

Anime Fans' Perceptions of LGBT Contents among Generation Z

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ABSTRACT This study examines how Generation Z (born 1997–2012) individuals who identify as anime enthusiasts interpret and negotiate non-heteronormative gender identity content—specifically LGBT themes within the Yaoi (Boys' Love) and Yuri (Girls' Love) genres—against the social values they uphold. Employing an applied edulinguistic approach and descriptive qualitative methods, the study gathered data through semi-structured in-depth interviews with six participants, a literature review of 29 relevant sources, and content analysis of popular anime titles. The findings reveal that while the six participants acknowledge anime's significant influence on adolescent speech patterns and behavior, they predominantly express discomfort regarding the representation of same-sex relationships. This resistance is deeply rooted in religious values, educational norms, and local cultural perspectives. Interestingly, despite their critical stance, the participants uphold freedom of expression and believe that viewers themselves bear the responsibility for self-limitation. Overall, this study highlights how anime functions as a "hidden curriculum" that shapes adolescent gender awareness, while also underscoring the urgent need to develop critical literacy and gender-responsive educational materials within the context of Industry 5.0.

Research Questions: (1) How do Generation Z individuals who identify as anime fans interpret and negotiate the LGBT content found in the Yaoi (Boys' Love) and Yuri (Girls' Love) genres in relation to their own social values? (2) How does the consumption of anime featuring LGBT content influence the language use and social behavior of Generation Z? (3) What are the attitudes of Generation Z toward the regulation of LGBT-themed content on digital platforms?

Research Objectives: This study aims to (1) identify and analyze the perceptions of anime-loving Generation Z regarding non-heteronormative gender identity themes in anime content, specifically within the Yaoi and Yuri genres; (2) describe the impact of consuming LGBT-themed anime on the language development and social behavior of adolescents from the perspective of applied edulinguistics; and (3) map Generation Z's attitudes toward the freedom and regulation of digital content as a reflection of their critical literacy awareness in the context of the Industry 5.0 era.

KEYWORDS: Applied Edulinguistics, Anime, LGBT, Generation Z Perceptions, Critical Literacy, Hidden Curriculum.

I. INTRODUCTION

The consumption of Japanese popular cultures pecifically anime and manga has permeated nearly all age groups in Indonesia, including Generation Z (those born between 1997 and 2012). Within this pop culture ecosystem, there are various genres that explicitly or implicitly feature themes of non-heteronormative gender identity, such

as *Yaoi*, which depicts romantic relationships between two men, and *Yuri*, which focuses on romantic relationships between two women (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017).

From an edulinguistic perspective, language in popular media serves as more than just a tool for communication; it acts as a medium for transmitting social values and ideologies. This means that when an adolescent watches anime, they are not merely consuming entertainment; they are simultaneously and unconsciously learning about gender norms, social relations, and self-identity through what is known as the "hidden curriculum" (Morea & Ghanbar, 2024).

On the other hand, as a nation with rich cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, Indonesia faces unique challenges in responding to the overwhelming influx of global culture. Enduring Eastern values, coupled with the pervasive influence of religious teachings on daily life, establish a moral foundation that frequently clashes with the content presented by foreign popular media, including anime (Tati Sherina Agustiana et al., 2024).

LGBT issues have been examined across a wide range of academic disciplines in Indonesia—spanning law, religion, psychology, and sociology to communication studies. However, research specifically focusing on the perceptions of Generation Z anime consumers regarding such content remains limited (Rumata, 2020). It is against this backdrop that the present study was conducted: to gain an in-depth understanding of how young audiences interpret, negotiate, and respond to the transgressive messages found in anime.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Applied Edulinguistics

Applied edulinguistics is an interdisciplinary field of study that examines the reciprocal relationships among language, education, and society (Saputra et al., 2023). Within this framework, language is not narrowly understood merely as a tool for verbal communication, but rather as a system that actively transmits social values, ideologies, and cultural norms to its users.

In the context of popular media such as anime, the visual and narrative texts presented function much like a "hidden curriculum." This term refers to the informal learning process that occurs outside the classroom—where a learner can form an understanding of gender identity, social relations, and even life values simply from what they watch or read. Therefore, from an edulinguistic perspective, it is crucial for educators to integrate critical literacy into the learning process so that learners do not merely become passive media consumers, but are instead capable of analyzing and discerning the ideological content conveyed through media.

2.2 Audience Reception Theory

Audience reception theory views viewers or readers not as passive recipients of information, but as individuals who actively derive meaning from a text based on their own cultural backgrounds and personal experiences (Kor, 2018). From this perspective, the meaning of a text is not monolithic or singular; rather, it emerges from a process of negotiation between the message encoded by the content creator and the audience's own frame of reference.

