



Indonesian Journal of Educational Research and Technology

Journal homepage: <http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/IJERT/>



Memetized Learning: How Humor-Infused Stories Can Engage Geography Students in the Digital Age

*Kudzayi Savious Tarisayi**

Stellenbosch University, South Africa

*Correspondence: E-mail: kudzayit@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Scholars have long recognized the power of traditional storytelling for engaging students and enhancing the learning experience. This study explores how integrating memes into storytelling, creating "memetized stories", can be an innovative strategy to teach geography concepts. Utilizing constructivism as a theoretical lens, in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 geography teachers who integrate memetized stories into their teaching. The findings reveal that memetized stories can be utilized in student projects, presentations, and to teach environmental issues, cultural sensitivity, and critical thinking skills. Integrating memetized stories into these pedagogical activities promotes active student participation, collaborative learning, and increased engagement and interest in the subject matter. However, teachers must ensure that memetized stories are used appropriately and sensitively. When done well, memetized stories provide a visual and humorous means for students to learn geography concepts through interaction with visual media, aligning with multimodal learning approaches. This study provides valuable insights into the potential benefits and drawbacks of incorporating memetized stories into the geography curriculum. Overall, the findings suggest that memetized stories can be an innovative and engaging strategy for teaching geography to millennial students in the digital age.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 27 Apr 2023

First Revised 06 May 2023

Accepted 23 Jul 2023

First Available online 24 Jul 2023

Publication Date 01 Sep 2024

Keyword:

Geography classroom,

Memes,

Storytelling.

1. INTRODUCTION

Memetized stories can be viewed as an intersection between traditional storytelling and memes (Lolos *et al.*, 2022). While the use of storytelling in the classroom has been around for generations, digital stories in general and memetized stories are a recent phenomenon. Smeda *et al.* (2014) explained that stories have been told as a way of passing on traditions, heritage, and history to future generations. Even today people continue to tell stories through new digital media tools. Storytelling is a process where a person (teller), using vocalization, narrative structure, and mental imagery communicates with other humans (the audience) who also use mental imagery and, in turn, communicate back to the teller primarily via body language and facial expression. Essentially, the act of storytelling involves a process where a person, known as the storyteller or teller, uses vocalization, narrative structure, and mental imagery to communicate with an audience. This communication occurs primarily using language, and the teller aims to evoke mental images and emotions within the audience, which they can then communicate back to the teller through their body language and facial expressions. By engaging students' imagination and emotions through storytelling, teachers can help to make learning more engaging and memorable, as well as foster a sense of empathy and understanding between students and teachers. Storytelling as a teaching method has also been termed a story-based learning approach. Teachers often exercise the most natural form of storytelling, relaying anecdotes from their own lives...when children focus on such stories told by their teacher, I know that, consciously or not, that teacher is in 'story mode'. Stories are the most fundamental and profound way we have of engaging with our fellow human beings. Storytelling has such wide application because, at its root, it serves universal human needs. The story makes sense out of a confusing universe by showing us how one action leads to another. It teaches us how to live by discovering how our fellow human beings overcome the challenges in their lives. And it helps us discover the universals that bind us to everything around us. A story-based learning approach moves children into the world of imagination while acquiring new skills, which simplifies the educational process and makes it more effortless. Storytelling is a teaching method that helps young learners solve given problems and tasks playfully creating constructive and creative comprehension of the given matter. Presented with a storyline, children perceive the learning process more easily and effortlessly. In this way, the acquisition of new knowledge and skills is veiled in a game, making it attractive to children who do not even realize they are learning. Recent scholarship has introduced the concept of the digital story. Digital story as a merger between traditional storytelling and the use of multimedia technology. Digital storytelling in English online learning and noted that millennial students were advancing in using innovative modernity in their learning (Yuliani & Hartanto, 2021). Essentially, memetized stories can be viewed as among the innovative ways of teaching millennials geography. Storytelling has been defined as the use of voice, facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, and interaction to connect a tale with listeners (Miller & Pennycuff, 2008). 'Memetized stories' deviate from this traditional approach of using voice and facial expressions and use images that are accompanied by captions. Memetized stories are generally a combination of memes and stories; within the classroom, the teacher will tell a story using memes. Memes are images with text that often relate to current events or social ideas. The combination of images and captions is usually couched in humor. Essentially, 'memetized stories' are digital stories in the form of memes, which are humorous or satirical images or videos that spread rapidly through social media. In the context of this paper, "memetized stories" are a creative way of telling a story using images in a condensed and easily sharable format. For example, a classic story or folktale

