

THE ROLE OF K-POP IDOLS IN INCREASING STUDENTS' ENTHUSIASM AND CONFIDENCE IN SPEAKING ENGLISH: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Izza Amalia Manshur¹, Ali Ashari², Henny Rahmawati³

*^{1,2,3} Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris FKIP Universitas Islam Malang
Email: ¹ 22001073002@unisma.ac.id*

Abstrak: K-pop has become a global cultural phenomenon, influencing various aspects of life, including English language learning. This study looks at how K-pop idols boost female students' enthusiasm and confidence in speaking English. Using descriptive qualitative methods, the study examines the experiences of female students inspired by K-pop idols in learning English. It highlights that interest in K-pop fosters motivation, self-confidence, and a supportive learning atmosphere. Data were collected through interviews with three female students. Findings show that K-pop idols affect English learning through social media, songs, and global fan interactions, enhancing students' speaking skills and confidence. The study concludes that K-pop idols can serve as motivational agents in English learning, offering insights into the link between popular culture and language acquisition. It suggests educators can use popular culture to create engaging teaching methods, enhancing students' learning experiences.

Keywords: K-pop idol, enthusiasm, confidence, descriptive qualitative

INTRODUCTION

The global phenomenon of K-pop (Korean pop music) has transcended cultural and linguistic barriers, significantly influencing various parts of the world, including Indonesia. The widespread popularity of K-pop idols has sparked a unique cultural exchange, with fans drawn to Korean music, language, and culture (Anwar R & Anwar W, 2014). This phenomenon opens up new opportunities in foreign language learning, especially English.

In Indonesia, where English is a compulsory subject, many students struggle to develop their speaking skills. Traditional teaching methods often lack student interest, resulting in low motivation and confidence (Ismiatun et al., 2024). In contrast, the influence of K-pop idols offers a new and more engaging approach. Valerio and Hernandez (2023) argue that K-pop idols' interactions with global fans in English provide a relevant and inspiring context for students to learn and practice English.

This study aims to explore the role of K-pop idols in increasing students' motivation and confidence in English through a descriptive qualitative. By analyzing the personal experiences of K-pop fans, this study seeks to understand how these idols influence their language learning process.

Descriptive qualitative research involves in-depth interviews with English education students who are also K-pop fans to obtain rich qualitative data. The data obtained will then be analyzed thematically to identify emerging patterns and themes.

This study has several research gaps that need to be acknowledged. First, the sample size was small, involving only three female English language program students, so the findings may not be representative of the student population as a whole. Second, this study only focused on the influence of K-pop on students' enthusiasm and confidence in learning English, without examining other factors that may play a role. Third, the data in this study were subjective because they only used interviews, so the experiences of individual participants may not be generalizable. Fourth, this study did not consider other variables such as teaching methods, learning environment, or previous experiences in learning English that may also affect students' English speaking ability. Finally, this study used a qualitative approach, so it did not produce quantitative data that could be used to measure the influence of K-pop more objectively.

Hayanda, F. F. (2022) investigates how the Korean Wave, particularly through K-pop and K-dramas, influences English language skills among fans in Indonesia. The research finds that these fans have improved their English skills by watching content with English subtitles, interacting with international fans, and engaging with English-language materials online. The improvement in their English proficiency benefits their daily lives, including education, tourism interactions, and social media engagement.

The difference between this research and another study is that the former looks at the overall impact of the Korean Wave, including various cultural elements, while my research specifically examines how K-pop idols boost students' enthusiasm and confidence in speaking English through personal narratives. My research adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on individual stories, whereas Hayanda's employs a quantitative methodology by using questionnaires sent via Google Forms.

Despite these differences, both studies share a common interest in how Korean culture affects English language skills and aim to understand how these cultural elements facilitate language learning. The populations studied are similar in that they include those influenced by Korean culture, although the details differ.

Ivone, F. M., and Renandya, W. A. (2019) focus on extensive listening (EL) in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The article discusses the benefits of EL, including improvements in listening skills, motivation, and overall language development, alongside

challenges such as lack of research and material availability. The findings suggest that EL enhances understanding of spoken language and fosters independent learning.

While this article explores EL to improve listening and speaking skills, my research considers K-pop idols as motivating influences for students learning to speak English, using qualitative methods to assess student experiences. Both studies highlight the importance of motivation in language learning but approach the topic from different angles. This study aims to answer the following research question.

1. How do K-pop idols influence students' enthusiasm for learning to speak English?
2. How do K-pop idols influence students' confidence in speaking English?

