

Laughing to Learn: Exploring the Impact of Teacher Humor on Motivation and Speaking Skill Development in Pakistani EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

The present study investigates the role of teacher humor in enhancing learners' motivation and speaking skill development in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms at the primary level in Pakistan. Recognizing that affective factors significantly influence second language acquisition, this research explores how humor, as a positive pedagogical strategy, contributes to student engagement, confidence, and communicative competence. Adopting a qualitative research design, data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews involving three teachers and forty Grade 5 students from a government primary school in Tehsil Lawa, District Chakwal. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that humor was used in multiple forms—verbal, nonverbal, and situational—to facilitate understanding, reduce anxiety, and sustain learners' attention. The findings indicate that appropriate and contextually relevant humor not only fosters a relaxed and interactive classroom atmosphere but also enhances students' willingness to participate in speaking tasks. Most students reported increased motivation, better retention of vocabulary, and improved confidence when humor was integrated into lessons. However, the study also cautions that excessive or misplaced humor can momentarily distract learners from instructional goals. Overall, the research concludes that humor, when purposefully and sensitively applied, serves as a powerful tool for creating a supportive and communicative environment conducive to language learning. The study recommends that teacher training programs incorporate humor-based strategies to strengthen classroom rapport and promote active speaking among young EFL learners in Pakistan.

Keywords: Motivation, Humor, Acquisition, Interactive, Instructional goals

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Background of Study

The word "humour" comes from the Latin word *umor*, which means "body fluid" (the substance that regulates human health and emotions) and is where we get the word "humour." A later definition of the term describes it as "anything that makes a person smile or chuckle" (Ross, 2005). When it comes to the educational setting, academics have a tendency to identify humour from a variety of perspectives based on the unique context in which it is used (Raskin, 2008).

Researchers in the social sciences, particularly those in the fields of education and psychology, have for a long time investigated humour for its general, conducive pedagogical effects on a variety of levels (Banas et al., 2011). This is the case despite the fact that humour has only received a limited amount of consideration from SLA researchers in the published literature (Askildson, 2005).

The use of humour in language instruction has taken a series of steps that are broadly comparable but gradually distinct. However, its replacement by behavioral approaches based on conformity, repetition, and cadence such as the Audio Lingual Method (ALM) allowed for very few new opportunities for the use of humour in the classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The death of the classical language classroom, which was based upon the traditional grammar translation approach, occurred at roughly the same time as the demise of most classical educational models in general (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

There is no doubt that the use of humour strengthens the ties between students and teachers as well as between students and their peers (Deiter, 2000). The use of humour that is not confrontational and that is relevant and acceptable can be an effective learning tool that reinforces concepts (Torok, McMorris, & Lin, 2004). It is the objective of each and every educator to achieve success in the classroom and to facilitate the education of their students. The teachers want their students to be enthusiastic and involved in the lesson. That level of involvement can be further fueled by the power of humour. A healthy dose of laughter is shown to reduce stress and boost creative output (Berk, 2002). It's not necessary to be witty to have a good sense of humour.

So, the significance of their ability to capture the attention of students through the application of comedy becomes much greater. This kind of teaching not only assists students in retaining information for a longer period of time but also enables them to maintain concentration while they are in the classroom (Banas et al., 2011). It makes the atmosphere in the classroom more upbeat, and it assists the teachers in regaining their

students' attention. Also, the students who were beginning to become distracted by their own worlds are brought back into the sphere of the classroom (Pollak & Freda, 1997).

When students are unable to cope with the mental and emotional strain that comes with the demands placed on them by their schools and communities, we frequently hear reports of them falling into depression or taking their own lives. The use of humour in the classroom is undeniably beneficial for reducing some of those pressures (Savage et al., 2017). It is one of the most effective ways of relieving stress because it eases tension, makes it easier to connect with other people, and is a necessity when the course load is particularly demanding (Berk, 2014).

