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How internet memes develop vocabulary proficiency among EFL university students

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Article Info

Abstract

This article explores how internet memes aid university students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in getting better at vocabulary acquisition. It argues that because of the nature of internet memes, memes use words and pictures, are often funny, and are part of popular culture, they are a new and unique way to learn and remember words used in daily communication. The article explains a simple plan showing how using memes can help students understand words better, remember them, and use them more actively and effectively. It shows how important it is to use resources from the digital world to make learning English more interesting, engaging, and useful. And the discussion ended with the suggestion that to improve language skills, we don't need to stick to traditional techniques; we can also get media and learning methods online, or even use both. One of the ways to improve language skills is by using internet memes because memes are equipped with several characteristics that make learning fun. However, it is important to note that we cannot rely on internet memes alone; it is better to use internet memes as supplementary tools.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English has undeniably become an absolute necessity in today's globalized world. English proficiency serves an important role in navigating diverse social, professional, and cultural contexts, enhancing students' ability to integrate into a variety of environments (Bondarchuk et al., 2025). Structural differences in language have become a challenge for EFL students. Students are often confronted with a new set of linguistic structures. Moreover, to achieve fluency in a Foreign Language (FL), EFL students need a knowledge of a large number of words.

To master a foreign language, a solid vocabulary foundation alongside grammar and pronunciation is required for effective communication (Cahyono & Widiati, 2008). Effective communication is achieved when both parties are familiar with the language's vocabulary, such as English. The determinant to successfully communicate in a second language is learners' vocabulary knowledge (Sathyaseelan et al., 2025). Groot (2000) emphasizes that vocabulary has something to do with reading, listening, speaking, and writing. It means that the basis of language skills is vocabulary. It is challenging for students to acquire language fluency without proper vocabulary knowledge. Following Nation (1990, as cited in Groot, 2000), a person must know at least 5000 words to grasp non-specialized writings. Furthermore, students gain the ability to process and understand new information more efficiently. Lack of vocabulary, rather than grammatical errors, is a major cause of communication breakdown in spoken and written interactions (Mewald, 2015). A strong vocabulary allows students to convey information, reflect social reality, express emotions, and demonstrate academic ability. Its depth directly impacts the communication effectiveness. It indicates that vocabulary is vital and a necessity in communication.

Vocabulary acquisition is an important aspect of second language learning. As Uberman (1998, as cited in Sathyaseelan et al., 2025) stated, vocabulary acquisition is increasingly recognized as an important element of language acquisition. According to Schmitt (2008), vocabulary acquisition is a continuous process that requires repeated exposure to words in multiple contexts. Following Barcroft (2009, as cited in Sathyaseelan et al., 2025), the vocabulary learning process involves two key components: incidental learning and intentional learning. According to Tan (2025:453), "Intentional learning involves structured, planned activities aimed at memorizing vocabulary, which often prioritize memorization over cognitive engagement. Incidental vocabulary learning occurs as a byproduct of other activities. This approach enables learners to acquire new words subconsciously, focusing on the overall meaning of the text rather than isolated vocabulary." The repeated exposure in multiple contexts allows students to develop a deeper understanding of word meaning and cognitive processing. Furthermore, repeated exposure to multimodal input during incidental learning resulted in better performance on previously exposed words, with greater impact during the first exposure and a decline thereafter (Bisson et al., 2014).

Nowadays, learning English is not limited to learning in school and hard copy materials; teachers, lecturers, and students can use the internet as a learning medium. Following Merkt et al. (2011, as cited in Amanda et al., 2024), learning effectiveness using internet-sourced media was comparable to or surpassed traditional textbooks. Furthermore, Zhang and Zou (2021, as cited in Sathyaseelan et al., 2025), digital media offers students, teachers, and lecturers to improve the foreign language learning process. With the rapid digital technology advancement and internet access, the way English is learned and taught has significantly changed. Students, teachers, and lecturers are no longer dependent solely on physical/hard copy materials such as dictionaries and grammar books. In today's era, they have a wide range of access to online platforms and multimedia resources instead. In recent years, the internet has become a powerful medium for language learning. Digital platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Reddit, Facebook, online dictionaries, SpellBee, Duolingo, British Council, and any other internet platforms that provide grammar lessons, pronunciation practice, listening activities, and X (formerly Twitter) serve as digital spaces where English is the main language often used, even for non-English-speaking countries.

