

# Integration of Internet Memes in Teaching Social Studies and its Relation to the Development of Critical Thinking Skills: A Literature Review

**Keno Ivan O. Matias**

*Senior High School Teacher, Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Marikina- Senior High School Department, San Roque, Marikina City, Philippines*

Corresponding author: aybanmatiaz08@gmail.com

**Received:** 10-07-2020

**Revised:** 18-10-2020

**Accepted:** 25-11-2020

## ABSTRACT

This exploratory paper aimed to review different articles that explains the integration of Internet Memes in teaching Social Studies as possibilities for developing students' critical thinking skills. Specifically, it aims to identify such researches which pertain to the relevance of internet memes as a medium for teaching the subject. As well as the significant relationship of it in developing that particular skill. The researcher found out that there are direct relations to the integration of internet memes in teaching, particularly to the development of critical thinking skills in various ways. Therefore, it is a clear manifestation of a new way of improving the skill in adapting to digital age. This suggests a Meme-Based learning method in dealing with students' cognitive development in the given course.

**Keywords:** Internet memes, development, critical thinking skills

The Santa Clarita Valley Signal (2020) stated to their article entitled Critical Thinking & Problem-Solving Skills Students Need that individuals who lack critical thinking skills have reduced opportunities for promotion and are more susceptible to manipulation and fraud. Similarly, many still graduate without the ability to read a scatterplot, build a coherent argument or recognize a logical fallacy (Camarata, 2017). In fact, this should be the concern that the Philippines is ranked as the 16<sup>th</sup> most ignorant nation in the world, for it signifies the deterioration of national cognition (Lugtu, 2018).

Education plays a crucial role in developing critical thinking among young people (Lugtu, 2018). For this reason, it is essential to develop critical thinking skills in students because it helps them to make difficult choices and enables them to continue to develop brilliantly after

they graduate (Singh, 2020). In addition, the academe must do more to ensure that today's students become professional thinkers for tomorrow (Haber, 2020). However, the role of teachers is now more complex than ever. A teacher is an agent of change. Associated with the development of critical thinking (Uksw, 2014).

One of the aims of education is to prepare students through discovery. Providing opportunities to practice being analytical thinkers can allow students to analyze the way of reasoning of others and test other's logic (Joseph, 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to adapt

**How to cite this article:** Keno Ivan O. Matias (2020). Integration of Internet Memes in Teaching Social Studies and its Relation to the Development of Critical Thinking Skills: A Literature Review. *Int. J. Soc. Sci.*, 9(04): 213-218.

**Source of Support:** None; **Conflict of Interest:** None



education to how learners learn, given the context of how knowledge is processed and consumed by each generation (Brown, 2020). Moreover, as a subject corresponds to what students want to do, interaction deepens as they willingly spend time in meaningful ways of thinking, dialoging, and generating ideas (McCarthy, 2014).

Quality Matters (2018) noted on their article entitled Use Humor to Improve Student Learning, with students, memes are very popular, making them a very relatable and engaging tool. And since memes are amusing, learners can not even know they are learning. When making memes, students use both imaginative and critical-thinking abilities. Since they mostly deal with current events or social problems, memes may also spark complex conversations. Plus, in the end, students develop technology skills.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Internet Memes

It is not well recognized, considering its success, that the meme has its roots in the academic world. The word “meme” is rooted in evolutionary biology, and in his famous 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*, Richard Dawkins coined it. A meme is a unit of cultural transmission or imitation. According to Dawkins; his examples include the idea of God, nursery rhymes and jokes, catchphrases and trends in fashion (Aslan, 2018). The study published by Diaz (2013) entitled *Defining and characterizing the concept of Internet Meme*, it is time to address the idea of “internet memes” a formalized notion of meme, operationalized in terms of communication disciplines. Roughly speaking, an expression, picture or video is an internet meme. It can be generated or centered on a real-life event that spreads across the internet allowing people to duplicate it. Often it spreads in the same way and sometimes it spreads by means of transition. Moreover, the internet meme is characterized as the deliberate creation and distribution by an individual or group of people of a group of digital objects and that these digital objects are transformed by the transmission of several users through the internet (Herbert, 2019). Taking to the following definitions, Shifman (2014)

authored the book *Memes in Digital Culture* clearly said that Internet memes (hereinafter referred to as memes) are best understood as groups of digital items or texts that many people create and share separately, but are aware of each other and have common features of content, shape, and/or place.