Its relevance to this study lies in the fact that Generation Z consumers of anime do not simply accept the transgressive messages found in LGBT content at face value. Instead, they actively negotiate these messages against the values—derived from family, school, and religious environments—that they have internalized since childhood. It is this negotiation process that gives rise to a diverse range of attitudes, spanning from outright rejection and passive tolerance to acceptance that is contingent upon context.

2.3 Queer Theory in Popular Media

In media studies, Queer Theory serves as an analytical tool to deconstruct representations of non-binary identities as well as unconventional portrayals of masculinity and femininity within narrative texts. In the context of anime, this theory helps explain how gender identity is depicted as fluid rather than rigid or fixed (Maimunah, 2014). Applying this theory is crucial for understanding the strong appeal that genres such as Yaoi and Yuri hold for specific audiences, including individuals who do not personally identify as LGBT.

2.4 Yaoi (Boys' Love) and Yuri (Girls' Love) Genres

Yaoi, or Boys' Love (BL), is a genre within Japanese popular media that focuses on romantic relationships between men. The genre is widely known among its fanbase—particularly among women, who are often referred to as *Fujoshi*. Narratively, Yaoi frequently explores forms of intimacy that lie outside rigid patriarchal norms; for many fans, the depicted relationships are viewed as a form of "pure fantasy" that does not necessarily correlate directly with their real-world sexual orientations (Zsila & Demetrovics, 2017).

Meanwhile, Yuri—or Girls' Love—is a genre that depicts romantic relationships between women. From an edulinguistic perspective, Yuri often introduces the concept of gender identity diversity to audiences informally through its visual and narrative content. The genre is also known for featuring representations of "female masculinity" that actively challenge traditional gender stereotypes (Maimunah, 2014).

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. This approach was selected because the research objective is not to measure phenomena statistically, but rather to gain an in-depth understanding of the "why" and "how" behind the way Generation Z anime consumers form their perceptions of LGBT content, taking into account each individual's cultural background and personal experiences (Morea & Ghanbar, 2024).

3.2 Research Subjects

The research subjects consist of six individuals from Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2012) who identify as anime enthusiasts (*wibu*). The determination of the number of participants is based on the principle of purposive sampling, prioritizing data depth and the representation of perspectives over the quantity of respondents.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted using three complementary instruments: (1) semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allowed the researcher to develop follow-up (probing) questions based on the flow of participants' responses; (2) a literature review of 29 sources concerning the consumption of LGBT-themed media, audience reception theory, and associated social impacts; and (3) content analysis of popular anime titles specifically featuring Yaoi or Yuri content.

In addition to verbal responses, the researcher documented field notes—capturing participants' non-verbal reactions and the interview context—to enrich the depth of the data analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis follows a qualitative procedure comprising four sequential stages: (1) Data collection, involving the gathering of all raw data from interviews, literature, and content analysis; (2) Data reduction, the process of filtering and focusing on the data most relevant to the research questions; (3) Data display, the presentation of data in narrative text and tables to facilitate interpretation; and (4) Conclusion drawing, the formulation of key findings based on the entire body of analyzed data (Fatinova et al., 2019).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Brief Participant Profiles

This study involved six participants, all of whom are active anime fans belonging to Generation Z. M.A.K. (001): 22 years old, vocational high school (SMK) graduate; currently studying Japanese for employment in Japan. From Manado, of Gorontalo descent; male, residing in Manado. Dani (002): 19 years old, vocational high school (SMK) graduate; currently studying Japanese for employment in Japan. From Manado; male, residing in Manado. Brian (003): 23 years old, vocational high school (SMK) graduate; currently studying Japanese for employment in Japan. From Sangihe; male. Petra (004): 19 years old, vocational high school (SMK) graduate; currently studying Japanese for employment in Japan. From Minahasa; male. Gibran (006): 21 years old, vocational high school (SMK) graduate; currently studying Japanese for employment in Japan. From Java; Sundanese ethnicity; male. Zidan (007): 22 years old, high school (SMA) graduate. From Manado; male of Arab descent.

