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## Humor in the EFL Context: An Investigation of Algerian Second-Year LMD Students' and Teachers' Attitudes at Medea University

### Abstract

Despite its undeniable locus in the teaching-learning process, the use of humor in EFL (English as a foreign language) classrooms seems to be disregarded. Its benefits, however, have been praised in academia. The aim of this article is to investigate students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of humor in the EFL classroom. Additionally, it examined the extent to which humor is used in the English language teaching-learning practice. This study adopted a descriptive design. A case study was undertaken at the Department of Foreign Languages, Section of English of Dr. Yahia Fares University (Medea) relying on two research instruments in order to collect data: a questionnaire for students and another for teachers, and classroom observation. The sample of the study is the selection of all second-year students (82) and teachers (11). The obtained data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The findings of this research denoted that the majority of students and teachers held significantly positive attitudes toward using humor in EFL classes. Thus, it was recommended that the integration of humor in the language classroom should constantly be at the forefront of every teacher's mind.

## 1. Introduction:

With the emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and language acquisition theories, it has been evidenced that lowering EFL students' affective filter and building a welcoming learning atmosphere is exceptionally recommended for success in the teaching-learning context. The latter techniques, in fact, dramatically help language students to maximize their concentration and motivation for learning (Brandl; Krashen).

Many crucial factors are identified as leading to teacher effectiveness. The incorporation of humor in the teaching-learning process has continuously been no exception (Berk). Accordingly, one can easily state that humorous teachers are favored by students, whereas less humorous ones are less preferred. However, the implementation of humor in the EFL classrooms is still debatable among specialists and educationalists. According to many researchers, the integration of humor inside the classroom can, indeed, enable language students to feel relaxed, decrease their anxiety and boredom, make a joyful classroom environment, and establish a close rapport with their instructors.

Despite its aforementioned bonuses, humor in education and in language teaching, in particular, is, in fact, an understudied subject. Put differently, the body of research regarding humor in English language teaching is much smaller compared to the focus that has been directed toward other strategies that can reduce students' boredom or anxiety, such as games or communicative activities (Nguyen). In Algeria, not much attention has been focused on the role of humor in English language teaching. Many teachers, educationalists, and students in Algeria have little or no knowledge about using humor in the classroom and its possible effects on English language learning. This is reflected in the lack of literature on this subject in Algeria. Moreover, there has been no similar research at the department of foreign languages section of English at Medea University, the context of the present study. This signals the existence of a gap in knowledge with respect to the crucial issue of utilizing

humor in class. This research, then, aims to contribute to the literature on humor by investigating second-year Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD) Algerian students' and teachers' attitudes toward the use of humor in EFL classrooms at Dr. Yahia Fares University of Medea.

Since the place of English as a foreign language is increasingly becoming more emphasized in Algeria, the mastery of a wide range of English language skills is definitely advantageous, or even a necessity, for success in one's professional, academic and personal life. Consequently, many researchers have attempted to find ways so as to facilitate and encourage English language learning. It is, perhaps, no surprise that a better understanding of humor and its role(s) in teaching English will lead to fruitful outcomes. Likewise, the results of the current study would not only encourage English language teaching but also aid teachers to confidently use humor in their instruction. Another expected benefit of this research would be the obtention of a well-founded understanding of how, why, and when humor should or should not be employed or allowed.

Another significance of this study is related to the researcher's teaching experience. Having been a teacher of English for two years in Elaouinate Middle School of Ain Boussif, Medea, Algeria, it is noticeable that most of my colleagues almost ignore the use of humor in their classrooms. On the contrary, they all share the same slogan "Teaching is a serious business. Therefore, I never attempt, in one way or another, to be humorous or even show one single smile on my face." For many of them, using humor in the classroom setting threatens the teachers' authoritative power which may result in the fact that students would show no more of their respect. The latter, of course, can be generally considered as an unavoidable quality of the teaching-learning process. Nevertheless, while some teachers consider humor as disadvantageous in teaching, many students, studying in the same school, claim that it is indispensable. These diverging points about humor might be the result of the teachers' little or no knowledge concerning the role(s) of humor in education, especially in English language

teaching. Eventually, the researcher has chosen the case of the department of foreign languages, English Section of Medea University (ESMU) in order to carefully examine students' and teachers' attitudes as regards the role(s) of humor-based instruction.

In light of these anecdotal observations and readings in the expert literature, the current study attempts to test the following two hypotheses:

- In contrast to EFL teachers', students' perceptions of the use of humor in EFL classes would be significantly positive.
- The extent to which teachers use or allow the use of humor in their EFL classes would be significantly limited in amount.

In order to support or refute the above hypotheses, the researcher has asked the following questions:

- What are ESMU second-year teachers' and students' attitudes toward the use of humor in the EFL schoolroom?
- To what extent do ESMU second-year teachers allow the use of humor in their EFL classes?

## 2. Review of Literature:

The present literature is an attempt to briefly describe the English language teaching (ELT) situation in the departments of English in Algerian universities since the context of the present research is teaching English as a foreign language in one University of Algeria. It is, then, attempted to review the diverse definitions of humor, deal with the well-known theories of humor and the positive or negative effects of humor in EFL classrooms, and synthesize some studies which investigated students' or teachers' perspectives relating to using humor in EFL/ESL classes.

### 2.1.ELT (English Language Teaching) Situation in Algerian Universities:

One can easily notice that the English language has become a global language, with speakers of English as a second or foreign language, who have, in fact, heavily outnumbered its native speakers (Crystal). As for its status in Algeria, English currently takes the position of a foreign language. Further, its implicit share, in the Algerian context, has been emphasized recently. In this sense, Miliani asserts that:

“In a situation where the French language has lost much of its ground in the sociocultural and educational environments of the country; the introduction of English is being heralded as the magic solution to all possible ills including economic, technological and education ones” (Miliani)

Owing to its crucial importance, English, admittedly, is currently taught as a foreign language in middle, secondary schools, and nearly all Algerian universities. More specifically, it is either taught in departments of English or in other departments as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at universities. No educational system, especially at the university level, is free from reforms in order to keep pace with or adapt to a world of continuous and rapid development. For this reason, the Algerian universities have applied the Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD) system.