In today's digital era, communication among young people has taken on a new form, particularly through internet memes. Internet memes are a mixture of text and images that work together to share meaning, often with humor or satire (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017; Scott, 2022). Memes are primarily jokes presented in formats such as images with text, GIFs with text, or simple text alone (Kalyuzhna et al., 2023). Furthermore, Internet memes are digital artifacts that share common characteristics and are shared across online platforms by various internet users (Shifman, 2014; Yus, 2021, as cited in Kalyuzhna et al., 2023). Moreover, Scott (2022), memes can be seen as a blend of images and words that function like metaphors, understood in the same way as

spoken metaphors. Furthermore, they are popular because memes can express and reshape opinions, often based on many people's common beliefs or stereotypes (Dancygier & Vandelanotte, 2017). Because internet memes are frequently shared, students may find similar words multiple times, reinforcing their understanding. This exposure will help learners understand how words and phrases are commonly used in daily communication. As a result of continuous exposure to English content, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students even learn English without realizing that they are learning. The development of memes shows a broader transformation in how language is consumed, shared, and learned in the 21st century. With the rise of digital media and the increasing engagement of young people in online communities, there has been a shift in the way students discover and acquire vocabulary. Informal digital platforms, including social media, video-sharing platforms, and memes, offer an authentic new context for vocabulary exposure.

The influence of digital media continues to expand. Among university students, especially those studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL), memes are not just entertainment but a form of exposure to real, informal, and current English. Unlike traditional classroom materials that often rely on formal structures, memes are raw, authentic, and deeply embedded in everyday usage. Havrylenko & Chugai (2024) mentioned that internet memes showcase modern language trends using slang and new words, making them a constantly evolving aspect of internet language. Many EFL students encounter slang, informal words, idiomatic expressions, and even cultural references through memes long before they hear them in the classroom.

Meme culture continues to influence internet communication, it is beginning to attract attention, particularly in language learning. Many perceive that internet memes are only used as a means to communicate or to entertain people. Therefore, this is an opportunity for integrating popular culture (internet memes) into an academic context, an opportunity for language development. Kalyuzhna et al. (2023) stated that internet memes, currently one of the most popular forms of online entertainment, are frequently encountered by learners and can be integrated into the learning process. Researchers have started exploring the educational potential of internet memes, focusing on how they can support comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, students' engagement, and even critical thinking. The effect of the internet may extend far beyond expectations, influencing learners' vocabulary acquisition and language development.

Despite the growing use of memes among EFL students, there remains a gap in understanding how this digital medium (internet memes) contributes to language development, specifically vocabulary proficiency? Moreover, many language students develop an understanding of modern and informal English vocabulary independently, without guided learning. This type of exposure can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, exposure to incorrect grammar, incomplete knowledge, or even the use of inappropriate expressions due to a lack of context.

People in today's era are highly engaged in online platforms, especially university students. Online platforms where internet memes are widely spread expose learners to informal language and internet slang. Internet memes provide engaging exposure to new words and expressions that make them a tool for learners' vocabulary development. Additionally, this study is motivated by the researcher's interest in internet memes as a form of digital communication. Then, the main objective of this paper is to explore how internet memes may contribute to vocabulary development among university students. This paper does not present empirical research, but draws on theories, existing studies, and real-world examples to develop a structured discussion.