When instruction is combined with humour, a magical mixture is created that makes mastering even the most challenging of subjects seem like a piece of cake for students. As one would always remember the context and, as a result, tie it to the topic, it would be very difficult to forget the same thing if it was associated with humour (Askildson, 2005). The use of humour in the classroom is one strategy for facilitating beneficial contact between teachers and students by breaking the ice (Garner, 2006). Because of the humour, the atmosphere is brighter, and the majority of the students find it simpler to converse or pose inquiries.

The teachers at today's schools are encouraged, on a fundamental level, to employ a variety of methods in order to teach the same old subjects. The purpose of the activity as a whole is to remove any sense of urgency or burden from the learning process so that it can be enjoyed more. The process of comprehending is simplified when accompanied by humorous elements and current-day illustrations (Banas et al., 2011). Without a shadow of a doubt, humour both energizes and contributes to increased creative output (Savage et al., 2017).

Problem Statement

The attitude that students have towards the target language is one of the major issues that teachers of second languages in primary schools report most frequently as a barrier to effective instruction (Gardner, 2010; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). The majority of students in Pakistan view English as a foreign language, despite the fact that it is taught as a second language in the classroom there (Manan et al., 2017). They study the language not because they have any interest in doing so, but rather because they are required to do so. It would appear that this has played a role in contributing to the decline in the standard of English used throughout the country (Rahman, 2020).

The importance of students' intrinsic motivation in their acquisition of a second language cannot be overstated (Dörnyei, 2005; Lamb, 2017).

Even though the vast majority of people who are learning English as a second language in our country are aware of the essential role that the English language plays as a medium of communication, there are still some students who do not have the necessary amount of enthusiasm to study the language (Khan, 2019).

Studies done in the past have demonstrated that students who participated in classes in which their teachers used humour in their lessons were more motivated in the classroom (Banas et al., 2011; Askildson, 2005). It is widely held, therefore, that incorporating humour into the process of learning a language can help the learning process itself, specifically the emotional and cognitive processes as well as the establishment of an encouraging atmosphere in the classroom (Garner, 2006; Berk, 2014).

According to the findings of some researchers, a significant number of Pakistani students of the English language have a low level of achievement for a variety of reasons. These reasons include a lack of exposure to a second language (L2), a lack of interest in learning the target language (TL), and a lack of motivation (Manan et al., 2017; Rahman, 2020). In the context of Pakistani government schools located in the Tehsil Lawa District of Chakwal, in addition to these other issues, the prescribed textbook and the students' low levels of competency in the target language are also factors (Khan, 2019).

This study contends that humour can improve teaching and learning processes in Pakistani English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings in general, and the context of the government sector in particular, when adequate consideration is given to the variables listed above (Banas et al., 2011; Berk, 2002). This study will explain how the use of humour in the classroom can create chances for language learning, as well as highlight the most important findings about the use of humour in the classroom. This study is intended to concentrate on the perspectives of students on the use of humour in the process of learning English.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the current study are as following:

1. To identify the different types and functions of humor used by EFL teachers in primary classrooms.
2. To examine students' perceptions of the role of humor in enhancing their speaking skills, classroom participation, and comfort level during English language learning.

Research Questions

The present study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What types of humor do EFL teachers use in primary classrooms?
2. How do students perceive the use of humor in improving their speaking confidence and participation in English language classrooms?

Significance of Study

It is anticipated that the results of this study will help teachers, learners, and the designers of teacher training programmes identify the positive and negative effects of using sense of humor in the EFL classroom and provide them with a very well basis for understanding the benefits of using humour in Pakistani EFL classrooms. Specifically, it is anticipated that this study will help teachers identify the positive and negative effects of using humour in the EFL classroom.

In addition to this, it is anticipated that the study will shed light on the potential drawbacks that could result from the inappropriate application of humour and that it will provide an understanding of the relationship between the use of humour and the level of proficiency that L2 learners have in the second language. The researcher has high hopes that the findings of this study would be beneficial not only to students and teachers but also to future researchers.

