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UTILIZING MEMES TO PROMOTE STUDENTS' MOTIVATION IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Keywords

Memes creation, Gadget utilization, Motivation values, Student's performance, Teaching strategy **Abstract** Keeping students' motivation to learn L2 is a challenging activity in teaching and learning process. Teachers are expected to perform their job dutifully by engaging students into attractive learning activities. At the same time, they are also contested with students' characteristics diversity. The utilization of memes is a proposed teaching strategy to minimize the gap between students' traits, technology rapid development, and the constant need of renewing effort to enhance students' performance. Seeking an opportunity of integrating between various mobile application, gadgets as well as internet access, memes creation may be considered as a breakthrough in educational field. The result of this study shows students' positive responses in creating memes activity. Most of the EFL students' responses stated that the activity is interesting therefore it is able to boost their motivation. The activity covers up three essential motivation values for learning an L2; intrinsic value, integrative value, and instrumental value.

INTRODUCTION

To really comprehend the development of youth nowadays; as they are commonly understood and perceived as a generation of digital world and technology; teaching and learning process constitutes a higher demand of understanding. To get into the most enunciated phrases of 'lifelong learning'; an educator must do their best to figure out the most suitable teaching strategy. It should apt learners' characteristics as well as current life events and progress (Andrew & smith, 2011; Astuti, 2016; Blattner & Fiori, 2011; Dolean, 2015, Grewal & Harris, 2009; Hattem, 2014; Kavaliauskiené & Ashkinazi, 2014; Lomicka, & Lord, 2012; Lomicka, & Lord, 2016; Tuned-Awe, 2015).

In recent years, an unarguable truth speaks that, more or less, our life digs deeper its claws on digital technology. Education field, moreover, heavily relies its massive source and distribution of any current update or research results via Internet. Digital tools mobilize people (in a sense of collaboration projects or information exchanges) efficiently and effectively. We (educators), as well as our students, receive, process and (re)distribute any information of what we have been previously perceived by utilizing digital technology touch. "Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach" Prensky (2001a: 1). In the other words, our students right now are representing totally different community.

Standing as a particular entity, our students should be apprehended as a unity of mixed composition of human race development and technology advances; "...today's students think and process information fundamentally different from their predecessors" Prensky (2001a: 1). That somehow, it affects the way of the students to learn something. Therefore, teachers in language classroom are facing a new challenge in understanding their students and creating appropriate teaching instruction for them, the Digital Natives. "Our students today are all "native speakers" of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" Prensky (2001a: 1), has said. It is due to the occurrence that almost all of them are spending their time mostly 'speaking' digital words. This kind of behavior is strongly indicated by the massive use of computers, Internet, and video games. On the contrary, the opposite generation of Digital Natives, the Digital Immigrants (the teachers) are slower in adapting yet adopting any technological update.

"Digital Immigrants learn – like all immigrants, some better than others – to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their "accent," that is, their foot in the past. The "digital immigrant accent" can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for

information second rather than first, or in reading the manual for a program rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us to use it." Prensky (2001a: 2)

Although, the Digital Immigrants are less competent than Digital Natives in utilizing technology, they contribute a significant part in shaping Digital Natives way of learning. Being in a constant comparison, Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants existences are yielding a substantial issue that every educators and students need to be aware of. The Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants are having different thinking pattern in such a way of retrieving and processing information. Let's understand this through close observation of both types of Digital tribes from their characteristics.

Digital Natives are accustomed to receive information really fast. They tend to do parallel process and multi-tasking. They can switch easily between one activity to another activity without being 'stuttered'. For example, they can share web link, make an Instagram post as well as editing their picture at the same time. Random access to multiple activities captivate Digital Natives' attention more, especially when they are networked or connected to the internet. That is the moment when they could exhilarate their performance better. Due to their notoriety of having limited span of attention and addiction to Internet connection, these students prefer their graphics before their text rather than text before graphic. Striving for instant gratification and flooding rewards, the Digital Natives prefer a joyful activity which is considered to be 'fun' and 'less serious' activity for most of Digital Immigrants. On the contrary, the Digital Immigrants tend "to learn slowly, step by-step, one thing at a time, individually, and above all, seriously" (Prensky, 2001a: 2; Cornu, 2011; Watkins, 2009).