The researcher believes that this research may help English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students be more aware of the negative and positive effects of learning through online sources such as internet memes. Because of the engaging nature of internet memes, students may enjoy the content presented by internet memes, so when they find informal words, idioms, slang, internet citizens' comment, or any other unfamiliar terms in English, there is a chance that students may open translator or searching the meaning of the related words to understand the jokes. This kind of activity may introduce them to new vocabulary. It may also increase other language skills such as speaking, reading, and listening. This research may help advance the theory of how a foreign language is learned. Internet memes may serve as a valuable tool or learning strategy to aid English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in advancing their mastery of a foreign language.

Literature review
The study conducted by Bisson et al. investigated how people attend to multimodal stimuli when participants learn something by accident. They were exposed to words in a foreign language (FL)

presented auditorily on their own, with a written translation in their native language (NL), or a native language translation and a picture. Bisson et al. (2015) found that learners showed significant retention improvements when foreign language (FL) words were presented through a combination of auditory, textual, and visual stimuli. Specifically, they found that integrating pictures with heard words and written translations significantly improved recall compared to presentations that relied solely on auditory and textual cues or auditory input alone.

Then, Cárcamo et al. (2016) found that multimodal teaching significantly improves vocabulary acquisition compared to monotonous memorization. The study emphasizes that multimodal strategies provide a more engaging and effective alternative, transforming vocabulary acquisition from a monotonous task into a joyful and meaningful learning experience. The research conducted by Cárcamo et al. investigated whether the use of multimodal learning can significantly improve vocabulary acquisition in school students. To determine how multimodal learning affects students' vocabulary acquisition, the researchers divided participants from two semi-public schools into four groups: 8th, 9th, 10th, and 11th graders. The study was structured as an action research intervention, consisting of five sessions, with a total of thirty words taught, and in each lesson, six new words were introduced. To track participants' progress, participants took a pre-test before the intervention and a post-test after exposure to multimodal input. In addition, a Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic (VARK) learning style test was also administered to help tailor learning materials and activities to participants' preferences.

Further research was conducted by Dian Purnama et al. Internet memes are suggested as a teaching strategy to help bridge the gap between student characteristics, technological advances, and the ongoing need to improve student performance. Dian Purnama et al. (2017) stated that the majority of EFL learners showed a positive response to the use of internet memes as learning media. The activity used in this study was a meme-making activity, which showed that the activity can increase students' motivation in learning a foreign language. To collect data from fifty EFL learners at the beginner level, the researchers used observation and interviews via email as research instruments. By integrating various mobile applications, internet access, and gadgets, meme-making can be a significant innovation in education.

Moreover, Pranoto & Suprayogi attempted to study EFL learners' perceptions of using memes, especially funny memes from the 9GAG app in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. This study also aims to understand how humor influences learners' engagement in these classroom activities. The study uses a qualitative research approach, collecting data from 30 adult EFL learners through observations and questionnaires. The diverse background of learners (gender, intelligence level, and social factors) is expected to contribute to the objectivity of learners' perceptions. Pranoto & Suprayogi (2021) have found that using humorous memes during teaching-learning sessions showed that a majority of EFL learners feel less stressed and can cheer them up. Furthermore, incorporating humorous memes deepens the chemistry. Moreover, EFL learners tend to be more actively involved in classroom activities.

Kayali & Altuntas (2021) stated that when it comes to teaching vocabulary, they struggle to find engaging methods. Learners find it hard to memorize vocabulary items. To solve this problem, the researchers used innovative learning strategies, such as internet memes. Memes have become a fancy yet entertaining way to express someone's feelings about a certain topic. They provide various real-life context situations for vocabulary learning. The combination of memes, quizzes, and feedback proved to be a successful strategy. They (learners) showed improved vocabulary recall, and the class environment became more engaging, enjoyable, and creative. This study aimed to establish an engaging and fun learning environment for students. The researcher specifically used memes for vocabulary revision. Furthermore, a feedback form was given after the experiment to measure their opinions on using memes.

