

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH
FERHAT ABBAS UNIVERSITY - SETIF-
FACULTY OF LETTRES AND LITERATURE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

**The Attitudes of English Middle School Teachers Toward the
Use of Humour as a Teaching Strategy
The Case of English Middle School Teachers in AinAzel -Setif-**

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Magister Degree in
Applied Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching**

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2011

EPIGRAPH

“I have come to the frightening conclusion: I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.”

Ginott 1993(as cited in Barnes, Christensen & Hansen, 1994, p.266)



In the Memory of my Father

DEDICATION

First and foremost, I humbly thank Allah almighty for giving me health and ability to accomplish this work despite all the obstacles.

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my mother who gave me self-confidence and love for learning, my brothers and sisters for their valuable support, encouragements, understanding and patience during this research and throughout my Magister studies. Without your unconditional love, enduring devotion, and tireless support I would not have been able to attain this accomplishment. God has surely blessed me far more than I deserve.

To the dearest person to my heart, my father, who was taken from us suddenly when I was a first year student. He dreamt of this moment. I am sure he would be very proud. I still cannot believe that he is no longer with us. I have so many good memories of him and I will cherish them as long as I live. Father, in each day, you are in my thoughts and not a day goes by when I do not pray that you are happier where you are. I will miss you all my life.

I am dedicating this work to my sister Habiba. She was my inspiration and motivation to complete this journey. I will never forget what you have done for me. To my nephews and nieces Zaki, Hishem, Khadidja, Zahra, Soumi, Mounir, Aymen, Amani, Narimane, Sara and the cute baby Anas. To all my aunts and uncles, especially Houcine. To all my brothers in law, Abd Elkarim, Farid and Nassah. I am grateful for your love and best wishes. You were a source of encouragement and motivation for me as I was completing this study.

To my friends Zahira, Souhila, Assma, Noura, Fatiha, and my best friend Hadi, for their encouragements and moral support provided throughout my studies. Thank you for everything.

I am extremely thankful to all the participant teachers who provided me with rich and detailed data for the study. Thank you for your cooperation and sharing your experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Though only my name appears on the cover of this dissertation, a great many people have contributed to its achievement. I owe my gratitude to all those people who have made this dissertation possible. There are not words enough to express my gratitude to the following people for their inspiration and direction in the course of my dissertation. These comments will have to suffice for now, however, until such time as I can more fully thank them.

My deepest gratitude is to my supervisor, **Prof. KESKES Said**. I have been amazingly fortunate to have a supervisor who gave me the freedom to explore on my own and at the same time the guidance to recover when my steps faltered. Prof. KESKES Said taught me how to question thoughts and express ideas. His patience, support and sense of humour helped me overcome many critical situations and finish this dissertation. I hope that one day I would become as good a supervisor to my students as he has been to me.

For their ceaseless generosity of time, knowledge, and patience, I am grateful to the jury members of my dissertation: Dr. LARABA Samir, Dr. MEBARKI Zahia, and Dr. KAOUACHE Salah for having accepted to serve on my examination board and for the time they invested to read and evaluate this work.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and wholehearted thanks to the following few special people: my post-graduation teachers who sacrificed their time to teach us. Many special thanks go to Prof. SAADI Hacène, University of Constantine for his overwhelming kindness and amazing way of teaching. He also deserves the greatest praise as he helped to make Psychopedagogy a lot of fun for us. I owe sincere gratitude to the ever pleasant and cheerful Dr. HAMADA Hacène, ENS Constantine who has made me a better teacher.

Special acknowledgements and appreciation go to Mr. BOULKROUN Fouad, University of Mila for providing me with important resources.

Many thanks also go to Mr. MOSBAH Rafik for being at my side in difficult moments, for being a precious source of motivation, guidance and encouragement. Thank you so much.

This study would not have been possible without the involvement of the research participants of Ain-Azel. I acknowledge and thank them for their participation.

I am grateful to the secretaries and librarians in the Foreign Languages departments of Sétif for assisting me in many different ways.

My colleagues: Hanan, Laila, Ahlem, Chahira, Moloud, and Assma for their encouragement and moral support provided throughout my postgraduate studies.

