Memes: Creative Technological Strategy for ESL Learners

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Abstract

Knowledge of English has become a sine-qua non for understanding the progressive ideas of the west apart from the increasing consternation of enjoying high status in the communities. Hence responding to the teaching of English language as an effective communicative skill becomes indispensable. With the introduction of ICT, teaching of English no longer remains a romantic illusion. The spreading hands of technology, the invasion of innumerable gadgets and plethora of platforms has become a unifying force, which can help tackle communication challenges.

Though English cements its position as the world's *lingua franca*, English language teaching has evolved with time, alongside advances in technology. Language Learning Technologies has brought about a paradigm shift in the art of teaching and learning. They have acted as catalyst in stimulating pupils to not just oil the wheels of communication in the world of business, trade, education, and tourism but also to emerge as confident orators & better communicators. The amalgamation of technology in classroom teaching has enhanced collaborative learning, lowered learning anxiety levels, improved academic abilities by engaging students constructively and thus help create self-motivated independent learners.

Objective

The paper is a humble attempt to homogenize language learning with internet meme videos into our classrooms. It inspires application of an exciting pedagogy based on creative and innovative practices. This article does not intend to debar the utility of textbooks in classrooms, instead it defines the inclusion of technical gadgets as aids to books to invigorate language teaching and thus make it more creative rather than cumbersome, more relaxed rather than rigorous and friendlier rather than intimidating. Over the years language teachers have witnessed significant progression from 'talk and chalk' to BALL to CALL and now to MALL Their roles have been redefined & are now expected to be facilitator, a trainer, a counsellor, a manager and a supervisor. As is rightly said by Widdowson, "The real English teaching can be realized not in the segregation of different units of grammar and composition but in its integration". Language teaching efforts by the teacher can churn dramatic outcomes when integrated with technology. Teacher being the fountain head of knowledge, optimism, and innovation, can overcome technical glitches and command technology with careful planning

Significance of Memes

We stand at a juncture where new-age students are taught in a manner that is foreign to them. Our Digital Immigrant instructors, speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language' (Prensky, 2001) and the digital natives finds it hard to sit in the classroom for lectures. Since technology has become an integral part of life which affects all the powers of grasping information through a plane text, students find it cumbersome to listen, take notes or understand the theoretical concepts during the lecture, more so the search engines and the internet has given much-needed impetus to student autonomy in the learning process by enabling the learners to find the latest and relevant information available globally which has made it harder to forge teacher-student relationships.

To address the transitional dynamics of the twenty-first century & the issue of the generation gap in teaching students through the integration of creative digital devices, flipped classroom is the new normal, it departs from the traditional teacher-centric instructional methods and provides learners with direct access to video lectures, slides, and other teaching resources on online educational platforms. Web-based ecologies facilitate student participation through interactive, innovative, and collaborative learning models.

To grasp the attention of the students it has become imperative to incorporate digital communication in the language classroom in an enterprising and novel way. Multihued pictures, video employed during classroom teaching has not only become a potent tool to actively engage them and but also enables them to relate to the language taught in context. Systematic adoption of internet memes and comic strips has helped in lending novelty, depth & humour and thereby reducing anxiety during language learning. It has not only brought about a paradigm shift from blackboard to the whiteboard, memory drives, web pages, and blogs but has also stimulated cognitive and sensory domains with the introduction of humorous, visual animations. Additions of subject-specific memes & PowerPoint presentations with humorous insertions are actively employed by international organizations, like The British Council, IELTS and Cambridge ESL in their TESL classrooms to assist in the simple understanding of the subject taught.

Student's learning can be tailor customized by improvising instruction methods of the teacher by introducing memes. Baysac believed that the learners' attention should be directed towards what is in front of them, that is, the teacher or the board. Constant attention creates involvement and a readiness to respond. This readiness can be created by using humorous memes. In the classrooms, instructors exploit interesting memes as part of the presentation to explain complex concepts more simply. Internet memes never solves the problem of complex concepts, but it simplifies the complex procedure of any topic taught by the teacher.

What are Memes?

Social networking sites gained popularity amongst the digital natives not only for entertainment but also for communication One of the marked developments in the communication space has been the extensive popularity of genealogy, the evolution of internet memes. It consists of a combination of funny images and texts that allude to specific situations, cultural references, or interest groups, through quick commentary, mood expression, or plain mockery. The internet meme was first introduced by Richard Dawkins in his studies related to genetics and memetic as a cultural unit. Wikipedia states that 'an internet meme is an activity, concept, catchphrase, or piece of media that spreads, often as mimicry or for humorous purposes, from person to person via Internet. Oxford Online Dictionary defines a meme as 'an image, video, piece of text typically humorous in nature that is copied and spread rapidly by the internet users, often with slight variations' (Oxford Online Dictionary, 2018).

