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**Memes and News Headlines: The Solution to Filipino’s Reading Comprehension or the Factors to the problem?**

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**Chapter I**

**Introduction**

Among 79 participating countries and economies, the Philippines scored the lowest in reading comprehension in the 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This is alarming as “Reading proficiency is essential for a wide variety of human activities - from following instructions in a manual; to finding out the who, what, when, where, and why of an event; to communicating with others for a specific purpose or transaction,” the summary of the PISA 2018 results reads. To comprehend a text, one must read. Throughout the history of mass communication, researchers have studied the impact of media on academic achievement. Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger, and Wright (2001, p. 1 as cited in Lin, et.al., 2011) noted that a new medium is often blamed for “capturing excessive time and interest of youth, for corrupting their values, for wasting time that would otherwise have been spent more constructively.” However, there are several media of teaching and learning available in the formal, non-formal, and informal types of education (Akram and Kumar, 2017)). The media introduces students to a new world inquiry approach rather than relying solely on textbooks and teachers for information (Akram and Kumar, 2017). Memes and news headlines have become the main determinant of this study as 1) in our modern media environment characterized by participatory media culture, memes have become a tool for citizens seeking to participate actively and discursively in a digital public sphere, and 2) in the height of the political season in the Philippines, headlines of newspaper articles on the internet have also become the subject of Filipino’s topic in discourse. These two create a considerable amount of noise on the internet. Memes prevail as it is a media that is easily “circulated, imitated, and transformed by individual Internet users, creating a shared cultural experience in the process” (Shifman, 2013: 367 as cited in Seiffert-Brockmann, et.al. 2017). Meanwhile, short forms like news headlines also stand out on social media as they are usually presented in a click-baiting format.

There are studies that use media, particularly memes, as a means to let students learn effectively or think critically in a classroom. For instance, Hartman, et.al. (2021) have found that students often make meaning of texts by connecting them to other texts from the popular culture they know and value. Research has shown that artistic response helps students form meaningful relationships with texts, thus, the study developed and implemented an artistic response strategy called the Perspective Meme activity as a way for students to explore character development through artistic response. The perspective meme strategy can benefit students by giving them an entry point into the text and enabling them to look more closely at how different perspectives might add to, contradict, or challenge each other. The strategy also pushes students to consider their own perspectives and how they experience the text. In addition, the strategy teaches students the value of activating and utilizing their prior knowledge to help them transact with and comprehend the text, and it can help them retain what they have read.

Beucher, et.al., (2020) analyzes students’ spoken and multimodal responses to a curriculum that purposefully foregrounded Native perspectives and digital media. The participants demonstrated nuanced understandings of rhetoric, argumentation, and multimodal redesign. Students found an avenue to critically analyze and remix media imagery (i.e. memes) relating to social contemporary and connected issues. By providing media texts showing multiple perspectives, students were invited to arrive at their own conclusions. Rather than being explicitly taught to critique (con)texts, Campano et al. (2013, as cited in Beucher, et.al., 2020) take an organic view of critical literacy, explaining that critical consciousness is activated when students “are afforded the curricular space to mobilize cultural and epistemic resources in their transactions with texts and with their worlds”.

Another study performed two experiments that attempted to analyze the effects of newspaper article headlines and summaries on final comprehension and recall (Leon, 1997). The study began with the aim of comparing two headlines and two initial summaries from the same article in terms of their influence on the comprehension and retention of the information read by the chosen subjects. According to the results obtained, the modified version brought about an improvement in the comprehension and retention of the news article. On the other hand, the headline and the summary of the original version did not produce the desired effect. The second experiment complements the first in the sense that it offers a possible explanation for the absence of significant differences among the conditions presented in the first. In general, the accessibility of a text depends heavily on the degree to which certain statements are integrated into the other contents. The study confirmed that the aims and criteria of journalists differ from those held by the authors of scientific texts and question whether the reading strategies applied are the same in both cases. The study then argues that, as journalists do not necessarily apply macrostructural criteria, what, then is the role of the headline and the summary in newspaper articles? The headline and the summary allow the reader to take in the most prominent information while scanning the article. Once the reader has ascertained the main ideas present in the article, the reading and comprehension of the article will become easier because he will not have to build the macrostructure himself.

With how the studies above investigate the benefits—or the lack thereof—of integrating memes in classroom learning and how some analyze the effects of news headlines on final comprehension, they do not seek the implications of memes and news headlines on reading comprehension as the main interest of the study. Implications here mean do memes and news headlines worsen the Philippine's reading comprehension level or can we use it as a means to help Filipinos know how to comprehend texts. Research of this nature has little to no evidence from the existing literature, hence, there is a need to fill this gap in specifically identifying how Filipino netizen’s interact or respond to memes and news headlines.

The purpose of this study is to examine how Filipino netizens on Facebook and Twitter respond, react, or interact with memes and news headlines and use that to analyze their reading comprehension. At this stage in the research, reading comprehension ability will be generally defined as a complex intellectual process involving a number of abilities. To reach this research’s goal, this research will be built on Rosenblatt’s framework (reader response theory) by using it to measure the ways netizens interact with memes and news headlines. The central component of reader response involves giving readers opportunities to make meaningful, authentic connections with the texts they are reading. Reader response theory is typically used in a classroom setting where teachers become facilitators rather than lecturers, and students actively engage with texts as they transform the texts’ words into meaningful connections to their personal lives. Such strategies hold students accountable for their train of thought. As students make connections to pieces of literature based on their prior knowledge and personal experiences, they inevitably begin to think critically about what they are reading. Because a reader-response approach requires readers to justify their interpretations of a literary piece with textual evidence, readers are challenged to explain which aspects of a text led them to derive their personal responses. Similarly, this paper will use reader response with the way netizens interact with memes and news headlines; they will be measured by their public comments as the response, the way teachers measure student’s response to literary texts.