could be retold using popular memes or internet humor to make it more relatable and entertaining for modern audiences. “Memetized stories” can be viewed as part of the emerging concept of “Memetized geography”. A memetized geography is a unique approach that incorporates humor, storytelling, and current events into teaching geography concepts. The idea is to create relatable content, shareable, and memorable. Memes have become a ubiquitous part of our online culture, and they offer a powerful way to communicate complex ideas in a simple, humorous, and engaging way. A way of learning geography using memes, which are in the form of humorous images or videos that are widely shared online.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study drew from a constructivist theoretical lens. Educational theory whereby learners construct their knowledge by a natural ability to think, by learning from the environment, or by a combination of both natural ability and environmental influences, where the result is an autonomous, intellectual learner. Constructivism is a theory of learning that states that learners construct their knowledge through their experiences. Mogashoa (2014) explained that Constructivism is a theory about teaching and learning that involves essential aspects such as culture, context, literacy, language, learners' interests and needs, personal experiences, interpretation of reality, as well as application of knowledge, which the researcher can analyze to determine their impact on teaching and learning policies. This means that learners are not passive recipients of information, but rather active participants in the learning process. They use their prior knowledge and experiences to make sense of new information, and they construct new knowledge by integrating the new information with their existing knowledge. Learners' participation in making memetized stories promotes active participation in the learning process. Additionally, memetized stories allow the learners to infuse their culture, context, and personal experiences to a greater extent.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was a qualitative case study. The case study approach was chosen because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the experiences of the participants in the study. Case study design focuses on one phenomenon, which the researcher chooses to understand in-depth regardless of the number of sites or participants for the study. This approach was particularly appropriate for this study because the focus was on exploring the use of memetized stories as a tool in the geography classroom. The study focused on a group of 10 teachers who recently completed their Post Graduate Certificate in Education at the same institution. The researcher used purposive sampling. Barglowski (2018) reported that purposive sampling is useful when the research is oriented toward rather clear-cut research. The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study and their experience with integrating ICTs into their teaching. The data for this study was collected through artifact interviews. Each participant brought a memetized story, which was used as a starting point for the interview. The artifact interview allowed the participants to discuss their experiences with memetized stories and their potential use as a tool for culturally responsive geography education. The data collected from the artifact interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen as it allowed for the identification and exploration of patterns and themes in the data. The data were transcribed and coded, and themes were identified based on the patterns that emerged from the data. The study was approved by the relevant ethics committee, and all participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured throughout the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Findings and Their Discussion

The findings on memetized stories as a tool within geography education are presented as themes that emerged from the study. The study sought to answer the following research questions: What are the most effective strategies for incorporating memetized stories into the geography classroom to promote active student participation and collaborative learning? What are the potential benefits of incorporating memetized stories into the geography curriculum? Each theme is supported by verbatim narrations from the participants in this study.

4.2. Memes Can be Used for Student Projects

The first theme is that emerged from this study. Memetized stories were integrated into student projects. The findings of the study revealed that some participants used memetized stories as an alternative approach to traditional long-written reports in student projects. This innovative strategy allowed students to demonstrate their understanding of a topic by creating their memes.

As one teacher shared that "I use memes for students to exhibit their comprehension of the subject. They have the freedom to create their memes to depict what they have learned, and this can be done either individually or in groups." Another participant revealed that "As the saying goes a picture says a thousand words. Memetized stories use pictures to tell a geography story, and I use those stories as part of student projects."

