

THE USE OF HUMOUR IN EFL CLASSROOMS

Mohamad Hosain Akbari

Lecturer, M. Hosain Akbari, English Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature
Balkh University, Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan
Email – Hussain.akbary@gmail.com

Abstract: *Humour is an effective tool for foreign language teaching and EFL classes. Humour is a vital aspect of human life, language teachers may often utilize humour to facilitate dual beneficiary both socially and psychologically. Humour is an authentic tool at all levels of proficiency and for the presentation of a language. L2 classrooms are life classrooms, where students taste the essence of life 'humour' since humour is the food of learning. One English teacher can teach literature interestingly, the other teaches grammar, some others may be well versed in linguistics but all English teachers can teach well with the help of 'humour'. This paper aims at presenting the role of humour in teaching English as a foreign language. Data was collected through the answered questionnaires of junior students in the English Department of Balkh University. As a result, the researcher found that the majority of students prefer the use of humour because they believe that using humour in the class fosters the learning environment, students are better engaged, and encourages class participation.*

Keywords; *Humour, language, English, EFL, classrooms, teaching, learning and socially.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Why do we use humour in language classrooms? Because life without humour is too awful a prospect to contemplate, but more fundamentally, because laughter facilitates learning. It makes both teaching and learning far more memorable for all concerned. The study focuses on how humour can be an effective tool in creating a foreign language classroom environment more conducive to learning. It will also examine how non-native English speaking teachers can benefit from using humour in language classrooms.

Most teachers and learners are, in the beginning, reluctant to use jokes with many languages contained in them. That is why most teachers avoid using humour in ELT. However, the use of humour does not necessarily force the learners and the teachers to be comedians. The reason to use humorous texts is to enhance language learning and to increase student participation in classroom activities.

Moreover, humour can be used to promote student-teacher interaction and to increase the quantity and quality of student talking time. This can also promote learner responsibility and autonomy and may be more relaxing than running back and forth between the units of a coursebook. This does not mean the course books are useless but activities using humour may be considered more appealing to students.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Though the research was experimental, the researcher tried to find out answers for the following questions:

- Does the use of humour facilitate English language learning?
- What impact does humour have in EFL classes?

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary concern of this study is to identify the role of humour in teaching English as a foreign language. In addition, to provide effective strategies for EFL teachers to use humour in their classes.

1.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

This research hypothesizes that the use of humour in EFL classes fosters English language learning.

1.4 RESEARCH LIMITATION

This study is limited to senior students in the English department of Balkh University. This research would be experimental to test our hypothesis. The population of this study contains only 50 male and female students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Humour naturally paves the way for the pupil to learn vocabulary, syntax, and semantics in the Target language (L2), even though, it may be less preferred with limited utilization in most language classrooms. Since many language teachers in India demand disciplined classrooms, expect perfect silent and controlled classrooms, they make humour as something that should be avoided (Alston, 2007, p.80).

Bell (2009) states that students who have a laugh, express less diversion and outbursts (emotions). Interactive classrooms are much better for teaching rather than a passive classroom. Humour provides space for healthy discussions. "For good ideas and true innovation, you need human interaction, conflict, argument, debate..." (Fisher, 2002, p.703). Humour is one such social skill, which we are lacking in nuclear society and family situation.

2.1 HUMOUR IN SYLLABUS

Deaner and Mcconatha (2010) said that the placement of communication in the curriculum and syllabi reinforced implicitly the adoption and use of humour in the classroom. It was said, smile is a universal language, it speaks much better; it is a key to open good transaction of ideas; humour could be a tool used by the teacher to teach the language effectively. Hawkey (2006) says, "Humour is the weapon of unarmed people". Teachers are the real warriors have to win the war (effective teaching) with their weapons (teaching techniques) with language as the only armour. Until recently, minimal attention was given to the effects of humour by language researchers; humour should begin with the fields of education and other related disciplines and perspectives (Garner, 2006).

In later times measurable effects of humour were evidenced by the L2 teachers. Hawakey (2006) made an attempt to measure the efficacy and immediacy of humour in L2 classrooms. His findings listed three criteria, viz., student affect, pupil behavioural commitment and cognitive learning. Garner (2006) reports that humour removes tension and aggression, elevates boredom and stimulates interest. Pupil and language tutor are well connected through humour.

