

# Humorous Linguistic Memes as Students' Coping Relief Against COVID-19 Anxiety

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**Abstract** This quasi-experimental study investigated the effects of humorous linguistic memes as a coping strategy against anxiety. The participants consisted of 41 students who were purposefully selected based on their manifestation of COVID-19 anxiety. These participants received interventions using humorous linguistic memes. The study used a researcher-made instrument on COVID-19 anxiety composed of 30 items on common anxiety about the coronavirus pandemic. The study utilized the mean for descriptive data analysis, the Mann-Whitney U, and the t-test for inferential data analysis. The researcher also analyzed the participants' impressions of humorous linguistic memes. Data analysis deduced that funny linguistic memes can potentially reduce a person's anxiety about COVID-19. Frequent exposure to funny memes may contribute to good mental and emotional health. The study suggests that individuals can be exposed to humorous linguistic memes when confronted with a stressful situation.

**Keywords:** *coping, COVID-19 anxiety, humorous, linguistic, memes*

## Introduction

The Philippines aims to improve living standards. Ambisyon Natin 2040 aspires to transform the Philippine society into a place where trust predominates, fostering a stronger sense of community. Additionally, volunteerism, which involves assisting those less fortunate in society, is promoted (Richter, 2021).

Since education is a fundamental and enabling human right, countries must ensure universal access to inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education and learning opportunities that promote lifelong learning for all (UNESCO Education 2030, Incheon Declaration, and Action Framework, 2016).

Following UNESCO's SGD 4, the DepEd initiated the "*Sulong EduKalidad*" initiative to assist learners in realizing their full potential through quality basic education. This plan is part of the Basic Education Development Plan 2030 (DepED 024, 2022). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the educational system notably shifted the mode of delivery from face-to-face to online learning. As a result of widespread vaccination, the COVID-19 threat has gradually diminished. The Department of Education also addressed the pandemic's immediate effects on learning, participation, and delivery, emphasizing quality education and resilience. On the other hand, state universities and colleges also exhaust all means to deliver quality education, particularly through virtual and blended learning modes, to sustain the students' academic needs.

Since online learning was still enforced among the students, others may have felt isolated and lonely as they were restricted to their homes for virtual classes and personal responsibilities. Home confinement intensifies emotional

anguish. Hence, dealing with stress is essential, especially when coping with another adjustment and the pressures of online learning. With a digital platform, exposure may be advantageous, and students can find refuge and enthusiasm. Relaxation in terms of a one-way humor can aid individuals in coping with difficult situations, such as the coronavirus. Freud emphasized the importance of humor as one of the highest levels of defense systems. Amid the stress and worry, the students might find humor that can relieve them psychologically (Martin & Ford, 2018).

As an emotional distress, anxiety is a negative feeling that leads to an unstable psychological state once left unattended. It is helpful to establish a coping mechanism to reduce the severity of the distress caused by the pandemic. This coping strategy can help alleviate the person's anxiety due to the coronavirus. Hence, this study utilized humorous linguistic memes to help mitigate anxiety when students have negative emotions like worry. In this way their anxieties are soothed by laughing at linguistic memes that have become viral during the pandemic.

### **Humor as a Coping Strategy**

Sigmund Freud considered humor one of the highest defense mechanisms. Turning to humor during a crisis helps manage stress and maintain emotional well-being (Fritz, 2020; Hussein & Aljamili, 2020). Humor culminates in a high-spirited mood, often outwardly expressed through laughter, smiles, grins, or sudden exhalations (Onanuga, 2019).

Humor and laughter could be viewed as adaptive mechanisms in response to negative emotions such as anger and sadness, as they allow people to find some relief by contemplating the absurdity and contradiction of the events they encounter (i.e., adopting a humorous perspective of one's own life) (Torres-Marín et al., 2022).

As relief therapy, humor is an attention grabber and a tension reducer (Welker, 1977, as cited in Zahoor, 2020). Among those with mental health struggles, humor is greater due to self-preservation mechanisms during times of distress (Rothermich et al., 2021). Establishing secure coping strategies that ultimately improve people's health concerns, difficulties, optimism, and adaptive humor can increase psychological resistance (Reizer et al., 2022).

Because of its universal appeal, humor is like music with no language restrictions (Onanuga, 2019). As Amici (2020) points out, humor, as a positive emotion, motivates individuals to reprint content that amuses or captivates them. It is a technique for detaching oneself from unfavorable circumstances.

