

The Role of Humor in Iraqi EFL University Classes and Its Effects on Students' Motivation: A Case Study of Kufa University

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ABSTRACT:- The study of humor is something that everyone finds fascinating. Humor in traditional teaching is misunderstood and defined as jokes only, which is considered by most teachers as a time waste, distractive tool to be used in classroom, and only directs students to learn through memorization. This is the main reason why students feel bored, not related to the material, and not willing to learn. Humor is employed in the English language classroom to instruct students on many grammatical ideas pertaining to the four primary skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The instructors of each language item and skill provide suitable examples of humor to the students, facilitating the students' faster assimilation of the content. This research study examines the impact of humor on the motivation and learning of Iraqi (EFL) students at the Faculty of Education for Girls, Kufa University. The relationship between humor, motivation, and learning is analyzed to demonstrate how it can affect them positively and adversely and how it should be utilized. Humor is considered as a safe haven, allowing kids to learn in a comfortable environment, so reducing anxiety, boosting self-esteem, and increasing their productivity. Taking students' personalities and cultures into account, it is the role of the instructor to choose the appropriate style of humor to employ. As a result, integrative motivation is fostered, which aids in becoming more proficient English language learners.

Keywords:- Humor, Motivation, English Language Learning, Teaching Methods

I. INTRODUCTION

People enjoy having fun and laughing. According to experts, laughter is an essential technique for English language acquisition. However, comedy is now confined to the education and classroom premises. It is an important method for modern English language teachers. Charlie Chaplin, the famed English comedy performer, once said, "A day without laughter is a day squandered." Today, the use of humor is not limited to the realm of enjoyment; rather, it is already ushering in a new era in education, particularly English language instruction. Humor is an effective method for teaching and learning. Experts believe that the efficacy of any form of humor largely depends on the viewpoint of the participant, despite the fact that humor has its own domain and significance. Literacy in English language culture among students is inadequate in our nation. Due to insufficient exposure to the English language, this condition develops. Teachers have thus developed a novel approach to instructing students in a particular language. It is commonly believed that students in our nation are reluctant to employ English in conversational situations. Humor has been proven as an effective method of motivating language learners to engage in English communication within this particular framework. Humor promotes human communication, and it makes people happy. It establishes the connection with creativity. Stand-up comedians are able to be creative since humor tends to study the environment.

Humor isn't the same everywhere. Due of boundary differences, it is frequently misconstrued. Bell (2011), on the other hand, points out that regional differences in comedy exist. As a result, researchers are working to develop a new hypothesis that explains how a single word may have such profound effects (p. 137). Our culture has a propensity of using the term "humor" from other cultures as a synonym for our own. In addition, comedy facilitates kinship and paves the way for globalization.

Despite this, the function of humor in learning and teaching remains debatable in Iraq. In today's world, education is based on entertainment." However, there is still a long way to go in the use of comedy in the classroom. In many schools, children are falling behind because they are being taught in the old-fashioned way. Applying classroom comedy requires the involvement of everyone involved: teachers and students alike.

1.1. Research Questions and Hypothesis

This study is expected to contribute to filling an important gap in the literature with respect to the study of the effectiveness of using humor in English language learning classes. Keeping this in mind, in general, this study aims to provide a vivid picture of humor in Iraqi EFL university classes.

The research questions of this study are:

1. To what extent, do the roles of humor play in fostering group cohesion in Iraqi EFL university classes?
2. To what extent, humor brings integrative motivation among Iraqi EFL learners?

The researcher holds the two subsequent hypotheses in the present study.

H01: Humor in Iraqi EFL university classes would boost and sustain enthusiasm among students while also promoting the teaching process.

H02: The employment of humor as an instructional tool would create problems with discipline.