Research Methodology

The present study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the role of humor in enhancing speaking skills and learner engagement in EFL classrooms. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of teacher and student experiences within natural classroom settings. The study was conducted at a government primary school in Tehsil Lawa, District Chakwal, involving three EFL teachers and forty Grade 5 students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The classroom observations focused on recording different types of humor—verbal, nonverbal, and situational—used by teachers during speaking lessons, as well as the immediate reactions and engagement of students. The semi-structured interviews with both students provided detailed insights into their perceptions of humor, its pedagogical value, and its influence on motivation and participation. All collected data were transcribed and analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework.

Data Analysis

Humor Used in Teaching Speaking skills

The information presented in this section was compiled using an observation protocol. The researcher relied on observation and video recording to gather data while the teacher made use of comedy. The researcher then made the following inferences about humour in teaching speaking skills.

The teacher used appropriate humour to help students better understand the content. Because it provided feedback for the students' presentations, the teacher incorporated comedy into the primary activity that comprised the learning process. The researcher was then able to determine, through the course of the observation, that the teacher uses comedy that is pertinent to the subject matter:

The audience will focus on your body motions as they become the primary focus of their attention. Thus, you need to make effective use of your body movements during the presentation. And everyone in the class laughs together.

According to the previously provided explanation, the teacher employed humour that was relevant to the subject matter of the students' presentation, which demonstrated how to use body movement when presenting. When the student gave a presentation, the teacher advised them to be conscious of how their bodies moved while speaking. Students should remember to maintain their bodies still throughout the presentation and only move their heads or hands in order to explain the material.

The teacher never failed to provide a demonstration of how to make effective use of body movement when speaking. In addition, the evidence presented above demonstrated that the teacher employed humour that was connected to the subject matter of the class because some of the students get it wrong when they use body movement in storytelling. The teacher encouraged students to engage in more exploration of storytelling, but emphasized to them the importance of maintaining bodily movement throughout the process, since this has an effect on the outcome.

The researcher came to the conclusion during the subsequent meeting of the observation that the use of personal experience and humour derived from external sources was beneficial to the learning process. Students who have had personal experiences are more likely to be interested in learning about the experiences of other people and to pay closer attention to the course material. This humorous account is filed under the heading of narrative anecdotes. This is an example:

Teacher: "Do you know about Putri?" that graduated from this faculty and she has good skills in speaking skills such as confidence and creative thinking. (Demonstrate your fervor, keep a solemn expression, and stand with your back straight. Then students laugh since the teacher was making hilarious expression)

The teacher told a narrative about people experiences to the students. The teacher desired the student's confidence and creative thinking to communicate the ideas in speaking skills. This occurs as a result of the fact that some of the students did not adequately prepare for the presentation. Furthermore, the teacher presented the narrative, and students laugh together. In addition, the explanation given above the teacher demonstrated that personal experience influences the students to pay attention to the subject matter. This was demonstrated by the students' attentiveness to the information provided by the teacher and by the students' positive response, such as laughter, after the teacher had explained something.

Nonverbal comedy offered numerous illustrated such as facial expression, gesture, and tone voice. The majority of the time, the teacher used humour as the primary activity in the learning process. This was done to help the student remember the knowledge, to assist the student in comprehending the teachers' feedback, and to keep the students from forgetting the information. For example: To begin, the teacher provided an illustration of appropriate verbal expression by using a verbal expression to fit the scenario. The teacher exhibited genuine expressions of joy when describing students' experiences.

A phony smile throughout the presentation of the tale revealed that the students had not adequately prepared for the performance. Moreover, ensure that the viewer is uninterested in the story. On the other hand, vocal expression causes the students to chuckle, which in turn makes them pay attention when the teacher is providing feedback. Then, during the telling of the narrative, smiling was an expression that encouraged self-assurance and sent a positive vibe to the audience. Example:

Student: "Wassalamualaikum." (Completed the presentation)

Teacher: (Smiling) "Ok thank you."

It is imperative that you pay close attention to how the story is told. When you relate the story, you can't help but crack a smile.

The preceding explanation demonstrated that the teachers smiled to portray their character when they were recounting the story. The student did not grin to convey how they were feeling, and she simply had an expressionless face when she was narrating the narrative. The teacher was providing the students with facts that they needed to be aware of in order to produce a successful performance and to convey their character.

