

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the introduction of the study. It consists of several sections, including the background of the study, research questions, research purposes, research significances, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous research. These sections provide an overview of the research and explain the main issues discussed in this study.

A. Background of the Study

Reading is considered a fundamental skill that supports learners' language development. However, teaching reading to junior high school students remains challenging. The finding of the research reveals that many students perceive reading activities as monotonous and difficult, especially when the texts provided are lengthy, lack visual support, and are disconnected from students' real-life digital experiences (Kasim & Raisha, 2017). This condition often results in low motivation, limited classroom participation, and minimal engagement during reading lessons.

Based on the preliminary observations conducted at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Bandung, it reveals that seventh-grade students frequently demonstrate a lack of interest and active engagement in English reading activities. Many students encounter significant difficulties when presented with traditional, lengthy reading texts that are heavily dominated by written language without adequate visual support. This condition renders reading lessons monotonous, leading students to become bored and passive in the classroom. Furthermore, as a generation accustomed to dynamic digital environments, these students appear to be more responsive to visual and concise materials, whereas the conventional reading materials currently used in schools often fail to bridge their multimodal learning needs (Yawiloeng, 2024). This gap underscores the urgent need for more relevant and engaging instructional media to enhance both students' motivation and their reading comprehension.

In responses to these challenges, several studies have highlighted the importance of integrating digital and multimodal texts into EFL classrooms to enhance students' reading comprehension and engagement (Altukruni, 2022; Hasriani, 2023; Yawiloeng, 2024). Multimodal texts, which combine visual and verbal elements, allow learners to construct meaning through multiple semiotic resources rather than relying solely on written language. Yawiloeng, (2024) emphasizes that EFL students tend to perceive multimodal texts positively, as visual elements help them comprehend ideas, infer meaning, and maintain interest during reading activities. This suggests that instructional materials incorporating both images and text can support students' reading comprehension more effectively than traditional texts alone.

One increasingly popular form of multimodal text in educational contexts is the internet meme. Memes typically consist of images accompanied by short texts that convey messages, humor, or social commentary. Although memes are commonly associated with entertainment, recent studies indicate that they possess pedagogical potential when used appropriately in language learning contexts. Altukruni, (2022), through a systematic literature review, concludes that internet memes can enhance students' engagement, motivation, and comprehension in EFL and ESL classrooms due to their concise language, contextual relevance, and visual appeal.

Although the term "meme" is not explicitly mentioned in the national curriculum, the principles underlying meme-based instruction align with the curriculum's emphasis on digital literacy, contextual learning, and the use of meaningful texts. Ahmadi, (2018) states that integrating digital media in EFL classrooms supports students' literacy development by connecting learning materials with real-life digital practices. In addition, Aliyu, (2024) argue that digital and visual content enhances students' engagement when it reflects their everyday experiences. In this sense, memes can be understood not as curricular content, but as instructional media that supports curriculum goals, particularly in fostering reading engagement and comprehension through multimodal texts.

Furthermore, English memes can function as a highly focused instructional media within a specific reading lesson. Memes operate as a flexible multimodal format that teachers can adapt for different stages of reading instruction, such as pre-reading to support meaning construction and post-reading to encourage discussion. Altukruni (2022) emphasizes that internet memes are adaptable multimodal resources that allow teachers to modify content, visuals, and linguistic complexity based on the specific learning objectives of a single classroom meeting. This focused implementation provides immediate exposure and engagement for the students.

From an empirical perspective, research also supports the use of memes as instructional media in reading instruction. Hasriani et al., (2023) found that the integration of memes as learning media significantly improved junior high school students' reading comprehension. Their findings suggest that memes help students understand textual meaning more easily because the images provide contextual clues that support interpretation. This indicates that memes can function not merely as humorous content but as meaningful texts that facilitate reading comprehension.

Beyond cognitive benefits, memes have also been reported to influence students' affective responses in language learning. Purnama et al., (2018) demonstrate that the use of memes in language classrooms positively affects students' motivation and engagement. Students showed higher enthusiasm and participation when memes were incorporated into learning activities, as memes created a more relaxed and enjoyable classroom atmosphere. Such positive responses are particularly important in reading instruction, where students often struggle with anxiety and lack of confidence.