2.2 THE CONTEXT OF HUMOUR

Bryant (2012) said that the context of humour is remodelled or changed. Humour in the classroom does various applications. There is diverse humour. Humour through interaction is recommended. L2 teacher needs to decide whether they should use conversational jokes, or written jokes from the text and literature or from other sources. Language teachers are often advised to adopt certain types of humour, which suit the learners' best. For instance, Forman (2011) divides humour as universal humour, culture-based humour and linguistic humour. He claims that elementary level students can benefit from these types of humour. Universal humour is fit for intermediate students. Later grade pupil benefits from all the three types. Wordplay and word wizard are tough areas of humour, but once initiated remain prolonged for a long time in pupils' memory.

2.3 FACILITATING LEARNING

Sense of humour is part of a good leader. L2 teachers should lead with humour. Identify humour in familiar stories. Utilize technology through visual and audio clips. Other modes may also be used. 'Humour' is often taken from comments, encouraging pupil to be open-hearted to pass and pick genuine comments (Bell, 2009). Some L2 teachers rush to complete syllabus and they push aside soft skills like humour and interaction. 'Humour' lessens the workload or makes it lighter; it acts as a bridge, links pupil and teacher, makes classes interesting, participatory and better understanding. Humour never intends 'funny teacher ship'; instead it calls for full-pledged teaching (Hawkey, 2006, p.178).

2.4 Humour: No Hurt Should Be Caused to Any Individual or Group

Teaching pedagogy involves the student teacher interaction, between groups and educator. For role play, humour is the tool. Continuing interaction is better to exploit humour subject. General discussions, group discussions or debates increase interest (Forman, 2011). Fisher (2002) states four main principles as: demand of information, demand for informed-consent, the demand for confidentiality, privacy and demand for the use of personal information. Humour is associated with subject content. Educational psychology demands that understanding and learning should occur freely, without hurting the feelings of others. humour is just a way, a part of teaching subject and so it teaches to maintain good psyche and environment

2.5 THE EDUCATIONAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT/S OF HUMOUR

"Humour is also a way of saying something serious" (Garner, 2006, p.178). How can teachers take advantage of laughter in academic settings? Unfortunately, many teachers fear humour, since they think of it as equal to losing their authority and therefore something to be avoided. I'm not going to tell jokes; it will mean erring on the side of

complete loss of control, and poor class conduct. Actually teachers do not know how wisely they can use it in the classroom (Alston, 2007).

Teachers enjoy humour, but don't know how to use it, so they don't want to look foolish. Yet humour is as authentic and as communicative a human reaction and social skill as is greeting and conversing with friends. Using humour and allowing laughter in class, does not mean that teachers need to be comedians. Teachers' main responsibility is to make the learning process easier, so if humour can make the learning process more enjoyable and can arouse students' interest and attention, why not use it in the class? (Hawakey, 2006).

2.6 USING HUMOUR IN LANGUAGE CLASSES

Various researchers have commonly stated some reasons for using humour in classroom atmosphere: its effect as a relaxing, comforting, and tension-reducing device, its humanizing effect on teacher image, and its effect of maintaining/increasing student interest and enjoyment (Akstibm 2007). In innovative language methodologies such as Desuggestopedia and Communicative Language Teaching Creating a positive, safe and stress-free atmosphere in the class is a must for the language learning process to occur. Humour, by decreasing anxiety and stress, can contribute to class unity among the language learners and make the learning process more effective and fun (Garner, 2006). Education and psychology researchers have focused on humour as a componential element of a larger set of affective behaviours impacting learning in the classroom that is generally referred to as immediacy behaviours.

The immediacy construct was first developed and introduced by Forman (2011) as a description for those communication behaviors among them that improve the physical or psychological closeness and interaction of two or more individuals. Such immediacy behaviours have been proved to result in positive effects within classroom contexts (Berk, 2012). Hawkey (2016) indicated that student perceptions of teacher immediacy were positively correlated with 1) student affect, 2) student behavioural commitment and 3) student cognitive learning. Such correlative evidence is also supported by Nussbaum (as cited in Fisher, 2012, p.706) wherein teachers who were recognized as effective also displayed more immediacy. Additionally, Garner (2006) examined the effect of teacher immediacy and student learning within a set of 20 verbal items, including an explicit entry for the use of humour.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The researcher used a mixture of a qualitative and quantitative research approach to investigate the hypothesis. Therefore, the researcher will consider students' opinion to answer the research questions.