Finally, my greatest thanks go to my mother who pushed me along the way and to my sisters and brothers for their love and their inspiration.

ABSTRACT

Much has been written in recent years about the positive aspects of the affective environment in the second/foreign language (S/FL) classroom. Such classrooms are ones in which anxiety levels are low and comfort levels are high. Learners are not afraid to take risks and use their second/foreign language. Students are encouraged and praised for their efforts to always use their S/FL in class. Students do not face ridicule, or negative criticism, do not feel threatened or intimidated. Middle school English teachers can adopt a number of pedagogical strategies for the sake of sustaining students' motivation and engagement, and for creating an affective relaxed classroom atmosphere conducive to learning. This can be achieved by effective use of humour which is more appreciated by learners. The present study aims at understanding the attitudes of English middle school teachers toward the use of humor as a teaching strategy that can help in creating such an affective classroom environment. We tried to figure out their perceptions about some effects of humour on students, classroom setting and teacher-student relationships. This study used qualitative research methods with the great expectations they would bring about the required results. A total of twenty participants of English middle school teachers of Ain Azel, Sétif participated in the interviews. The findings were not encouraging in that the majority of the teachers did not appreciate the use of humour as a teaching strategy. In fact, they showed their skepticism toward the use of humour as an effective teaching tool and toward the effects it has on the learning and teaching experiences. Different reasons and justifications were sorted out: lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, lack of knowledge, lack of the sense of humour in the teachers' personality, the fear that humour might offend some students in the classroom, the disbelief in the seriousness of humour, the belief that humour is non-productive, chaos-creating and time-wasting were the major reasons why most

teachers tend to resist the use of humour in teaching. On the basis of this, a series of recommendations were proposed to help them approach with more confidence 'humour' and, how it can eventually help them create a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning.

ABBREVIATIONS

FL : Foreign Language

FLT: Foreign Language Teaching

HLT: Humanistic Language Teaching

SL : Second Language

TL : Target Language



CONTENTS

Introduction

1 Background of the Study.....	2
2 Statement of the Problem.....	3
3 Aims and Significance of the Study.....	4
4 Research Question.....	5
5 Data Collection Procedure.....	5
6 Ethical Issues.....	6
7 Structure of the Dissertation.....	6
8 Definitions of Terms.....	7

Chapter One: Humanistic Approach and Affective Factors in Foreign

Language Teaching

Introduction.....	9
1.1 What Is Humanistic Approach?.....	10
1.2 Affective Factors	12
1.2.1 What is Affect?.....	13
1.2.2 Influence of Affect on Educational Context.....	15
1.3 Some of Important Affective Factors.....	16
1.3.1 Self-esteem.....	16
1.3.2 Memory.....	18
1.3.3 Motivation.....	18
1.3.4 Anxiety.....	20
1.4 Role of the Teacher as a Facilitator.....	22