#### 2.1.1. LMD Features and Objectives:

The reform movement of the educational system in Algerian universities introduced a set of objectives so as to boost students' competencies, and introduced the three elements of the system. These three elements of the LMD system: the “licence” degree, which is equivalent to the BA (Bachelor Degree) with three years of study (6 semesters); the Master

degree for two years of study (4 semesters); and finally, the Doctorate degree for three years of research (6 semesters). She added that the aim behind changing the system of teaching in the Algerian higher education is to enable students to “follow the flow of technological growth” to use the researcher’s words (DJEBBARI).

In Algeria, the English language has become a determining factor for the survival of most people. The teaching of English at Algerian universities, therefore, is emphasized as was stated earlier. Many educationalists have continuously been trying to find ways in order to promote the English teaching-learning process. For instance, it has been proposed that the effective environment in the second or foreign language classroom is recommended for enhancing English learning. In order to achieve this effective environment, researchers have suggested a number of strategies. One of these strategies is the use of humor (Cook; Harmer). Hence, it is vital to provide a brief overview of the literature about humor.

## **2.2. Defining Humor:**

It has been conceived that humor is a slippery and loose term; it is viewed differently and no single definition is conventionally decided. Humor can be considered as a multifaceted phenomenon. Humor, then, cannot be an easily defined concept due to its complex nature; it can mean different things in different contexts. According to (Martin Rod), the dimensions of humor includes, at the first hand, anything that an individual says or acts upon that is perceived and considered as humorous or funny and is expected to provoke laughter. Second, being humorous includes the mental processes undertaken in order to both create and make amusing stimulus. Last but not least, humor does not neglect the affective responses involving enjoyment (Cornett).

According to Oxford Advanced Students' Dictionary, humor is defined as follows: "the quality in something that makes it funny or amusing; the ability to laugh at things that are amusing." Apart from tending to provoke laughter and amusement, humor has been differently defined by many authors. From an educational standpoint, the simplest definition of humor may be: "any message, verbal or non-verbal, communicated by the teacher and makes the students feel amused." (Hurren). Similarly, other researchers go even deeper claiming that humor is not limited to the telling of jokes, but it is that strategy used to create close rapport between teacher and students.

All definitions of humor, therefore, change according to the study area being emphasized by the researcher. However, in order for a person to fully understand the concept of humor, he/she is supposed to explore its theories.

### **2.3.Theories of Humor:**

The phenomenon of humor has been a matter of various definitions; it has also been the subject of diverse theories. The well-known ones are the superiority theory, the incongruity theory, and the relief theory.

#### **2.3.1. The Superiority Theory:**

Indeed, Plato and Aristotle believe that the reason behind people tending to use humor is their feeling of superiority, at least in some aspects, over those laughed at. Hence, the pleasure of humor, as far as this theory is concerned, is witnessed when an individual is superior to another. Similarly, (Cornett) believes that humans laugh at others who are perceived as inferior people and tend to feel joy at being superior to others. He adds that: "defects in others are humorous as long as they are not harmful to the victims" (Cornett). In other words, people laugh at others' mistakes, misfortunes, and failures because of their own

high pride in their abilities and achievements. Due to the distinct students' level of intelligence and achievement in class, using this type of humor might impair the relationship between a teacher and his/her students. However, humor cannot be, by all means, interpreted by the superiority theory merely. The incongruity theory, thus, was established.

### 2.3.2. The Incongruity Theory:

Insofar as this theory is concerned, humor is basically thought to be as the result of the contradictory or the incongruous juxtaposition of two (or more) ideas, elements, or people. Simply put, the incongruity theory asserts that humor and laughter are aroused when something does not adhere to what is accepted as the mainstream norms (Morreall). For that reason, a clown's face is generally known as humorous (since it is not an ordinary face). As another example of this condition, Mark Twain once said: "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education". Like the superiority theory, the incongruity theory of humor does not account for other situations of laughter and humor. Then, the relief theory emerged.

### 2.3.3. The Relief Theory:

The relief theory presents humor as the preferable strategy used to show anxious or tense hidden emotions. Put differently, (Seaward), regards humor as a response to stressful situations. Thus, this theory emphasizes on the fact that laughter releases tension, and therefore positively impacts on humans' minds. Further, this theory considers humor as a way of expressing restraints that are put on people by society or themselves. That is to say, humor is viewed as the temporary way adopted in order to get released from the restraints of the conventional social requirements (Monro et al.). In the same vein, (Shade) mentions that laughter provides us with a little freedom from the immense restrictions, such as constraints of our rules and principles that we tend to follow daily. Thus, it is obvious that the relief

theory concentrates on the social and behavioral aspects of humor. For example, when a mathematical teacher uses humor while explaining a hard equation that students could not figure out, this enables everyone to laugh, and therefore, lessen this dreary and tense atmosphere of learning. Thus, humor is but a reaction of a given tense situation.

It can be deduced that each theory suggests a specific angle to comprehend the nature of humor. From a sociological standpoint, the superiority theory considers humor as a kind of animosity towards powerless people; while from a cognitive perception, the incongruity theory concentrates on the stimulus; and from a psychological point of view, the release theory focuses on the mental process. However, no theory can fully expound the complex nature of humor and cover all its functions. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the types of humor that can be utilized in the classroom.