The above views show that some participants used memetized stories as part of their student projects. By incorporating memetized stories into student projects, the educators provided a novel and engaging means for students to express their understanding of a topic. One of the geography topics that was taught by the participants using a memetized story was climate change. This approach reveals that learning is an active process of constructing meaning through interactions with the environment. The use of memetized stories in student projects also aligns with the concept of multimodal learning, which recognizes that individuals have different ways of processing and interpreting information. By utilizing memetized stories in student projects, teachers provided a visual and interactive means for students to engage with the material. Thus, it can be argued that the use of memetized stories in the geography classroom involved their integration into student projects.

4.3. Memes Can be Used for Student Presentations

Using memetized stories in the geography classroom can be a valuable tool for enhancing student presentations. Furthermore, the findings from this study revealed that memetized stories were incorporated into student presentations. It is common knowledge that presentation skills are essential both in the classroom and outside the classroom. Memetized stories can be utilized in the geography classroom to aid student presentations. One teacher reported that "Memetized stories were used to make student presentations more interesting and engaging. They were used to add humor and visual appeal to a presentation."

The participant connected the use of memetized stories in student projects with student presentations. Students could present their projects in a class by using memetized stories. Memetized stories made it easy for the students to explain concepts in an interesting and captivating manner. Using the constructivist theory, the findings reveal that memetized stories can be a valuable tool for enhancing student presentations and their active learning. By integrating memetized stories into their presentations, students used visual elements to

engage their audience and add a touch of humor to their work, potentially making the presentation more memorable and enjoyable for their peers. Additionally, the use of memetized stories in student presentations helped foster creative thinking by encouraging students to consider alternative means of presenting the information. It was noted that memetized stories provided the students with an untraditional way of learning and presenting the information. Generally, the use of memetized stories in student presentations in the geography classroom provided a fresh and innovative approach to traditional presentation styles while simultaneously promoting student engagement and creativity.

4.4. Memes Can be Used to Teach Environmental Issues

It was interesting to note that the participants were utilizing memetized stories to teach environmental issues in the geography classroom. Findings from the study also revealed that memetized stories can be used to teach environmental issues in South Africa.

One participant stated, "Memetized stories can be used to teach students about climate change and other environmental issues. Memes generally make the teaching of controversial issues easier. They can be used to make these topics more relatable and interesting." Memetized stories can be considered a form of visual communication that has the potential to engage learners in a fun and relatable way, making complex issues such as climate change more accessible to students. By using memetized stories to teach environmental issues, the teachers create a more inclusive and interactive learning environment, where students can learn and express their ideas in a language that is familiar and appealing to them. Memes are part of the 21st learners' daily lives and therefore teachers would be missing an opportunity by a note including them in their teaching. Furthermore, some memetized stories available online often carry messages that are not always accurate or reliable, and by using them in the classroom, educators can encourage students to question the sources and validity of the information. This can lead to more informed and nuanced discussions on complex issues such as climate change, where students can evaluate and analyze different viewpoints and arguments. For example, different schools of thought on climate change are easier to explain using memetized stories according to the participants in this research. Overall, the use of memetized stories to teach environmental issues is an innovative and engaging pedagogical strategy that can enhance students' learning and critical thinking skills. However, educators that use memetized in their teaching should be mindful of their content and context, ensuring that they are appropriate and relevant to the topic at hand.

4.5. Memes Can be Used to Teach Cultural Sensitivity

The findings of the study indicate that memetized stories can be effectively utilized to teach cultural sensitivity in the geography classroom in South Africa. Being sensitive to diversity is critical and of utmost importance in diverse countries like South Africa, and memetized stories offer an avenue to navigate these often minefield teaching terrains. Participants acknowledged that memetized stories can be used to teach about cultural differences and promote cultural sensitivity within the geography classroom, a crucial aspect in a country like South Africa that is still grappling with the aftermath of apartheid. As one participant noted, "Memes can be used to teach empathy and understanding. Empathy is important, especially in diverse classrooms." The use of memetized stories in the classroom can help navigate the potential pitfalls of teaching a diverse student population, particularly when it comes to sensitive topics that reveal cultural diversity. By using memetized stories to teach about cultural sensitivity, students can gain a better understanding of different cultures and develop empathy toward those who are different from them. Furthermore, the use of