1.4.1 Creating Psychological, Comfortable and Safe Learning Environment.....23

1.4.2 Cooperative Learning.....24

1.4.3 Teacher Characteristics.....25

Conclusion.....27

Chapter Two: Humour and Teaching

Introduction.....31

2.1 Humour Definitions.....32

2.2 Theories of Humour.....33

2.2.1 Incongruity Theory.....33

2.2.2 Superiority Theory.....35

2.2.3 Relief Theory.....36

2.3 Humour Styles and Cultural Issues in the Classroom.....37

2.3.1 Affiliative Humour.....37

2.3.2 Self-enhancing Humour.....38

2.3.3 Aggressive Humour.....38

2.3.4 Self-defeating Humour.....39

2.4 Effects of Humour.....41

2.4.1 Effects of Humour on Students’ Classroom Physical Disposition41

2.4.2 Effects of Humour on Students’ Classroom Psychological Disposition.....42

2.4.2.1 Stress and Self- esteem.....42

2.4.2.2 Attention and Engagement.....44

2.4.2.3 Motivation.....46

2.4.3 Cognitive Effects of Humour.....48

2.4.3.1 Comprehension and Retention.....48

2.4.3.2 Creativity and Critical Thinking.....49



2.4.4 Effects of Humour on Classroom Setting.....51

2.4.5 Humour as a Communication Facilitator in the Classroom.....54

2.4.6 Negative Effects of Humour.....55

2.4.7 Effects of Humour on Teacher Immediacy.....57

2.4.8 Teacher Immediacy and Effective Teaching.....60

2.4.9 Implementing Humour in the English FL Class.....62

Conclusion.....64

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction.....67

3.1 Research Design and Procedures: Selecting a Methodology.....67

3.2 Rationale for Qualitative Research Paradigm.....68

3.2.1 Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research.....70

3.2.2 Generalizability.....73

3.3 Data Collection Instrument.....73

3.4 Data Collection Procedures.....74

3.5 Description and Administration of the Interview.....77

3.5.1 Procedure.....82

3.5.2 Participants.....83

3.4.3 Data Analysis.....84

Conclusion.....85

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussions

Introduction.....87

4.1 Data analysis and Interpretations of the Teachers’ Interviews.....87

4.1.1 Stage One: Results of the Closed-ended Questions.....87



4.1.1.1 Perception of Humour Effects on Students’ Classroom Psychological Disposition.....	87
4.1.1.2 Perception of Humour Effects on Students’ Cognitive Development.....	93
4.1.1.3 Perception of Humour Effects on the Classroom.....	97
4.1.1.4 Perception of Humour Negative Effects.....	101
4.1.1.5 Perception of Humour Effects on Teacher’s Immediacy and Effectiveness	102
4.1.2 Stage Two: Results of the Open-ended Question.....	105
4.1.2.1 Reasons for not Incorporating Humour in the Classroom.....	105
4.1.2.1.1 Lack of Motivation.....	106
4.1.2.1.2 Lack of Knowledge.....	107
4.1.2.1.3 Lack of Self- confidence.....	107
4.1.2.1.4 The Belief that Humour is Non-Productive, Chaos- Creating, and Time Wasting	109
4.1.2.1.5 Lack of the Sense of Humour.....	110
4.1.2.1.6 Disbelief in the Seriousness of Humour	112
4.1.2.1.7 Belief that Humour would Destruct Students’ Focus on the Subject Matter.....	113
4.1.2.1.8 Teachers’ Credibility.....	113
Conclusion.....	115
 Chapter Five: Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research	
Introduction.....	117
5.2 Recommendations.....	117
5.3 Suggestions for Further Humour Based-classroom in an Algerian Context...121	



5.4 Limitations of the Study.....122

Conclusion.....123

General Conclusion.....124

Bibliography

Appendices

Résumé

ملخص

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Humor and Stress.....	88
Table 4.2: Humor and Anxiety.....	89
Table 4.3: Humor ans Self-esteem.....	90
Table 4.4: Humor as a facilitator of Students' Interest and Engagement.....	91
Table 4.5: Humour and Motivation	92
Table 4.6: Humour and Comprehension.....	93
Table 4.7: Humour and Retention.....	94
Table 4.8: Humour and Creativity.....	95
Table 4.9: Humour and Critical Thinking.....	96
Table 4.10: Humour and Classroom Environment.....	97
Table 4.11: Humour and Classroom Management.....	99
Table 4.12: Humour and Classroom Communication.....	100
Table 4.13: Humour and Negative Effects.....	101
Table 4.14: Humour and Teacher's Immediacy.....	103
Table 4.15: Humour and Teacher Effectiveness.....	104

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Two-dimensial Model of Humour.....	41
Figure 4.1: Humour and Stress.....	88
Figure 4.2: Humour and Anxiety.....	89
Figure 4.3: Humour and Self-esteem.....	90
Figure 4.4: Humour as a Facilitator of Students’ Interest and Engagement.....	91
Figure 4.5: Humour as a Motivation.....	92
Figure 4.6: Humour and Comprehension.....	94
Figure 4.7: Humour and Retention.....	95
Figure 4.8: Humour and Creativity.....	96
Figure 4.9: Humour and Critical Thinking.....	97
Figure 4.10: Humour and Classroom Environment.....	98
Figure 4.11: Humour and Classroom Management.....	99
Figure 4.12: Humour and Classroom Communication.....	100
Figure 4.13: Humour and Negative Effects.....	102
Figure 4.14: Humour and Teacher’s Immediacy.....	103
Figure 4.15: Humour and Teacher Effectiveness.....	104