Furthermore, humor on social media has psychological effects because it causes people to smile, leading to a positive mental state (Oduor & Kodak, 2020). As gallow humor, it consists of sarcasm, quips, and hilarious remarks, which enable the person to remain witty and amusing. It eases tension by allowing people to laugh, decompress, and bond (Chiodo et al., 2020). For health and wellness, humor can alleviate the adverse psychological consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Saricali et al., 2022).

### **Linguistic Memes as Humor Coping Strategy**

The term "*meme*" originated from the Ancient Greek *mīmēma*, meaning "*something imitated*" (Benveniste, 2022). English evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins coined the term "*meme*" in his book, *The Selfish Gene*, published in 1976. He proposed the concept as an element of culture, encompassing fashion, ideas, and religion. He notes that memes are transmitted from brain to brain through imitation (Yoon, 2016).

Getting the credit, Dawkins elaborated that a meme is a cultural unit that infects individual minds and seeks replication through imitation for the sake of its survival (Dynel, 2016). He further described memes as forms of cultural propagation and a way for people to transmit social memories and cultural ideas to each other.

“*Memes*” are images, photos, or videos shared on digital platforms, and then text is added to them to make the original “*meme*” come alive. This text is meant to show the author’s message.

Memes are rhetorical devices that follow a set of rules. They include image macro memes, public character or celebrity memes such as sarcastic comments, character memes, and exploitable memes (Hussein & Aljamili, 2020).

Individuals can use memes to communicate their feelings and goals to others online. Some internet memes are funny and meant to make people want to accept peace, while others are scathing and meant to help a black campaign (Zubaidah & Ardelia, 2018).

In English, memes include neologisms, metaphors, slogans, fixed phrasal phrases, and purposeful lexical swaps. They have their own set of standards for word order and spelling that differ from the conventions of Standard English (Kostadinovska-Stojchevska & Shalevska, 2018).

In the classroom, memes can hold students’ attention and help them connect with learning a language (Harshavardhan et al., 2019). To convey culture, funny memes use regional language with linguistic features such as sound (phonetic) and symbolic language styles such as metaphor, metonymy, euphemism, and polysemy (Sariah, 2021). Moreover, students believe humor may lighten their mood and reduce tension during English teaching and learning sessions. Also, humor helps improve the teacher’s

and EFL students' rapport improving their retention and comprehension of the material (Paranoto, 2021).

People with psychological issues may find that memes are an excellent coping tool. They may provide a humorous perspective on a negative situation and a sense of peer support through connection with others (Akram et al., 2021). As important bonding icons, memes can foster and perpetuate experiences and feelings of belonging. Strengthening linkages to such collective identities highlights the importance of memes for coping, criticism, and community (Newton et al., 2022).

Several studies support the current findings on humorous linguistic memes as an effective coping mechanism: Fritz, Hussein, and Aljamili (2020), Torres-Marin et al. (2022), and Saricali et al. (2022) were among those who demonstrated that humor helps manage and sustain mental and emotional well-being. Sariah (2021) and Paranoto (2021), on the other hand, were among those who discovered the potential of humorous linguistic memes in English classrooms. The study contributes to anxiety alleviation as an effect of the pandemic or any life-threatening circumstances. Linguistic memes can generate a source of laughter and psychological relief amid life's difficulties and challenges. As relief therapy, humor functions as an attention grabber and a tension reducer (Welker, 1977, as cited in Zahoor, 2020), and establishing a secure coping strategy, like exposure to humorous linguistic memes, may alleviate anxiety and depression levels.

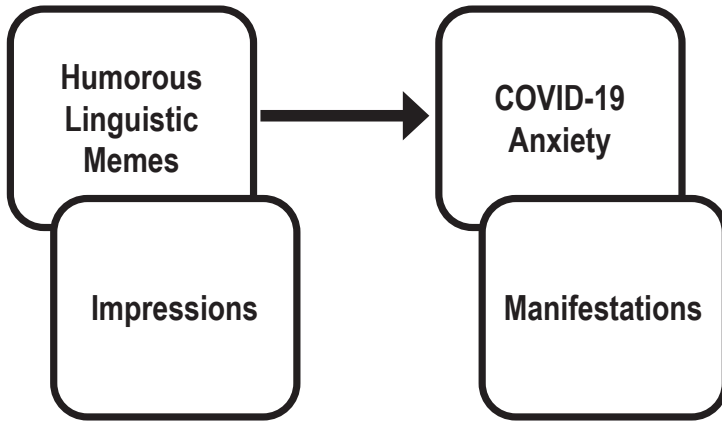
### **Framework of the Study**

There are various coping mechanisms that individuals can employ to manage challenging and demanding situations in their lives. The effects of humorous linguistic memes on anxiety resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic are