Then the teacher was giving feedback to the students that displayed smiling movement: stretching bones, showing teeth, smiling and the students laugh together. Such expression should be used by the students in their performance since expression makes the audiences engaged in the

plot. Second, the action taken by the teacher to bolster the humorous content of the lesson.

The action made it simpler for the teacher to combine comedy and provide feedback for the class using a single motion. The teacher demonstrated once more, on the basis of the observation, the disposition of the students' performance when justifying the veil while they were presenting a story. The teacher emphasized to the class the importance of the students dressing appropriately and maintaining a nice appearance during their performance.

The students were able to mix movement and word because to the facilitation provided by nonverbal communication. Because the students were able to represent a character in the story through the use of the gesture, it is beneficial to the performance of the storytelling. Example:

Student: (Waves hands and explains why the veil is necessary)

Teacher: You need to make sure that your garments are properly prepared. It is inappropriate to justify your performance with a veil and pretend that all of the students are present.

The discussion that was just reviewed demonstrated that the student justified her veil by waving her hands. After that, the teacher practiced the gesture by smiling, waving their hands, and justifying their veil. The performance was upsetting and unattractive, and as a result, the students would do well to ensure that they have everything under control.

Thirdly, in order to grab the students' attention, the teacher raised her voice. The usage of sounds and expressions on one's face makes it simpler for a teacher to engage in conversation with their students.

Student: "(in a low voice) once upon a time..."

Teacher: "Please open your mouth and be louder."

The discussion that took place earlier illustrated that the teacher requests a stronger voice from the students in order to make the lecture understandable. In the demonstration, the children spoke in a hushed tone and were difficult to understand when they related the story. In addition, the researcher discovered that the teacher frequently used non-verbal forms of humour.

The teacher used a form of comedy that was non-verbal to help the students better absorb the material. A healthy contact between the teacher and the students can also be formed through the use of nonverbal comedy by the teacher. The preceding explanation demonstrated that the teacher is capable of increasing the students' level of attention to the subject matter. Nonverbal communication was very important for the students to improve their knowledge of the topic when it came to storytelling.

On the other hand, the educator integrated teacher-targeted comedy and nonverbal humour into their delivery of humorous material. The

preceding explanation demonstrated that the teacher used comedy that was linked to the subject matter by making gestures that made it easy for students to understand the teachers' feedback. This type of comedy, along with nonverbal humour, is used because it makes it simpler for the students to take in and process the material.

The teacher used riddles as a way to investigate the students' sense of humour through the usage of imagery. During the observation, the teacher gives the students discussion and asks them to come up with riddles based on what they see. This is a single poster that contains four different pictures.

To illustrate, the students gave a presentation to the class in order to impart the information that they had learned. This portion helps the student enhance their ability to communicate orally. The students' creative thinking was stimulated as well as their interpretation of the information from the discussions through the use of riddles. The following is a list of riddles that the students described:

Teacher A commented that the first discussion demonstrated that the student had put in a lot of effort in order to earn a decent value. After that, he makes the decision to concentrate on what he desires, and there is no longer a difficulty. In the end, he completed the task in a hurry and then continued on to play a game. After that,

The teacher said, "Are those bright students?" followed by laughter because teacher A had just delivered the material with serious faces.

Teacher B noted that the student did not study but rather took a break and was unsure on how to begin studying again. After that, we saw him having fun by playing games and enjoying his time. As a result, the discussion conveyed the idea that he wishes to achieve success in spite of his lack of academic preparation. After that, the teacher stated, "really?" and laughed, so he did not do anything other than wish everyone to have a positive experience and laugh together.

After a few minutes, Teacher C went on to explain that the student had worked very hard in order to obtain a high value, and he had succeeded in doing so. After that, he engaged in some playful activity. So, it is possible to draw the conclusion from this debate that we can grant awards based on how much effort has been put in.

The student laughed when the teacher asked, "which portions exhibited comedy?" because she had not explored humour in the presentation. The teacher had asked the question.