1.2. Significance of the study

"This work is significant since it will contribute to the expansion of knowledge in this field. This domain includes past studies and enhances arguments with newly discovered data. In the future, it may be beneficial to investigate other aspects connected to the substance of humor in learning. The majority of studies were conducted in a western culture, thus their findings may not align with ours. Furthermore, this research investigates the potentially transformative impact of solitary modification on the profession by focusing solely on the viewpoints of Iraqi EFL instructors and learners.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Humor

Humor is the capacity to find certain things amusing, the manner in which individuals perceive certain things as humorous, or the quality of being humorous, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary. Multiple definitions exist for the term "humor." According to Pinheiro (2016), humor is anything that is regarded as amusing, satirical, or presumptuous (p. 2). According to Sen (2012), humor is a form of entertaining discourse. Positive emotions and thoughts are fostered within organizations, groups, and individuals. One purpose of humor is to induce laughter in others and foster an atmosphere of relaxation. Complicating matters, Pollak and D. Freda (1997) classified comedy as a "social skill." It was suggested by the authors that humor aids in stress management, alleviates feelings of sadness, anxiety, and despondency, and enhances one's self-esteem (p. 176). Humor possesses the potential to elicit feelings of pleasure and temporarily alleviate tension among individuals.

According to Ross (1998), humor is defined as "something that elicits laughter or a smile from someone" (p. 1). Humor has the ability to enhance people's enjoyment, yet there are certain cases when this may not apply. Humor can occasionally lead to feelings of humiliation. What one person finds hilarious may not be amusing to another else. Ocon (2015) defined humor as a subjective perspective. He believed that it varied among individuals (p. 3). Based on these qualities, humor can be a very powerful tool for eliciting laughter from individuals. It mitigates psychological stress and offers mental gratification.

2.2. Humor and Education Process

In his study, Karobkin (1988) discovered that humor was deemed unacademic as a pedagogical method in the 20th century (p. 154). Dziegielewski et al. (2003) shown that humor is a highly effective tool for facilitating learning in an educational environment. He proceeded to cite Jerry King, a former educator and member of the National Education Association, who stated, "We are overlooking the main idea; laughter does not hinder learning, but rather improves it" (p. 77). Currently, educators employ humor in the classroom, employing jokes and amusing anecdotes conveyed through technology.

The crucial role of humour in education is increasing steadily. We have progressively distanced ourselves from the conventional educational environment. In the past, teaching experience primarily revolved around the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), whereas the current approach places greater emphasis on communication. Educators employ humour as a strategy to establish rapport and ease tension. To establish a relaxed and favorable atmosphere for the lesson, a mentor may commence by sharing a humorous anecdote or a perplexing puzzle with the class. According to Wulf (2010), using humor in test items can involve incorporating multiple choice questions on a relevant subject. According to the author (p. 156), he held the belief that incorporating comedy into the classroom environment may effectively alleviate exam-related anxiety. Minchew (2001) suggests that instructors should employ various techniques to enhance the enjoyment of learning and actively engage students in the learning process (p. 60).

As stated by Lujan and Di Carlo (2016), humor has a remarkable effect in reducing tension and serves as a therapeutic remedy for boredom. Both authors asserted that humor serves as an unrestricted form of therapy that enhances learning without imposing strain on the memory (p. 433). Previous studies conducted by Berk (2000), Darling & Civikly (1986-1987), and Pollak & Freda (1997) have demonstrated that humor plays a crucial role in human psychology by fostering a positive learning environment in educational settings. It enhances the connection between students and teachers in the classroom.

Based on Pinheiro's opinion (2015), teaching can be categorized as an "Interpersonal endeavour" and humor as a "Common communication behavior" (p. 3). Humor is emerging as a novel pedagogical approach. Instructors who possess a well-developed sense of humor exhibit a strong inclination and enthusiasm for acknowledging the creativity of their students. Crossman (1964) characterized humor as a highly advantageous teaching approach for enhancing the liveliness and attractiveness of the classroom (p. 528). Poirier and Wilhelm (2014) found that humor is commonly used to enhance communication of challenging and monotonous subjects in educational settings (p. 1).