highlighted in this study. The research is anchored on Sigmund Freud's Relief Theory of Humor, which posits that humor helps people release pent-up tension. Humor is an attention-getter and a tension reliever (Parantoto, 2021; Zahoor, 2020).

**Figure 1**

*Framework of the Study*



Turning to humor during a crisis helps cope with stress and maintain emotional well-being (Fritz, 2020; Hussein & Aljamili, 2020). Memes and humor are synonymous with generating enjoyment and laughter among individuals. The study hypothesized that there was no significant difference in the participants' COVID-19 anxiety level after exposure to humorous memes as an entire group and as to sex.

Figure 1 shows the flow and scope of the study. Linguistic humorous memes serve as an intervention to reduce COVID-19 anxiety among the participants.

## **Purposes of the Research**

This study aimed to determine the effects of linguistic humorous memes on the participant's COVID-19 anxiety.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the COVID-19 anxiety level of the participants before and after exposure to humorous linguistic memes?
2. Is there a significant difference in the participant's COVID-19 anxiety level after exposure to humorous memes as an entire group and as to sex?
3. What are the participants' COVID-19 anxiety manifestations and impressions of humorous linguistic memes as coping relief?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study looked into the effectiveness of humorous linguistic memes as a coping mechanism for COVID-19 anxiety in a quasi-experimental setting. The participants' COVID-19 anxiety levels were compared before and after they were exposed to humorous memes. The study utilized a pretest and posttest design, where the researcher concluded whether using humorous memes effectively reduced their anxiety or worries about the pandemic. The quasi-experimental approach employed in this study is comparable to randomized experimental designs. It enables researchers to draw valid conclusions even when complete control is not feasible (Ary et al., 2014). A quasi-experimental design is highly valued, for it would determine the effects of a strategy,



which is humorous linguistic memes as coping relief during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **The Participants of the Study**

The study consisted of 41 students who were identified and purposefully chosen. The pre-survey instrument and online interview where participants discussed their concerns about the pandemic found that they shared the same features as exhibiting anxiety about COVID-19. The samples were then exposed to the humorous linguistic meme intervention.

## **Instrument**

The study utilized a modified researcher-made instrument on COVID-19 anxiety patterned after the questionnaire developed by Chandu et al. (2020). The instrument comprises 30 items on common anxiety about the coronavirus pandemic. The items underwent content validation by a panel of experts, who were the university professors, to achieve appropriateness and exactness of the terms. The pilot testing of the instrument was done among separate groups of students with an acceptable reliability index of ( $\alpha=.67$ ).

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### *Pre-intervention*

The researcher prepared the necessary humorous memes and organized them by subject before the intervention. These memes were collected while browsing the internet. The researcher obtained the participants' permission to participate in the study using the Google form. They were identified using a survey that included characteristics such as internet access, not being vaccinated, and getting tested for COVID-19. The researcher described the study's objective and advised that they could decline the intervention if they

were unwilling or uncomfortable. Before the experiment began, the participants were given an orientation. They were amenable to the experiment and took the COVID-19 Anxiety pretest. The study utilized the following scale in determining the participants' anxiety about COVID-19: 4.21 - 5.0 - Severe anxiety; 3.41 - 4.20 - Moderately severe; 2.61 - 3.40- Mild anxiety; 1.81 - 2.60 - Moderately mild; and 1.0 - 1.80 - Minimal anxiety.

### *The Intervention*

After the pretest, the researcher exposed the participants to humorous linguistic memes. Seven linguistically humorous memes were posted online on the Messenger group page and group chat three times a week. The participants wrote their impressions and reactions to humorous linguistic memes in their journals. They were also free to add more posts with memes that show humor.