#### **2.4.Types of Humor:**

This research adapted the humor types that were suggested in one study by (Bryant et al.). According to these researchers, humor may take many forms in the classroom: a joke, which means a short prose constructed and followed by a punch line; a riddle, which is viewed as a question or statement with a humorous answer or meaning; a pun, which is considered as “structurally” or “phonetically” indistinguishable words or phrases containing two or more meanings in order to simultaneously play on their various meanings; a funny story, which is related to a series of connected instances or the activities of a single incident as a tale; humorous comments, a brief statement containing a humorous aspect; visual humor, which takes the form of pictures, cartoons, or comic strips that involve humorous messages; and physical humor, which can be seen as the “exaggerated” or “distorted” tone, or pronunciation, facial expressions, gestures, or impersonation aiming to provoking amusements. Arguably, when humor is employed, it can take three laughing situations.

Humor can be employed in order to be laughed at, make others laugh, or to be able to laugh at oneself. As far as these three situations of humor that can be provoked in the classroom, humor is regarded as a double-edged sword in the sense that it can either be an effective teaching tool, or an exceptionally harmful one.

### **2.5. Humor in the EFL Context:**

As stated earlier, although the use of humor has been praised in academia, the body of research regarding the integration of humor in the EFL context is relatively small. Although (Cook; Harmer) emphasize that play is a crucial element in the acquisition of a language, the fun element is almost neglected and absent from English textbooks today. This is also true for middle school and high school English textbooks in Algeria. One page merely among one entire “file” of study is devoted to humor in those textbooks. It, then, can be said that humor has been taken for granted in EFL classrooms despite its undeniable position in the teaching-learning process.

(Forman) examined the effects of humor in the ESL/EFL contexts. The researcher observed one EFL classroom of 31 students in Thailand. The researcher examined all the cases of humor that happened in a class of students whose level in English is beginner, conducted by an instructor who is fluent in Thai. Through humorous language play, Forman reported that the atmosphere of the classroom, in general, became more welcoming as students were smiling and laughing. What is more important is that students’ participation in the classroom was elevated despite the fact that students’ English proficiency level was low. Thus, humorous language play, according to Forman, not only established a joyful and warm classroom environment but also students’ engagement was remarkably raised.

In an experimental study on the effects of humor on language learning in an EFL setting,

Blyth and Ohyama (2011) employed a list of sixty riddles. 148 university students of English participated in this study. A pre-test and a post-test consisting of vocabulary items from the glossaries for the riddles were submitted to students in order to test their vocabulary acquisition. Students participated in the riddle-telling activity, after the pre-test. One student was asked to show to another student the glossary for a riddle until his/her partner is familiar with the vocabulary so that the student tells him/her the riddle. The results of the post-test revealed that students improved their vocabulary knowledge and confidence. Further, students appreciated the incorporation of humor (Blyth and Ohyama, 2011).

#### **2.6. Studies on EFL/ESL Students' and Teachers' Attitudes toward Humor:**

Since the objective of this research is to examine students' and teachers' attitudes toward humor in the EFL classroom, it becomes significant to briefly define the term, "attitude" and review a few studies whose main objective is similar to a great extent. Attitudes are clearly defined as "a person's attitudes- that is, his or her predispositions to act in a positive or negative way toward people, ideas, and events- are fundamental dimensions of that individual's personality. Attitudes are the mirror of the mind." (Ryan et al.)

Several researchers, indeed, attempted to seek students' beliefs on the use of humor in second or foreign language teaching classrooms. For instance, a study by (Aboudan) investigated 200 students' views on the use of humor in an ESL context at the University of United Arab Emirates (UAEU). More specifically, the researcher explored students' attitudes in relation to the effects of humor on the understanding, recall, and retention of difficult materials. The population chosen was from three English class levels: introductory, intermediate, and advanced. The results illustrated that more students were in favor of humor in the second language Classroom than against. 71% of UAEU the surveyed students pointed out that humor helps them in learning difficult materials. 99% indicated that jokes help them

pay more attention during class time and increase their level of concentration. In comparison, the results showed that only 1% of UAEU the surveyed female students believed jokes do not have an effect on developing concentration in class. Similarly, only 5% claimed that humor does not help in learning a second language, and only sometimes fosters their attention (19%). Overall, humor can be of great profit as regards students' viewpoints. Supporting Aboudan, (Olajoke) further evidenced that the attitudes of students on using humor in the teaching of English as a second language in Nigeria are significantly positive. A questionnaire was administered to randomly selected 50 (25 males and 25 females) students. His study demonstrated that students believe that humor decreases tension (96%), permits ESL class participatory (80%), allows lectures flow freely (96%), helps understanding of lectures (98%), reduces the differences between students and teacher (60%), aids retention of taught lectures (90%), makes the class interesting (98%), and enhances class attendance (70%). Regarding the negative students' viewpoints, however, the study indicated that 30% of the students believed that humor could cause disrespect between the students and instructor.

As regards teachers' attitudes toward the use of humor in EFL classes, a study by (Raha) explored the attitudes of English middle school teachers toward the use of humor in class. The study employed qualitative research methods. A total of twenty teachers of Ain Azel, Sétif, Algeria, participated in the interviews. The findings revealed that the majority of the teachers did not welcome the use of humor. Further, they showed their "skepticism", to use the researcher's term, as regards using humor as an effective teaching strategy and toward its effects on the learning and teaching context. The main reasons behind the fact that most teachers seemed to oppose the integration of humor were: lack of knowledge, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, lack of teachers' sense of humor, the belief that some students might be offended by humor or a certain joke, and the idea that humor is "non-productive,

chaos-creating and time-wasting”, to use the researchers’ terms. These were the major reasons behind the teachers’ disagreement with the incorporation of humor in their EFL classrooms.

