

Humour: A Tool to Enhance EFL Learning

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Abstract

A sense of humour counts as a virtue in our society. It is often a desirable leadership quality. Displaying a sense of humour in the classroom sends a signal to students that having a sense of humour is important. If teachers can teach a student to have a sense of humour about the very serious things in life, they are teaching much more than facts and figures.

The purpose of this study is to use Humour as a powerful teaching tool to impart knowledge to the students. Humour, provided it is not used in excess, can increase attention and interest and help to illustrate and reinforce what is being taught.

The use of humour in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning is still more or less an unexplored territory. As an effective factor, the use of humour can greatly affect both the classroom atmosphere and student motivation. Research has shown that humour has the ability to influence creative thinking in the students. It has been noticed that in college classrooms, language teachers are using humour more often than other teachers. Teachers use funny stories related to the topic to improve students' overall attitudes. This paper tries to explain the effective use of humour in classroom teaching.

Keywords: Humour, EFL Learning, Teaching tool, Classrooms, Benefits

Introduction

The definition of humour is broadly anything that is perceived to be funny, comical or amusing. It is determined by context and cultural sensitivity. The use of humour in educational settings is related to positive student perceptions of the instructor and the learning environment (**Huss, J. & Eastep, S. 2016**), a foundation and rationale established to further consider the expanded use of humour as a critical element of any instructor's classroom orientation.

Humour can also reduce stress, capture and retain student attention, expand student comprehension, build relationships with students and colleagues. It can support classroom management, enhance joyful craft of teaching and learning and even promote long-term recall. According to **Jones, (2014)**, the use of humour as a viable pedagogical approach is on the rise in almost every discipline.

The purpose of this study is also to highlight how humour might be useful in making a more student-centric atmosphere for the students and ultimately making the instructor more effective in the eyes of the students and to explore students and teachers' perspectives on the use of humour in classroom. This study is also to determine the attitudes of professors within a College of Education towards the use of humour as a component of effective teaching.

A touch of relevant humour can perk up even the dullest topics. College teachers have more subject matter for humour as they are teaching mostly grown-ups. In western countries, much research has been already done in this area and the results point to an increasing need to use humour to achieve effectiveness in the classroom. The two major objectives of college teaching i.e. to build teacher student connection and to engage in the learning process can be realized by the apt use of humour in teaching (**Berk, 1996**).

The present paper also highlights the impact of using humour and laughter in creating a relaxed and open atmosphere for language learning, to grab and hold students' attention, increase retention of what is learned, foster a constructive attitude towards mistakes, and stimulate both creative and critical thinking during a language classroom. Humour in language classes reduces tension, improves classroom atmosphere, increases enjoyment and has a positive impact on the student-teacher interactions.

Why Humour?

When humour is planned as part of the teaching strategy, a caring environment is established, there is an attitude of flexibility, and communication between student and teacher is that of freedom and openness. (**Watson and Emerson, 1988**). Humour, when applied in the language classroom, influences learning outcomes. Many students often enter classrooms lacking motivation and feeling stressed. To keep them motivated, **Berk, (1996)** says that the psychological and physiological benefits of laughter can have a direct impact on teaching and learning, especially in five significant areas: teacher -learner rapport, classroom atmosphere, student responsiveness, test - performance, and student attendance. It builds rapport between the students and teacher. —When teachers have a sense of humour and aren't afraid to use it, students relax and become listeners. Having a sense of humour is an indication that the teacher is human and can share with the group. Education and psychology researchers have focused on humour as a componential element. Positive connections between teachers' use of humour and academic achievement

even follow students into colleges and beyond. (Hickman, Gregory P.; Crossland, Garnet L. 2004-2005). This research presents “Humour” as an effective tool to help students pay more attention during classes and helps learning difficult material with greater ease.

Benefits of Humour

Psychological Benefits

The psychological and physiological benefits of laughter can have a direct impact on teaching and learning, especially in these areas: teacher -learner rapport, classroom atmosphere, student responsiveness, test performance, and student attendance. It builds rapport between the students and the teacher. It also alleviates pain, tension, fear, anxiety, and depression. It improves mental and physical health and helps cope with stress. Humour reverses negatively conditioned feelings Enhances students’ well-being. Humour isn’t just a tactic to keep students’ attention, it’s crucial for keeping the instructors positive over the course of the year. It elevates self-image and self-esteem also.

Social Benefits

It improves students’ morale and encourages a sense of trust. Humour also works as a tool to establish professional relationships with students. It breaks the ice and reduces fear and tension.

Reveals the humanness of instructors

Bridges the gap between instructors and students

Educational Benefits

Captures students’ interest and enhances boring or dreaded subjects

Increases students’ attention and motivation

Inspires creativity

Elevates confidence

Facilitates comprehension of course materials

Assists in problem-solving

Encourages risk taking

Things to Avoid

Degrading remarks

Offensive humour

Excessive humour

Personal remarks

How to Use Humour in a Class

Smile and be lighthearted

Be spontaneous/natural

Foster an informal climate

Begin class with a smile

Use stories and experiences...

Relate things to life...

Plan lectures in short segments...

Encourage a give-and-take climate

Ask students to supply stories...

Tell a joke or two ...

Strategies to Use Humour

In order to provide the most positive environment for students in the classroom through humour is to follow these four strategies. Instructors should only use humour in the classroom that they are comfortable with. Instructors do not have to be funny to be effective in the classroom.

The research shows that the only humour that should be demonstrated in the classroom is the humour that provides the most positive perceptions. Instructors should avoid negative or hostile humour, especially humour that isolates students.