### *Post-Intervention*

After the two-month intervention, from September to October 2021, the participants took the post-test using the same instrument given during the pretest to determine their COVID-19 anxiety level after exposure to the memes. The researcher herself conducted the post-test with jumbled items to achieve reliability or consistency of results. Their responses were tallied and subjected to appropriate statistical analysis and interpretation. The study hypothesized that there was no significant difference in the participants' COVID-19 anxiety level after exposure to humorous memes as an entire group and as to sex.

## **Data Analysis Procedure**

In interpreting the data, the study utilized the mean, Mann-Whitney U and t-test. Mean was used in the descriptive data

analysis, while Mann Whitney U, and t-test were utilized in the inferential data analysis. The researcher analyzed the participants' impressions of humorous linguistic memes as an intervention for COVID-19 anxiety.

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings on the impact of humorous linguistic memes on the participants' COVID-19 anxiety. The succeeding tables show the descriptive data analysis and interpretation of results on the participants' pre- and- post-intervention level humorous linguistic memes.

### Participants' Level of Anxiety on COVID-19

Table 1 shows the participants' COVID-19 anxiety level before exposure to humorous linguistic memes.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Level of Anxiety and Manifestations of COVID-19*

|  | N= 41 | Mean | Description       |
|--|-------|------|-------------------|
| As an Entire Group   |       |      |                   |
| Pre-intervention   |       | 2.97 | Mild Anxiety      |
| Post-intervention  |       | 2.78 | Mild Anxiety      |
| Sex  |       |      |                   |
| Male (n=24)  |       |      |                   |
| Pre-intervention   |       | 2.97 | Mild Anxiety      |
| Post-intervention  |       | 2.80 | Mild Anxiety      |
| Female (n= 17)   |       |      |                   |
| Pre-intervention   |       | 2.97 | Mild Anxiety      |
| Post-intervention  |       | 2.76 | Mild Anxiety      |
| Manifestations   |       |      |                   |
| I went off-line from social media activities to avoid topics on COVID -19. |       | 4.08 | Moderately severe |

|   |      |                   |
|---|------|-------------------|
| I overworked (writing emails, house chores) to forget about the threat of COVID-19. | 3.71 | Moderately Severe |
| I refrained from spending time face-to-face with relatives and friends.             | 3.52 | Moderately Severe |
| I paid close attention to others displaying possible symptoms of COVID-19.          | 3.43 | Moderately Severe |

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4.21 - 5.0 - Severe anxiety; 3.41 - 4.20 - Moderately severe; 2.61 - 3.40- Mild anxiety; 1.81 - 2.60 - Moderately mild; and 1.0 - 1.80 - Minimal anxiety

Table 1 demonstrates that the entire group of participants, ( $m=2.97$ , was worried about the COVID-19 epidemic before being exposed to humorous linguistic memes. They had moderately severe anxiety to the point where they went offline from social media activities to avoid topics on COVID (overworked [e.g., writing emails, house chores],  $M=4.08$ ; to forget about the threat of COVID-19,  $M=3.71$ ; refrained from spending time face-to-face with relatives and friends,  $M=3.52$ ; and paid close attention to others displaying possible symptoms,  $M=3.43$ ). The findings demonstrate that humorous linguistic memes can reduce COVID-19 anxiety levels when they are high or severe. The participants no longer felt threatened by the epidemic because their worries or suspicions about COVID-19 had diminished to that extent. These were the participants' common statements:

Student 1: *"Memes help me forget about the pandemic's concerns or issues."*

Student 2: *"They alleviate my anxiety and concern about the current situation."*

Student 3: *"Memes can cure depression and anxiety little by little."*

Student 4: *"They connect me with my deeper self and ease my worries."*

Student 5: *“Because of memes, I can still control myself from worrying too much about COVID-19.”*

Student 6: *“Memes help ease worry and anxiety. They spread positive energy and optimism, which is especially important during a pandemic.”*

Student 7: *“Memes help me not worry about COVID-19.”*

Student 8: *“They also divert my attention, and I forget about COVID-19.”*

For the participants, humorous linguistic memes have an impact on their anxiety. They felt relieved from COVID-19 after seeing these funny memes. Internet memes are created to entertain and persuade people toward peace (Zubaidah & Ardelia, 2018).

