Beyond Laughter:

The Affective Benefits and Instructional Challenges of Integrating Memes in EFL Instruction

Nafilah M. Aloairdhi

PhD Candidate in Applied Linguistics, Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (IMSIU), Saudi Arabia

1 Why this study?

- Memes are part of students' everyday digital language.
- Research links memes to **lower anxiety, motivation** and **vocabulary** gains.
- **Gap:** Saudi meme research focuses on politics, culture and marketing, not EFL teaching.

2 Research questions

RQ1 Do memes enhance language learning?

RQ2 How do memes shape the classroom environment?

RQ3 Do memes motivate learners?

RQ4 What challenges do instructors face?

+ instructors' own recommendations

3 Framework

Teacher cognition (Borg, 2003, 2006)

Beliefs

↓

Contextual factors

↓

Practice

Lens: multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996): are students meme **consumers** or **creators**?

4 Method

Mixed methods

Descriptive statistics + thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

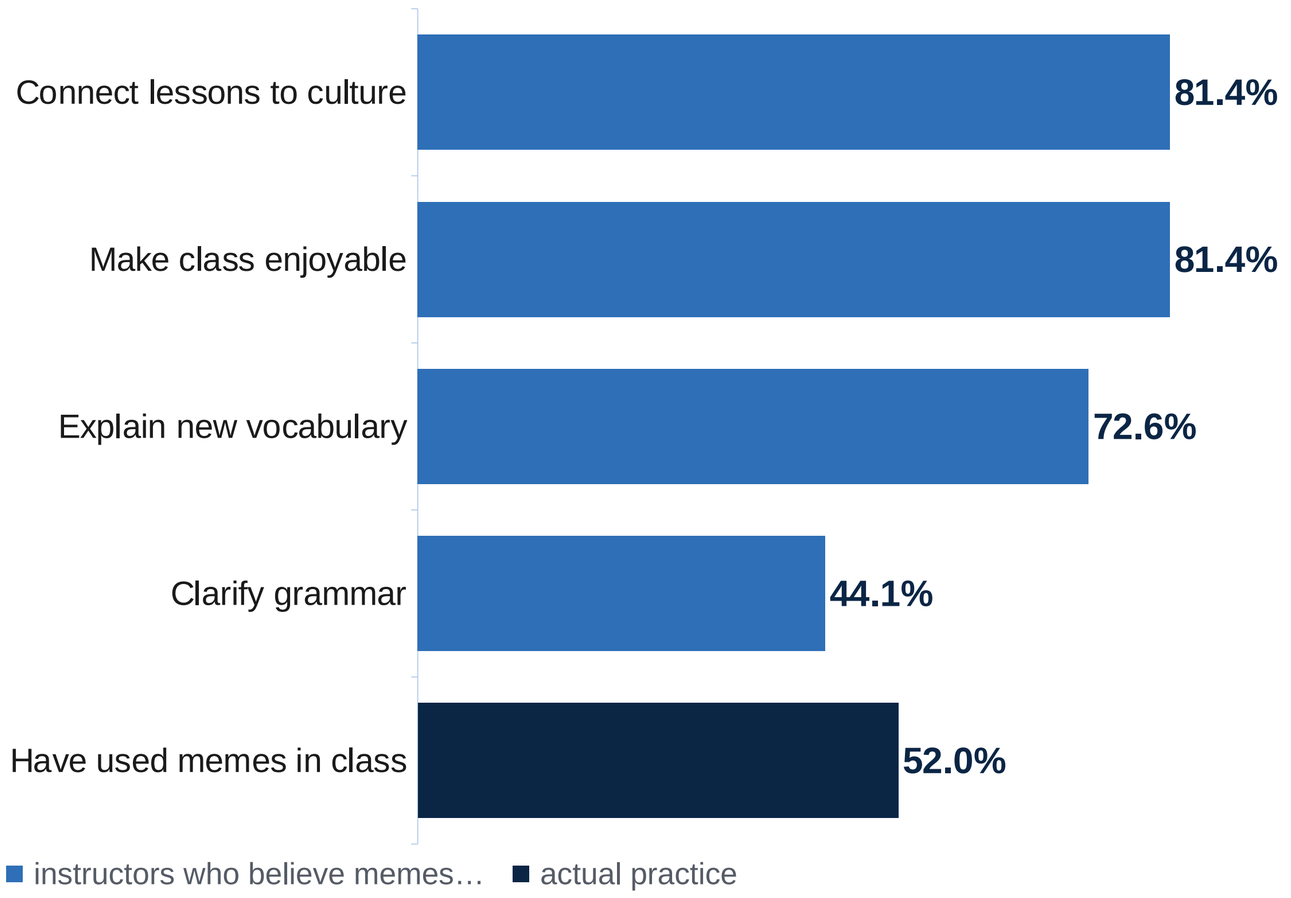
102 EFL instructors

22 Saudi universities

27 + 3 Likert + open items

α = .91 reliability

5 Findings: a belief–practice gap



Only **11.7%** of users let students create memes: mostly **consumers**, rarely creators.

Contextual factors behind the gap

71.6% preparing memes takes too long

68.6% fear inappropriate content

47% lack training

"Meme usage changes rapidly and the age gap is real."
— participant

6 Recommendations

- Use memes as a supplement: warm-ups, discussion, vocabulary
- Build a shared meme bank
- Align memes with lesson objectives
- Invite students to create memes

7 Implications

- Professional development in digital literacy
- Institutional support to save preparation time
- Clear guidance on culturally appropriate content

Key references

Borg, S. (2003). Language Teaching, 36(2), 81–109.

Borg, S. (2006). Teacher cognition and language education. Continuum.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3(2), 77–101.

New London Group. (1996). Harvard Educational Review, 66(1), 60–92.

Contact: nafela.alowerdi@gmail.com