INTRODUCTION

Introduction

1 Background of the Study.....	2
2 Statement of the Problem.....	3
3 Aims and Significance of the Study.....	4
4 Research Question.....	5
5 Data Collection Procedure.....	5
6 Ethical Issues.....	6
7 Structure of the Dissertation.....	6
8 Definitions of Terms.....	7

1. Background of the Study

It is well known in education that learning is a complex process that includes much more than merely gathering factual information. Students need to organize the knowledge they have gained, use that information to make decisions, develop many various skills, and function within the social environment where those skills and decisions are needed. Because the acquisition of these abilities differs greatly among students, the methods used to develop these skills also must vary. Therefore, good teaching methods include many techniques, and humour is a non-traditional strategy that meets the learning needs of students and develops their creative thinking. Berk (1996) presented a sound reason for its inclusion in teaching, by stating that “Humour appreciation involves not only cognitive processes (such as those needed for incongruity resolution), but also affective and emotional processes as well” (p. 26).

Most students in the classroom context, unfortunately, often view many of their classes as triple threat courses: boring, difficult, and stressful (Deiter, 2000). Overcoming these kinds of students’ perceptions may be one of the greatest challenges in teachers, especially if they want to motivate and engage the students in the learning process.

When enumerating the qualities that describe an effective teacher, one may immediately think of clarity, organization, preparedness, scholarship, content knowledge, and love of students. One may not readily indicate “sense of humour” as a critical attribute. Although numerous studies have shown the positive effects of humour in the learning environment (Berk, 2000; Berwald, 1992; Bryant & Zillman, 1989; Clabby, 1979; Colwell, 1981; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Pollack & Freda, 1997). According to Deniere (1995), humour is still underused in the FL classroom, and most teachers often resist using it as a teaching tool (Berk, 1998).

2. Statement of the Problem

Middle school students should be learning in an environment where they feel free to express themselves and have open and caring relationships with their teachers. Teachers can strive to develop affective effective teaching characteristics and a learning environment for the class that is compatible with humour. However, in the Algerian reality, teaching has always been associated with seriousness and rigidity. Students are subjected to smacking or hitting if they happen to be humorous. So, the idea of being friendly and humorous in the classroom seems to be unreachable. During our few years of experience as a middle school teacher, we have noticed that most students were uninterested and most of the time showed no engagement in what is going on in the classroom. During the presentation of the lessons, most of them have been witnessed chatting with their classmates, others were drawing on the tables, and some other students were playing with their cell phones. This issue has been discussed with other colleagues, and they have expressed the same observations. Most other teachers have complained of the students' indifference in the classroom. In other words, this indifference is what we call dullness and boredom. According to Deiter (2000), dullness and boredom in the teaching and learning processes can kill student intellectual interest in any subject and destroy all student desire to pursue study. Teaching effectively requires imagination and creativity to turn students on by turning their negative perceptions about teachers and learning off. Using humour can be a successful teaching tool for that purpose.

Henceforth, the catalyst for this study to explore thoroughly the issue of humour in teaching has been of big deal for the researcher himself for our ultimate objective is to make our classrooms alive and free of boredom. In this respect, I have chosen to start my research with a corpus collection, by discussing the topic of humour as a teaching tool in our classrooms with the students and the middle school teachers of English in Ain Azel that have been selected for this study. The students who, after being informally interviewed, (See

Appendix 2), argued that they are overwhelmingly in favour of the use of humour in the classroom, and that they prefer a teacher who has a sense of humour for their favourite teachers are those who made them laugh and more importantly made learning fun. Being the focus of this research, teachers were interviewed using the focus group technique (See Appendix 3) to gain a primary understanding of what they think about humour in the classroom as a teaching strategy. Along the interview, teachers clearly stated their knowledge and understanding of the concept humour, but at the same time, they elaborated their skepticism toward its use in the educational context. They have expressed their doubts about humour and its effects on the learning outcomes. Hence, it is obvious that while teachers are skeptical toward the use of humour in the educational setting, students voice their support and appreciation of humour as an adjunct to their learning. For that reason, it is strongly believe that this issue is of paramount importance in teaching and need to be deeply investigated.

