

Comparison of Gen Z And Non-Gen Z Awareness of Slang and Colloquial Language

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Abstract

Language continued to evolve as cultural and technological forces shaped everyday communication, with slang and colloquial expressions becoming especially prominent among Generation Z speakers. This study, titled “Comparison of Gen Z and Non-Gen Z Awareness of Slang and Colloquial Language,” aimed to: (1) assess the level of awareness of slang and colloquial language among Generation Z and non-Generation Z respondents; (2) examine the differences in interpretation and usage of common slang terms between the two groups; (3) identify significant differences in their levels of awareness; and (4) develop instructional material to raise the awareness of non-Generation Z individuals regarding contemporary language forms, particularly slang terms. Using a descriptive-comparative quantitative design, data were gathered from 247 respondents—207 freshmen students from Laguna University–College of Education and 40 non-Gen Z individuals—through pretests, surveys, and workbook evaluations. Pretest results showed that Generation Z respondents achieved a mean score of 25.89 out of 35, indicating high awareness, with a standard deviation of 4.85 reflecting moderate variability due to digital culture and social media exposure. Non-Generation Z participants scored a mean of 9.40, indicating low awareness, with a higher standard deviation of 6.32, suggesting wider variability possibly linked to limited interaction with younger generations. The Mann-Whitney U test confirmed a statistically significant difference ($U = 212$, $p < 0.001$), with a large effect size of -0.952 , highlighting a substantial generational gap. Key findings emphasized Generation Z’s digital immersion, non-Gen Z’s outdated norms, and the need for targeted interventions. Overall, the results emphasized language’s evolution and the need to bridge awareness gaps for effective, context-aware communication. Based on the findings, the study briefly recommends the refinement and wider dissemination of the workbook to relevant educational and community settings to continue supporting non-Gen Z individuals in navigating evolving linguistic trends.

Keywords: Generational Gap; Colloquial Language; workbook; awareness; comparison

1. Introduction

Language is a dynamic and evolving system, continuously shaped by cultural, technological, and generational influences. One of the most prominent linguistic shifts in recent years is the widespread use of slang and colloquial expressions, particularly among Generation Z. These informal language forms have become central to the everyday communication of young people. While traditionally viewed as inappropriate for academic settings, their prevalence invites deeper inquiry into how students perceive, understand, and navigate these expressions.

This study investigates the effects of colloquial language, particularly slang, on the linguistic awareness of freshmen students in the College of Education at Laguna University. Recognizing that students often bring their informal language habits into the classroom, the researchers developed a workbook that integrates commonly used slang and colloquial terms. The study aims to assess the perceived validity of the workbook, explore students' level of awareness regarding informal language, and compare their communication preferences with those of non-Generation Z individuals.

Grounded in Language Socialization Theory, individuals acquire language through social interaction. Gen Z's exposure to slang through peer communication, media, and digital platforms leads to the natural integration of these terms into their everyday language. In contrast, older generations may lack similar socialization experiences with contemporary slang, contributing to generational gaps in comprehension. This study seeks to address that gap by evaluating whether exposure to colloquial language influences communication styles, and whether there is a significant difference in awareness between Gen Z freshmen and their non-Gen Z counterparts. The researchers hypothesize that freshmen exhibit higher familiarity and usage due to increased exposure through digital media and peer communication.

1. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design This study employed a quantitative-descriptive and developmental research approach. Specifically, it utilized a descriptive-comparative design to determine the level of awareness of slang and colloquial language between Gen Z and non-Gen Z individuals. Additionally, a developmental design was used to create and validate a workbook aimed at bridging this linguistic gap.

2.2. Population and Sampling This study employed purposive sampling, specifically criterion sampling, to select participants. The total number of Gen Z respondents from Laguna University is two hundred seven (207). This includes fifteen (15) students from BSSED-Mathematics, forty (40) from BSSED-Science, seventy-four (74) from BSSED-English, and seventy-eight (78) from BEED. Additionally, there are forty (40) non-Gen Z respondents aged thirty-five (35) and above.

2.3. Research Instrument The primary research instrument was a specially designed workbook aimed at introducing and reinforcing vocabulary through engaging stories, interactive exercises, and writing prompts that incorporated slang, idioms, and other colloquial expressions. A pre-test was administered to assess vocabulary awareness, utilizing a 35-point scoring system featuring matching terms, fill-in-the-blanks, and sentence construction tasks. An evaluation survey was also conducted among experts to assess the workbook's validity and overall usefulness.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedures The IDVD model was utilized to guide the instructional design process. Both Gen Z and non-Gen Z participants completed a pre-test to assess their initial proficiency and familiarity with slang and colloquial language items. Following this, the workbook was developed to support non-Generation Z individuals in understanding modern language forms, and the material was evaluated by selected experts.