Unlike Aboudan’s and Olajok’s studies, the present study deals with EFL rather than ESL students’ perceptions of utilizing humor. Hence, some minor differences may be witnessed in terms of the findings. It is, also, worthy of mentioning that students’ positive perceptions’ of humor do not, of course, reveal its actual positive effects. In contrast to Raha’s, the current study investigates university English teachers’ perspectives rather than middle school instructors. Thus, it is expected that trivial divergence, in relation to their attitudes toward humor, may be witnessed. Concerning research tools, most of the previous studies have used questionnaires and interviews so as to gain the respondents’ perceptions in relation to the use of humor in class. Although the use of the latter instruments of data collection has been proved to be efficient, this study will make use of the classroom observation tool. The latter is regarded as integral especially when complex issues, such as humor, are investigated. Moreover, the present study adds to the limited number of studies on humor in EFL contexts via following and enhancing the ways research has been carried out previously. It can also be stated that the aforementioned studies have either dealt with students’ or teachers’ perceptions; this study, however, deals with both of the teachers’ and students’ viewpoints in the EFL context in order to obtain a deeper perspective. In Algeria, not much attention has been directed toward investigating students’ and teachers’ perspectives regarding humor in EFL classes. This is partly obvious in the lack of literature on this subject in Algeria.

The present review of the literature has first dealt with the situation of English language teaching in Algerian universities. Then, it has explored definitions of humor, its major theories, its possible positive or negative effects in EFL classes, and reviewed a few

studies which investigated students' or teachers' perspectives regarding the incorporation of humor in EFL/ESL classes. Finally, it is hoped that the current study will add more data with reference to students' and teachers' perspectives on employing humor in the learning and teaching practices, including students' and teachers' perceptions in Algerian contexts.

### 3. Methodology:

As mentioned previously, the present study is designed to investigate the attitudes of university students and teachers toward the use of humor in the EFL classroom. Hence, a case study was employed depending on two research instruments so as to collect data: a questionnaire for both students and teachers, and a classroom observation. In the Algerian context, this is the first research that examined both of the university EFL students' and teachers' attitudes toward humor simultaneously. Unlike the studies mentioned in the literature review, this research permits one to easily compare between students' and teachers' perceptions of the role(s) of humor in the EFL class.

#### 3.1.The Research Design:

Regarding the aforementioned purpose of this study and in order to answer its research questions, this study is based on descriptive research. Because of the complex nature of humor, the researcher used a triangulation technique of both quantitative and qualitative data so as a deeper understanding of the topic could be obtained. Further, three data collection instruments were used so as to increase the reliability of the findings.

#### 3.2.The Sample Population:

The participants that were taken in this research were university teachers and students from Medea who were kindly requested to participate in the research tools. Accordingly, the

researcher has selected a sample of eighty-two (82) students and eleven (11) teachers, which, in fact, represent the whole population of group one and two of second-year students and teachers.

The researcher had selected eighty-two (82) Algerian EFL students (males and females). The great majority of these students have studied English as a foreign language for nine years from middle school to secondary school and finally reaching university. These informants are second-year students studying in the department of foreign languages (section of English) at Medea University, Algeria. They are aged between 19 and 25 years old. The reason behind selecting second-year LMD students and teachers is that they come from different regions in Medea, Algeria. The latter reality helps the researcher to obtain more reliable data because their social background is slightly different and therefore their attitudes toward humor might vary accordingly.

The researcher had also chosen eleven (11) Algerian EFL teachers at Medea University, Department of Foreign Languages, Section of English. The majority of these teachers hold a “Magister” degree in English, while others hold a “Master” or “Licence” degree. They are in charge of two levels: first-year and second-year students of English. Among those teachers, a few are substitute teachers, while others are permanent ones with varying teaching experience between one year and fifteen years. The teachers were both male and female, with ages ranging from the early twenties to mid-thirties. The main purpose behind the choice of those EFL teachers is to explore the differences, if any, in viewpoints on humor since they are distinct in age, gender, and teaching experience. This divergence aids the researcher to gain a more detailed and solid picture of humor in an EFL setting.

### 3.3. Instrumentation and Procedures::

The researcher pursued a descriptive case study in order to investigate the attitudes of both students and teachers toward the use of humor in the classroom. To achieve the latter objectives, a questionnaire for both students and teachers, as well as a classroom observation were utilized. A questionnaire is viewed as a set of written questions. The researcher employed it in order to collect data in a short period. In this respect, (Dörnyei) posits that many researchers use the questionnaire not only because they are effortless and easy to administer, but exceptionally useful in order to instantaneously gather a wide range of data about a particular focus of research. In fact, the questionnaire can be viewed as a precious research aid to gain exact and accurate findings of any case study under investigation. The researcher used two types of questions: multiple-choice items and open-ended questions.

The first case study of this research was Algerian university EFL students. As a result, a questionnaire was addressed to all second-year students (82 students) from group one and two- who were chosen via Dr. Yahia Fares University, Department of Foreign Languages, Section of English, Medea. The purpose of this questionnaire is to provide a clear picture of the students' perceptions regarding the use of humor in their EFL classes.

The teachers' questionnaire is the second research instrument, which comprises a set of questions that were addressed to all the second-year teachers (11) in the Department of Foreign Languages, Section of English of Dr. Yahia Fares University in Medea. Like the students' questionnaire, the reason behind this questionnaire is to provide data about the teachers' background knowledge concerning the integration of humor in their EFL classes.

Classroom observation can be viewed as a tool that enables the researcher to be fully aware of what is happening in the classrooms. In other words, it is a means that can be used in order to gain solid and direct data about the behavior and the interaction of both teachers and students simultaneously. In this regard, it is emphasized that "Observation is

fundamentally different from questioning because it provides direct information rather than self-report accounts.” (Dörnyei).