3. Aim of the Study

Humour is a valuable teaching tool in teaching and learning for establishing a classroom climate conducive to learning. Appropriate and timely humour in the classroom can foster mutual openness and respect and contribute to overall teaching effectiveness (Kher et al., 1999). The major purpose of this research is to explore the attitudes and perceptions of some middle school teachers of English toward the use of humour as a teaching strategy. In other words, what is the perceived effect of humour on the educational context (i.e., to what extent do they perceive humour as an effective teaching tool that would enhance learning and teaching outcomes. Moreover, we want to figure out why those teachers perceive humour in teaching the way they do, with the purpose to make recommendations to promote humour as a teaching tool.

The investigation of these perceptions and attitudes will hopefully broaden the insight into this issue. This study, therefore, might be helpful to English teachers, curriculum designers and students. It will allow them to change their minds about the strategies they use to draw students' attention while they are learning. This study might also be important for researchers because it advocates the topic of humour in teaching and learning to help enhance students engagement and motivation to successfully complete course requirements. It is intended to stimulate interest in the implications of pedagogical humour in the hope that researchers and teachers alike would recognize the multiplicity of benefits inherent in general classroom humour and make attempt to consciously or deliberately use humour in the educational setting.

4. Research Question

This study specifically addresses the following research question:

- How do English middle school teachers perceive humour as a pedagogical teaching strategy? and why?

5. Data Collection Procedures

Burns and Grove (2001) define data collection as “the precise systematic gathering of information relevant to specific research objectives or questions” (p.49). For this study, we have first conducted a primary data to reinforce the statement of the problem by opting for two interviews: a focus group interview was designed for one hundred twenty (120) students in each middle school to get first insight with regard to the students' perceptions toward the use of humour in the classroom. The researcher asked questions and took notes. Another interview was also conducted with seven (7) middle school teachers to gain a primary understanding of their attitudes and opinions about the use of humour in their teaching. After gaining these primary data, in-depth structured interviews have been developed in order to adhere to the qualitative requirements of the study. The information derived from the

literature review has been used to construct in depth-interviews pertaining to specific questions covered during the interviews to ensure consistency.

6. Ethical Issues

Merriam (1998) notes that with all forms of research there is a “concern that the investigation be concluded in an ethical manner” (p.120), and that in the case of qualitative research “ethical dilemmas are likely to emerge with regard to the collection of data and the dissemination of findings” (p.213). To somewhat mitigate potential issues in data collection and dissemination of findings, we presented my research including an interview script to the participants that have been explained the nature and the purpose of the study. I do not refer to these participants by name in order to provide a small measure of anonymity. Moreover, they were told that they have their right to cease participation in the study. All the participants that were selected for the research willingly agreed to participate.

7. Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation comprises five chapters; two of which are theoretical reviewing literature about the humanistic approach and affective factors in foreign language teaching (FLT). It deals mainly with definitions of concepts, some important affective factors, their effects on learning and their implications to language teaching and learning in addition to some strategies that teachers could invoke in order to create that affective classroom environment. The second chapter examines the literature relating to humour in education. This review highlights definitions of humour, theories and various types of humour and its effect on the classroom environment, when and where to use humour, as well as its implementation in the FL classroom, etc. Chapter three is devoted to the research design and the methodology used in the study where a qualitative approach was opted for, as well as the justification of its use. Then a general view is presented on the interview as data collection procedure to get the answers to the research question outlined above. The fourth chapter

presents the analysis and the interpretation of the empirical data obtained by the data collection procedure. In the last chapter, recommendations for teachers about how to look and deal with humour in order to achieve better learning and teaching experiences, along with some suggestions for humour-based classroom research in an Algerian context

8. Definition of Terms

The following terms are frequently used in this study:

-Perceive

“The process of human transaction with environment. It involves organizing, interpreting, and transforming information from sensory data and memory. Perceptions of reality are uniquely individual, based on a person’s total life experiences” (McEwen & Wills, 2007)

-Humour

Humour – Any message, verbal or nonverbal, that is communicated by the instructor and evokes feelings of positive amusement by the student (Hurren, 2006).