The following table presents the results and discussion of this study:

Tabel 1. Research Participant Findings

Participants	Favorite Genre	Understanding Terms	Understanding Terms	Grounds for Rejection	Regulatory Stance
M.A.K (001)	Action, Sci-fi, Misteri, Romance, Ghibli	Know the term BL but don't understand its meaning in depth.	Deeply uncomfortable; identifying as an opponent of LGBT.	Religious teachings & school education since childhood.	Unrestricted; it is up to the audience to exercise self-restraint.
Dani (002)	Action, Sci-fi, Misteri	Unrestricted; it is up to the audience to exercise self-restraint.	Unpleasant to look at, strange, and disturbing.	The magnet analogy—opposite poles attract—is used to frame same-sex relationships as deviant.	-
Brian (003)	-	Never encountered content with LGBT themes.	-	-	-
Petra (004)	-	Never encountered content with LGBT themes.	-	-	-

Participants	Favorite Genre	Understanding Terms	Understanding Terms	Grounds for Rejection	Regulatory Stance
Indra (005)	-	Never encountered content with LGBT themes.	-	-	-
Gibran (006)	Action, Sci-Fi, Mystery, Romance, Ghibli	Have read comics and watched anime with LGBT themes.	Inconsistent with Indonesian culture; incompatible with LGBT views.	Local cultural values and norm violations.	Unrestricted; it is up to the audience to exercise self-restraint.
Zidan (007)	Action, Sci-fi, Mystery, Romance, Ghibli	I have watched a few titles containing LGBT content.	Extremely awkward and uncomfortable..	Not in accordance with established principles (religious and normative).	Unrestricted; it is up to the audience to exercise self-restraint.

Source : Primary Data, 2026

1. Informants' Understanding of LGBT-Themed Content

A striking initial finding is the disparity in understanding among the informants. The majority of informants—namely M.A.K. (001), Dani (002), and Gibran (006)—recognized the term "Boys' Love" (BL) as a form of LGBT-themed content; however, their familiarity was superficial and lacked a deep understanding of its meaning. Meanwhile, three other informants—Brian (003), Petra (004), and Indra (005)—had never been exposed to LGBT-themed content at all, rendering it impossible to complete their assessment sections.

This pattern indicates that exposure to LGBT-themed content among the informants is uneven and heavily dependent on each individual's media consumption habits. Informants who actively consume a wider range of genres—such as Romance, Sci-Fi, and Ghibli—are more likely to encounter such content compared to those with narrower genre preferences or those who did not specify any preferences at all.

2. Perceptions of LGBT-Themed Content

Among the informants who had been exposed to LGBT-themed content, the resulting affective responses tended to be negative and uniform. M.A.K. (001) and Zidan (007) explicitly expressed a strong sense of unease and discomfort. Dani (002) described the content as disturbing, strange, and unpleasant to look at. Gibran (006) expressed the view that such content is incompatible with Indonesian cultural identity.

What is interesting is how the informants do not merely experience aesthetic discomfort but also construct moral judgments and a collective identity underlying that reaction. M.A.K (001) actively identifies as an "LGBT opponent"—an identity construct indicating that the rejection of LGBT content has become part of the informant's self-image, rather than just a situational response.

3. Basis of Rejection: Religion, Norms, and Cultural Analogies

The grounds for the informants' rejection can be categorized into two broad groups: religious and pedagogical, and cultural and normative.

M.A.K (001) and Zidan (007) clearly cite religious teachings as the primary foundation for their rejection, with Zidan also adding social norms. Interestingly, M.A.K mentions "school upbringing from childhood" as a factor shaping his attitude, demonstrating that this rejection is not merely a personal choice but the result of a formal socialization process that began at an early age.

On the other hand, Dani (002) employs a magnetic physics analogy—in which opposite poles must attract—as a framework to view same-sex relationships as naturally "deviant." This analogy reflects an attempt to rationalize opposition through natural logic rather than relying solely on religious dogma. Gibran (006) frames this opposition within the context of local cultural values and as a departure from norms prevailing in Indonesian society.

The diversity of these argumentative bases—ranging from religion, formal education, and natural analogies to cultural values—demonstrates that the opposition to LGBT content among the informants is multidimensional and rooted in various mutually reinforcing belief systems.

4. Stance on Content Regulation

The three informants who provided responses regarding regulation—M.A.K. (001), Gibran (006), and Zidan (007)—consistently expressed the same position: they prefer an approach based on self-regulation (or self-censorship) by the audience rather than restrictions imposed by external parties or institutions.

This stance is somewhat paradoxical given the strong negative emotional reaction they expressed. Individuals who feel deeply uncomfortable and define their identity in opposition to LGBT issues simultaneously do not support top-down regulation of such content. This can be interpreted as a reflection of a commitment to the value of freedom of expression, or as a reflection of skepticism regarding the effectiveness of state regulation concerning digital content.

5. Note on Data Limitations

It should be noted that three informants (Brian, Petra, and Indra) did not provide sufficient data for further analysis because they had never been exposed to LGBT-related content. This raises an important question: is this lack of exposure the result of an active choice (e.g., conscious avoidance) or merely a matter of chance in their media consumption? Further exploration of this aspect would enrich the depth of the findings.