2.3. Humor and Learning Process

Teslow (1995) stated that knowledge acquired through humor is effectively retained. Individuals acquire knowledge more effectively when humor is present, as it evokes positive emotions within them. Aboudan (2009) argues that humor has a significant role in promoting effective teaching methods in the classroom (p. 2). Humor cultivates a constructive rapport between students and teachers, alleviates stress and unease, and enhances engagement in classroom lectures; all of these elements contribute to effective learning. Moreover, there is a lack of uniform understanding of comedy within educational institutions. According to Banas et al. (2010), humor is a concept that lacks uniformity. The focus is not only on acquiring knowledge but also on fostering a sense of unity among students in the classroom learning environment (p. 117). Creativity can serve as the secondary component of humor in the context of learning. Undoubtedly, it aids learners in thinking creatively and unconventionally. According to McGhee (n. d.), humor facilitates the development of learners' creativity by enabling them to extract extraordinary elements from regular situations (p. 4). An illustrative instance from Owen's article in *The Internet TESL Journal* spanning from 1998 to 2005:

Humor is a vital resource to employ in the classroom since it fosters a fresh outlook and stimulates novel concepts in any discipline. College students truly favor instructors who alleviate the tedium of the classroom. When employed accurately, humor can enhance the enjoyment of the learning process. Pollak and D. Freda (1997) found that even slight humor has the ability to engage the focus of a distracted student in the classroom. Students value mentors who make the effort to provide complex concepts in the form of a narrative (p. 177).

The relationship between humor and learning is now closely linked, and they both contribute to the exploration of the linguistic connection. Certain jokes are formulated or delivered in a vague or unclear manner. Consequently, the omission of crucial information leads to a significant misinterpretation by the audience. Honig (1988) asserted that learners must possess a strong command of the language to prevent incongruity (p. 61). Ultimately, proficient language understanding can aid in elucidating the implicit significance of verbal or written comedy. Ross (1998) inquires about the reason for Edward Woodward having four Ds in his name. "If he didn't, he would be called E-war Woo-war" (p. 8).

3.4. Humor in Psychology

Humor is a psychological reaction characterized by a sense of amusement and the ability to make humorous judgements. Humor is essential due to its allure, enjoyment, amusement, ability to promote invention, and capacity to mitigate criticism. Humor fulfils various significant social, cognitive, and emotional roles (Martin, 2007; xv). Furthermore, it is widely accepted among researchers that humor encompasses concepts, visuals, written content, or occurrences that possess an element of incongruity, peculiarity, rarity, unpredictability, or deviation from the norm (ibid, 2007, p6). Psychologists have maintained a longstanding interest in humor for more than a century, beginning with Freud's exploration of jokes and their connection to the unconscious mind. Psychologists have categorized the phenomenon of humor into four primary components, as previously mentioned. Initially, contemplate the societal context. Furthermore, there exists a cognitive perceiving process. Furthermore, take into account your emotional response. Furthermore, there is the vocal-behavioral expression. The subsequent depiction elucidates the definition of humor in relation to many subfields of psychology.