Considering the importance of understanding Digital Natives as main composure of teaching and learning process, Dingli and Seychell (2015: 9) redeem Prensky's ideas into a simplified explanation.

"Digital natives are today's young people who were born into the digital era and are growing up exposed to the continuous flow of digital information. Digital natives are a generation or population growing up in the environment surrounded by digital technologies and for whom computers and the Internet are natural components of their lives." (2015: 9)

To sum up the discussion about Digital Natives, here are their listed traits:

- a. Digital Natives base their action and thought in 'here' and 'now' (what's current, what's commonly discussed, and what's popular)
- b. Most of them are information seekers. Information a day, keeps popularity stay. It is part of Digital Natives chanted charm as they constantly seek for rewards.

- c. Update is a must. Current issue holds a prominent position in their life which is signified best through fast access of internet.
- d. Mobile applications, gadget, and internet access are Digital Natives powerful vehicles to gain their needs.
- e. To stay connected and keep in touch, time and space are transformed into the availability of Internet access, smartphones and mobile platforms/applications.

The following questions may highlight a better understanding about the difference between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants:

- a. Does internet serve as first place for you to get information
- b. Does internet connection bind your 'existence' on constant connection?
- c. Will you be fine without gadget and internet connection?

Gadgets and internet are the primary needs of Digital Natives. They prefer to be self-sufficient to get information by utilizing Internet connection. Self-solving problem may be considered as ultimate achievement when it is performed successfully without any other person's assistance.

MEMES

The basic explanation about meme is something which is being transferred from one person to another person. This particular something can take diverse kind of forms: idea, instruction, behavior, or a fragment of information, Blackmore (1999: 4). The word meme is coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book, The Selfish Gene, as an attempt to explain the way cultural information spreads (Shifman, 2014). "The examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches" (Dawkins, 2006: 192). This small unit of culture spread from person to person by copying or imitation method.

When a concept or an idea is distributed to another person, we can say, a meme is being spread. Once this meme is perceived and received an approval, shared, and propagated for several times; the established concept of meme may or may not available. Why does such thing happen? It is because memes have its own life and power once it is being dispersed. "Memes spread themselves around indiscriminately without regard to whether they are useful, neutral, or positively harmful to us." It can be said that memes do not differentiate nor sort any information it has kept inside. Its job is only multiplying itself as many as possible, no matter how insignificant it may be. Thus, regarding its pace of spread-ability, a meme could

be taken into account also as a virus of mind (Broodie, 2009). In figure 1, below, we can see things which are counted as memes and complexes of memes.



Figure 1. Memes Subcategorization (Blackmore, 2000: 66)

Originated as an idea, meme has been widely spread via social network, blog or email in the form of image, video, hashtag, songs, and many others due to rapid advances of internet. Later on, the interaction between memes and internet creates a new version of memes; internet memes. What are internet memes? Internet memes are a subset of this general meme concept which reinforces to fit in to the culture and environment of the internet. The concept of the internet meme is first proposed by Mike Godwin in June 1993. Later on, in 2013, Dawkins characterizes an internet meme as a meme which is being deliberately altered by human creativity. Memes provide a powerful new way to combine few things such as, creativity, art, message, and humor in the internet culture (Kariko, 2012).

In educational field, memes are not something uncommon. As cited in Kariko (2012), Scott Stillar, an English teacher at the University of Tsukuba in Japan, thinks that one type of internet memes, the Rage comics, is one of great ways to teach the English language. Rage comics are cartoons using an ever-growing set of internet memes. They consist of well-known faces and expressions—anger, shock, defeat, surprise, pleasure, success, or horror, which therefore mean to show universal feelings or emotions of varying degrees under a variety of conditions. Rage comics are used as vehicles for sharing experiences with humor. Kariko's (2012) study examines how students use their creativity in employing these memes.

Kariko's study discusses Internet memes found by internet users and how it appeals for them, by deconstructing what internet meme is and what it does. Analysis is conducted especially on how the relation between images, text, and meanings connect with each other to form social messages, political messages, universal emotions, or merely to make humor and entertainment for its users. Kariko examines five samples of internet memes taken from the internet and decodes their relation between images, texts, and meanings using semiotics. These samples are then introduced as writing assignments to: a) two BINUS University's English department classes, and b) one Global English Class. The study reveals that humor and creativity in using internet memes are related to the students' achievement in their studies.