In addition to riddles, students are encouraged to investigate comedy through the use of pictures. In this lesson, the teacher made available various media in order to help students improve their performance in terms of their speaking skills. The above explanation demonstrated that the three students came up with distinct facts and interpretations regarding the

discussion. The use of humour is something that the students can practice thanks to the discussions. When there is humour involved, the students have more fun communicating the concepts that they got from the discussions.

Students Response Toward the Use of Humor in Teaching Speaking Skill

After the researcher had done observation in the classroom to obtain an idea of the many types of humour that the teacher utilizes during the learning process, the researcher next questioned the students for their replies. The researcher pays attention to the reactions of the students in order to understand how they reacted when the teacher used comedy in the classroom.

The researcher chose three individuals from the entire class at random to observe, and these students were selected since the majority of their reactions were positive and negative. Then, every one of them came from a unique background, both in terms of knowledge and experience. The findings of the observation revealed that the vast majority of the students have a favorable reaction when it comes to making use of comedy in the classroom.

The fact that the students gave a positive answer indicates that they understand and appreciate the humour that their teacher uses while providing feedback to them. The vast majority of students believe that comedy should be used in the classroom because it can transform the atmosphere of the class to make it less stressful, easier to receive information, and more conducive to student concentration on the subject matter being covered.

During the classroom, while both instruction and learning were taking place, the researcher participated in a class on public speaking skills. As evidence that the majority of the students were laughing at the teacher's jokes and enjoying themselves, I'll use this. The vast majority of the students appeared to be enjoying themselves, relaxing, and finding it much simpler to obtain the information from the teacher's response.

At the same time, some of the students were providing critical feedback since they believed that comedy did not increase the student's attention to the topic at hand but rather served to refresh the brain while the teacher was speaking. The favorable answer was,

"Humor makes it simpler to comprehend the facts provided by the material and the comments made by the teacher." (The A and B Teachers)

According to the above response, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the majority of the students believe that humour assists them in comprehending the material covered in the class. The students have a good

reception to the content as a result of the usage of comedy, which makes it simpler for them to absorb the knowledge.

Students are more likely to feel better when they utilize humour because it helps them better absorb teacher feedback. Students feel more at ease and are better able to concentrate when humour is incorporated into the lesson. In order to impart knowledge in a way that would leave students feeling uplifted, the teacher frequently resorted to using nonverbal humour. Moreover, humour makes people enthusiastic to learn the content being presented. Those students who provide negative feedback can be presented the following statement:

"No, Humor relieves tension and did not make it possible to absorb the topic." (Teacher C)

The following examples of student responses provide the second positive and negative response:

"Laughter makes it simpler to communicate information. The teacher set a better example to practice exploring material through humour, and making speaking in public was made to be more enjoyable (Teacher A and B).

According to the previous response, humour is beneficial to the students since it helps them develop their speaking skills. Many mentioned that comedy encourages individuals to speak up since it makes it simpler to communicate their thoughts. Making people laugh made it easier for the children to have a positive contact with the audience. In addition to that, the teacher set a great example by using comedic timing throughout her performance. Then, a response that is not positive, such as

"No, merely to renew the brain," can be given. (Teacher C)

The answer is that humour makes learning more comfortable and enhances the amount of positive connection between teachers and students. It also raises the amount of student participation. Thus, an atmosphere that is conducive to good learning can benefit from the inclusion of comedy. In addition to the students, more awareness and participation in learning and public speaking skills is required.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicated that irony and teasing were employed most frequently in elementary class. This was the case in respect to the differences that existed between the pupils. Irony was utilised more frequently by the instructor. The findings backed up the instructor's assertion that one should exercise greater caution when using sarcasm in primary school because the capacity to recognise irony and sarcasm only increases with increasing age (Pexman & Glenwright, 2007; Recchia et al., 2010).