Memes humorously comfort the students. These are some of their testimonies:

Student 1: *“Memes give fun and relieve sadness.”*

Student 2: *“They are helpful in uplifting my spirit when I feel down or when I have got many things to think about.”*

Student 3: *“I find the memes comforting and entertaining. They relieved my stress and anxiety about this pandemic.”*

Student 4: *“The memes that I see every day lighten my spirits, especially now that I feel stressed.”*

Student 5: *“They give me a happy vibe and entertainment.”*

Student 6: *“Memes spread happiness even with the current events.”*

Iloh (2021) stated that memes can infuse humor or jokes. According to Brown (2020), digital memes are creative and can hold attention. Memes have a positive impact on emotions. They have the power to reduce fear and anxiety.

Additionally, memes are good for mental health. Several students attested to this finding, as presented in the verbatim responses of the following students.

Student 1: *“Memes freshen up my brain, chill my mind, and help me see the positive side of life.”*

Student 2: *“Memes boost positive energy in my mind, helping me reflect and learn from them.”*

Student 3: *“Memes help me forget about my problems and issues, especially during this pandemic.”*

Student 4: *“Memes distract my mind from the problems I face in this world, even for a small period of time.”*

Student 5: *“They help me avoid overthinking about COVID-19.”*

Zahoor (2020) believes in humor as a form of relief therapy. It serves as an attention-getter and a tension-reducer. Turning to humor during a crisis helps manage stress and maintain emotional well-being (Fritz, 2020; Hussein & Aljamili, 2020).

## Differences in the Participants' Anxiety Level of COVID-19 after Exposure to Humorous Linguistic Memes

**Table 2**

*Comparison of the participants' Pre-and Post-Anxiety Levels on COVID-19*

| N= 41    | Mean | U      | p-value |
|----------|------|--------|---------|
| Sex      |      |        |         |
| Male     | 2.97 | -.491  | .623    |
| Female   | 2.78 |        |         |
|          |      | t-test |         |
| Pretest  | 2.97 | 5.160  | .000    |
| Posttest | 2.78 |        |         |

The findings in Table 2 reveal that no significant difference existed in the participants' pretest and post-test anxiety levels as to sex, ( $U = .623 > .05$ ). However, as an entire group, a significant difference exists in their pre-test and post-test levels of anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic ( $p = .000 < .05$ ), which means that humorous linguistic memes can control the students' emotional distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. This result implies that exposure to humorous memes can help anxious individuals better cope with anxiety. Memes can change a stressed psychological state.

Memes that show jokes, funny stories and quotes significantly affect school performances and reduce the stress of both teachers and students (Baysac, 2017). For the students, humorous linguistic memes serve as happy pills set a good mood, ease worry, give comfort, serve as a form of coping, are good for mental health, and are relevant to real-life experiences. For the participants, funny social media memes have psychological implications that lead to laughter, creating the desired positive mental state to cope with the threats posed

by the coronavirus disease (Oduor & Kodak, 2020).

Memes, although primarily targeted at creating humor and relief, draw attention to underlying social constructs and realities on which the humor is hung (Onanuga (2019).

The participants expressed their impressions by saying:

- Student 1: *“Memes help me laugh while facing the crisis.”*
- Student 2: *“They light up my mood at a certain time.”*
- Student 3: *“They set me in a good mood and make me feel less alone.”*
- Student 4: *“Memes uplift my mood when I am in the range of madness.”*
- Student 5: *“I love memes because sometimes they brighten up my mood.”*

Memes serve as coping. Memes helped the participants cope with the COVID-19 anxiety. Their impressions are revealed as follows:

- Student 1: *“Memes help us cope with the everyday stress.”*
- Student 2: *“They can be a key weapon in the mental health battle during the pandemic.”*
- Student 3: *“Humorous memes are capable of reframing the source of negative experiences and/or emotions.”*
- Student 4: *“Helping us cope with life in a pandemic.”*



Student 5: *“I was able to forget my dilemma for a short time due to memes, which also gave me plenty of time to formulate ideas on how to cope with it.”*

Some memes are relevant to real-life experiences. Students seem to enjoy memes for reasons:

Student 1: *“Memes give me a higher level of humor and more positive emotions.”*

Student 2: *“They are relatable, funny, and smart.”*

Student 3: *“Memes make us more positive and happier, even though we’re in a bad situation right now.”*

Student 4: *“Make me reminisce my funny experiences in life.”*

Student 5: *“They separate me from reality. Memes help me connect and feel like I belong.”*

Vinokurova (2021) stressed that memes typically involve a witty juxtaposition of images and text that expresses emotions about a widely relatable situation. Engaging students in memes creates healthy peer relationships and provides an outlet for COVID-related emotions.