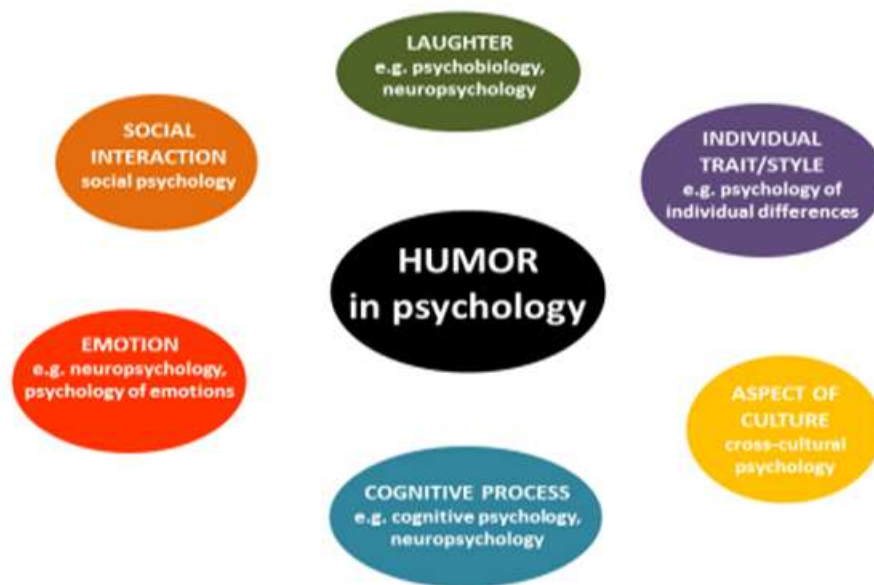


Figure 1.1 Humor in relation with different subfield of psychology

Psychologists apply therapeutic humor, utilizing the power of a smile and laughing, as a form of therapy to improve the well-being of patients. Indeed, certain establishments in affluent nations utilize laughter as a means to alleviate patients' apprehension, rage, tension, and distress. When it comes to humor as a quality of therapists, it is crucial to keep in mind that perceptions of therapist qualities can also impact how effective they are perceived to be. Cultural beliefs about therapists are believed to shape perceptions of what is considered appropriate behavior for a therapist (Lemma, 2000, as cited in Blevins, 2010, p3). Trained jokes are employed in certain European facilities as a valuable resource to aid patients in overcoming daily challenges and enhancing their quality of life.

III. METHODS

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative student survey was conducted. 10 of the questions were closed-ended. The researcher's ability to establish a numerical ratio, which benefited in subsequent data analysis, was the main justification for choosing a quantitative design. The Lickert Scale, however, was used to create survey questions for both students and teachers. For instance, Strongly disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly agree = 5

Devotedly, the participants responded to ten questions. A systematic arrangement had been applied to the questions. Consequently, the participants who engaged in the survey experienced a sense of relaxation and comfort. The questionnaire sought the perspectives of students regarding the implementation of humor elements in English language teaching. The individuals simply denoted the proportion specified on the Lickert scale.

3.1.2. Participants

The overall number of participants was 100, consisting of 10 teachers and 90 students. All participants in the study were fourth-year students enrolled in the Department of English Language at the Faculty of Education for Girls/University of Kufa.

3.1.3 Administration

The questions for the survey were written in MS by the researcher. The survey consisted of a total of 10 different statements. All of the questions were arranged in descending difficulty from simple to complex. Later, in the discussion section, their responses were carefully considered and examined.

IV. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. The Outcomes of the Questionnaire

This section includes the calculation of students' questionnaire responses.

SA= Strongly Agree A = Agree N = Neutral D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

Table 4.1. Humor is a great way to break the ice in the classroom.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	10	25	15	30	10
T:			4		6

Table 4.2. The use of humor in the study of a foreign language has been found to be effective.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	20	10	10	10	40
T:			5		5

Table 4.3. Humor has a positive effect on students' minds.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:		30		10	50
T:		2		4	4

Table 4.4. Even in a foreign language, the use of humor can help convey complex ideas.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	30			50	10
T:			1	2	7

Table 4.5. An English instructor who has a sense of humor encourages me to learn English.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	10		5	40	35
T:				10	

Table 4.6. I prefer taking English courses with an English instructor who uses humor in the classroom.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	3	9	6	42	30
T:		1	2	4	3

Table 4.7. Humor defuses anxiety in classroom activities.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	5	8	7	32	38
T:		1		2	7

Table 4.8. Humor promotes critical thinking

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	10	15	15	24	26
T:		2		3	5

Table 4.9. I am more likely to attend class when there is a serious classroom atmosphere.

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:	15	25	20	10	10
T:		3		2	5

Table 4.10. When the English instructor uses funny example it makes me more interested in learning English

	SD	D	N	A	SA
S:		10	19	21	40
T:			1	4	5

4.2. Discussion

Upon synchronizing all of the data, the researchers utilized them in the discussion chapter to ascertain the study's outcomes. Based on the survey data, students (with a mean score of 4.3) perceive humor as an effective method for breaking the ice in a classroom setting. Students may make a class more participatory, dynamic, and

collaborative by using humor. It may additionally offer students a chance to get to know one another before the classroom activity begins. In their literature evaluation, Dziegielewski et al. (2003) asserted that using humor is an effective approach to initiate English language courses (p. 77). According to the study, teachers should ensure that their use of humor as an icebreaker aligns with the classroom agenda. In addition, it can distract the students, cause instructors to lose control of the class, and waste valuable time.

Based on the outcomes of the survey, students (Mean-4) hold the belief that humor can be beneficial in the process of learning a second language. The concepts of grammar and pronunciation can be effectively elucidated in the classroom through the utilization of humor. In addition, incorporating humor into instruction promotes the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Students additionally articulate their opinions in a public forum. Consequently, the conversation becomes productive. The researchers emphasize that presenting a grammar difficulty with humor increases pupils' connection with their mnemonic device. The user's text is empty. As an illustration, the humorous grammar rules from 2011 state that one should not begin a sentence with a conjunction. When instructors use this type of framework in the classroom, students may easily retain this material in their long-term memory. However, it is also beneficial to think in a divergent manner.