4.2 Understanding of Terms and Consumption Motives

An interesting initial finding is that the majority of participants became familiar with LGBT-related terms—such as "Boys' Love" (BL) or "Gay"—organically through interactions with media and their social environments, rather than through structured conceptual understanding. Participants M.A.K. (001) and Dani (002), for instance, acknowledged being familiar with the term "BL" but did not fully grasp the meaning behind it. This indicates that the process of acquiring vocabulary and concepts regarding gender identity among Generation Z occurs informally and unconsciously through media consumption—a process that mirrors the mechanism of the "hidden curriculum" within an edulinguistic perspective.

As for consumption motives, interest in anime is generally driven by the quality of the narrative (storyline) and visual aesthetics, rather than by a specific search for LGBT content. Nevertheless, when such content appears unexpectedly in the titles they watch, participants are compelled to respond actively based on their own value systems.

4.3 Perceptions and Attitudes toward LGBT Content

The most notable finding of this study is the prevailing attitude of discomfort and rejection expressed by participants regarding the depiction of same-sex relationships in anime. This rejection is not spontaneous; rather, it is rooted in three key pillars:

1. Religious Values

All participants who expressed discomfort stated that their religious teachings explicitly define same-sex relationships as a deviation. This view has been internalized from an early age and serves as a strong moral filter when consuming media.

2. Local Cultural Values

Some participants employed analogies based on natural logic to express their views. Participant Dani (002), for instance, used the analogy of magnetic poles—specifically that like poles cannot join together—to argue that same-sex relationships contradict the "laws of nature" as they understand them.

3. Social and Family Environment

Values instilled by family and educational institutions (schools) from an early age shape a mindset that significantly influences how participants evaluate content. Interestingly, the participants' parents generally did not actively forbid the consumption of anime; consequently, the adolescents enjoyed the freedom to consume such media while still using family values as a personal benchmark for evaluation.

These findings align with the Audience Reception Theory framework (Kor, 2018), which asserts that the way individuals interpret a text is inextricably linked to the cultural, religious, and social backgrounds they bring with them. In other words, the "meaning" of anime content does not reside solely within the text itself but emerges from the intersection of the text and the viewer's lived context.

4.4 Impact on Behavior and Language Use

One of the most edulinguistically relevant findings is that anime has been shown to influence the speech styles and social behavior of adolescents. Participants acknowledged changes in their way of speaking after watching anime intensively. Even more significant is the phenomenon of adopting LGBT-related terms—such as "gay," "lesbian," or terminology from the BL (Boys' Love) genre—not for self-identification, but as a means of mockery during daily peer interactions (Participant M.A.K, 001).

This phenomenon reveals two important points: first, anime functions as a "hidden curriculum" that actively expands adolescents' gender-related vocabulary; and second, the use of this vocabulary in social contexts undergoes a functional shift away from its original meaning—a phenomenon known in sociolinguistics as language appropriation.

4.5 Attitudes toward Content Regulation: Freedom vs. Personal Responsibility

Another interesting finding concerns the paradoxical attitude participants displayed regarding anime content regulation. On one hand, they firmly expressed opposition to LGBT content. On the other, however, they unanimously maintained that anime should remain free from external restrictions. Their argument was that the true responsibility lies with the viewers themselves to exercise "self-limiting"—the ability to curate their viewing choices and actively skip scenes or titles deemed incompatible with their personal values (Turner, 2016).

From an edulinguistic perspective, this capacity for self-limiting represents a tangible form of critical literacy. It demonstrates that, despite having received no formal education in media literacy, the participants have organically developed the ability to reconcile transgressive media messages with their own social realities and life principles.

These findings also open up opportunities for the educational sector to further cultivate the critical capacity already naturally present in Generation Z.

V. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1. Understanding of Terms

The majority of participants became familiar with terms such as Boys' Love (BL) organically through media exposure rather than through a deep conceptual understanding. This familiarity arose indirectly from consuming entertainment content—particularly anime and other popular media—resulting in an understanding that tends to be superficial and lacks substantive critical reflection.

2. Attitudes toward Content

The prevailing attitude among participants is one of unease and discomfort regarding LGBT content. Such content is generally viewed by participants as a form of deviation. This attitude does not arise spontaneously; rather, it is significantly influenced by the internalization of religious values, cultural norms, and perspectives instilled within the family environment. Consequently, this negative response reflects social and moral constructs deeply rooted in the participants' daily lives.