memetized stories in the geography classroom can also help to promote critical thinking skills among students. Through the analysis and interpretation of memetized stories, students are encouraged to think critically about the messages conveyed and the cultural assumptions that underpin them. This type of analytical thinking is important for developing a more nuanced understanding of cultural differences and promoting empathy among students. These findings are consistent with Petty (2021) that digital storytelling-enhanced students' empathy. In addition, the use of memetized stories in the classroom can help create a more engaging and interactive learning environment. Thus, through a constructivist theoretical lens, it can be argued that memetized stories promote active learning in the geography classroom. The adoption of memetized stories helps make the learning experience more relatable and interesting for students, particularly when it comes to sensitive topics such as cultural differences. Memetized stories provide a rare opportunity for learners to bring their cultures and diverse lived realities to the classroom. Hence, the author argues that memetized stories have the utility to teach cultural sensitivity among learners.

4.6. Memetized Stories can Promote Critical Thinking

The participants in this study revealed that memetized stories promote critical thinking. One participant stated, "Memes can be used to teach students how to analyze and interpret information. They can be used to teach critical thinking skills. Students could critically engage with the topics that were portrayed in the memetized stories." Another participant explained, "Preparing a memetized story appears easy at first, but learners need to understand the concept first. After understanding the concept, they will need to find a suitable image and tell their story in a few words humorously. All this requires a great deal of critical thinking."

From the above verbatim narrations, it can be noted that assigning learners a memetized story promotes critical thinking. Students are required to learn how to analyze and interpret information, thus developing their critical engagement with content. By analyzing the content of memetized stories, students can engage with the topics being presented in a more meaningful way, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject matter. This finding shows that the use of memetized stories in the classroom is a valuable tool for educators looking to enhance critical thinking skills in their students. Furthermore, the interactive nature of memetized stories can encourage students to be more engaged in the learning process as they are actively participating in the interpretation of the media. It is worth noting that the use of memetized stories should be balanced with other instructional methods to ensure that students develop various critical thinking skills. Therefore, this study highlights the potential of memetized stories to promote critical thinking skills (Showova, 2020, Ataci, 2023) and underscores the importance of incorporating innovative teaching methods to enhance the learning experience of students.

4.7. Memetized Stories Increase Engagement, Participation, and Interest

Memetized stories increase engagement, participation, and interest in the subject matter according to findings from this study. The use of memetized stories made learning more enjoyable and entertaining, thereby capturing the attention of students according to the participants in this study. One participant stated, "I noticed that when I use memes in my class, students are more engaged and interested in what I am saying. Memetized stories bring humor into the classroom. They find the memes funny, and this helps them to remember the topic." From this view, it can be argued that memetized stories promoted engagement and interest in the subject matter by using humor. Furthermore, humor, which is a crucial part of the memetized stories, helped the students remember the content taught. These findings

from this study reveal that memetized stories could be a useful tool for educators looking to increase student engagement and interest in their subject matter. Additionally, the use of memetized stories in the classroom encouraged student participation in class discussions, according to participants in the study. Another participant explained, "When I use memes in my class, it sparks conversation and debate. Sparking debate and conversation is good for learner participation." As students engage in class discussions sparked by the memetized stories, they are exposed to different perspectives and ideas, leading to a richer learning experience in the geography classroom. In addition, the use of memetized stories in the classroom can also foster a positive learning environment. The humorous and relatable approach to learning can create a relaxed and welcoming atmosphere in the classroom, leading to increased student confidence and participation.