Memes in Learning

Today, knowledge is growing exponentially. Memes are now being extensively and popularly employed in the educational fields as well. Memes are intertextual and are a perfect tool of learning through forming connections across and between subjects. Critical thinking is an important aspect of learning, Memes help students build this skill by encouraging them to be sceptical of what they view on social media websites and to be mindful of the accuracy of the content they share. Memes can be introduced as ice breaking activity in the class representing DO'S & DONT'S.

Courtesy: independent.co.uk

An important historical event can be taught by actively employing meme-creation program and make their own meme with a witty subtitle.
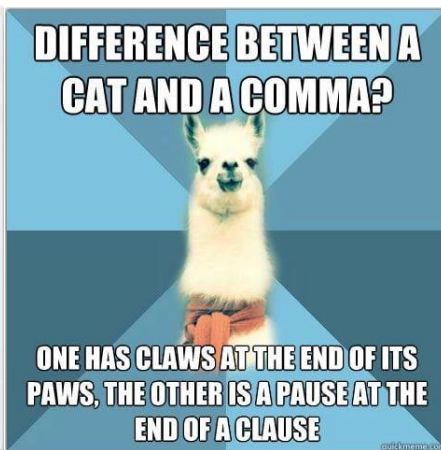

Courtesy: memegenerator.net

Memes in ESL

Internet memes are a hybrid between a picture and a verbal message. Memes that carry graphic representations of dialogues, along with pictures, are better alternative to using pictures in language classrooms. Young learners   curate and analyse Internet memes to develop their communication skills by introducing Humour which improves students' understanding and promotes retention and recall of course material Memes can be infused with grammatical puns to learn the complexities of grammar through the puns in the classroom.

Courtesy: blogs.chatham.edu   Courtesy: quickmme.com

In language learning classes teaching and learning vocabulary has a significant importance, memes are trendy phenomena to create an enjoyable environment in the class. Using meme creation enhances students' participation in the class and helps students revise vocabulary items intermingled with fun.
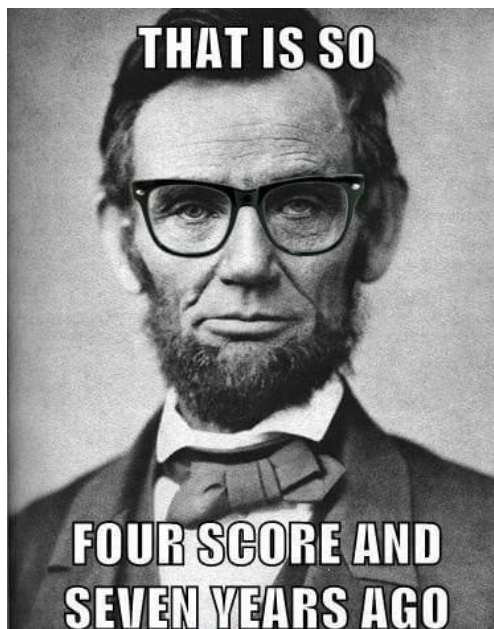

Courtesy: iste.org

Memes can also be creatively used to to summarize a section of the novel or dramatize a point from a novel or short story.
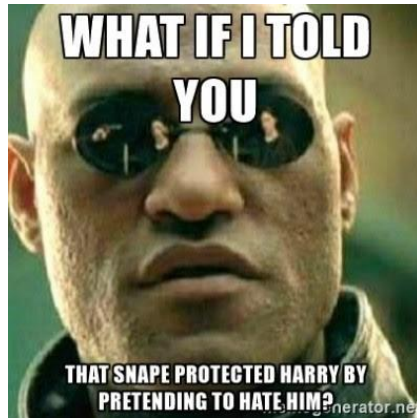
Courtesy: memesmonkey.com

An intriguing meme can be used to introduce chapter to help catch the attention and constructively engage students as they walk into the classroom.

Courtesy: imgflip.com

An activity was undertaken wherein Each group was asked to develop one meme based on the given topics that they had received during English classes. Each group was assigned to upload or post their meme creation in the appointed Instagram account. Creating memes 'supported intrinsic, integrative and instrumental values which affect the students' motivation'. Using memes enabled the actual process of learning the 'target language-intrinsic value; target language itself and its speaker-integrative value; and consequences and benefits of having learned the target language-instrumental value'.