According to Eagen (2010), humor sparks public attention and encourages divergent and creative thinking. The questionnaire's results confirmed what Eagen (2010) had pointed out. Keeping with the previous remark, the ratio indicates that teachers' (Mean-4.4) and students' (Mean-4.2) humor has a significant favourable impact on students' minds.

Using humor enables students to overcome their fears, reduces classroom nervousness, and makes them feel at ease during discussions. In the following instance, teachers' (Mean-3.8) and students' (Mean-4.2). A good second language classroom, on the other hand, may have an impact on students' psychology as well. Berk (2000), Darling & Civikly (1986-1987), and Pollak & Freda (1997) all emphasized the use of humor as a means to decrease anxiety in the classroom. Based on the researchers' observations, humor is highly effective in reducing both boredom and anxiety in real-life situations. It induces relaxation in the brain and muscles, while simultaneously facilitating the process of learning.

Humor encourages critical thinking. In this study, both participants had the same 3.9 ratio. Humor facilitates the proper processing of the brain. Humor is currently considered genuine material in the classroom, as reported by students and instructors. The main rationale is that it enhances the classroom environment by fostering a more amicable and streamlined environment. In addition, humor enhances pupils' concentration on challenging subjects and fosters the generation of creative solutions. Therefore, it may be argued that humor fosters inventiveness in real-world situations and optimism in the process of learning the English language.

Humor contributes to the development of integrative motivation for English language. Motivation is the cornerstone to every successful endeavor. Integrative motivation involves learning a language out of personal curiosity, with no specific objectives in mind. Due to their own enthusiasm and personal interest, individuals are enthused about studying English culture. This statement's survey mean scores are (Students – 3.9). Even if there is a (0.7) point gap in the average scores of students and teachers, the researcher likes to believe that humor can be used to increase integrative motivation in the English language classroom. Moreover, teachers bear the greatest obligation for motivating students by citing various English language jokes. Consider classroom vocabulary instruction.

Humor reflects the dispositions of instructors in the classroom, as evidenced by the means of both teachers (4.1) and students (4.1). Students actually do favor instructors who intersperse sessions with quips, humorous anecdotes, or puzzles. Students prefer a varied curriculum to a monotonous lecture, which produces a depressing classroom atmosphere. "Entertaining course material adds variety to lectures," as Simin and Ketabi (2017) claim (p. 4). Subsequently, a thought-provoking scholarly discourse ensues. However, teachers must exercise extreme caution while presenting comedy. Too much laughter frequently results in chaos. As a result, students take the course for granted. Teachers are unable to retain classroom authority. Although humor diminishes the authoritative position in the classroom, teachers must nevertheless preserve their personalities. The mean score of 3.6 for both participants is in agreement with the statement that humor facilitates the development of positive relationships with teachers. Observations in the classroom indicate that students are at ease when it comes to posing inquiries and that their mental state is tranquil, facilitating the assimilation of input.

Teachers' mean (4.1) and students' mean (4.1) imply that humor is used to reflect teachers' classroom characteristics. In actuality, pupils tend to favor lecturers who intersperse their lectures with jokes, humorous stories, or puzzles. A monotonous lecture creates a dreary classroom environment, whereas pupils need learning diversity. According to Simin & Ketabi (n.d.), hilarious course materials bring variety to teaching (p. 4). Consequently, this leads to a fruitful classroom debate. However, instructors must exercise extreme caution while conveying comedy. Frequently, excessive laughter leads to disorder. As a result, students evaluate the course too lightly. Teachers are unable to retain classroom authority. Certainly, humor lessens the teacher's authority in the classroom, but teachers should still keep their individuality. Both participants have a mean

opinion of 3.6 regarding the statement that humor benefits in forming positive relationships with teachers. Observations in the classroom indicate that students feel free to ask any questions and are in a relaxed condition, which facilitates easy input capturing.