The researcher, then, used classroom observation in order to capture the immediate reactions of the students concerning humor, which are sometimes hard to notice. It, indeed, provides a source of data that cannot be fully achieved by other research tools, such as a questionnaire or an interview. Consequently, classroom observation was carried out in two classrooms (group one and two) over two sessions taught by two different teachers. The first classroom is group one containing forty-five (45) students (5 males and 40 females), and the second group consists of thirty-seven (37) students (7 males and 30 females).

### **3.4. Results and Data Analysis:**

The next step of any research design, then, is to advance toward the results and data analysis. The researcher analyzed data qualitatively and quantitatively so that the reliability and generalisability of results could be provided.

#### **3.4.1. Students’ Questionnaire Results Analysis:**

Question Three: the amount of humor used in the EFL classroom

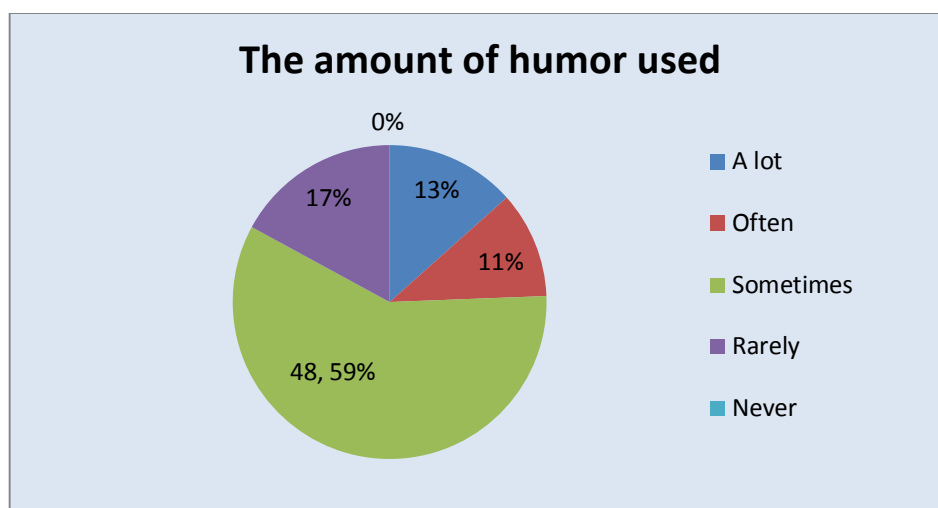


Figure 5 the amount of humor used in EFL classes

The purpose behind question three is to determine the extent to which humor is used in the EFL classroom. The figure 5 above reveals the results obtained. More than half of the subjects (n=48; 59 %) said that humor is sometimes utilized. 14 participants (17%) said that it is rarely employed. However, 11 students (13%) posited that humor is made use of to a great extent. Last but not least, no single subject stated that humor is never used in the classroom.

#### Question Five: humor is important to EFL learning

No response	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
00	28	34.1	39	47.5	11	13.4	2	2.4	2	2.4	82	100

Table 7: humor is important to EFL learning

The above table shows students' basic perspectives regarding the place of humor in EFL classes. A great majority of the informants agreed that humor is of paramount importance as far as foreign language learning is pronounced: 39 of the students (47.5%) agreed and 28 students (34.1%) strongly agreed with the statement that says humor is important in the EFL

teaching and learning process. The latter two positions are taken by a total of 78.6% participants. Only 2 students (2.4%) disagreed and 2 others strongly disagreed with the previous statement. Eventually, 11 students (13.4 %) remained neutral.

### 3.4.2. Teachers' Questionnaire Results Analysis:

Question Three: the amount of humor used in the EFL classroom

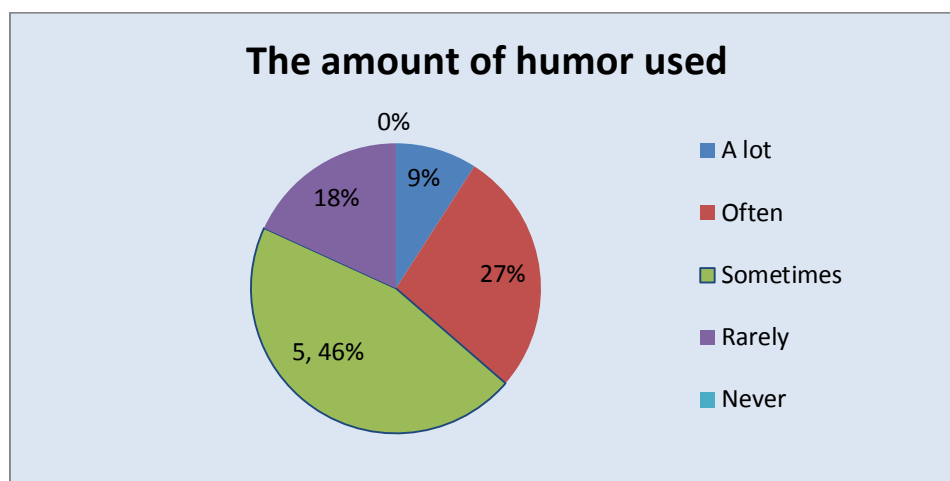


Figure 9 teachers' use of humor in EFL classes

The sole aim of this question was to know to what extent teachers use or allow the use of humor in their classes. The results represented in the figure above show that almost half of the teachers (n=5; 46%) reported that humor is sometimes utilized. 27% of teachers claimed that humor is often used in their classes. Only one teacher, indeed, said that it is used to a great extent. On the contrary, 18% of teachers (2) stated that humor is seldom employed. Finally, no teacher said that humor is never used in their EFL classrooms.