METHOD

Research Design

This research adopts a descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative research is a research approach that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the meaning and perspective of research subjects (Ahmadi & Rose 2014). Based on students' personal stories and experiences, the descriptive qualitative method was chosen to explore the role of K-pop idols in increasing enthusiasm and self-confidence when speaking English. This approach allows for an in-depth understanding of how these idols impact students' enthusiasm and confidence.

Setting and Participants

The participants in this research were three female students currently enrolled in the English Language Education undergraduate program at the Islamic University of Malang. They stated that they liked K-pop idols and the benefits that gave them enthusiasm and confidence when speaking in English from their idols. The participants were in different semesters, two students in the 6th semester and one in the 8th semester. Their ages ranged from 20 to 22 years. Undergraduate programs are dominated by women, and although there were several male participants, none met the criteria to be participants in this study. Even though the sample of participants is small and specific, it is hoped that it will provide an accurate picture of the population.

Data Collection

The research data were collected through two main methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences with K-pop idols and how this affected their motivation and confidence in speaking English. All interviews were fully recorded and later transcribed for in-depth analysis. Second, storytelling sessions were conducted. In these sessions, participants were encouraged to share

personal stories in which K-pop idols played a significant role in improving their English skills. The goal of these sessions was to obtain rich and detailed narratives to understand the emotional and motivational aspects underlying language learning.

Data Sources

The main data source for this research is students majoring in English education who are fans of K-pop idols and who have shown an increase in their enthusiasm and self-confidence when speaking English. The participants were selected based on the following criteria.

1. Students majoring in English education.
2. Actively involved in K-pop fandom at least 1-3 years.
3. Willing to share experiences regarding the influence of K-pop idols in increasing enthusiasm and self-confidence when speaking English.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting thematic patterns in text data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data analysis involved several steps to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. All recorded interviews and storytelling sessions were transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then subjected to thematic code-based analysis to identify key themes related to the influence of K-pop idols on students' enthusiasm and confidence in speaking English. Emerging themes included intrinsic motivation through identification with idols, opportunities to practice through singing K-pop songs, and peer support through fan communities.

Data were categorized into these themes were then woven into a coherent narrative that described individual students' experiences. To validate the findings, triangulation was conducted with previous research examining the influence of celebrities on learning motivation. The results of this study indicate that K-pop idols serve as role models who inspire students to improve their English skills. These findings have important implications for language educators, who can leverage students' enthusiasm for K-pop to create more engaging and motivating learning environments.

Trustworthiness

To increase the credibility of this research, several steps have been taken. First, the researcher engages with participants and the research context to gain an in-depth understanding. Second, triangulation is used by collecting data from various sources and methods. In addition, member checking is carried out by returning findings to participants to ensure accuracy of interpretation. Discussions with colleagues are also carried out as part of peer debriefing.

The researcher provides a thick description of the research context, participants, and data collection process. This detailed description allows readers to evaluate the extent to which these findings can be applied to other contexts.

An audit trail is created to document all steps in the research process, including decision-making and changes that occur. A code-recode procedure was also carried out to ensure consistency in data coding.

The researcher applies reflexivity continuously by evaluating the influence of potential bias and personal position on research. In addition, confirmability audits are carried out by asking a third party to review the data, findings, and analysis process.

FINDINGS

How do K-pop idols influence students' enthusiasm for learning to speak English?

K-pop Idols Influence Students' Enthusiasm for Learning Process

1. Exposure to English in K-pop songs and content

All informants indicated that K-pop played a role in increasing their interest in English, especially through the use of English in song lyrics or K-pop-related content. As the first informant, she said:

"Yes, of course. When I was listening to K-pop songs for the first time in my life, I found that they used English words just a few English words, which I think is cool" (I1)

The first informant stated that after listening to K-pop became more interested in learning English because some English words in K-pop songs were "cool to say." Meanwhile, Informant 3 emphasized that K-pop videos with English subtitles helped them understand English grammar more easily and enjoyably than learning conventionally. She stated:

"It wasn't a big difference before I knew K-Pop. I liked learning English before I knew K-Pop. However, after knowing K-Pop, I learned through their short videos that have English subtitles. So I also learned the grammar from there. Because it's written, it's easier to understand and more fun than learning structures and stuff" (I3)

2. Motivation from interaction with K-pop idols

Moments of interaction with idols, either through fan sign events or in video content, motivated the informants to learn English. For example, Informant 1 was motivated by the desire to interact directly with idols at fan sign events, which encouraged them to improve their English skills to communicate better on that occasion. She said:

“The most motivating moment for me was the fan sign event held by K-pop groups or idols. Who doesn't want to have a face-to-face interaction with their idol So yeah, I am learning English so that Maybe in an opportunity. I will get the chance to meet them and have conversations with them” (I1).