Furthermore, Quinal (2019) noted to her study entitled *Philippines vs. America Filipino Generated Memes as Stimuli for Xenocentrism*, Internet memes are now widely regarded as a type of “cultural artifact” by scientists and sociologists that helps spread cultural knowledge or philosophy about certain aspects of everyday life. Therefore, the meme definition itself is good introduction to diagnoses in broader perspective (Nowak, 2016) (Swafford).

A meme involves a memetic message and a meme performance and has a range of characteristics, including but not limited to salience, frequency, adaptability, argumentativity, sociality, embeddedness, embodiedness, locality, relativity, emotionality and dynamicity, if driven by a logical way of thinking (Xie, 2020). Also, Padgett & Swafford (2016) on their study entitled *A Critical Case Study of Teacher Education Student Created Memes*, without feeling forced to react in a certain way, memes are a creative way to convey an opinion or reveal true feelings.

In an article posted in *High Five History* by Deehan (2016) students focus on what they learned through comedy to make things more engaging (and to tap into critical thinking and creativity). Student were asked to construct amusing memes about the subjects we were looking at, events and individuals. Another example, in the study conducted by Reddy, Singh, Kapoor & Churi (2020) entitled *Joy of Learning Through Internet Memes*, they asked the students to construct political memes based on their own evidence-based political arguments to improve the critical thinking capacity of students and this will enable students to be critical of the content of the memes they are exposed to day-to-day life. In addition, Pontillas *et al.* (2020) published a study entitled *Filipino Memes: Generation Z's Way of Indirectness* noted that Memes that talk in a funny way about serious matters. But the content still has

this underlying sense. Therefore, students must learn the ability to identify problems, gather information that will help them to approach the issues objectively, balance the issues against values, and make accurate decisions in order to exercise the components of critical thinking as defined by Glaser (Nappi, 2017). Evidently, Harvey & Palese (2018) clearly stated on their study entitled #Nevertheless Memes Persisted: Building Critical Memetic Literacy in the Classroom that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom, memes provide teachers with a strong and appropriate way of addressing critical thinking and debate. For instance, A webpage Kapwing Resources (2019) posted an article entitled Make History Lessons Relevant Using Memes in the Classroom, they said that many educators and students are starting to realize the power of memes to cultivate storytellers and link students with past experiences and people.

This is because today's generation is realistic and wants to learn skills and does not want conventional teaching that enforces memory instead of knowledge. They want to be imaginative in class-room-based teaching methods (Reddy, Singh, Kapoor & Churi, 2020).

### Development of Critical Thinking Skills

The Foundation for Critical Thinking (2019) defines Critical thinking as the process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or assessing data obtained from or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication as a guide to belief and action that is intellectually disciplined. In addition, Critical thinking involves conceptualizing the data, applying the data to problems, analyzing the data, and synthesizing it before a final assessment is made (Lynch, 2018).

Shattuch-St. Mary's School (2018) stated on their article entitled Critical Thinking in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, one will be able to analyze intelligence, explain concepts, search for possibilities and alternatives, and solve problems using reasoning, resourcefulness and creativity by thinking critically. Another primary aspect of critical thought is reviewing and comparing the effectiveness of evidence and concepts (Singh, 2020).

Nappi (2017) published a Journal entitled The Importance

of Questioning in Developing Critical Thinking Skills on which she identified the three characteristics of Critical Thinking:

1. an attitude of being able to consider the issues and subjects that fall within the context of one's experience in a reflective way;
2. awareness of the experience of the individual; Logical inquiry and reasoning methods; and
3. some skill in the application of those methods. In light of the evidence that supports it and the more assumptions to which it tends, critical thinking calls for a constant effort to analyze any conviction or supposed form of understanding.

One of the four features (communication, teamwork, critical thinking, and creativity) that learners must have in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is critical thinking itself. Critical thinking is important, as the world community faces great challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Tapung, Maryani, Supriatna, 2018).

Social studies teachers should be aware of the changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and should design instructions to promote living abilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For this reason, the development of critical thinking skills in education is becoming more relevant (Pandeeka & Maneekul, 2019).

Hence, teachers should be able to meet the mandate of developing critical thinking for learners as a frontier of education (Fuad, Zubaidah, Mahanal, & Suarsini, 2017). Also, each instructor must be able to teach students how to collect data, analyze it, screen distractions, and think for themselves. Since critical thinking is so important, some claim that every teacher has the duty to integrate the application of critical thinking into his or her subject area (Kasten, 2017). Furthermore, Habibah, Setyowati & Mustika (2018) discussed on their study, Improving Critical Thinking Skills of Students through the Development of Teaching Materials, that the logical thinking ability of students can be increased by a successful learning process. For that, it is important to package the learning process in such a way that students are actively engaged in the classroom. However, Nelson (2017), on his review of the book *The Critical Advantage: Developing Critical Thinking Skills in School*, suggests

that, at young age, the building of critical thinking skills must begin.