3. Linguistic Impact

LGBT-related terms adopted from anime content serve a specific social function among the participants: they are used for teasing or joking during peer interactions. Notably, the use of these terms does not reflect the participants' self-identification with the groups or orientations the terms denote. This phenomenon demonstrates that language from a specific subculture can be adopted in social contexts that differ from—or even contradict—its original meaning.

4. Content Regulation

Regarding content regulation, participants generally support freedom of content on digital platforms. However, they believe that the responsibility for filtering the content consumed lies with the viewers themselves, rather than with the platforms or external regulators. This principle is known as self-censorship or self-limitation, wherein individuals are expected to manage and limit their own content consumption based on their personal values and considerations.

Tabel 2. Summary of Research Findings

Theme	Key Findings
Understanding Terms	The majority of participants became familiar with terms like Boys' Love (BL) organically through media, rather than through a deep conceptual understanding.
Attitude towards Content	Predominantly displaying unease and discomfort, and viewing LGBT content as a deviation influenced by religious, cultural, and family values.
Dampak Bahasa	LGBT terms adopted from anime are used as a source of mockery in peer social interactions, rather than for self-identification.

Theme	Key Findings
Regulasi Konten	Participants support content freedom but believe the responsibility for filtering lies with the viewers themselves (self-limiting/self-censorship).

Source: Processed from primary data, 2026

VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATION AND CRITICAL LITERACY

An increasing body of research addresses the role of gender-sensitive pedagogy as a vehicle for change in higher education teaching (e.g., Kalonaityte, 2014; Bromseth & Sörensdotter, 2012; Lykke, 2012). Observers argue that introducing post-structuralist feminist thought into teacher education (Lenz Taguchi, 2005)—which values the intersection of norms regarding nationality, sexuality, and ethnicity—is crucial for the holistic development of teachers. Globally, gender equality and equity have been identified as key issues in teacher training (Kreitz-Sandberg, 2016). According to UNESCO (2015), integrating gender equality into teacher education encompasses a range of practices and policies, including institutional culture, teacher attitudes, gender-responsive policies, and, importantly, the design of gender-sensitive pedagogy and teaching materials. These factors are vital for designing gender-sensitive teacher training curricula at the macro level, utilizing management tools and evaluation strategies developed with gender sensitivity in mind. Therefore, teacher education institutions need to evaluate and develop curricula that incorporate gender sensitivity. (Ananga, 2021)

6.1 The Urgency of Gender-Responsive Teaching Materials

The findings of this study underscore the urgency of developing gender-responsive teaching materials within the context of the Industry 5.0 era. Such materials must be designed in response to the reality that popular media—specifically anime—have long served as "informal teachers" for adolescents, predating the influence of formal school curricula. The objective is not to pass judgment on or prohibit the consumption of specific content, but rather to equip students with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate and reconcile the values encountered in media with their own local identities and values (Warouw & Rambing, 2024).

6.2 Integrating Critical Literacy into Language Learning

From the perspective of English Language Teaching (ELT)—or language learning in general—this study offers a clear direction: texts and narratives within language learning materials can serve as effective vehicles for fostering inclusive gender awareness. Educators need to integrate critical text analysis into the learning process so that learners not only achieve linguistic proficiency but also develop the ability to discern the ideologies hidden behind texts—whether literary works, news reports, or visual media such as anime.

6.3 The Role of Family and Social Environment

This research also underscores the pivotal role of the family and the social environment as the primary moral foundation for adolescents. At a time when formal institutions have yet to fully integrate media literacy into their curricula, the family serves as the first line of defense. Consequently, media literacy programs involving parents and the community must become part of a broader educational agenda.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Generation Z anime enthusiasts hold complex and nuanced attitudes toward LGBT content in anime—views that go beyond a simple black-and-white dichotomy. While they reject such content based on religious values, local culture, and family upbringing, they simultaneously uphold freedom of expression and believe that moral responsibility ultimately rests with the individual viewer.

From an edulinguistic perspective, this phenomenon confirms that anime functions as a "hidden curriculum" that tangibly shapes the vocabulary, mindsets, and gender awareness of adolescents. Conversely, the finding that participants organically develop self-limiting abilities and critical thinking skills when encountering transgressive content offers an optimistic outlook: Generation Z possesses an innate capacity to become reflective media consumers.

The most significant implication of this study is a call for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers to urgently integrate media literacy and critical literacy into formal curricula. By doing so, the critical capacity already naturally present in Generation Z can be systematically strengthened; this enables them not only to withstand exposure to ideologies that conflict with local values but also to evolve into wise and responsible digital citizens in the era of Industry 5.0.

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