Informants 2 and 3 also indicated that they felt the need to learn English because their idols spoke the language, which amazed and motivated them. They said:

“The moment that made me want to learn English more is that as fans, we kind of like to interact with our idols. And from that, almost, not almost, but little, some of the K-pop idols are not from Korea as well. From that, I know that English is very important because generally, normally, globally, English is known as the language that almost the world, everyone learned about” (I2).

“The experience that motivates me to learn English is when I see idols when they speak English, especially when their accent is good and fluent. So I was amazed with their pronunciation. So I have motivated and learned English more” (I3)

3. Influence of Global Fandom Community

Although some informants did not directly use K-pop song lyrics to learn English, interactions within the global K-pop fan community forced them to communicate in English. Informant 1 emphasized that communicating with fans from various countries, especially in fandom wars, has helped improve their English skills, including arguing and discussing. She said:

“I joined they are just K-pop Fans or K-pop fandom community in line which consists of many people around the world not just in Indonesia, and automatically we have a conversation in English” (I1)

How do K-pop idols influence students' confidence in speaking English?

K-pop Idols Influence Students' Confidence in Speaking English

1. Motivation from K-pop idols' difficulties in speaking English

Informant 1 stated that seeing idols struggling to learn English (such as former iKON member B.I who was initially not fluent but kept trying) motivated them to improve their English skills. The realization that idols also faced similar challenges made them feel more confident in trying to master the language. She said:

“EXO, Bigbang, and also iKON they are all motivated me to learn English because not all of the members have a strong ability to speak in English so, they are not all able to speak English but they have been obligated must be able to speak English, because they have to use English to make

English versions of their songs. Then for example B.I former member of iKON, and I found that he is perfect he's the leader, producer, and also a composer, but he lacks English, but he is never desperate and keeps trying to learn English and now he has a strong ability in English. I want to be like him who works harder to learn English” (I1).

2. Direct influence from idols who are fluent in English

Some idols who are already fluent in English also inspired informants to be more confident. Informant 2, for example, felt inspired by NCT members Mark Lee and Johnny Suh who come from English-speaking countries. She felt that these idols showed how being multilingual is cool, which in turn increased their confidence in speaking English. She said:

“An example of the situation that helped me improve my confidence is while watching our idols like Mark Lee and Johnny Suh from NCT, also the others speaking English that kinda feel like wow, they're very cool. Because they're from Chicago and Canada, they're cool. They can also be multi-lingual, that's also cool” (I2).

3. The impact of K-pop idols on language confidence is not universal

Although there was an increase in confidence for some informants, such as Informants 1 and 2, Informant 3 felt that the influence of K-pop on her confidence in speaking English was not very significant. She stated that their English skills were indeed better now, but not because of the direct influence of K-pop. She said:

“It does not have a big difference. Because, actually, before or after knowing K-pop, it was not the main reason for me to learn English. So maybe my English is better now than it used to be, but it's not because of K-pop” (I3).

However, they admit that K-pop idols' efforts in learning English remain inspiring.

DISCUSSION

How do K-pop idols influence students' enthusiasm for learning to speak English?

K-pop Idols Influence Students' Enthusiasm for Learning Process

The findings of this study align closely with existing theories on language learning through popular culture and fan engagement, offering valuable insights into how K-pop influences English language acquisition among its fans.

1. Exposure to English in K-pop Songs and Content

This study found that K-pop content plays a significant role in increasing students' motivation to learn English. Participants expressed that K-pop lyrics in English made the language feel more relevant and interesting. This is in line with Crossman's (2024) view that highlights the role of

popular media as an authentic learning resource that can improve motivation and language skills. Furthermore, one participant emphasized that K-pop content videos with English subtitles facilitated grammar comprehension, supporting that exposure to authentic media contributes to natural language acquisition. This is in line with the findings of Alhadad et al (2021) stated that English-language entertainment, such as films, songs, and texts, provides significant benefits to their English skills.