Incorporation of memes in the classroom determined the readiness of the students by having their undivided attention & arousing their attention. It helped in setting the mood of the

class, could spark moments of laughter thus made the class happy. Since the learners could concretely visualize an idea or concept, it aided in sustaining learning interest.

Learning through internet memes is a joyful experience as a learner. It was further aggrandized by conducting survey on the students of classes XI & XII. The survey was conducted on 130 students of classes XI & XII. The students were in the age grp of 17-18 yrs both from science, commerce and humanities background. The rating was kept from 1 – Strongly agree to 5- Strongly disagree.

Analysis of use of internet memes in language classroom
Discernment of students regarding practical applicability of internet memes

General Questionnaire I
Question 1. What is your opinion about English language learning? Total number of students participated in the survey were 130 students. Most of the students felt English language learning is fun, whereas only handful of students found it confusing and difficult to score.

Question 2. Do you know any social media sites? All the students expressed their familiarity with social media sites.

Question 3. How many social media accounts do you have? Almost of the students have at least 2 social media accounts.

Question 4. Are you aware of memes? All of participants are familiar with memes.

Question 5. Do you like memes? All of students liked memes because they are funny.

Memes Questionnaire II
Question 1. Views on integration of memes inside classroom. 95% of participants agreed upon memes integration for language learning and teaching process.

Question 2. Significance of memes in enhancing understanding of English. 82% students were of the opinion that memes enhanced their understanding while 6% disapproved it while 12% were neutral.

Question 3. Are memes an enjoyable activity? 76% Participants enjoyed creating memes whereas 13% remained neutral and 11% did not consider it enjoyable.

Question 4. Integration of memes for diverse topics. 80% Participants preferred utilizing memes as a learning tool for diverse topics.

Question 5. Do you agree or disagree if the teaching of English is combined with social media?

82% participants state their agreement on integrating social media for English learning process.

SURVEY QUESTIONS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
USE OF MEMES INSIDE CLASS	39%	56%	3%	1%	1%
ENHANCING UNDERSTANDING OF ENGLISH	30%	52%	12%	4%	2%
IS IT ENJOYABLE ACTIVITY	29%	47%	13%	8%	3%
USE OF MEMES FOR DIVERSE TOPICS	31%	49%	11%	5%	4%
TEACHING OF ENGLISH WITH SOCIAL MEDIA	37%	45%	15%	2%	1%
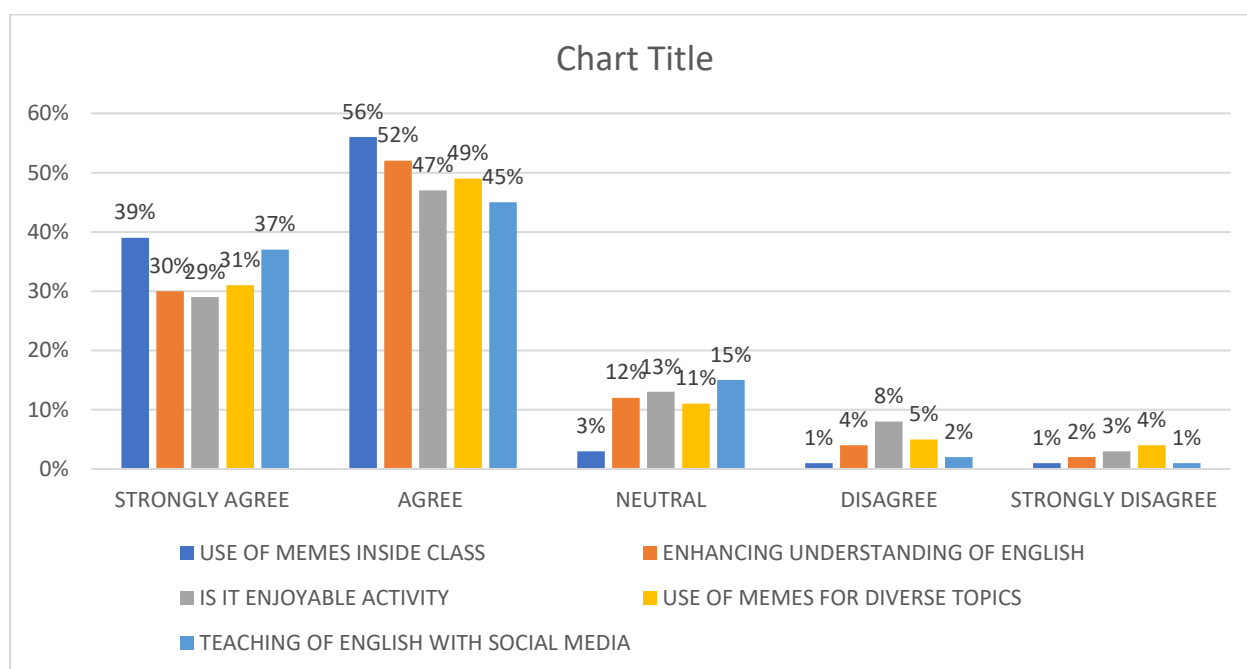
Statistical analysis of survey (RQ1) of students regarding the inclusion of memes in class-room practices. The table shows the percentage calculation of survey on percentage on memes. It showcases students' inclination towards use of memes in classrooms since most of them feel that it is helping them to understand the concepts better.