In the study conducted by Wang and Seepho (2017), it is stated that several teaching techniques have been used to facilitate the development of critical thinking abilities, the most important of which are group discussion, concept mapping and critical questioning. Also, Mahanal *et al.* (2019), on their study entitled RICOSRE: A Learning Model to Develop Critical Thinking Skills for Students with Different Academic Abilities, formulated the learning model of RICOSRE. It is structured to facilitate higher-order thought for students. The RICOSRE syntax consists of reading, identifying a problem, constructing the solution, solving the issue, reviewing the solution, and expanding the solution. Finally, Field trips, extracurricular events, project-based learning, and even use of YouTube in classrooms are all ways to start thinking critically (Nelson, 2017).

On the other contrary, Harshavardhan, D & Kumar (2019) published a study entitled Humour Discourse in Internet Memes: An Aid in ESL Classrooms suggests that teaching needs to be creative in order to be successful in the ever-changing classroom dynamics of the twenty-first century. Members of virtual communities interacting mainly through the digital medium are the youth of the present era. This digital contact has its influence on conventional lectures in the classroom. In addition, based on the study of Purnama (2017) entitled Incorporating Memes and Instagram to Enhance Student's Participation stated that the teaching and learning of today faces more challenges because technology continues to upgrade itself. Teachers are expected to incorporate as many technology items as possible to facilitate the participation of students in classroom activities. Evidently, Bruyckere, Kirschner & Hulshof (2016) discussed on their article entitled Technology in Education: What Teacher Should Know has confirmed that learning effectiveness is largely measured by the manner in which the medium is used and the consistency of the training that accompanies that use. The choice of medium does not affect learning when media (or multimedia) are used for instruction. For instance, Internet memes have been developed by the newest types of media (Cannizzaro, 2016).

Moreover, Boa Sorte (2019) revealed that Internet memes are massively embedded into the everyday lives of students, and a few taps on the mobile phone screen that can easily access or create them. They are part of digital community in which students are engaged in an inevitable way. Furthermore, Clayton (2019) discussed on her study entitled 'Meme-orising' visual literacy in the classroom: Investigating the role of meme in literacy development, memes are pictures containing few words introduces them as acceptable visual texts because the manner in which materials are perceived is questioned. Beyond what has been simply spelled out in words, they involve analysis and interpretation, and the absence of interplay between image and text may challenge...readers as they read...to consider visual texts' potential for meaning. Also, Internet memes that involve verbal and visual elements play an important role in the autonomous and intrinsic development of meaning. They are also used not only to amuse the reader by humorous messages, but also to express moral messages (Ariyoga & Rahyono, 2020). For example, students find examples of memes that deal with the subject and examine the underlying subtext of each as a way to start exploring the cultural commentary around a topic. This contributes to a rich debate and ties course material to current events (Reyes, Kaepffel & Basayne, 2018). Therefore, the use of memes helps educators to see how students view a specific problem and where they are thinking about it (Navera, Garinto & Valdez, 2019).

In a research journal published by Suseno (2015) his article entitled Building the Digital Learners' Motivation and Critical Thinking by Using Internet Memes (A Practical Classroom Approach of English Language Learning, he identified pointers for using meme:

When coping with the critical thought of various students, teachers should treat the content of memes differently. It is proposed to use simple pictures and simple words for children or young learners. An important theme for children's memes is how they feel, what they do every day or about a good/bad habit. For adolescents, the message is best tailored for teenagers to reveal comedy, parody, or current lifestyles or common issues. Meanwhile for adult learners, the material may

touch on society's satires, social protest, cultural issues, political comedy, or other complex problems that happen.

Indeed, Meme's position in the classroom is not only funny, but also educational (Harshavardhan, D & Kumar, 2019).

## SYNTHESIS

The articles reviewed showed that there is a possible use for internet memes as a tool in teaching Social studies. Moreover, the significant relationship of internet memes in developing the critical thinking skills was also seen in the literature reviewed. However, the review conducted by the researcher in the given articles are still insufficient to clearly prove the study. Thus, it is recommended to conduct further studies on the other effects of internet memes both in the use of it in teaching Social studies and in the development of critical thinking skills. Still, it cannot set aside the possibilities of a Meme-based learning method for future purposes.

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