Aedo & Millafilo (2022) stated that the learners felt that the use of memes was a new and fun way to learn and develop vocabulary. When students feel that an activity is fun, they feel more motivated to learn. In addition, when someone enjoys something, their brain will be more receptive to new information. This increased motivation can lead to greater effort in vocabulary acquisition. Memes often provide visual and contextual clues that help in understanding the meaning and use of vocabulary. Research results show that the use of multimodal texts (memes) can improve students' vocabulary acquisition. This study aimed to explore how the use of multimodal texts (memes) affects English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' vocabulary acquisition and retention. The participants of this study were 18 EFL students from Chile, who were 6th graders, aged 11-12 years

old, attending an elementary school. Memes were then selected by the researcher based on specific vocabulary criteria. Data was collected by following the following procedure: one before the intervention, one immediately after the intervention, and two weeks after the intervention was completed.

Then, Altukruni (2022) stated that learners in language classes experience increased motivation and interest when learning with internet memes. This method creates a fun and engaging environment, helps them remember and understand new information better, and makes complex ideas easier to process and understand. By conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), this research aims to explore how humor and meme-based activities affect language learning. In addition, it also aims to provide practical guidelines for using memes in the language classroom. The researcher believes the findings will motivate educators to use this innovative approach.

Smith (2023) stated that by creating "*idiomemes*" (meme-based idioms), students' engagement and comprehension of multimodal discourse increases as students use culturally familiar images. This approach transforms the often challenging task of idiom acquisition into an interactive and culturally appropriate experience, which significantly increases student engagement and comprehension. Smith's research explored the benefits of internet memes and design as an innovative and creative activity in English Language Learning (ELL). This research also emphasizes the use of meme creation as a pedagogical activity, while other researchers highlight the usefulness of memes in EFL learning.

Further study conducted by Amanda et al. aimed to investigate the effectiveness of memes in vocabulary acquisition. Data was collected from twenty-six EFL learners in 12th grade using a mixed methods approach. To assess internet memes' effectiveness, the study used pre- and post-vocabulary tests. It used a questionnaire containing eleven statements and five open-ended questions to gather students' opinions to better understand how memes affected their vocabulary acquisition. Utilizing both the t-test and descriptive analysis, Amanda et al. (2024) found that the use of memes has proven to be an effective tool in improving EFL learners' vocabulary acquisition.

Syaifudin (2024) found that this study highlights the interesting relationship between internet memes and the process of acquiring knowledge, especially in terms of vocabulary. The entertaining nature of memes contributes to a more enjoyable learning experience, where acquiring knowledge, especially vocabulary, happens easily as part of a relaxing activity. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to explore students' perceptions in integrating internet memes into vocabulary learning. The research data was collected through observation, documentation, and interviews with 5 selected participants who met the research criteria.

The studies reviewed share a common focus on the role of multimodal texts, specifically internet memes, in improving vocabulary acquisition among learners. Each of these studies highlights how memes contribute to language learning by providing an engaging, visually supported, and context-rich experience that facilitates vocabulary retention.

METHODS

This research employs a conceptual methodology aimed at synthesizing existing digital theories, research, and practices to construct a coherent argument about how internet memes influence vocabulary development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This approach is appropriate as it allows for theoretical exploration and expansion of existing language acquisition frameworks without the need for original empirical data collection. As noted by Jaakkola (2020), conceptual methodology is useful for bridging disciplines and expanding theoretical understanding, especially when examining new phenomena such as the influence of digital culture on learning.

This research uses an *adaptation theory design* to critically analyze and expand existing theoretical models relevant to language learning in the context of internet memes. Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which states that second language learning is facilitated by comprehensible and meaningful input, is the core theory in this domain. Krashen belives that "second-language students acquire language competence by exposure to language that is both understandable and meaningful to them" (Tricomi, 1986). This is complemented by Vygotsky's Social-Cultural Theory (SCT), Alkhudiry (2022) stated Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) emphasizes the importance of meaningful human interaction in language learning, culture, and leads to meaningful L2 learning experiences through collaborative activities. The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive conceptual lens for understanding how memes, as multimodal and interactive digital texts, support vocabulary development.