MOTIVATION VALUES

Motivation is an important aspect to determine the learners' success and/or failure. Dornyei (2001) claims, which is based on his personal experience, that 99 per cent of language learners who really want to learn a foreign language or who are really motivated will be able to master the language better, regardless of their language aptitude. It shows that motivation affects the learners' achievement in learning. Williams and Burden (1997) as cited in Dornyei (2001) mentioned that there are two types of factor which influence the students' motivation to fluctuate. They are internal motivation and also external motivation.

Internal motivation takes place when the motivation comes from the students itself, such as intrinsic interest of activity. While external factors are affected by various matters outside the students or from the students' surrounding such as parents, teachers, peers, and the nature of relationship with those significant others; such as getting rewards or punishment from them. Furthermore, it is also related to the learning environment, whether it is comfortable for the students or not. As the external factor, the teacher role in the language classroom may help the students to be motivated. Dornyei (2001) stated that motivating someone to do something can be done by involving many different things: from trying to persuade a person directly to exerting indirect influence on the students by arranging the conditions or circumstances in such a way that the person like.

Building motivation can be carried out by making the learning and teaching process meaningful for the students. Motivating L2 learners can be achieved by promoting positive language-related values and attitudes. According to Dornyei (2001), there are three kinds of value dimension of motivation. They are intrinsic value, integrative value, and instrumental value. The intrinsic value of L2 learning is associated with the learners' interest and enjoyment of language learning activity. The important point to generate this interest is to arouse students' curiosity and attention. The teacher should create attractive activities and enjoyable tasks in the classroom, such as by employing computer-assisted language learning (CALL) which most students, our Digital Natives students have been already interested in.

The second one is integrative value. It is about individual's willingness and interest in social interaction with members of other groups where the language is used. The students are supposed to have positive attitude towards everything where the second language is associated with: its culture and its speakers. Promoting integrative values is important due to the urgent necessity to be able to communicate harmoniously with members of different cultures. Intercultural communicative competence should be promoted in language classroom by raising cross-cultural awareness. Learners should be familiar with interesting/relevant aspects of second language culture such as focusing on cross-cultural similarities and differences. Teacher can bring various cultural products (e.g. magazines, music, TV recordings, videos) and as well as authentic materials to class.

The last dimension is instrumental values. Instrumental values are related to the practical, pragmatic benefits of mastering second language; for example, earning extra money, getting a promotion, pursuing further studies where performing second language ability is a requirement, pursuing hobbies and other leisure activities which require the language (e.g. computing). Instrumental strategies offer the simplest method of addressing the value aspect of motivation. We can simply relate the successful completion of the assigned tasks to consequences that our students will probably encountered. Teacher may develop an association between second language proficiency and desirable students' outcomes.

One way in increasing students' motivation is by varying the activities, tasks, and material which are out of classroom routines and based on student's characteristics (Lightbown & Spada: 2001). Digital Natives' students who accustomed with technology will prefer the learning activities, tasks, and material which are technology based. Therefore, the utilization of memes as teaching strategy in teaching and learning process is chosen to increase their motivation.

The higher students' motivation in learning the target language, the wider the filter of internal process will be opened. So, students will receive a great amount of language input via teacher's teaching process. Here, Filter is the first internal process which covers which target language models the learner will choose; which parts of language that come first; the learning strategy and the speed of acquiring the language (Dulay, et al: 1982).

METHOD

1. Participants

There were 50 EFL students who participated in this study. They were considered as students of beginner level of tertiary students. In the process of creating memes, they

were divided into several groups. Each group consisted of 2 or 3 students. The students were required to make 2 memes based on the topic given by the lecturer. In this study, one of the researchers acted as their lecturer and other researchers were as the classroom practice observers.

Table I. Participant Information

	Male	Female
Number of participants	26	21
Age (range)	20 - 21 years old	19-21 years old
Length of English	6-12 years	6-12 years
exposure		

2. Research Instruments

The instruments used in this study were observation and email interview. The observation was utilized during classroom practices. This study employed complete observant in the process of observation. As stated by Fraenkel, et.al (2012) that the role of complete observer was just paying attention on the activities of a group without taking any way of participating in those activities. The subjects of the researcher's observations may, or may not, realize they were being observed. The researchers who acted as observers did not participate in the activity being observed but rather "sit on the sidelines" and watched. The observation focused on how students' engagement in classroom activities took place. Fraenkel, et.al (2012: 447) proposed several approaches in doing observation. The approach used in the observation was by giving no explanation to any of the participants and using broad focus observation. In broad focus observation, there was holistic view of the activity or characteristic being observed and all of its elements sought.