Furthermore, the seventh-grade curriculum features various types of reading texts. However, descriptive text serves as the most suitable genre for meme-based instruction, Dyah Ayu Aprilianti & Sukarno (2025). Memes provide immediate visual anchors and humorous contexts. (Cordova et al. 2025). These visual elements help students visualize abstract vocabulary accurately. (Amanda & Hadiyanti 2024). This visual association reinforces student's lexical

acquisition, particularly in understanding adjectives (Knapp & Watkins, 2005). Furthermore, the combination of image and text in memes functions as a powerful multimodal tool. (Mukherjee & Mukherjee, 2025). This tool simplifies how students decode linguistic features. It achieves this goal without altering the core generic structure of the descriptive text.

By focusing on the specific implementation of English memes in a single reading instruction session, this study seeks to demonstrate that memes are not merely entertainment-based materials. This focus allows the research to explore how the targeted use of memes influences classroom interaction, students' cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses, and instructional challenges, thereby providing a clear understanding of meme-based instruction in EFL reading contexts.

Despite the growing body of research on memes in language learning, most existing studies focus on motivation, vocabulary acquisition, or general language skills Kayali & Altuntaş, (2021), while relatively few investigate the implementation of memes specifically for teaching reading at the junior high school level, such as the study conducted by (Cordova et al., 2025) Moreover, limited attention has been given to exploring how memes are implemented in real classroom settings and how students respond to their use during reading activities, particularly within Indonesian EFL contexts.

Therefore, there is a clear need for an in-depth qualitative investigation that explores the practical implementation of English memes in teaching reading, students' responses toward this instructional strategy, and the challenges and benefits that emerge during the teaching process. This study employs a qualitative case study approach to examine the implementation of English memes in teaching reading to seventh grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Bandung. By focusing on classroom practices and students' experiences, this research aims to provide pedagogical insights for English teachers regarding the effective integration of digital and multimodal materials in reading instruction.

B. Research Question

Based on the description above, this research aims to answer the following question:

1. How are Meme-Based Instruction implemented in the teaching of reading for 7th grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Bandung?
2. How do 7th grade students' respond to the use of Meme-Based Instruction in reading activities?
3. What challenges and benefits emerge during the implementation of Meme-Based Instruction in teaching reading?

C. Research Purposes

The purpose of this research are follows:

1. To explore the implementation of Meme-Based Instruction in teaching reading to 7th grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Bandung.
2. To explore 7th grade students' responses toward the use of Meme-Based Instruction in reading activities.
3. To identify the challenges and benefits that emerge during the implementation of Meme-Based Instruction in teaching reading

D. Research Significance

This research is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English language teaching, particularly in the context of reading instruction and the use of digital learning materials.

1. Theoretical Significance:

Theoretically, this study is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge in English language teaching, especially in the use of multimodal materials such as internet memes in reading instruction. This research may enrich existing discussions on how visual and textual elements can support students' comprehension and engagement in EFL reading activities. In addition, the findings of this study may serve as a reference for future researchers who are interested in exploring digital learning media in language education.

2. Practical Significance:

Practically, this research is expected to provide insights for English teachers regarding the use of memes as alternative learning materials in reading instruction. The findings of this study may help teachers understand how memes can be implemented in classroom activities to support students' engagement and interaction during reading lessons. Furthermore, this research may also provide useful information for educators and researchers who are interested in integrating digital culture into language learning contexts.

E. Research Scope

This study is limited to the implementation of English in teaching reading to seventh grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Bandung. The research focuses specifically on the use of memes as instructional media during reading activities in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

However, this study acknowledges that the effectiveness of English memes connects directly to the text type and instructional purposes. From a multimodal perspective, memes can support reading comprehension specifically within descriptive texts by assisting students in understanding meaning and visual context (Cordova et al. 2025). Mukherjee & Mukherjee (2025) explain that memes facilitate meaning making through the interaction of visual and verbal elements. This interaction supports learners when processing descriptive text. Rather than replacing the main reading text, memes function as supportive materials that scaffold comprehension, especially for lower-level learners who benefits from visual cues.