**Chapter II**

**Literature Review**

Hartman et. al., (2021) proposes that artistic response strategies can facilitate meaning-making at the evocative dimension of response and lead to deeper responses in the cognitive and reflective dimensions. As English Language Arts teachers, they have found that students often make meaning of texts by connecting them to other texts from the popular culture they know and value. For instance, their students frequently referred to current memes in order to draw parallels with what we were studying. The researchers created the Perspective Meme activity as a way for students to explore character development through artistic response. In general, memes can be useful tools in the classroom when used strategically. A meme’s simplicity in form can make it more accessible for students than a traditional essay or composition, which often requires students to consider elements such as organization, mechanics, grammar, flow, and style. Furthermore, because most students are familiar with memes, the perspective meme strategy can help activate background knowledge by allowing students to apply a familiar means of interacting with information to a text.

Kayali (2021) conducted an experiment wherein they seek to facilitate the language learning process by incorporating images, vocabulary items, and written text, namely *memes*. Memes were used for vocabulary revision. To see its effect on vocabulary recall, a quiz was conducted before and after the experiment. The result showed that the use of memes affected the vocabulary recall of the Medicine students who study at the College of Foreign Languages positively. Using memes in vocabulary revision activities promotes the students’ proficiency level; the students scored higher in the post-test. Secondly, the students became more interested in the activity through images. Therefore, the study concluded that memes could be used as one of the strategies to create an innovative learning and teaching process.

There is a study (Purnama, 2017) that seeks an opportunity to gain a wider yet meaningful engagement of technology and language learning, especially by incorporating images, written text, and specialized topics into a social media application posting (memes and Instagram). The result, as it is expected, students prefer this kind of activity better than previous activities they have encountered inside the classroom. There are advantages in utilizing memes in order to be creative and innovative in language teaching, one of which is that memes creation proposes an eye-catching learning process that will be easily adopted by students. However, in spite of the results presented, further observation and research will be needed to see whether creating memes has a significant contribution to students’ proficiency level of English.

Procházka (2014) examined the recently emerged multimodal artefacts commonly known as Internet memes in the light of the new literacies that are rapidly emerging in the digital age. They demonstrated how the influence of Netspeak pushes the textual elements of certain memes to the edge of legibility, let alone comprehensibility. In other words, the ability to produce, decipher, understand and enjoy most of the Internet memes requires new skills, strategies, dispositions, and social practices–this corresponds with the first assumption of the study (cognitive and social competence). In addition to visual and textual features, this paper also reviews some concepts of distribution and classification of Internet memes that point to their highly contagious, varied and unstable character as a result of the virtually unlimited means of creating and altering them by a virtually unlimited number of people. This confirms the second assumption, since Internet memes enjoy global collaboration. The paper concludes that Internet memes do indeed fit the theoretical framework of the new literacies outlined in the paper’s introduction, even though this paper illustrates only their most distinctive features.

A study (Ahmmed, 2016) investigated how reading English newspapers improves vocabulary and reading skills of Students of Dhaka University. A list of twenty words from “The Daily Star” on 21 November 2015 was provided to test how much vocabulary participants have learnt by reading English newspapers. On the basis of questionnaire and vocabulary list, the study focuses on the effectiveness of English Newspapers in improving vocabulary and reading skills. The study indicates that students‟ vocabulary and reading skills are gradually improving. Although the study focuses on the news article itself and not only just the headlines to improve their reading skills, the study also highlighted that by reading the headlines, the participants were able to display reading skills.

Another study (Che, 2014) tested whether schemas influence one’s reading comprehension of English newspapers. The result shows that the teaching method of schema activation played a great role in promoting the students’ reading comprehension, which is mainly reflected in the following aspects: (1) The schema method can help the students form or activate the schemas about the reading texts in a short time and improve their reading comprehension and thus arouse the interest of the students in the texts, which, before the formation of the schemas or activation of the schemas, might be the fields the students know nothing about or have no interest in. (2) By comparing the experiment results of the two groups, it can be found that the main reason for the difference of the experiment results is the lack of schemas of the text, or in another word, the lack of the background information of the text.

**Chapter III**

**Methodology**

The study will use corpus-based analysis to investigate the implications of memes and news headlines to Filipino’s reading comprehension. In this method, the data will be collected from a corpus of 50 public comments under 5 different meme original posts from Facebook, and 50 public replies under 5 different News Headlines posted on Twitter. The study deemed it necessary that a qualitative analysis is appropriate to analyze how Filipinos respond to memes and news headlines and how to determine if it’s going to be the solution or not to Filipino’s reading comprehension.

The data will be manually analyzed aided by spreadsheets. For memes, to measure if the commenter grasped what the memes originally convey, the researcher will seek out the original poster of the meme to ask about the meme and its explanation. It will be ten comments per meme. For news headlines, the researcher will summarize each respective news article and analyze the replies collected if they match or not. It will be ten replies per news headline.

Table 1: Memes

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Meme1 | What the meme trying to convey (from the original poster) |
| comment1 | Did the comment grasp what the meme is trying to convey? (did they respond positively/negatively like they supposed to? etc.) |
| comment2 |  |

Table 2: News Headlines

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| News Headline1 | Summary of the news article |
| reply1 | Did the reply convey that they understood the headline by reading the entire news article? |
| reply2 | D |

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