3.1 DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

The major source of data used to find answers to the research questions is the answered questionnaires of participants of the chosen classes. First, the researcher collected factors through the senior classes in the English Department of Balkh University and literature. Then the researcher prepared a questionnaire and distributed it to senior classes. After the questionnaires were collected, the questionnaires were analysed by using the Microsoft Excel program. In addition, for making the results clear, concise and comprehensible, the researcher used figures for each question of the questionnaire.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

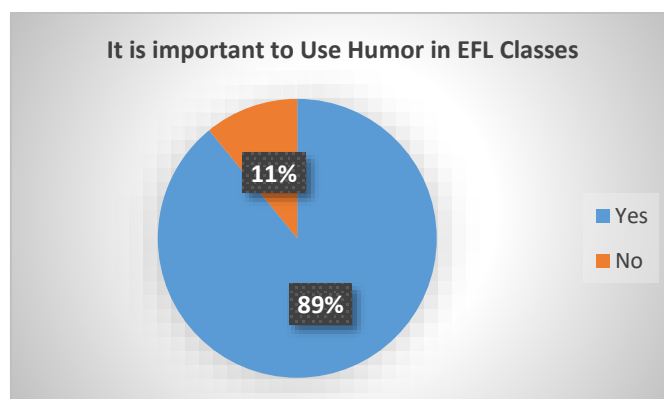


Figure 1. It is important to use humor in EFL classes

In this question, the researcher asked students whether they perceived humor is an effective tool in EFL classes or not. The results show that 89% of students are certain about the importance of humor. However, 11% of students are not in favor of humor usage inside the EFL classes.

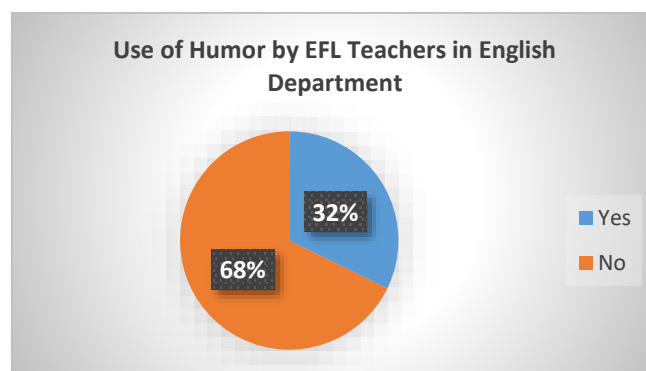


Figure 2. Use of humor by EFL teachers in the English Department

In the next question, the researcher asked students about the usage of humor by EFL teacher in the English department of Balkh University. The researcher found that 68% of lecturers use humor inside the class, however, 32% of them do not use.

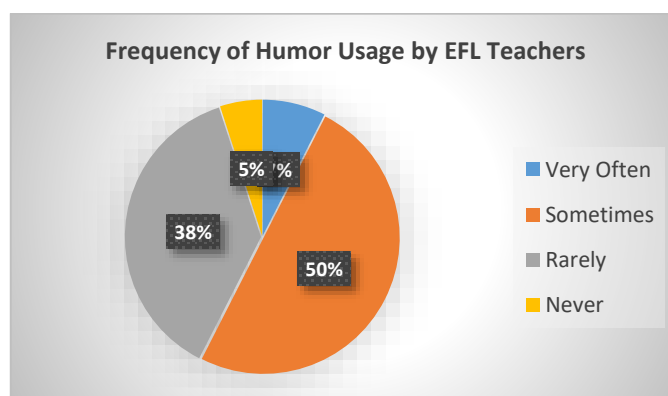


Figure 3. Frequency of humor usage by EFL teachers

In this question, the students are asked about the frequency of humor usage by EFL teachers in the English department of Balkh University. 50% of students indicated that EFL teachers in the English department sometimes use humor in the class, 38% said they rarely use humor, and 7% said teachers often use humor in the class. However, 5% of students think that their teachers never use humor in the class.



Figure 4. Types of humor used in the class

Figure 4 shows the types of humor used in the EFL classes in the English department. The majority of students, 32%, said that the teachers use jokes as a humorous tool in the class. 32% said facial expressions, 24% said humorous comments are also used as tool and 12% of students said that teachers also use funny stories in order to bring humor in the class.