The scope of this study is restricted to the teaching of reading skills and does not examine other language skills such as listening, writing, or speaking. The participants involved are limited to seventh grade students, and the findings of this study are not intended to be generalized beyond the specific educational context, as the research adopts a qualitative case study approach

Furthermore, this study concentrates on describing how English memes are implemented in classroom instruction, exploring students' responses toward the use of memes in reading activities, and identifying the challenges and benefits

that emerge during the teaching process. It does not aim to measure the effectiveness of meme-based instruction quantitatively or compare it with other teaching methods.

The memes used in this study are limited to English-language memes that are relevant to the reading materials and learning objectives. The use of memes is examined solely within the context of classroom instruction and learning activities.

F. Conceptual Framework

This section outlines the conceptual framework of the research. The framework illustrates the logical relationship between the key variables in this study. It maps out the implementation of English memes in teaching reading for seventh-grade students. It also highlights the students' responses alongside the emerging challenges and benefits. The following diagram visually represents this conceptual framework:

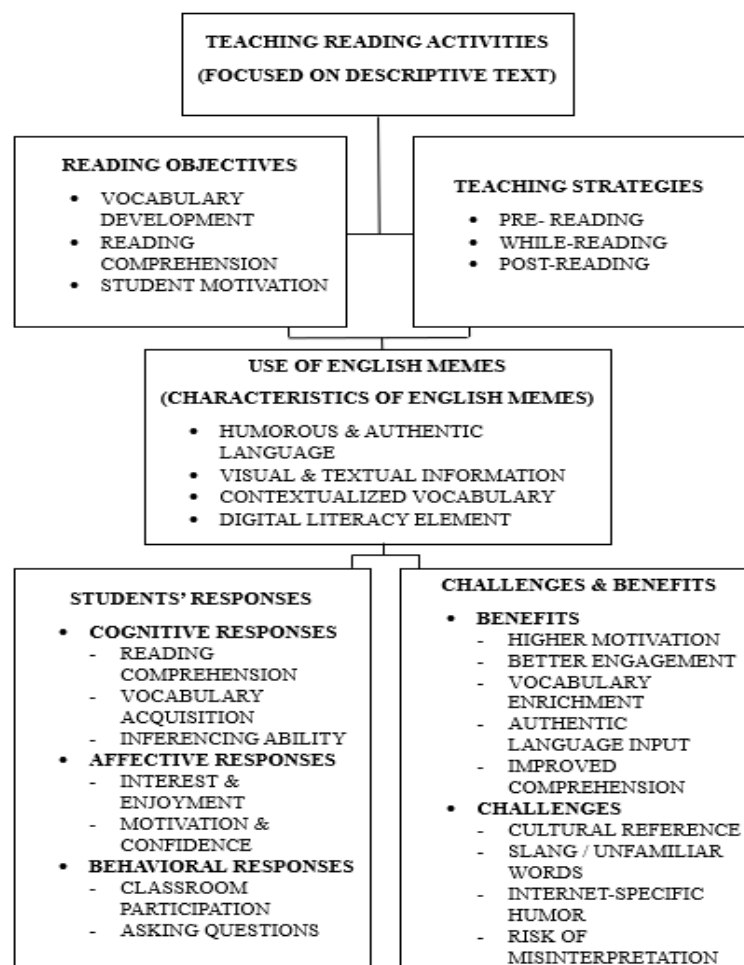


Figure 1. 1 Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that focuses on the development of students reading skills through the integration of multimodal media within descriptive text reading activities. Reading is a foundational skill in language learning that requires active cognitive engagement and comprehension. In this regard, teaching reading is conceptualized as an intentional instructional process aimed at developing students' ability to draw meaning from text and integrate it with their prior knowledge to achieve comprehension (Grabe & Stoller, 2020). However, as established in the background, teaching reading at junior high school level often hindered by the monotonous of conventional texts, which can lead to low motivation and difficulty in meaning-making (Kasim & Raisha, 2017). Therefore, this framework positions reading skills as the primary area of focus, necessitating a learning approach that helps students understand complex texts.