Humor, on the other hand, is a difficult endeavor. Teachers are not always able to generate humor on the spot. In this study, teachers scored (4) and students scored (3.9) entirely agreed with this topic. If instructors say something out of the blue and students do not comprehend, the teacher risks losing students' trust. As a result, it follows that in order to appreciate humor, students must have strong verbal skills. The questionnaire's scenario is nearly the same (teachers' mean-4.3, students' mean-4.1). If the humor is not recognized by students, teachers are wasting valuable classroom time. A simple recommendation would be for instructors to choose words based on their student's comprehension level. As a result, being vigilant is one approach to prevent these situations, or the mentor can provide a clear background of terms if the meaning is unclear to students.

Creating humor, on the other hand, is a challenging task. Teachers can't always make a joke on the spot. In a survey, four percent of teachers and three-point-nine-point-nine-point-nine-point-nine-point-n if teachers say something unexpectedly and pupils do not get it, there is a significant chance that they will lose their students' attention. In order to comprehend comedy, pupils must have a strong grasp of the English language. The survey results are nearly same (mean for teachers is 4.3 and for students it is 4.1). If students are unable to recognize the comedy, teachers are wasting valuable classroom time. A simple recommendation would be for teachers to consider the proficiency level of their students when selecting appropriate words. Therefore, vigilance can be used to avoid such situations, or if learners are unfamiliar with a word's meaning, the mentor can provide a concise explanation.

Humor is the most significant factor. In the educational sector, it has social, pedagogical, and cognitive value. If a teacher use humor effectively and appropriately, it can be a vital tool for maximizing student learning. Additionally, it must keep in mind that excessive humor may have a negative impact on both learning and the personality of the teacher. The essential goal must be always be a productives instructional strategy, with the use of humor to assist and facilitate the learning process.

V. CONCLUSION

The overview of this topic provides the notion that comedy can be utilized as an effective learning aid in the classroom. The survey results and scholarly references substantially support this position. According to the researcher's results, the advantages are readily apparent. Tension and anxiety between students and their instructors can be alleviated through the use of humor when appropriate. Creative thought and expression may be stimulated with its assistance. Collaboration among children can additionally promote solidarity and cooperation. Students' comprehension of academic matters may be aided by a humorous illustration.

However, instructors should thoroughly assess the perils associated with utilizing unsuitable or excessive humor. If an excessive amount of humor is incorporated into the classroom, students could start to adopt a more casual attitude. Moreover, this could squander valuable instructional time. The instructor should proactively discourage inappropriate humor, including statements that are sexist, racist, biased, or derogatory in any kind. Teachers should have the freedom to utilize humor in the classroom, as long as it is executed correctly. If the instructor utilizes it appropriately, it serves as a valuable tool that improves students' communication abilities and facilitates learning, especially in the context of language acquisition.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Employing humor as a pedagogical approach necessitates a diligent instructor who can effectively utilize it without compromising classroom order. In addition, the researcher offers the following main tips for using humor in a considerate way:

1. Teachers should be able to provide humor and choose the right kinds.
2. If humor is used in a classroom context, teachers must adhere to the course objectives.
3. Humor is acceptable when used to provide a helpful learning environment.
4. Using humor throughout the session is not always beneficial. In other words, discipline issues are a result of humor, which causes teachers to lose the respect of their students.
5. When humor is unsuccessful, it is not acceptable. In other words, it is important to avoid employing humor when it does not produce better outcomes.

The significance of this study is that positive humor provides potential ways for overcoming such obstacles, as it can facilitate L2 acquisition by fostering a more relaxed, motivating, and secure classroom environment. However, certain considerations should be taken when employing humor in the classroom, and teachers must first assess its appropriateness in the context of Iraqi EFL classes. To ensure that humor has a good impact in the classroom, instructors should avoid jokes that ridicule students for their ignorance (poor competence in the TL) or bad behavior.

The present study's findings imply that teachers' and students' humor, as perceived and practiced, is a significant classroom phenomena with multi-layered qualities that can be interpreted in various ways. However, there are still a number of areas that require further inquiry in order to build a deeper grasp of the topic. It is suggested that a bigger, randomly selected sample be selected in order to compare its results to those of the current study. In addition, the authors suggest that comparable research be undertaken in other EFL contexts and other contexts where the use of humor is further investigated.

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