2. Motivation from Interaction with K-pop Idols

The second finding shows how important direct or indirect interaction with K-pop idols is in motivating fans to learn English. Informants reported that the experience of attending fan signing events or watching video content featuring their idols increased their desire to master English better. This motivation arises from the hope of being able to communicate effectively with idols, especially when idols use English in interactions. This is in line with Hayanda (2022) which states that K-pop idols, who are often admired for their diverse language skills, serve as role models for language learners. The language skills possessed by idols inspire fans to commit to learning the language, as a form of appreciation for their idols. The strong emotional connection between fans and idols creates high intrinsic motivation to improve language skills, a factor that may be more effective than conventional classroom learning approaches.

3. Influence of the Global Fandom Community

The third finding underscores the crucial role of the global fan community in fostering English use among K-pop fans. Although not all fans learn English exclusively through song lyrics, many highlighted that active participation in the fan community, especially during discussions or “fandom wars,” has improved their English skills. Interaction with fans from different countries requires a bridge language, and English is often the first choice. This aligns with Hayanda’s (2022) and Valerio & Hernandez's (2023) findings that multilingual interactions between K-pop idols and international fans create a real-life language learning context. Fans are encouraged to switch between Korean, English, and other languages in everyday communication, indirectly improving their fluency. Informant 1’s experience in the fandom debate is a concrete example of how involvement in a global community facilitates language practice in a more dynamic and spontaneous situation compared to a formal learning environment.

Overall, these findings confirm that K-pop is not just entertainment, but also an effective informal language-learning tool. Continuous exposure to English, motivation from interactions with idols, and the opportunity to practice the language in real contexts through a global fan community create a powerful synergy, increasing interest and confidence in learning English.

How do K-pop idols influence students' confidence in speaking English?

K-pop Idols Influence Students' Confidence in Speaking English

The findings of this study highlight the diverse ways in which K-pop idols influence students' confidence and motivation in learning English, aligning with the theoretical frameworks on the role of media figures as language role models.

1. Motivation from K-pop idols' difficulties in speaking English

Motivation derived from idols' struggles with English (as seen in Informant 1's case) is an important factor. When fans observe idols, such as former iKON member B.I, working hard to overcome language barriers, they are reminded that even public figures face similar challenges in learning a new language. This shared struggle boosts fans' self-confidence, making them believe that if idols can work through difficulties, so can they. This resonates with Hayanda (2022) which suggests that K-pop idols, praised for their language skills, serve as aspirational figures for language learners. Idols' perseverance in mastering foreign languages becomes a source of motivation for fans, who feel encouraged to pursue their own language goals.

2. Direct influence from idols who are fluent in English

The second finding relates to the direct influence of idols who are already proficient in English. Informant 2, for example, drew inspiration from fluent English-speaking idols like NCT's Mark Lee and Johnny Suh. These idols represent the "coolness" of being multilingual, and their fluency in English is perceived as a model for international communication. Hayanda (2022) also notes that idols' proficiency in English, displayed during international interviews or social media interactions, can inspire fans to become more confident in their English-speaking abilities. In this case, seeing successful individuals use their language skills in global contexts adds to the appeal and practicality of being proficient in English.

3. The impact of K-pop idols on language confidence is not universal

Informant 3 felt that while they had improved their English, it wasn't primarily due to the influence of K-pop. They acknowledged that idols' efforts were inspiring, but their progress was attributed to other factors. This is consistent with Nur Aliyah Nur's (2019) research, which indicates that while enthusiasm for language learning can build confidence, it is not the sole contributor. Students' confidence in speaking English can be shaped by various other experiences and motivations.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that K-pop idols play a significant role in increasing students' enthusiasm and confidence in speaking English. The influence occurs through exposure to English content, motivation from idol interactions, and participation in global fandom communities. Students become more eager to learn English when they see their idols communicating in the language and feel motivated to improve their skills to interact with international fans. Practically, the findings suggest that integrating students' interests such as K-pop into English learning can enhance engagement and effectiveness. Educators can leverage this by incorporating K-pop-related content into classroom materials to create a more stimulating learning environment.

Suggestions

Teachers can utilize K-pop media such as songs, interviews, and subtitled videos to create more engaging learning experiences, and encourage students' participation in international fan communities to improve their language confidence and fluency; meanwhile, K-pop fans can utilize lyric translations, English interviews, and online discussions with global fans to enrich their vocabulary and speaking skills, especially through active participation in fan communities; further research is needed to explore the influence of K-pop on other language skills such as writing and reading comprehension, as well as the long-term impact of K-pop exposure on language proficiency, so that utilizing the educational potential of K-pop can make language learning a more enjoyable and effective process.

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