In light of this, the instructor of the Primary class frequently employed a form of humour that is considered to be more neutral: teasing (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). Additional types of humour had similarities with these types, such as being tied to a factor besides age. Because of the emphasis placed on vocabulary in primary school lectures, for instance, students engaged in language play more frequently (Bell, 2011; Dynel, 2009).

The findings not only demonstrated that it is impossible to depend solely on age as a separate component that affects the use of humour, but they also revealed some fascinating variances in how people use humour (Raskin, 2008). The study supplied vital findings to the area of research since it gave extensive information on specific target groups that have not been researched before (Martin, 2019). Also, the study offered an in-depth look at the use of humour in primary school classes that were all taught by the same teacher.

The current study had a number of interests, one of which was the impact that humour has on the environment of a classroom. The findings demonstrated that humour has primarily beneficial consequences (Banas et al., 2011; Garner, 2006). A handful of the cases in the data exhibited indications of negativity, but these were more related to the disruption of educational activities and the presence of undesired noise than they were to the actual content of the humorous sequences (Meyer, 2010).

In addition, the current study could only depend on observations, making it difficult to conduct an analysis of humour as a potentially detrimental force (Crawford, 2003). The participants were the only ones who could have confirmed that the extracts were negative; however, because of the limits of the current investigation, no interviews with students were included in this report.

If there are no visible signals that demonstrate a move from humorous mode to serious mode, including severe emotional responses like crying, it is difficult for an observer or even a teacher to confirm that the use of humour has a detrimental effect (Dynel, 2009). When a student, something, or someone is playfully targeted during a lecture, however, one cannot be certain of the pupils' actual feelings because there are no apparent indications to indicate this (Billig, 2005).

In point of fact, the teacher mentioned throughout the course of the interview that the job of a teacher might occasionally mirror the work of a detective in the sense that one must recognise when humour develops into bullying as opposed to humour that is in good character (Keltner & Bonanno, 1997). The current research featured a number of flaws and restrictions that needed to be taken into consideration. To begin, it was not easy to make a comparison of the students' use of humour because there were other factors that had an effect on it. These factors included the context of the lesson as well as each student's individual use of and reactions to humour (Nesi, 2012).

In addition, because there was a lack of data, we were only able to identify a few distinct variances. Second, it was difficult to determine the impact that humour had on the environment of the classroom through simple observation alone. This was due to the fact that both the instructor and the students expressed their negative feelings and reactions with less clarity than their positive feelings and reactions (Martin, 2019). In conclusion, if more time had been spent analyzing the data before the interview was carried out, it may have been possible for the interview to provide more helpful information on particular comedic sequences. Despite this, the interview contributed significant new material that was helpful to the ongoing research and was a valuable addition to the process.

It was possible to analyse the findings in relation to the teacher's perspectives on humour because another method of study was used, which was an interview with the teacher (Garner, 2006). In a study that relied solely on conversation analysis, all of the findings were based on observations and, as a result, on the understandings of the participants' display of each other's actions (Haugh & Bousfield, 2012). However, in a study that included the teacher interview as an additional method of study, the findings were able to be analysed in relation to the teacher's own perceptions of humour use and impact.

In conclusion, several recommendations for additional research could be given. It would be interesting for future researchers to compare the ways in which a teacher and his or her students use humour when they are just getting to know each other as opposed to when they have worked with one another for a long time and have had the opportunity to establish their relationships (Morrison, 2012). This is because the teacher who participated in the current study placed a strong emphasis on the importance of the history and relationship between the teacher and the student. Also, it would be an interesting topic for research to investigate how the usage of humour between a teacher and a new class or group of students evolves throughout the course of a teacher's career in the classroom (Martin, 2019).

Because younger children have more trouble comprehending and producing certain types of irony, for instance, one other interesting research topic would be to investigate even younger students' or nursery children's use of humour (Pexman & Glenwright, 2007). This is because younger children have less experience with the forms of irony. In conclusion, when considering the positive and negative effects that humour can have on the atmosphere of a classroom, it would be beneficial to conduct a study that included student interviews in order to gain insight into the possible negative effects that are lurking beneath the surface of humour in the classroom (Billig, 2005; Crawford, 2003).

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