To further validate the quantitative findings, the study gathered the participants’ impressions of linguistic memes, categorized into themes: serve as happy pills, set good moods, ease worry, give comfort, serve as coping, are good for mental health, and are relevant to real-life experiences.

**Table 3**

*Participants' Significant Statements, Codes, Categories, and Themes with descriptions drawn from the Transcripts*

| <b>Significant Responses</b>  | <b>Codes</b>                     | <b>Categories</b>                  | <b>Themes</b>          | <b>Description of Themes</b>                                     |
|---|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| help me laugh while facing the crisis<br>give me a happy vibe and entertainment spread happiness even with the current events                   | laugh<br>smile,<br>happy         | Positive<br>emotion                | Serve as<br>happy Pill | Memes mean laughter, smile and happiness among the participants. |
| light up my mood at a certain time<br>they set me in a good mood and make me feel less alone<br>uplift my mood when I am in a range of madness  | mood                             | Positive<br>emotion                | Set good<br>mood       | Memes promote a positive feeling.                                |
| memes help me not worry about COVID-19<br>ease my worry and anxiety about the current situation<br>cure depression and anxiety little by little | anxiety,<br>worry,<br>depression | Negative<br>to positive<br>emotion | Ease worry             | Memes help combat the participants' worries and anxiety.         |
| give fun and relieve sadness<br>helpful in uplifting my spirit when I feel down<br>comforting and entertaining                                  | spirit<br>relieve                | Positive<br>emotion                | Give<br>comfort        | Memes are source of fun and relief.                              |

|   |                        |                                       |                                     |   |
|---|------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| help me cope with everyday stress key weapon in mental health battle capable of reframing the source of negative experiences and/or emotions        | cope emotion           | Survival strategy Anxiety alleviation | Serve as coping                     | Memes have a positive impact on emotions and mental states. |
| help me cope with everyday stress key weapon in mental health battle capable of reframing the source of negative experiences and/or emotions        | cope emotion           | Survival strategy Anxiety alleviation | Serve as coping                     | Memes have a positive impact on emotions and mental states. |
| freshen up my brain, chill my mind; Help me look the positive way of life. boost positive energy to my mind help me to reflect and learn from them. | mind, problems, issues | Psychological relief                  | Good for mental health              | Memes lessen the participants' anxiety and negative vibes.  |
| make me reminisce my funny experiences in life Memes help me connect and feel like I belong.  | positivity, connect    | Relatable experience                  | Relevant to real life's experiences | Memes make the participants feel connected and belong.      |

## **Serve as Happy Pills**

The students shared that “*memes help me laugh while facing the crisis (S-1); give me a happy vibe and entertainment (S-5); memes spread happiness even with the current events (S-6).*” Constant exposure to funny memes gives a person a happy feeling. Humorous memes are therapeutic agents that enhance one’s emotional state and promote psychological well-being.

This insight implies that memes, like medication, can remedy the negative inner state of an individual, regardless of his level of anxiety. Funny memes lead to laughter and create a desired positive mental state (Oduor & Kodak, 2020).

## **Set a Good Mood**

For the participants, humorous memes “*light up my mood at a certain time (S-2), set me in a good mood and make me feel less alone (S-3), uplift my mood when I am in a range of madness (S-4).*” *Engaging in funny memes brings delight and cheer.* This means that memes foster positive emotions in a person. This finding implies that memes make someone feel less distressed by generating feelings of relief, optimism, and laughter instead of negative emotions. Memes with humor can give them psychological relief amid anxiety and tensions (Martin & Ford, 2018).

## **Ease Worry**

Worry over COVID-19 was common among the students. To them, “*Memes help me not worry about COVID-19 (S-7).*”, *Memes help ease worry and anxiety (S-6), cure depression and anxiety little by little (S-3).*” Amid worries, diverting attention to something comic, like linguistic memes, might provide a relaxed frame of mind. Memes can pacify a tense person until he finds relief and emotional equilibrium. The result implies that humorous memes that elicit internal calmness may

transform an individual's apprehension into optimism and hope. Internet memes are created to entertain and persuade people towards peace (Zubaidah & Ardelia, 2018).