The data sources include an in-depth review of previous empirical studies on language learning and the use of internet memes, as well as a systematic analysis of publicly available internet memes collected from social media platforms. No personal or identifiable data from students was collected, in accordance with ethical research practices and the conceptual nature of this research.

Data collection for memes involves selecting examples that highlight phenomena related to vocabulary relevant to learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), such as idiomatic expressions, slang, and wordplay in context. The analysis focuses on the semantic content of memes, cultural references, and the social context in which they circulate. This approach enables the application of conceptual theory to concrete examples of language use in digital environments, demonstrating how memes provide easily understandable input in meaningful social contexts, therefore facilitating vocabulary acquisition.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1. General findings

Key Finding	Supporting Evidence	Explanation
Multimodality enhances vocabulary retention	Bisson et al. (2015); Cárcamo et al. (2016)	Combining audio, visual, and textual stimuli improves recall by providing richer input.
Memes increase motivation and engagement	Dian Purnama et al. (2017); Pranoto & Suprayogi (2021); Kayali & Altuntas (2021); Amanda et al. (2024); Aedo & Millafilo (2022); Altukruni (2022)	Humor and cultural relevance in memes create fun, engaging learning environment that boost motivation and reduce stress.
Memes provide authentic and culturally relevant context	Smith (2023); Syaifudin (2024)	Memes expose learners to rel-life language use, including slangs and idioms, enhancing linguistic competence.
Memes support repeated exposure and contextualized learning	Syaifudin (2024); Kayali & Altuntas (2021)	Frequent sharing and contextual cues in memes facilitate spaced repetition and deeper understanding.
Limitation and challenges	Al Rashdi (2021); Reddy et al. (2020); Syaifudin (2024); Antón-Sancho et al. (2022)	Memes' slang, cultural references, rapid growth, and possible inappropriate content pose challenges for vocabulary learning.

Based on the table above, the main findings from the literature review and meme analysis highlight several important aspects of using internet memes for vocabulary development in learners of English as a foreign language (EFL).

The effective ways to teach vocabulary include focused attention, repeated exposure, meaningful engagement, and motivation (McKeown, 2019; Nation, 2024; Schmitt, 2008; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). It is unique that the nature of internet memes aligns with principles of effective vocabulary learning. These include:

First, the researcher indicates that multimodal input combining visual and textual elements can aid vocabulary learning. Bisson et al. (2015) found that learners were better at remembering foreign words when exposed to a combination of auditory, textual, and visual stimuli. Cárcamo et al. (2016) also demonstrated that multimodal teaching strategies are significantly more effective than monotonous memorization. Memes illustrate these principles through the integration of images and text, providing learners with richer semantic cues, context, and more memorable learning experiences. Internet memes typically combine textual and visual elements. Students have to interpret both image and text, understand implicit meanings, and sometimes, students have to analyze layered jokes. Take a look at the example below.

Image 1. Internet memes taken from 9GAG

To understand the joke, students need to know what information is provided. After learning the information, students will try to connect it textually and visually to understand the context. The person in the example is Jason Momoa (Visual). The textual information is "Hi, I'm Jason, and this is momoa." The joke punch-line is "this is momoa", and momoa sounds like "my mower." If there is just text or just an image, it is hard to understand the message behind it. With this nature, memes can provide students with a richer and memorable context than text alone.

Second, the appealing and often humorous nature of memes creates a positive affective climate, which is crucial for language learning success. Memes reduce anxiety and increase enjoyment, encouraging active participation (Amanda et al., 2024; Dian Purnama et al., 2017; Kayali & Altuntas, 2021; Pranoto & Suprayogi, 2021) and humor enhances motivation, strengthens attention, and makes difficult concepts easier to understand (Aedo & Millafilo, 2022; Altukruni, 2022). The interactive nature of memes encourages active participation in online communities, where students engage in discussions, create and modify their variations, and ultimately enhance their vocabulary development. In line with (Trowler, 2010), many studies have established a strong correlation between student engagement in engaging activities and positive student success and growth. Therefore, engaging with internet memes can provide a more immersive and natural learning environment, allowing learners to better understand how informal language is used. Humor also improves students' performance by reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, and sustaining attention (Savage et al., 2017).
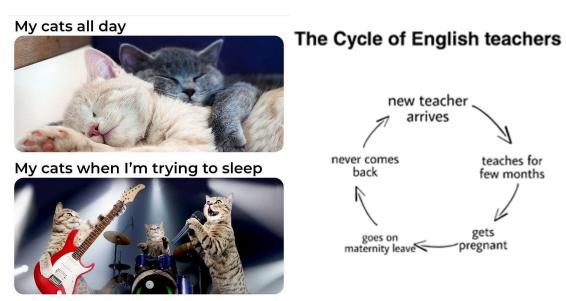