4.8. Drawbacks in Using Memetized Stories

Despite the utility of memetized stories in the classroom revealed by this study, teachers should take note of some drawbacks associated with humor-centered learning approaches. Humor as a pedagogical tool can be like walking on a tightrope. If done well, it could enhance learning or at the very least make learning more fun. However, if not done well, it could have disastrous consequences. This study concurs that teaching approaches that make us humorous such as memetized stories need to be used with caution as they may lead to negative externalities such as sarcasm and stereotyping of some sections of society. One participant noted, "Learners need careful guidance and supervision when creating their own memetized stories. Efforts to be humorous may lead to the stereotyping and insensitive depiction of some races, genders, etc. that may be offensive." Essentially, from this view, it can be argued that memetized stories may produce good results when mastered very well. However, if it is not properly mastered, memetized stories may lead to harmful results such as stigmatizing stereotyping of some students. Furthermore, another participant cautioned, "It is vital that a teacher know their context before introducing memetized stories to the classroom. The teacher needs to know their school, their classroom, and their community." The above view emphasizes the teacher knowing their context before considering introducing memetized stories in the classroom. Some school contexts can be fertile grounds for pedagogical experimentation, while others are inhibitive. Thus, these drawbacks confirm the importance of context and culture as explained by social constructivism. Social constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding. School projects or class presentations may be misconstrued as opportunities to settle scores with other students. Other students may view memetized stories as an opportunity for comic relief without any educational benefits. Therefore, this study noted some drawbacks that are brought about by using memetized stories in the classroom. The findings on the drawbacks of using humor in the classroom echo [Lei et al. \(2010\)](#). [Lei et al. \(2010\)](#) noted that the drawbacks of humor in the classroom included degrading remarks to students, offensive humor, and excessive humor. Hence, from this study, it was noted that teachers must keep a watchful eye on students to ensure that their work is not degrading and offensive to other students.

5. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussion of findings, it can be concluded that this study highlights the potential of memetized stories as a tool in geography education. The findings of the study reveal that memetized stories have multiple uses in the classroom, including for student projects, student presentations, and teaching environmental issues and cultural sensitivity.

Incorporating memetized stories into student projects and presentations provides a novel and engaging means for students to express their understanding of a topic, while the use of memetized stories to teach environmental issues and cultural sensitivity fosters critical thinking and analytical skills. The use of memetized stories also aligns with the concept of multimodal learning, recognizing that individuals have different ways of processing and interpreting information. The study shows that memetized stories can be an innovative and engaging pedagogical strategy that can enhance students' learning and critical thinking skills. However, educators that use memetized stories in their teaching should be mindful of their content and context, ensuring that they are appropriate and relevant to the topic at hand. In summary, this research offers valuable insights into the use of memetized stories in geography education and highlights the need for continued research and exploration in this area.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

7. REFERENCES

- Ataci, T. (2023). Memetizing genocides and post-genocide peacebuilding: ambivalent implications of memes for youth participation and imaginaries in Rwanda. *Information, Communication and Society*, 26(16), 3157-3178.
- Barglowski, K. (2018). Where, what and whom to study? Principles, guidelines and empirical examples of case selection and sampling in migration research. *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies*, 9, 151-168.
- Lei, S., Cohen, J. and Russler, K. (2010). Humor on learning in the college classroom: evaluating benefits and drawbacks from instructors' perspectives. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 37(4). 326-331.
- Lolos, A. M., Etrata, A. A., Gonzales, K. C. I., Lipura, M. B., and Abusam, H. P. (2022). Decoding the metaphor of humor: Understanding why Filipino cybernauts cannot stop clicking on internet memes. *ASEAN Journal of Community Service and Education*, 1(2), 117-120.
- Miller, S., and Pennycuff, L. (2008). The power of story: Using storytelling to improve literacy learning. *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education*, 1(1), 36-43.
- Mogashoa, T. (2014). Applicability of constructivist theory in qualitative educational research. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, 4(7), 51- 59.
- Petty, J. (2021). Using arts-based digital storytelling in neonatal care to enhance nursing students' empathy. *Nurse Child Young People*, 33(4), 13-18.
- Shomova, S. (2020). Meme literacy in Russia: Perceptions of internet memes by a student audience and issues of critical thinking. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 13(26), 266-283.
- Smeda, N., Dakich, E., and Sharda, N. (2014). The effectiveness of digital storytelling in the classrooms: a comprehensive study. *Smart Learning Environments*, 1, 1-21.
- Yuliani, S., and Hartanto, D. (2021). Designing digital storytelling in English online learning. *International Journal of Educational Management and Innovation*, 2(3), 309-321.