Question Five: humor is indispensable in EFL teaching

No response	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
00	03	27.2	04	36.3	03	27.2	01	09	00	00	11	100

Table 15: humor is indispensable in EFL teaching

Table 15 exhibits the teachers' opinions toward the statement: "Humor is indispensable in the English classroom." Almost the majority of teachers, a total number of 07 teachers or 63.6%, agreed with this idea. However, one teacher (9%) disagreed with the statement while 03 other teachers were neutral.

#### 3.4.3. Classroom Observation Results Analysis:

The major goal behind deploying this instrument was to obtain direct information about the extent to which humor is used, and students' and teachers' positive or negative reactions to its use in their classrooms. In fact, there were two lessons observed, which were taught by two different teachers to two distinct groups, as well (group one and group two). One session was a speaking lesson, while the other was a class of literature. These sessions were taught by two different teachers. The results below sum up the field notes from those two observed classrooms. During the first session of speaking, it, at first glance, was clear that the students' (group one) motivation was low as it was the last session of the day; they seemed tired and showed little enthusiasm and desire toward the lesson. More remarkably, it was realized that the teacher did not warm up his students in order to raise their level of interest and attention. Instead, after greeting them, he started asking five students to individually present their prepared topics in order to evaluate their speaking skills. The time allotted for each presentation was not equally spent by the students.

Regarding the use of humor in this class, it was observed that it was rarely utilized. Throughout a class of one hour and thirty minutes, humor was used three times only. One time by the teacher and twice by students while delivering their oral presentations. It was observed that students, in general, did not incorporate humor in their presentations. Additionally, the types of the entire amount of humor observed were humorous comments merely. Two of these humorous comments made were spontaneous, whereas the other one was planned. Moreover, the humorous comments were not relevant to the content of the presentations presented. As for both of the students' and teachers' reactions toward humor, it has been clearly observed that both of their responses were significantly positive. This was clear when the majority of the students burst into laughter, and when the teacher drew a smile on his face when humor was provoked. The second session was attended with group two studying a module called "American literature" by a female teacher. Like the first observed session of speaking, it was noticed that students' motivation was not high. The majority of the students seemed a little enthusiastic about the class and showed little motivation. Concerning the general description of the lesson, like the first session, there was an absence of the warming up phase. The teacher greeted her students and then asked them to remind her about the previous lesson that they had covered in the previous session. Only two students responded to this question. The teacher subsequently introduced the lesson in the form of lecturing. She asked the students to take notes as they listened to her and invited them to ask questions during the lesson whenever necessary. It is noticed that the students' participation was low. The lesson was ended by giving a summary of the points covered. As far as the use of humor is concerned in this lesson, it was observed that it was rarely integrated as the case of the first session observed. In other words, during the whole session, humor was used only one time. Like the first class, the type of humor employed in this class was "a spontaneous

humorous comment”. Additionally, humor use was not related to the content of the lesson taught. Concerning students’ and teachers’ reactions toward humor, it has been clearly observed that the great majority of students, as well as teachers, welcomed it. Put differently, the students and the teacher laughed and showed positive emotions in their faces.

It is also essential to mention that part of the classroom observation was devoted to the classroom setting. Both classes of speaking and literature were crowded to some extent; 35 students in group one and 40 students in group two. In addition, the researcher noticed that there were no ICT tools found in both of the classes. The students were not well organized in the way they were seated; girls took the front places, whereas boys were sitting at the back.

### **3.5.Data Discussion and Interpretation of the Results:**

To begin with, it seems vital to discuss and interpret all the main findings of the above-mentioned research instruments. The discussion is structured around the two research questions raised at the beginning of this study.

- What are ESMU second-year teachers’ students’attitudes toward the use of humor in the EFL schoolroom?

To reach an answer to the above question, the researcher relied on a questionnaire for both students and teachers and made use of classroom observation.

Indeed, students’ and teachers’ questionnaires provided essential insights about the students and teachers’ attitudes toward using humor in the EFL teaching-learning process. It is clear from the findings that the majority of both students (45,1 %) and teachers (66%) believed that humor tends to provoke laughter and amusement. This confirms (Martin Rod) definition of humor suggested in the literature. He stated that humor is anything someone

says or does that is perceived and considered as humorous or funny and is expected to provoke laughter. Humor, therefore, is meant to stimulate laughter and amusement to its core. Moreover, approximately the same percentages of both students and teachers opted for other meanings of the term humor, for instance, telling jokes, laughing, being sarcastic, or these meanings altogether. The latter terms, however, cannot express what humor really is. According to the literature, they are only forms of humor. For instance, telling jokes is considered as a type of humor implemented merely.

From the standpoint of students' and teachers' opinions about the role(s) of humor in EFL classes and the reactions of students' toward it, the results clearly showed that the majority of both of the students and teachers believed that humor is an important element in the EFL classroom. They stated that EFL learning is beneficial due to its wide range of positive outcomes. However, the first hypothesis suggested that unlike EFL students', teachers' attitudes toward the use of humor in EFL classes would be significantly positive. By contrast, the results clearly indicated that not only university students perceive humor as advantageous, but also teachers. In other words, both the teachers' and students' welcomed and responded positively to the subject of the incorporation of humor in the EFL classroom. According to them, the most frequently mentioned advantages of humor were that it helped to reduce anxiety, tension and stress, create a positive classroom atmosphere, and establish a close relationship between students and teacher.