2.5. Treatment of Data The pre-test scores were analyzed using statistical methods such as mean and standard deviation. A mean comparison using the Mann-Whitney U test was employed to determine if there is a significant difference between the level of awareness among freshmen students and non-Generation Z individuals.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Mean Scores of the Gen Z Group The Gen Z sample achieved a mean score of 25.89 out of 35, which the study's rubric classifies as a High level of awareness. This indicates that Gen Z respondents demonstrate a solid baseline familiarity with the slang items included in the instrument. The standard deviation of 4.85 signals moderate dispersion around the mean.

Table 1. Mean scores of the Gen Z Group

Number of Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
35	25.89	4.85	High

3.2. Mean Scores of the Non-Gen Z Group The Non-Gen Z sample scored a mean of 9.40 out of 35, a Low level on the same instrument. This stark contrast demonstrates that the Non-Gen Z participants have limited recognition or understanding of the tested slang vocabulary. The standard deviation of 6.32 indicates substantial dispersion, suggesting that while the majority are unfamiliar, a minority may have higher exposure.

Table 2. Mean scores of the Non-Gen Z Group

Number of Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
35	9.40	6.32	Low

3.3. Difference Between the Scores of Gen Z and Non-Gen Z Groups The Mann-Whitney U test comparing Gen Z and Non-Gen Z scores produced $U = 212$ with $p < 0.001$, indicating a statistically significant difference between the two groups' distributions. The reported effect size of -0.952 indicates a very large practical difference. This combination supports the study hypothesis that Gen Z demonstrates markedly higher familiarity with slang and colloquial expressions than older participants.

Table 3. Difference Between The Scores Of Experimental Groups

Group	Mann-Whitney U	Effect Size	p	Analysis
Gen Z	212	-0.952	<0.001	Significant
Non-Gen Z				

3.4. Instructional Material Developed This research produced a workbook for vocabulary development of students that integrated slang terms. The compilation of common slang terms at the end of the workbook can be used to develop and raise the awareness of non-Generation Z individuals about slang terms.

4. Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

4.1. Conclusions Gen Z respondents demonstrate a high level of awareness of slang and colloquial language, reflecting their constant engagement with digital platforms and peer networks. In contrast, Non-Gen Z respondents exhibit a low level of awareness, indicating they are less exposed to contemporary informal language, which may create communication barriers. There is a significant generational gap in slang awareness, with the difference being both statistically significant and practically large. The findings affirm the study's hypothesis that digital media exposure heavily influences slang familiarity.

4.2. Recommendations It is recommended that non-Generation Z individuals actively engage with instructional materials that introduce contemporary slang to build awareness and understanding. Generation Z individuals are encouraged to serve as linguistic bridges by sharing their knowledge through collaborative learning environments. Future workbooks should prioritize clarity and contextual relevance, while future researchers could explore the long-term effects of integrating slang into educational materials.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Pre-Test Questionnaire Scoring System

Table A: Scoring System

Test	Criteria	Points/Item	Total
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Part 1: (10 items) Match the slang terms in the selection provided to their respective meaning.	Matched the slang term to its correct meaning	1	10
	Matched the slang terms to its last meaning	0	
Part 2: (10 items) Provide the correct missing slang terms in the sentences provided.	Provided the correct slang term needed in the sentence.	1	10
	Provided the wrong slang term or word needed in the sentence.	0	
Part 3: (15 points) Identify the slang terms used in the short story provided and use it in a sentence.	Identified slang terms used in the story and used it in a sentence correctly.	3	15
	Identified slang term used in the story, but the sentence created using the slang term was incorrect.	2	
	Did not identify slang terms used in the story and did not create sentences using slang terms.	0	
Total			35

Appendix B: Statistical Tools

Table B: Statistical Tools

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	STATISTICAL TREATMENT	FORMULA
1. What is the level of awareness among freshmen regarding the use of colloquial language particularly slang terms compared to that of non-Generation Z individuals?	Mean and Standard deviation	$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$ $s = \frac{\sum (x - \text{mean})^2}{n}$
2. What are the differences in interpretation and usage of common slang terms between Generation Z and non-Generation Z individuals?	Mean and Standard deviation	$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum X}{N}$ $s = \frac{\sum (x - \text{mean})^2}{n}$
3. Is there a significant difference between the level of awareness of colloquial language and slang terms among freshmen students and that of non-Generation Z individuals?	Mann-Whitney U	$U_1 = R_1 - \frac{n_1(n_1+1)}{2}, U_2 = R_2 - \frac{n_2(n_2+1)}{2}.$
4. What instructional material can be developed to raise the awareness of non-Generation Z individuals regarding contemporary language forms, particularly slang terms?		