Image 2. Internet memes taken from Reddit

Third, memes provide examples of authentic language embedded in popular culture, including slang and idiomatic expressions, which are often overlooked by textbooks. Smith (2023) introduced the term "idiomemes" to describe meme-based idiomatic expressions that enhance understanding by linking linguistic and cultural competence. Syaifudin (2024) noted that interacting with memes deepens students' symbolic and pragmatic competence, bridging classroom learning with real-world language use. Memes are rooted in popular culture. With this authenticity, meme makes the learning materials for university students more relatable and engaging. Exposing them to how language is used in a real-world context. Informal language and slang understanding are important in present-day communication. The nature of memes can be a fun way to introduce and encourage students to explore language diversity and current communication styles. Smith (2021, as cited in Syaifudin, 2024), by engaging in this humorous and popular cultural phenomenon found in the real world, students have the opportunity to develop their linguistic and symbolic competence through the process of analyzing and even creating their own memes.

Image 3. Internet memes taken from Reddit

Fourth, due to viral spread on social media, memes provide students with repeated opportunities to interact with new vocabulary in various contexts, facilitating spaced repetition, a key principle for retention. Kayali & Altuntas (2021) support this, showing that quizzes and feedback combined with memes improve vocabulary recall. Syaifudin (2024) highlights the value of the comment section and social interaction that accompany memes, which encourage students to seek clarification and deepen their understanding. These communication support Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT), it emphasizes the importance of meaningful human interaction in language learning.

The humorous and cultural aspect of internet memes often comes from shared experiences of the internet community, fostering a sense of personal connection. Memes can enhance intrinsic motivation to understand and use the vocabulary.

gierlsquad

when people give me compliments I feel like a vending machine trying to accept a wrinkly dollar and it's just really frustrating for everyone involved

helenasund

I've never related to anything more in my life

Image 4. Internet memes taken from X (formerly Twitter)

Memes are contextualized multimodal social practices that can provide language learners with exposure to meaningful social contexts and semiotic scaffolds for observation and creative expression (Syaifudin, 2024). A lot of internet memes tell a mini-story or expose students to some specific scenarios. To understand memes, students need to understand the context. This contextualization helps students understand the meaning and nuances of the words' usage, going beyond simple definitions.

Image 5. Internet memes taken from 9GAG

Internet memes are shared through online platforms. Therefore, students will face numerous informal words and idioms. Internet memes are frequently shared, and learners may find similar words multiple times, reinforcing their understanding. Their nature facilitates immediate comprehension and makes them suitable for quick and repetitive exposure to new vocabulary, aiding in spaced repetition. This exposure will help students understand how words and phrases are commonly used in daily communication. When students are exposed to slang or unfamiliar vocabulary, they will translate the words, looking them up on through website, and the other way is by checking the comment sections (Syaifudin, 2024).

Finally, the table above also acknowledges some limitations and challenges in using memes for language learning, such as the difficulties learners may face in understanding slang, the rapidly changing nature of memes, and the potential for inappropriate content. Vocabulary development is influenced by many factors, such as school lessons, books, and other media. It is hard to consider that internet memes contribute to learners' advancement alone, since there are other learning sources.