The interview was used in the end of the study as a tool in exploring students' impression during classroom activities. The interview which was employed in this study took place as an important way for a researcher to check the accuracy of or to verify or refute the impressions that the researchers have gained through observation (Fraenkel, et.al., 2012). The type of interview which was employed in this study was open-ended interview. The open-ended interview had the characteristic that all interviewees were

asked the same basic questions in the same order. The worded or the question was in a completely open-ended format. The type of the question given was opinion questions. It aimed at finding out the students' opinion about the implementation of memes in their classroom. The students should answer to such question which called out attention to the respondent's attitudes of the use of memes.

3. Procedures

- a. In the beginning of classroom activities, the lecturer as well as the researcher gave certain topic of lesson.
- b. The lecturer introduced what was meme, its form, and how to create it. The lecturer gave specific rules in creating memes. The memes' contents should not include racism, bullying issue and bad words (cursing or swearing words). They should use students' own pictures. The lecturer did not limit the students' working period as long as the memes were in line with the instruction.
- c. As the exercise, the students were given a task to create 2 memes for each group
- d. After they created it, they shared and presented the memes in front of the class. Each group stood in front of the class explaining what they had done and what their memes' creation meaning sense.
- e. In the end of the class the researcher asked the students' impression by interviewing them through email. The lecturer required each of students to write down their impression about how their feeling using memes as learning process as one of classroom activities.

4. Interview Interpretation

There were 31 responses based on the email interview. The students were asked to response into four main responses and explained further why they gave such responses.

Table II. Interview

	Questions	I	F	C	E
1.	How's your impression in creating memes during classroom				
	activities? Why?				
	(You may choose more than one category)				

Explanation:

I (**Interesting**) = If the students think that task is bringing something new, unique, and not boring during classroom activity

F (**Fun**) = If the students think that this task is making them feel happy and increase the joyfulness situation while doing it.

C (**Confident**) = If the students think that this task helps them to increase their knowledge regarding to the materials being discussed.

E (**Easy**) = If the students think that this task is not burdensome, simple, understandable, and flexible

5. Memes Codification

There were 47 memes creation made by the EFL students. All of the written text on memes was coded. These included the *correct*, *almost correct*, and *incorrect* based on the topic given by the lecturer. The researchers tried to tabulate the data on the classification. When the data were coded, it would be benefited in the ease process of grouping the data for the purpose of analysis (Fraenkel, et.al, 2012). On the following session, explanation of the codified elements was briefly explained.

FINDINGS

The findings of this research were in the form of pictures; consisting a number of students' memes and their responses towards memes which were used as an assignment in the classroom. Students were given a task to create meme(s) in relation to the topic being discussed — past tense. Researchers, then, assessed the memes by involving several instructions that had been informed to the students in advance. The memes were supposed to be written as a proof that students have understood the materials — Past Tense.

At the beginning of class activity, students were asked to develop memes by using the appropriate pictures and stating captions in the form of past tense. As most of the students have already been familiar with memes – researchers had asked them in the beginning of this project introduction – they did not seem to have any difficulty in choosing the appropriate pictures to support their memes. Some of them used one single picture, while the others were using the combination of pictures/picture-collage. From this activity, we have collected 47 memes and 43 responses.

The collected memes were classified into three categories based on the correctness of the language use, in this case is in past-tense application. The first category was addressed to accommodate the "correct" memes, which means that the memes have already presented in the correct form of past tense. Next, the second category was addressed to accommodate the "almost correct" memes, which means that the students have shown some indicators of past tense, however they fail to write in the correct form of past tense. The third category belonged to the "incorrect" memes, which means that the students did not succeed to meet the expectation of writing memes using the correct form of past tense.

Based on the above classification, from 47 memes, researchers found 23 memes (49%) classified as "correct", 13 memes (28%) classified as "almost correct", and 11 memes (23%) classified as "incorrect". Thus, researchers could conclude that this task was successfully helping the students to express their ability in applying their knowledge about past tense.