This sustains the findings of the two previously mentioned studies (Aboudan; Olajoke) about students' perceptions regarding humor; whereas it contradicts the study by (Raha) which concluded that middle school teachers did not welcome the use of humor in their EFL classes. Thus, it is important to mention that unlike middle school, university teachers expressed approval to the integration of humor in their EFL classes. The fact that one perceives a certain practice as of paramount importance, it indicates that his/her attitude

toward it is positive. The majority of both students (78.6%) and teachers (63.6%) showed their agreement to the statement “Humor is important in the EFL teaching-learning atmosphere”. Likewise, both of students and teachers regard that sense of humor is one of the personality features of effective teachers. The great majority of the students (80.4%) and more than half of the teachers (54.4%) expressed their agreement to the latter view. Nevertheless, it has been suggested by students and teachers that humor should be carefully used so as not to harm the students or the classroom atmosphere. Not only non-humorous teachers were least preferred, but also the overall serious and somber atmosphere of the classroom. In that, almost half of the students (46.3%) and the great majority of the teachers (90.8) showed their opposition to the belief that the EFL learning-teaching process is supposed to be serious and free of any type of humor. It is stated in the literature that learning a foreign language may be accompanied by anxiety and tension so when humor is part of the classroom it benefits many students and results in a joyful learning-teaching experience. Studies mentioned earlier suggest that humor can be a valuable aid in decreasing and minimizing students’ anxiety in the EFL classroom. Similarly, this study is no exception. That is to say, the majority of students (70%) and the great majority of the teachers (81.7%) supported the statement “Humor reduces students’ anxiety in the EFL classroom”.

Humor, then, does not only facilitate a good relationship between teachers and students but also minimizes students’ anxiety. As it was seen in the literature review, one of the benefits of humor lies in the fact that it aids to establish and maintain a close rapport between students and teachers. In other words, students learning would be better achieved when the relationship between both students and their teacher is healthy and based upon mutual respect, trust, and appreciation. The findings of this study supported and strengthened this position. By way of explanation, the majority of the students (76.5%) and all of the teachers (100%) upheld the statement that says: “Humor facilitates a good relationship with

students and teachers'. Thus, it is claimed that there is a strong connection between humor and student-teacher relationship. Humor is, also, closely relevant to the course objectives envisioned by the teacher. In other words, humor might serve as a means to understand the topic being taught. It was shown that the majority of the students (68.2%) and all of the teachers (100%) agreed that humor helps students understand and grasp the lesson. These findings go hand in hand with the previous studies' results in the literature, such as Abdoudan's research (2009).

Concerning the negative effects of humor, two statements have been devised: "Humor is a waste of precious learning and teaching time", and "Humor causes distraction in the classroom." Both students and teachers were asked to show their agreement/disagreement with the two aforementioned statements. As for the first statement, 66% of the students and 81% of the teachers expressed their objection to it. Concerning humor and distraction, More than half of the students (57.3%) and almost half of the teachers (45.4%) disagreed with the statement. In fact, it was noted in the literature that one of the risks of humor is distraction (Fisher, 1997). This study did not confirm that standpoint. It is essential to admit that the findings of this study rely on students' and teachers' opinions. In comparison, Fisher explored an experimental study. Therefore, experimental studies might be more reliable than descriptive ones. To sum up, from the results obtained from both of the students' and teachers' questionnaires, one can easily state that there was obvious agreement as far as the crucial role(s) of humor in the EFL classroom. So, one part of the first hypothesis mentioned earlier, "Unlike EFL teachers', students' attitudes would be significantly positive", is confirmed and the other part is disconfirmed as far as students' and teachers' questionnaires are concerned. Put differently, the findings supported one part of the hypothesis which claimed that students' attitudes toward humor would be significantly positive. Yet, the results

obtained showed that teachers' attitudes, also, were significantly positive by contrast to what was hypothesized and expected.

One main reason behind making use of the classroom observation is to capture the immediate responses of students and teachers toward the use of humor in the classroom. A positive response to a given action often depends on a hidden positive attitude or predisposition and the opposite of the matter is also true. Not only students' and teachers' questionnaires showed students and teachers' appreciation of humor in EFL classes, but the classroom observation as well. The researcher noticed the majority of students' and teachers' positive emotions whenever humor was used. Nevertheless, the students' and teachers' attitudes toward the role of humor were primarily based on their own experience only. So, it is important to state that the actual positive outcomes of humor cannot be evidenced by both students' and teachers' opinions; rather, empirical studies are in need to be carried out so as to enable one to confidently proclaim the roles of humor in the English classroom.

During both of the sessions attended a total of five times where humor was initiated. It was observed that the great majority of students and both of the teachers enjoyed humor. It was shown in their positive facial expressions. Additionally, humor helped establish a sense of unity in the classroom. In other words, the laughter by students and teachers took place simultaneously, and therefore, made all students and teachers feel unified. The researcher, in fact, could see that the two teachers in both groups were confident with both of their humor and students' humor. However, it seemed that teachers may not be fully aware of the wide range of humor types. In both of the classes, only humorous comments were made. Only one student included a humorous comment in the presentation that was not spontaneous. Both teachers ignored the warm-up stage; it is believed that humor is one of the effective strategies that can be utilized during the warming up stage, especially in the case of the observed classes where students' motivation for learning seemed low to a certain extent. Likewise,

across the lesson of literature, the teacher explained many new definitions and supported them with examples. Yet, she did not, in one way or another, utilize humor along with her elaboration and lecturing. Humor, as indicated previously, could help students understand or even remember concepts more easily when they are expounded by making pleasant and relevant use of humor. Thus, the incorporation of humor was neither effective nor important from the viewpoint of the observer due to the latter situation. To conclude, although the great majority of students and teachers responded significantly positive toward humor usage, it was observed that humor was underestimated as far as its implementation is concerned. The first hypothesis claimed that students' responses toward humor would be positive, whereas, teachers' responses would be negative. According to the results of the classroom observation, the great majority of students' and both teachers' reactions toward humor were positive.

- To what extent do ESMU second-year teachers allow the use of humor in their EFL classes?

