows that pop culture elements, such as movies, music, and social media, can increase students' motivation in learning English. Teachers can take advantage of relevant and interesting content for students to create a more dynamic and fun learning atmosphere.
- b. Contextualization of Materials: Integrating pop culture allows teachers to relate the subject matter to students' everyday experiences. For example, using song lyrics or dialogue from a

movie as teaching material can help students understand the use of language in a more real and relevant context.

Pop Culture Element Integration Strategy

For pop culture integration to be effective, teachers need to implement strategies that are planned and relevant to learning objectives. Some of the recommended strategies include:

- a. Selection of the Right Content: Teachers need to choose pop culture elements that are appropriate for the age and interests of students. For example, using animated movies for young students or popular TV series for teenagers. This selection must take into account the values of education and local culture.
- b. Interactive Activities: Implement activities that actively engage students, such as group discussions about themes in the movie or creating presentations based on their favorite songs. This not only improves language skills but also encourages collaboration between students.
- c. Social Media-Based Collaborative Activities: Creating content such as vlogs, podcasts, or educational memes using English can be a creative way to improve language skills as well as collaboration.
- d. Use of Technology: Utilizing digital platforms such as social media or learning applications that contain elements of pop culture. This can create a more interactive and engaging learning environment for students.

Improving Teachers' Teaching Skills

- a. Training and Professional Development: Teachers need to be trained to understand how to effectively integrate pop culture into the curriculum. This training can include workshops on the use of digital media and culture-based learning strategies.
- b. Reflection on Teaching Practices: Teachers should regularly evaluate and reflect on their teaching practices after applying pop culture elements. This is important to understand its impact on student motivation and engagement and to make the necessary adjustments.

By applying these implications, it is hoped that the English learning process will be more interesting and effective, and will be able to significantly increase student motivation

Teachers' Challenges in Learning Using English-Speaking Pop Culture

Using pop culture content in English learning can be an effective tool to increase student motivation, but it also faces a variety of challenges. One of the main challenges is the use of informal language that often appears in pop culture content. Slang and slang used in movies, songs, or social media may not conform to the norms of language taught in schools. This can lead to confusion among students regarding the proper use of language in formal and informal contexts (Indriani, 2023).

Additionally, sensitive themes that often appear in pop culture content can be problematic for teachers. Content that contains elements of violence, sexuality, or other social issues can cause discomfort in the classroom and potentially trigger unproductive discussions. Therefore, teachers need to be selective in choosing teaching materials from pop culture so that they remain relevant and in accordance with the educational values they want to convey (Placer et al., 2024).

Another challenge faced is the difference in understanding between teachers and students about the context of pop culture. Students may be more familiar with current trends on social media, while teachers may not keep up with those developments. These mismatches can create communication gaps and reduce teaching effectiveness. Therefore, it is important for educators to keep their knowledge of pop culture updated in order to bridge the gap (Sumiati, 2024).

Character education is also an important aspect in facing this challenge. Teachers need to provide guidance to students on how to critically evaluate the pop culture content they consume. By teaching students to distinguish between entertainment and positive values that should be applied in daily life, teachers can help them develop a critical attitude towards the information they receive (Fatimah & Rahma, 2025).

Furthermore, teachers should provide clear guidance regarding the use of language and the social context of pop culture content. This includes an explanation of the meaning behind the vocabulary and phrases used and the situations in which a particular language should be used. In this way, students will better understand the nuances of English and be able to use the language more appropriately (Indriani, 2023).

Collaboration between teachers, parents, and students is essential to maximize the benefits of using pop culture content in learning. By involving all parties in the learning process, these challenges can be overcome more effectively. This will create a learning environment that supports character development while increasing students' motivation to learn through approaches that are relevant to their daily lives (Placer et al., 2024).

One of the important aspects of learning English that taps into pop culture is the selection of content that matches students' ability levels and interests. Relevant content will increase student engagement and build their intrinsic motivation to learn. As stated by Krashen (1982), comprehensible input is the key in the process of second language acquisition. Therefore, educators need to select material from pop culture that is not only visually or thematically appealing, but also has a level of linguistic difficulty that matches the student's abilities.

The selection of content from pop culture, such as English-language movies, songs, series, or YouTube videos, should take into account the student's age, cultural background, and social sensitivity. For example, songs with vulgar lyrics or series with violent content are not appropriate for middle or high school students. In contrast, series like *Friends*, *Stranger Things*, or music from singers like Taylor Swift or Ed Sheeran, are often safer and more relevant. According to Duff and Maley (2007), authentic content can encourage students' emotional engagement and build a bridge between the target language and their real life.

However, just providing content is not enough. Teachers also have an important role in providing the right context so that students can understand and appreciate the material. The context provided can be in the form of cultural background, explanations of slang terms or idioms, and discussions about the social values contained in the content. According to Richards (2015), understanding the cultural context of authentic material is essential to help students acquire communicative competencies, not just linguistic competencies.

One effective approach to providing context is through *pre-viewing* or *pre-listening activities*. Before watching a movie clip or listening to a song, the teacher can guide a brief discussion about the topic, character, or setting that will appear. This helps build students' schemas and makes it easier for them to understand the content of the material. In addition,

activities such as *vocabulary prediction* or *cultural brainstorming* can enrich students' understanding of vocabulary and cultural values that emerge.

In the learning process, teachers can also take advantage of *scaffolding* by providing gradual assistance, such as providing English subtitles, song transcripts, or glossaries of important terms. Over time, this assistance can be reduced to encourage student learning independence. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of the proximal developmental zone (ZPD), which is the distance between what students can do on their own and what they can achieve with help. With this approach, students will feel more confident in exploring English- language pop culture content.

The selection of the right pop culture content and the provision of adequate context not only enriches the English learning process, but also strengthens students' motivation. The combination of engaging, relevant, and contextual learning allows students to feel closer to English as a global communication tool. Therefore, teachers should continue to evaluate and update the content used according to the needs and development of students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that English-speaking pop culture plays a significant role in shaping the motivation to learn English among students. Exposure to English-language music, movies, television series, and social media indirectly increases students' desire to understand and use the language in their daily lives. As stated by Kramsch (1993), "language is not only a means of communication but also a symbol of social identity," which reinforces the idea that pop culture is a medium for identity formation as well as motivation in learning languages.

Furthermore, learners' engagement with pop culture content not only enhances their linguistic abilities, but also strengthens their intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Many learners attribute success in understanding English to their ability to access and enjoy their favorite content, such as songs or movies. This is in line with the findings of Gardner & Lambert (1972), who stated that instrumental and integrative motivation are strongly influenced by social and cultural environmental factors.

The researchers suggest that educators and educational institutions begin to integrate elements of English-speaking pop culture into the learning curriculum. For example, the use of song lyrics, movie trailers, or discussions about popular series can be an interesting and relevant means of developing language competence. In addition to improving language skills, this strategy is also able to encourage students' motivation to learn more naturally and contextually.

For further research, it is recommended that the scope of the study be expanded to include more respondents from different educational backgrounds and ages, as well as examine the long-term effects of pop culture exposure on language learning outcomes. More in-depth qualitative research can also provide more detailed insights into the dynamics of learning motivation formed through popular culture consumption.

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