### **Give Comfort**

Students expressed that *“memes give fun and relieve sadness (S-1); helpful in uplifting my spirit when I feel down (S-2).”* Humorous memes can provide solace to a person. Memes as comforters are mechanisms that ease melancholic feelings and can even get rid of depression. This means that whenever a person feels down, he may resort to immersing himself in memes to lift his spirits.

This insight implies that humorous memes can ease any sorrow caused by unfavorable circumstances. Iloh (2021) stated that memes have the capacity to infuse humor or jokes. Digital memes are creative and can hold attention (Brown, 2020).

### **Serve as Coping**

Memes helped the participants cope with the COVID-19 anxiety. Their testimonies reveal, *“Memes help me cope with everyday stress (S-1); key weapon in mental health battle (S-2), capable of reframing the source of negative experiences and emotions (S-3).”* Every individual must develop a set of coping mechanisms to manage anxiety attacks. A person who is cognizant of the effectiveness of humor, particularly that which is prevalent in linguistic memes, may turn to these memes for amusement to transform unpleasant emotions into pleasant ones. This result encourages using hilarious memes as a coping strategy during difficult times. This transforms negative feelings such as fear and lack of faith into strong belief and optimism. Humor and laughter could be adaptive mechanisms in response to negative emotions (Torres-Marin et al., 2022).

## **Good for Mental Health**

The following were the impacts of linguistic memes on the students: *“freshen up my brain, chill my mind; help me look at the positive way of life (S-1), boost positive energy in my mind; help me to reflect and learn from them (S-2).”* Maintaining one’s mental health is essential for reducing the amount of unplanned anxiety one encounters. Exposure to amusing memes reduces a person’s cognitive burden. When his head is free from mental pressures, he can think clearly and make better judgments and choices. This finding implies that linguistic memes displaying humor can relax a fatigued or stressed mind. Memes can relieve mental tension. Turning to humor during a crisis helps manage stress and maintain emotional and mental well-being (Fritz, 2020; Hussein & Aljamili, 2020).

## **Relevant to Real Life’s Experiences**

Students seem to enjoy memes for some reasons: *“make me reminisce about my funny experiences in life (S-4). Memes help me connect and feel like I belong (S-5).”* Memes that evoke pleasant memories cause people to smile or laugh, two beneficial emotions that strengthen the heart. Frequent meme engagement brings back joyful memories and fosters positive and happy recollections. This result suggests that amusing memes can foster a sense of belonging and facilitate reflection on one’s circumstances. Vinokurova (2021) stressed that memes involve a witty juxtaposition of images and text that expresses emotions about a widely relatable situation.

## **Conclusion**

The main objective of this study was to determine the effects of humorous linguistic memes on COVID-19 anxiety. Exposure

to funny memes may be a potential coping strategy to reduce a person's anxiety in a life-threatening crisis situation like COVID-19. The study may be beneficial since humor can alleviate anxiety or worry. Humorous linguistic memes can change one's depressive mood to a relieved and happy one.

The study revealed that exposure to humorous linguistic memes was effective in reducing anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Constant exposure to humorous linguistic memes eased their worries and fears. The finding implies that humor had an impact on their psychological well-being. The finding affirms Sigmund Freud's relief theory, which emphasizes that humor is a highly effective defense amid life's anxiety and distress.

The participants showed positive impressions of humorous linguistic memes as seen in the following themes: serve as happy pills, set good moods, ease worry, give comfort, serve as coping, are good for mental health, and are relevant to real-life experiences. The themes imply that humorous linguistic memes are beneficial to a person's emotional and mental health. Funny memes are therapeutic; they promote positivity over negativity, pacify burdens, lift the spirits, relieve mental pressures, foster connectivity, and strengthen hearts. Humorous memes generate laughter and smiles and, hence, stabilize healthy psychological well-being.

With humorous memes as a potential coping strategy, frequent exposure may contribute to good health. Humor may be a way of life in the classroom, at home, or at work. In the classroom, teachers may integrate memes into academic discussions. Hilarious memes can help learners pay more attention and get more involved in language learning.

Humorous memes have a significant effect on students' performance and help them cope with stress. They are effective pedagogical tools for enhancing learning and expressing positive emotions. The online platform restricted

the posting of freshly developed humorous memes. The inadequate internet connection hampers the students' ability to collaborate and share more, especially when done face-to-face.

Future research on humorous linguistic memes may challenge findings of higher levels of relief from anxiety when tried in a face-to-face setting. The participants may feel more motivated when they can express their feelings about the memes.



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