The graphical representation of above survey is drawn in bar graph.

RQ2: What is the impact of including meme in classroom practices?

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In order to answer the RQ2, the midterm performance of the students is compared with final term student performance.

The students are in their senior secondary classes at St. Xavier's school.

Comparative analysis of mid-term results (RQ2)

Students' grades of the midterm tests were compared with the students' performance during final term exams at St Xavier's Among the two, one was inclusive of memes and the other was the traditional approach where normal question answers were there. Students' performance was compared with two parameters such as success rate and failure rate. The category of success rate shows an improvement of final term students (students who passed the course with the meme-based approach) with the midterm students (students who passed the course with the traditional approach).

MID TERM PERFORMANCE USING TRADITIONAL APPROACH

	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS PASSED	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS FAILED
TRADITIONAL	130	103	27

MID TERM PERFORMANCE INCLUSIVE OF MEMES

	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS PASSED	TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS FAILED
INCLUSIVE OF MEMES	130	119	11
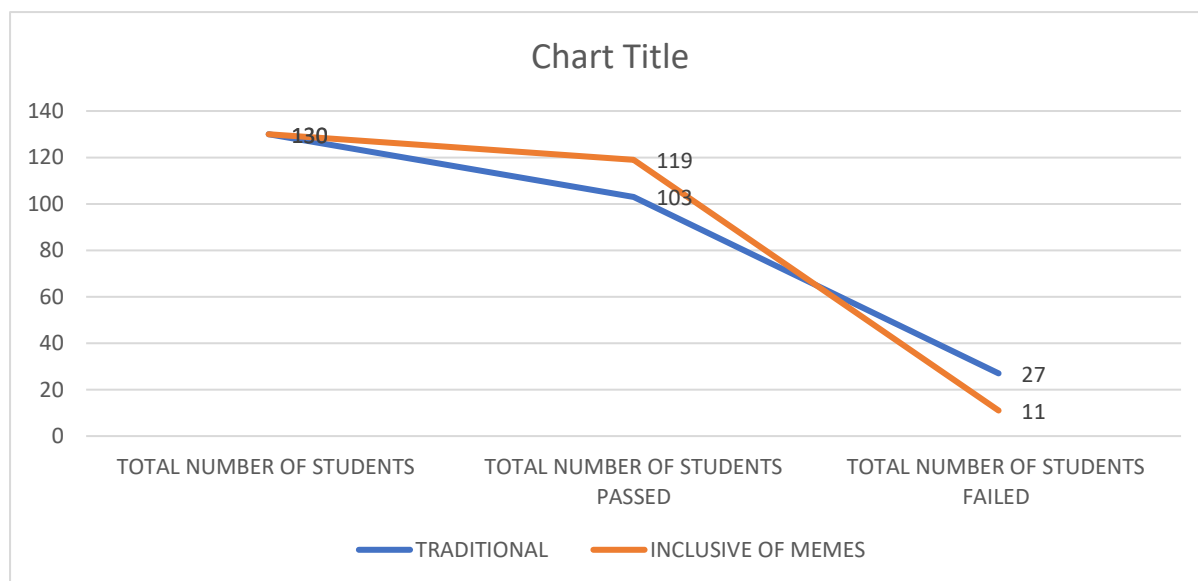
Conclusion

The numerical and statistical study has shown the students favourable response for the incorporating memes as a creative tool. Based on the study the article promotes fruitful engagement of the amalgamation of enjoyable yet fun mixed form of language learning activity and pervasive technology which will have far reaching impact on students' communicative skills in the long run.

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