The language used in internet memes may be confusing for learners since memes often use slang, humor, or sarcasm. This will lead the learners to misinterpret and lead to incorrect word usage. Al Rashdi (2021) mentioned that learners have struggled to understand the meaning of internet memes because their implicit messages are complex, requiring both social media experience and familiarity with the target culture. The rapid change in internet memes makes internet memes that are popular today irrelevant tomorrow. Influenced by social and cultural context, it could lead the way in how students interpret them. Students' interpretation skills may vary since everyone has different levels of language skills and internet exposure. Moreover, internet memes can be inconsistent in their quality and accuracy. They might expose grammatical errors, misspellings, or inappropriate language. Because of this, relying solely on internet memes for learning could expose

students to strengthen misunderstanding, and it is better to use internet memes as a supplementary tools (Reddy et al., 2020; Syaifudin, 2024).

Because of memes' simplicity, this can limit internet memes' effectiveness for comprehensive vocabulary learning, as they may not offer proper words or detailed explanations. Additionally, sometimes memes that are roaming around the internet may inherit cultural biases, and the lack of context may pose a challenge for students (Syaifudin, 2024). These are challenges of achieving educational goals with humorous materials, such as ethical concerns like potentially offending social groups, and the risk of internet memes being misused as a mere entertainment rather than effective learning sources (Antón-Sancho et al., 2022). Not all memes are appropriate for academic use.

Discussion

RQ: how this digital medium (internet memes) contributes to language development, specifically vocabulary proficiency?

Based on the conceptual analysis, review, and synthesis of existing research findings, the use of internet memes supports vocabulary development among EFL university students as follows:

Internet memes combine text and images in an integrated manner, presenting vocabulary in a context-rich format. This multimodal input helps learners understand meaning through visual cues alongside textual elements, facilitating deeper semantic processing. For example, students exposed to memes involving idiomatic expressions or slang can connect the vocabulary with the accompanying images or scenarios, which strengthens memory retention and understanding. This aligns with Bisson et al. (2015) and Cárcamo et al. (2016) cognitive theory suggesting that multimodal input enhances language learning effectiveness.

Moreover, internet memes often use humor, pop culture references, and situations that learners can relate to, which emotionally engage them. This reduces anxiety and increases enjoyment, creating a positive learning environment where students are more willing to explore and internalize new vocabulary. The entertaining nature of memes encourages repeated exposure, active participation, and social interaction (such as commenting or sharing), which further enhances vocabulary acquisition. These affective benefits support Krashen's affective filter hypothesis by reducing emotional barriers in the learning process.

Another considerable point of using internet memes is that they expose learners to informal vocabulary, including slang, idioms, and internet-specific language that is often not found in traditional textbooks. This authenticity helps learners understand how vocabulary is used naturally in everyday communication. Interacting with memes allows students to develop pragmatic and cultural competence, understanding the nuances of meaning and usage that are essential for fluency in informal contexts. Memes are widely spread on social media, causing users to frequently encounter the same words in various contexts. This frequent and regular exposure is in line with the principles of vocabulary learning, such as repetition and context variation, which support long-term retention. Additionally, the social aspect encourages learners to interact with content and engage in discussions with fellow learners, further supporting vocabulary understanding through meaningful communicative activities.

Furthermore, by employing fun and engaging activities such as meme analysis, meme creation, and translation encourage learners to actively interact with vocabulary rather than just passively receiving it. By interpreting jokes, cultural references, and wordplay, students deepen their semantic and pragmatic understanding. Creating memes using new vocabulary also facilitates productive skills and reinforces vocabulary mastery through creative use. This interactive process aligns with Vygotsky's emphasis on collaborative and meaningful learning within a socio-cultural context.

However, the informal nature of memes poses challenges, including confusion in language use, cultural uniqueness, and potential inaccuracy of content. Therefore, careful selection and teacher guidance are essential to maximize educational value and minimize misunderstanding.