To address these challenges, this framework explores the pedagogical link between English memes and reading comprehension through structured teaching strategies, including pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities. English memes function as multimodal learning materials that combine visual and verbal elements to facilitate understanding (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2021). Within this framework, the relationship between memes and reading lies in the use of multiple semiotic resources such as image that provides a context that supports the verbal text, thereby reducing the cognitive load for students. By utilizing memes as reading materials, students are expected to bridge the gap between their digital literacy and formal English reading tasks (Yawiloeng, 2024).

During the implementation process, students interact with the memes as descriptive reading texts. This interaction is expected to generates students' responses across three distinct dimensions: cognitive responses (such as vocabulary acquisition and inferencing ability), affective responses (including interest, enjoyment, and confidence), and behavioral responses (reflected in classroom participation and willingness to ask questions). Students' responses

serve as important indicators of how the use of memes influences their learning experiences during reading activities (Altukruni, 2022).

In addition, the implementation of English memes may result in both challenges and benefits. Challenges may include students' misinterpretation of meaning, unfamiliar vocabulary, or difficulties in understanding cultural references embedded in the memes. On the other hand, benefits may include increased engagement, enriched vocabulary, authentic language input, improved reading comprehension, and a more enjoyable classroom atmosphere (Kayali & Altuntaş, 2021).

By examining the relationships among the implementation of English memes, students' responses, and the emerging challenges and benefits, this conceptual framework guides the data collection and analysis processes of the study. It helps the researcher understand how English memes are utilized in teaching reading and how they shape students' learning experiences within a specific classroom context (Hasriani et al., 2023).

G. Previous Study

Several previous studies have explored the use of internet memes in English language teaching, particularly in relation to students' motivation, engagement, and language comprehension. These studies provide an important foundation for understanding the pedagogical potential of memes, while also highlighting research gaps that justify the present study.

One study conducted by Purnama et al., (2018) investigated the use of memes to promote students' motivation in language classrooms. The findings revealed that integrating memes into instructional activities created a more enjoyable learning atmosphere and significantly increased students' motivation and participation. Students responded positively to meme-based activities because the materials were relatable and visually engaging. Although this study emphasized motivation rather than reading skills, it demonstrates that memes can function as effective instructional media in EFL contexts, supporting the present study's focus on students' responses to meme-based instruction.

A more skill-specific investigation was conducted by Hasriani et al., (2023) who examined the use of memes as media for teaching reading comprehension to junior high school students. Their study reported a significant improvement in students' reading comprehension after memes were incorporated into reading instruction. The visual elements in memes were found to help students interpret textual meaning more effectively. This study is closely related to the present research; however, it employed a quantitative approach and focused on learning outcomes rather than the implementation process and students' classroom responses.

In addition, Altukruni, (2022) conducted a systematic literature review on the integration of internet memes in EFL and ESL classrooms. The review concluded that memes have strong potential to enhance students' engagement, motivation, and comprehension due to their multimodal nature and cultural relevance. However, the study also identified several challenges, such as students' misinterpretation of meaning and the cultural specificity of certain memes. This review supports the relevance of meme-based instruction while emphasizing the need for classroom based qualitative studies that explore how memes are implemented in real teaching contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, Yawiloeng, (2024) explored EFL students' perceptions of multimodal texts in reading instruction. The study found that students viewed multimodal texts positively, as visual support helped them comprehend reading materials more effectively and reduced cognitive load. Although this study did not specifically focus on memes, its findings strengthen the conceptualization of memes as multimodal texts that can facilitate reading comprehension. This supports the theoretical foundation of the present study.

Despite the growing number of studies on memes and multimodal texts in EFL classrooms, several research gaps remain. Most existing studies employ quantitative methods and focus on learning outcomes such as test scores or motivation levels. Kayali & Altuntaş, (2021) mention that limited attention has been given to qualitative investigations that explore how memes are implemented in classroom instruction, how students respond during the learning

process, and what challenges and benefits emerge from their use, particularly at the junior high school level in Indonesian EFL contexts. Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by conducting a qualitative case study on the implementation of English memes in teaching reading to seventh grade students at SMP Muhammadiyah 8 Bandung.