These are the examples for each category:

1. First Category: "correct"

These are the examples of the memes classified as "correct" as they have presented the correct form of past tense.





Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 1 shows two girls almost crying after feeling an unrequited love, with caption "I answered his message in 1 minute but he answered my message in 1 week". This meme has already employed the correct form of past tense, indicated by the use of "answered" as the past form of "answer". Figure 3 shows a girl who stares blankly at wall, with caption "When you stayed up all night did your homework and the teacher said, keep it.". This meme employs more than one grammar form as requested by the lecturer. Students add and additional caption by quoting Justin Bieber's famous song title, "What do you mean" as a continuation statement of preceding caption. Furthermore, this meme also successfully employs the past tense of words: stay (stayed), do (did), say (said).

2. Second Category: "almost correct"

These are the examples of the memes classified as "almost" as they have shown some indicators of past tense although they fail to write past tense sentences in the correct form.



Figure 4 Figure 5

Figure 4 shows a girl and a boy who seemingly having a conversation about their love relationship status. This meme has already employ the correct form of past tense, indicated by the use of "did" and "was" but unfortunately the students over apply the past tense form.

- "What did you thought about our love?"
 The correct form should be "What did you think about our love?"
- "Tried to counted the star in the sky."

 The correct form should be "I tried to count the star in the sky."
- "Awww. It was infinited?"
 The correct form should be, "Awww. Was it infinite?"
- "Nope. It was wasted of time."

The correct form should be, "Nope. It was a waste of time."

Figure 5 shows the failure of using past form as a parallel sentence. The first caption states, "I didn't need you to turn on my notification." It has met the writing criteria of past form. But the second caption is written in present form. Thus, it fails to meet the requirement of past tense topic, "But, I need you to turn on my heart."

3. Third Category: "incorrect"

These are the examples of the memes classified as "incorrect" as they shown that they have failed to meet the expectation to write appropriate memes caption by using the correct form of past tense.

Friendship is fun



althought sometimes crazy together

Figure 6



Figure 7

Figure 6 cannot show any remark of the use of past tense in the caption since it is written in present form instead of past form. Therefore, it is considered that it cannot fulfill the requested expectation of this task. On the other hand, figure 7 lacks of coherence from each written caption thus makes it difficult to understand the meaning.

In order to measure the success of this activity in students' point of view, the following activity was conducted on the subsequent meeting. Researchers were collecting students' responses. Researchers asked participants to write their comments about the task of creating memes. They were allowed to write both in English and Bahasa Indonesia. Researchers believed that the presence of L1 could help to obtain more honest responses from the students. However, many students have successfully written their comments in English, from total number of 43 responses, there was only 29% of responses which was written in Bahasa.

Despite the choice of language used in students' responses, researchers found that almost all students (100%) were pleased by this kind of activity. Since they were requested to give their comments in free form of writing, researchers developed particular classification to simplify the presentation based on students' responses. There were four classifications employed, they were Interesting (I), Fun (F), Confidence-Boosting (C), and Easy (E).

The response was classified as Interesting (I) if the students think that this task is bringing a new, unique and exciting atmosphere into their learning activity. The response was classified as Fun (F) if the students think that this task is making them feel happy and increase joyful condition while they were doing it. The response was classified as Confidence-boosting (C) if the students think that this task help them to increase their knowledge regarding to the materials being discussed. The response was classified as Easy (E) if the students think that this task is not burdensome, simple, and understandable.

There were 30.2% of total responses stated that this task was interesting (I). Students were stating it by saying that this task was new, unique, cool innovation, up-to-date, and not boring. This is the example of the responses for stating Interesting:

We think this task meme is very interesting and not boring, we hope this task be continued next semester

Salit harmawan (184) Andirizki ivani (197)

Figure 8

There were 30.2% of total responses stated that this task is Fun (F). They stated it by saying that this task was making them feel happy, less serious, and get refreshment in the end of teaching and learning session. The following figures are the examples of the responses for stating Fun:

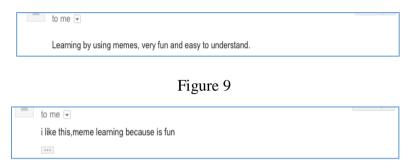


Figure 10

There were 20.9% of total responses stated that this task is Confidence-boosting (C). They stated it by saying that this task is increasing their creativity, give them challenge to write and very helpful. These are the examples of the responses for stating Confidence-boosting:

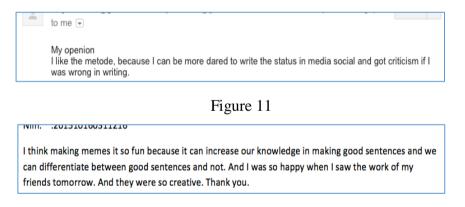


Figure 12

There were 18.6% of total responses stated that this task is Easy (E) to do. They stated it by saying that this task is simple, easy to understand, and can be done everywhere. These are the examples of the responses for Easy statements:

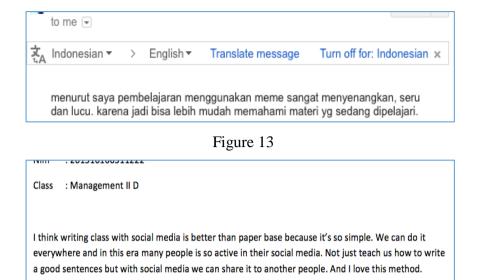


Figure 14

DISCUSSION

Teachers were now facing the new challenge in understanding their students and creating appropriate instruction for them. Involving technology-based task, which was undeniably unseparated from our students who were famously known as "Digital Natives" (Prensky, 2001a), was highly needed. Thus, the researchers presented a new solution that may apt this concept.

Meme was a product of digital world and as a part of community of Digital Natives, students were very much addicted to visual things (Kleinschmit, 2015). Memes creation may retract students' attention which was very limited. Memes embody Digital Natives preferences on graphics before text and not otherwise; text before graphic. Strongly awarded with constant perseverance of instant gratification and flooding rewards, the Digital Natives much arguably preferred a joyful activity. An activity that often times accredited as 'fun' and 'less-serious' activity. They demanded educators to develop a particular learning environment where they could increase their level of performance and boost their motivation as well. This was a great opportunity for teaches or educators to create a relation between second language (L2) proficiency and desired outcomes of students' performance.

In order to be successful in the learning process, motivation should not be neglected. Involving memes in learning activity was the best representation of arranging the learning condition or environment based on students' preferences as stated by Dornyei (2001). Meme embarked the example of authentic materials. It provided the students with meaningful learning material since students were creating their writing masterpiece – memes caption – based on their experience and their real-life habit.

From the three dimensions of motivation (Dornyei, 2001), using memes in learning activity definitely suited them all. Memes was considered as an attractive activity (Interesting: 30.2%) and enjoyable task (Fun: 30.2%) because it employs computer-assisted learning which most students, our Digital Natives, had been already familiarized with. Therefore, it was proven that memes had intrinsic value.

Having previously mentioned in the above paragraphs about authentic materials, memes associated students' willingness and their interest of intercultural communication. Students learned to create memes based on their photo of their daily life and made written caption in English by employing specific form of language rules; past tense. Thus, it could be stated that this activity had the second dimension of motivation; the integrative value.

The last dimension was instrumental dimension. It dealt with the practical and pragmatic benefits of mastering second language. Involving memes as a task in language learning was the instrument to provide students with the opportunity to express their ability and mastery in English. Especially, in this case, was the application of correct past form in written sentences that were used as captions in students' memes.

CONCLUSION

Motivation took an important role in determining success and/or failure in learning. By bridging the students' interest to classroom activity, the researchers believed that it could be a solution for challenging problems currently faced by the teacher. Memes, as a product of digital literacy, were the example of students' interests that undoubtedly tightly attached to student daily life which was mostly occupied by digital life. This was due to the fact that they were the digital natives. Tracking students' interests and adjusting it to learning objectives required by the curriculum as well as involving memes in learning activity were proven to be reliable to promote students' motivation in learning English.

SUGGESTION

For further research, future researcher should seek an opportunity whether this kind of activity is applicable for longer period of teaching and learning process; at any kind of: topics, language skills, and level of students' language proficiency. Future research should also be conducted in small classroom size in order to have in-depth analysis of the utilization of memes. Furthermore, researchers may try to relate memes creation and multi-literacy since the developing process of memes constitutes a higher order of thinking that are best applicable for students with intermediate-advanced level of English proficiency.

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