Instructors must be sensitive to the ages of the students and the setting when incorporating humour. Instructors should use humour that's relevant to the material. Research shows that four jokes per hour is optimal in a classroom setting.

If the goal of instructional humour is to increase learning, specific steps should be followed. The humour should illustrate a concept that has been presented in the class. Instructors should then summarize the material again after the laughter subsides. Paraphrasing the concept again reinforces the information and improves learning. Effective application of humour can assist teachers to engage students, and even ease distress during exams. Instructors that provide the most positive environment for students in the classroom are the Instructors that present humour following these four strategies making them funny in the classroom.

Effects and Outcomes of Humour in Classroom

Krashen (1982) was of the view in the "Monitor Model" that affective filter (psychological barrier) must be lower to comprehend the L2 input. When the learners are relaxed and motivated, it is low, and the use of humour brings the affective filter. When the teacher creates a friendly and relaxed atmosphere in the class, the students become more motivated to do well in the class. The performance, proficiency and fluency of the students become more effective. Use of humour can be beneficial in order to gain the students liking and win their attention.

Outcomes of Positive Humour

In addition to having students learn curriculum, most teachers wish to have students enjoy time in their classes (Burgess, 2000). Humour increases motivation to work hard and learn subject matters.

- Positive attitude of students towards studies and one-another.
- Increase participation in learning process.
- Increase motivation to work hard and learn subject matters.
- Strong relationship between teachers and students.

Shortcomings of Humour

Baid and Lambert (2010) reported that inappropriate humour can actually create a hostile classroom environment and trigger a decline in student's self-esteem. Intentional negative use of humour, or even unintentional misuse, can be alienating and subversive (**Roth well, Siharath, Bell, Nguyen, &**

Baker, 2011). However, humour alone cannot be effective and sometimes, too much humour can work against learning and even destroys the whole teaching plan. To be effective, humour along with other teaching and learning activities in the communicative language classroom, must be well prepared and have a specific pedagogical objective behind. Language learners need to be prepared too. It could damage one's credibility and sometimes make negative impact on students' mind .Repeatedly putting one's self down could damage perception of teacher competence .Besides this ,the researchers opine that Students dislike those teachers who target them .In many cases ,it has been found that negative humour increases conflict and tension in classroom resulting aggressiveness in students.

Methods

Participants and Setting

In this study, Purposive and random sampling procedures were used in the selection of the sample. Two surveys of 98 **Intensive English Program** students were conducted in the College of Science and in the Community College. A set of interviews were also distributed to them as part of the Research. The researchers investigated the use of humour in both colleges. They examined how students perceived instructor's uses of various types of humour during class, and the types of humour that students and faculty recommend for use in the class. They also correlated the way instructors incorporated humour into their class lectures with their perceived competence and effectiveness, and it was investigated whether students felt their learning experience improved when their teachers used humour. We also discussed topics such as "sarcasm," professor gender, student and faculty support of humour, and humour in classrooms, tests, and the rest of life. Can humour, when used appropriately has the potential to humanize, illustrate, defuse, encourage, reduce anxiety, and keep people thinking?

Responses showed as expected positive feedback on general classroom humour usage. Some positive effects perceived were their improvements in retention, willingness to participation, enjoyment in learning and classroom atmosphere, as well as a lowering of stress. Based on their experiences as a student, each student was asked to give their opinion to each statement listed below. Students were asked to respond strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree (where these responses were assigned values from 5 to 1 respectively).

- 1) I feel more relaxed in the class when my teacher makes me laugh
- 2) I feel nervous when I need to make something humorous in my class
- 3) I feel like working harder when what I have to say/act is humorous
- 4) Our class atmosphere is more comfortable when we are making humorous
- 5) I am more likely to go to a class where the instructor uses some humour
- 6) A humorous teacher makes our class atmosphere more relaxed.
- 7) I can remember English easier when my teacher is being humorous.
- 8) The use of humour by an instructor is typically a waste of classroom time.
- 9) Use of humour appears to reduce my anxiety and stress in the classroom

Results

The results show that humour can be a powerful tool when used in the class room. Most of them were of the view that Humour helps to keep them at ease in the class. The teachers' responses were also

positive. Large percentages of the faculty members declared that humour is an integral part of their teaching strategy and that humour can serve to relax students, alleviate anxiety toward difficult

Material and testing, bolster retention of content, and generate excitement for the material being taught. Humour, if incorporated appropriately in classroom teaching is a good thing and also helps in better retention of the topic being taught. Students' responses were overwhelming. Majority of them feel that use of humour in classroom teaching facilitates a good teacher-student relationship. Majority of students also feel that having a good sense of humour is an attribute of an effective teacher. The Instructors also stressed that humour should be incorporated in the classroom. Also the most commonly stated reasons for employing humour were: 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.

Conclusion

Use of humour in an English Language class is an instructional tool a teacher can use in a classroom to increase its effectiveness and enhance eagerness of the students of English language. When a teacher uses humour in class, it can result in a number of benefits and advantages for both the teacher and students. This is also a fact that by teaching students to be able to laugh at themselves, teachers are showing students how to cope in the real world which is one of the most important survival skills we have.

However, negative or harmful kind of humor such as sarcasm, mimicry and mockery should strictly be avoided as it leaves negative impression. It is therefore suggested that humor should become an integral part of any positive learning classroom. Instructors have to be aware of unintended consequences and interpretations of humor across cultural lines (Nasiriya & Mafakheri, 2015). Along with encouragement and praise, it should be one of the many useful tools used by teachers to make their classroom more inviting and conducive to learning.

A teacher should not keep students laughing for the sake of humor. She should rather want them to learn best when they laugh most.

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