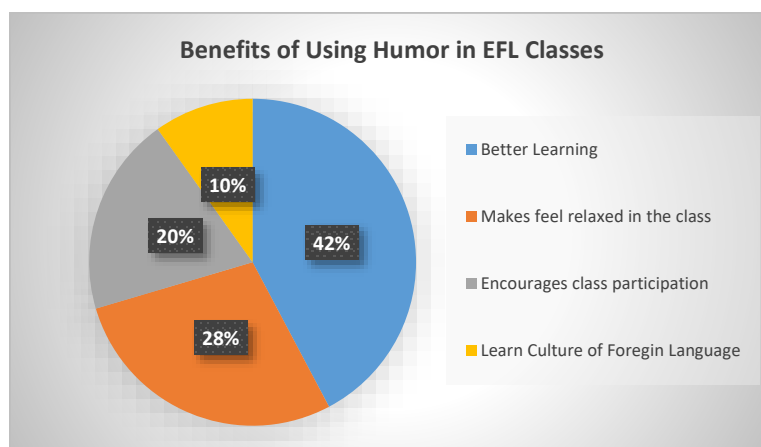


Figure 5. Benefits of using humor in EFL classes

In this question, the researcher asked students about the benefits of using humor in the EFL classes. The results show that 42% of students think that it fosters better learning, 28% of them think that it makes them feel relaxed, 20% of students claim that it encourages class participations, and 10% of students think that it helps them to learn culture of foreign language.

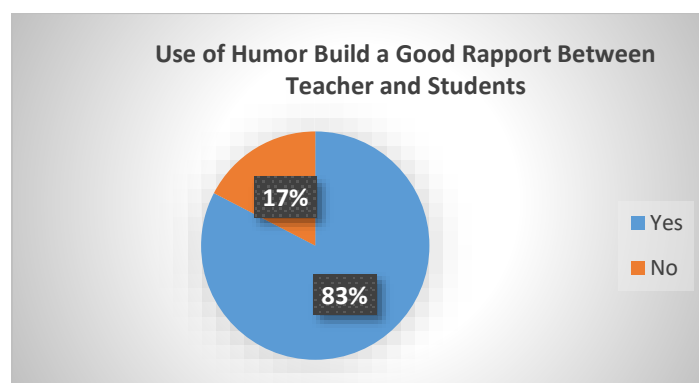


Figure 6. Use of humor builds a good rapport between teacher and students

In next question, the researcher wanted to know whether use of humor helps to build a good rapport between teacher and students. 83% of students agree with the statement, however, 17% of students disagree.

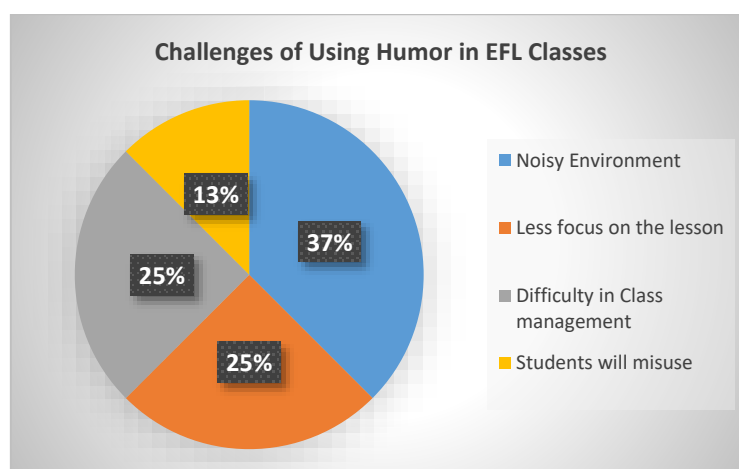


Figure 7. Challenges of using humour in EFL classes

Next, the researcher asked students about the challenges of using humor in EFL classes. The results show that 37% of students think that it causes the environment to be noisy, 25% of students think that it distracts students' attention, 25% of them also consider classroom management as a challenge in using humor and 13% of them think that students will misuse the humor.