There are some points for reflection and discussion is that, to test the effectiveness of the utilization of internet memes as a pedagogical tool, future research should prioritize empirical studies (both qualitative and quantitative). Controlled experiments would involve measuring retention, vocabulary acquisition, alongside qualitative studies that explore teachers' and students' perceptions. More research is needed to determine the long-term impact of meme-based vocabulary retention over extended periods. Knowing the fact that the massive growth of the internet and the internet memes' evolving speed.

Educators need training on how to use internet memes effectively and responsibly, incorporating meme-based activities, and developing effective teaching programs. Additionally, the educators can conduct a workshop on how to use digital tools, especially memes, in their lessons. This included how to choose memes, lead discussions, and handle sensitive topics. Educators must be able to sort out which internet memes are suitable for teaching and learning activities. Because memes that are widespread on the internet sometimes, or maybe even many, use words or sentences that are inappropriate and even contain elements of racism or other ethical issues. Therefore, educators should carefully select memes that are culturally appropriate, relevant to the curriculum, and contain the target vocabulary or provide a context for inferring it. That is the reason why the educators should develop or use curated libraries of safe and educationally valuable internet memes. Furthermore, examining how cultural differences can affect the interpretation and pedagogical effectiveness of memes in various EFL settings is necessary. More than just a humor or cultural phenomenon, memes are also a powerful tool for conveying messages, including in information warfare, propaganda, and advertising. Memes uniquely enable the expression of taboo emotions and are effective in building communities.

Using internet memes as an alternative to assessments, such as vocabulary notes and creative projects. Perhaps, educators can develop it again in the future so that internet memes can be used optimally, more variably, and innovative. Educators can also take advantage of the internet of memes by developing many teaching materials and specific guidelines for using memes to teach words. These guides should provide clear rules for choosing good memes and planning activities. Educators can encourage students to create their own memes using new vocabulary. This is a very active and creative way for them to practice and remember words. Moreover, while doing teaching and learning activities, students may find some internet memes difficult to understand due to cultural or social media contexts; educators can help students discuss and scrutinize the hidden meanings. This will turn challenges into opportunities to learn more about language and culture.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the pedagogical potential of internet memes, arguing that their multimodality, humor, engaging, and relevancy can effectively develop EFL students' vocabulary acquisition and retention.

Internet memes are not only digital artefacts that share cultural development or humorous content, but they also have the potential as a powerful pedagogical tool. The researcher also speculates that internet memes' multimodality, which engages both textual and visual processing, leads to richer memory traces for new vocabulary items. Internet memes' sense of humor can reduce anxiety, increase students' engagement, and create a positive emotional association with learning; by doing so, internet memes can deepen and improve recall. Internet memes expose students to a variety of vocabulary types, including idiomatic expressions, slang, abbreviations, and culturally relevant terminology, unlike learning from a decontextualized word list. The participatory nature of meme culture allows students to not only consume but also create and share language content. This active engagement promotes students' autonomy, creativity, and digital literacy. If integrated well, memes can transform vocabulary teaching into a dynamic and culturally responsive practice. Additionally, when students struggle to understand a meme because it lacks context, this can be turned into a valuable learning moment. By guiding them to discuss the meme and discover its meaning, they will gain new words and a deeper understanding of the culture.

The contribution that this discussion lies in offering a chance on how digital media can offer rather than just as a mere entertainment, but internet memes are beyond that. This paper provides educators to move beyond traditional methods and embrace a strategy that aligns with digital literacy and the current cultural interests of university students. This significance goes beyond just making learning "fun"; it speaks to the need to develop multimodal literacy and prepare students to communicate effectively in a world where visual and textual information are linked.

In summary, the theoretical and practical evidence synthesized in this study confirms that internet memes have significant pedagogical potential in improving English vocabulary acquisition as a foreign language (EFL). In line with the principles of multimodal learning and socio-cultural interaction theory, memes provide a rich, authentic, and engaging context for vocabulary learning. However, careful implementation and additional clarification are essential given the inherent challenges and limitations of meme-based materials. Future research can build on this conceptual

foundation through empirical investigations to further validate the effectiveness of memes in various contexts of English as a foreign language learning.

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