In addition, the present research attempted to investigate the extent to which humor is actually utilized in the teaching-learning process. To achieve this, one question in the students and teachers questionnaire attempts to reveal the amount of humor used in the EFL classes. More importantly, since humor is a phenomenon taking place in the classroom, the best way to explore the extent to which it is actually used is via classroom observation.

The second hypothesis proposed in this study was that the amount of humor used in the classroom would be very limited. This research hypothesis was verified by data from the students' and teachers' questionnaires. The findings clearly showed that more than half of the students (n=48; 58 %) and nearly half of the teachers (n=5; 45%) reported that humor is sometimes utilized. Thus, the aforementioned second hypothesis is not confirmed according to the students' and teachers' questionnaires' results.

In order for the researcher to reach reliable conclusions about the amount of humor used in class, classroom observation was employed so as to cross-check the teachers' and students' questionnaires' results. As hypothesized, humor was rarely used in both sessions. During both classes, which were of one hour and a half for each, humor was used five times only. The duration of every humorous comment takes a time of five seconds approximately. The latter observation signals that humor was rarely used in the classroom. Hence, unlike students' and teachers' questionnaires, the classroom observation confirmed the hypothesis. All in all, the results obtained from both questionnaires and classroom observation tools were distinct. That is to say, according to the second hypothesis, "The extent to which humor is utilized would be very small in amount", the students' and teachers' questionnaires results contradicted and denied this hypothesis to a great extent, whereas the classroom observation supported it to a large degree.

#### 4. Recommendations and Limitations:

Based on the earlier findings, it seems of paramount importance to explore some recommendations and considers the limitations of the present study. With the findings of the present study in mind, a number of recommendations can be suggested for the sake of effective incorporation of humor in the EFL learning-teaching atmosphere.

1. First and foremost, it is crucial for teachers to acquire an understanding of the complicated phenomenon of humor. Additionally, it is essential for teachers to learn about the main types of humor that can be utilized in the classroom and attempt to have a sense of its potential positive or negative effects in the EFL teaching-learning process. Their understanding should depend on sound academic awareness and not upon guesses and gut feelings merely.

2. Not only teachers but also students' awareness of humor was shallow. Thus, teachers should encourage and advise students to integrate humor while delivering their presentations, for example. The teachers should also evaluate humor usage along with all the other aspects of successful presentations.
3. Humor is an effective teaching technique according to the majority of both students' and teachers' views. Hence, it is desirable for teachers to make sound use of humor in their teaching to build a positive classroom atmosphere, to reduce students' anxiety and boredom, help them learn more easily, and build a good rapport with their instructors.
4. It was found that teachers were not only fully aware of the concept of humor but also about its integration as a means to reach the course objectives envisioned by the teacher. Thus, teachers should be given training in humor and its implementation so as to acquire the necessary skills related to using humor in the language classroom to enhance the teaching-learning process and maintain a close relationship with their students.
5. The study revealed that humorous teachers are more preferred by the great majority of the students. Accordingly, in recruiting teachers, there is a need to consider their sense of humor. Teachers' humor should, therefore, be evaluated and assessed.

Like any research, the present study is not free from limitations. What faced the researcher at the first step is the lack of time because the present study was conducted through the use of the triangulation technique of both quantitative and qualitative data. The findings were obtained from both of the students' and teachers' questionnaires and classroom observation. Likewise, concerning the classroom observation, the researcher attended two sessions only. More classroom observation would have led to more reliable data on how humor is used in

the EFL classroom, and in order to confirm the amount of humor used in different classes. Another limitation which might be extracted from this research is that students' perceptions of humor might not be reliable enough, especially due to the complex phenomenon of humor. That is to say, humor is a vast concept that the students might fail to provide dependable data. For language teachers to confidently use or allow the use of humor, they should base their practices on empirical studies, rather than opinions or viewpoints in relation to its positive effects. Hence, one can easily suggest that more empirical studies are needed in order to justify the incorporation of humor in EFL classrooms.

Additionally, it is important to mention that the present research investigated the students' and teachers' attitudes toward humor in relation to some basic aspects only. It did not undertake an investigation of students' and teachers' perceptions of all the possible positive or negative effects of humor in the EFL classroom. Accordingly, further research on other effects of humor, which were not raised in this thesis, can be pursued. For example, the point whether students and teachers believe that using humor in the EFL classroom can help students develop an awareness of American or English cultural perspectives or practices. Last but not least, the recommendations suggested are by no means exhaustive due to the small size of the populations in the current study, and the results cannot be representative enough since this research covers a particular case of a small number of students in only one department among many other departments of English in Algeria.

## Conclusion

Despite its undeniable locus in the EFL teaching-learning environment, the body of research regarding humor in English language teaching is lacking in the Algerian context. Accordingly, this research aimed to contribute to the literature on humor by investigating second-year Algerian students' and teachers' of English attitudes toward the use of humor in

EFL classrooms at Dr. Yahia Fares University of Medea, Algeria. The findings obtained from both of the students' and teachers' questionnaires and the classroom observation clearly indicated that not only students but also teachers considered the use of humor in teaching as significantly positive, and the majority of them appreciated and welcomed its incorporation. As for its actual use in the classroom, the findings from both questionnaires reported that humor is sometimes employed in the informants' EFL classes. However, according to classroom observation, humor is seldom and rarely utilized. It was observed that its implementation was not effective, as well. All in all, it seems a truism to assert that humor is welcomed and appreciated in our personal daily lives. This research focused particularly on its roles inside the classroom where EFL teaching-learning is involved. This research attempted to confirm that humor is viewed as indispensable not only in our lives but also in the classroom including the English schoolroom situation. Humor has been viewed as a crucial pedagogical tool and a vital bonus that can be appropriately integrated for the sake of improving English language education, especially in Algerian EFL contexts.

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