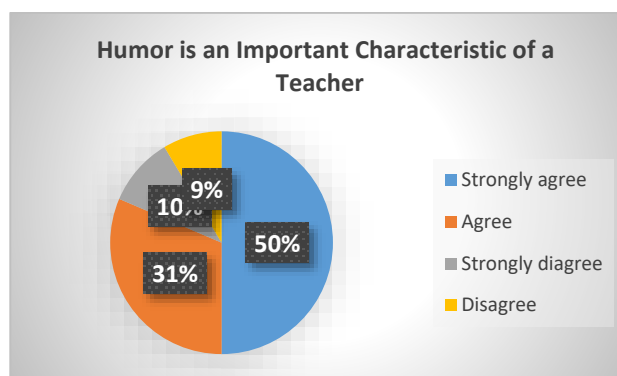


Figure 8. Humor is an important characteristic of a teacher

In the last question, the researcher wanted to know whether students consider humour as an important characteristic of a good teacher or not. The results show that 50% of students strongly agree with the statement, 31% of them agree, 10% of them strongly disagree and 9% of them disagree with the statement. In fact, the majority of students are in favour of humour.

5. DISCUSSION:

Humour is an important part of our daily life. A combination of learning with humour will be more enjoyable for EFL students. Therefore, this study is important to draw students' and teachers' attention to this important aspect of learning. The findings of this study indicate that most students believe that the use of humour is obligatory in EFL classes. The findings also show that the majority of students in the English department of Balkh University do not use humour in their teaching. The results also show the types of humour that students prefer to be used in the class. They are jokes, humorous comments, facial expressions and funny stories.

The study of Azizifard (2012) also supports the finding of this study. His study aims at investigating the effects of context and humour on learning language functions for male and female students of the first grade of high school. The sample of the study consisted of 89 male and 90 female students who were randomly assigned to four experimental groups and two control groups. The control group followed their schoolbook. The results showed that the experimental groups (male and female) for whom the language functions were taught in the form of context with humour outperformed the other groups. In addition, the results showed no difference between male and female participants' performance.

Souza (2008), also researched the use of jokes and riddles in language learning. Her study focuses on the use of jokes and riddles as a tool for learning English as a foreign language and culture. The study was based on six aspects involved in helping students understand humour: interpretation, structure, learning tool, cultural issues, individual differences, and motivation. Regarding cultural aspects. The results showed that jokes were a source of motivation for the students in learning a foreign language and culture.

6. CONCLUSION:

The purpose of this research is to shed light on the use of humour in teaching English as a foreign language. There are various researches that stress the use of humour in language teaching. According to scholars, the use of humour facilitates English language teaching, in addition, it helps shy learners to have the courage to speak and get along with other classmates. The findings of this study show that most students believe that the use of humour is important in EFL classes. The results also show that only 32% of teachers in the English department of Balkh University use humour in the class. In addition, most students prefer the use of jokes and humour comments as humour tool in the class. In addition, the use of humour in EFL classes foster better learning, and makes students feel relax in the class. It also encourages students to get engage in the lessons. Furthermore, the use of humour builds a good rapport between teacher and students. However, there are some challenges in using humour in the class. The findings show that using humour in the class makes the learning environment noisy. The teacher will have more difficulty in class management. Furthermore, some students will misuse the humour of the teacher.

REFERENCES:

1. Alston, S. (2007). Nothing to Laugh at: Humor as a Means of Coping with Pain and Stress. *Australian Journal of Communication*, 34: 2, 77-89.
2. Bell, N. D. (2009). Learning about and through humor in the second language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*, 13: 3, 241-258.

3. Berk, R. A. (2012). Student ratings of 10 strategies for using humor in college teaching. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 7: 3, 71-92.
4. Bryant, J. (2012). Teachers' Humor in the College Classroom. *Communication Education*, 28, 110-118.
5. Segovia, L. P. & Hardison, D. M. (2009). Implementing Education Reform: EFL Teachers' Perspectives. *ELT Journal*, 63: 2, 154-162.
6. Deaner, S. L. & McConatha, J. T. (2010). The relationship of humor to depression and personality. *Psychological Reports*, 72, 755-763.
7. Fisher, M.S. (2002). The Effect of Humor on Learning in a Planetarium. *Science Education*, 81: 6, 703-713.
8. Forman, R. (2011). Humorous Language Play in a Thai EFL Classroom. *Applied Linguistics*, 32: 5, 541-565.
9. Garner, R. L. (2006). Humor in Pedagogy: How Ha-Ha Can Lead to Aha! *College Teaching*, 54: 1, 177-180.
10. Hawkey, R. (2006). Teacher and learner perceptions of language learning activity. *ELT Journal*, 60: 3, 242-252.
11. Kaplan, R. M. & Pascoe, G. C. (2001). Humorous Lectures and Humorous Examples: Some Effects upon Comprehension and Retention. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69: 1, 61-65.