-Sense of humor

“The mental faculty of discovering, expressing, or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdity incongruous: a pervasive style for approaching life events” (Benson & Haith, 2009, p.189).

-Laughter

“Laughter is the physical expression of what is humorous. It has bodily properties such as sounds, facial gestures, and usually involuntary muscle movements” (Lowenstein & Bradshaw, 2004, p. 54).

-Attitudes

“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 mirror of the mind.” (Ryan & Cooper, 2008, p.171).



Chapter One

Literature Review on Humanistic Approach and Affective Factors in Foreign Language Teaching



Chapter One: Humanistic Approach and Affective Factors in Foreign Language Teaching

Introduction.....	9
1.1 What Is Humanistic Approach?.....	10
1.2. Affective Factors.....	12
1.2.1 What is Affect?.....	13
1.2.2 Influence of Affect on Educationl Context.....	15
1.3 Some Important Affective Factors.....	16
1.3.1 Self-esteem.....	16
1.3.2 Memory	18
1.3.3 Motivation... ..	18
1.3.4 Anxiety	20
1.4 Role of the Teacher as a Facilitator.....	22
1.4.1 Creating Psychological Comfortable and Safe Learning Environment	23
1.4.2 Cooperative Learning	24
1.4.3 Teacher Characteristics.....	25
Conclusion.....	27

Introduction

How to successfully acquire a FL? Many linguists and psychologists have been trying their best to answer such problems (Wei & Cook, 2009). During the recent years more and more researchers have begun to study the affective factors. For a long time, foreign language teaching has been under the model of teacher-centred. This teaching model emphasizes the cognitive aspect, but ignores the emotional communication between learners. So, nowadays emotional illiteracy is common phenomenon.

In FLT, there appear a lot of approaches. This chapter lays special stress on humanistic approach and analyses the influence of some important affective factors on language learning, with a view to drawing teachers' attention to students' emotions in fulfilling their teaching task.

From the 1970s, humanism in education has attracted more and more people's attention (Jebb, 2010). According to its theories, the receiver in education is first a human being, then a learner. If a person cannot satisfy the basic needs physically and psychologically, he will surely fail to concentrate on his language learning whole-heartedly. Affect is not only a basic need of human body, but also a condition and a premise of the other physical and psychological activities (Arnold & Brown, 1999). So language learning and the affect are closely connected and have aroused many theoretical educators' interests to do research in this field.

This chapter reviews literature on humanistic approach and some affective factors in learning a FL. First, an overview of the humanistic approach is developed. Second, the definition of the concept affect is given. Third, the influence of affect on the educational context is presented. Fourth, some important affective factors: self-esteem, memory, motivation and anxiety are discussed. Finally, we look at the role of the language teacher as a

facilitator in order to avoid many problems in the classroom and in creating a positive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning by describing some strategies to do so.

1.1 What Is Humanistic Approach?

Humanism is originally a psychological term. It emphasizes the importance of the inner world of the human being and places the individual's thoughts, feelings and emotions at the forefront of all human developments (Ebert & Culyer, 2007). There are three prominent figures in this field.

Erikson (1963) is generally accepted as developing his theory from Sigmund Freud, but he sees that human psychological development depends not only on the way in which individuals pass through predetermined maturational stages, but on the challenges that are set by society at particular times in their lives. Erikson calls this the fundamental "epigenetic principle". Another is Maslow (1968), who proposes a hierarchy of needs: deficiency (or maintenance) needs and being (or growth) needs. Deficiency needs are directly related to a person's psychological or biological balance, such as the requirements of food, water or sleep. Being needs are related to the fulfillment of individual potential development. The third one is Rogers (1969), who advocates that human beings have a natural potential for learning, but this will take place only when the subject matter is perceived to be of personal relevance to the learners and when it involves active participation of the learners. Although these three humanists have different ideas, their theories are all connected with humanism and their theories contribute greatly to the appearance of humanistic approach.

Humanistic approach has inspired many language teaching methods which emphasize humanism as the most significant element in the teaching process. According to McEwen and Wills (2007), the definition of humanistic approach in language teaching is a term that is sometimes used for methods in which the following principles are considered important:

- 1) Development of human values.
- 2) Growth in self-awareness and in the understanding of others.
- 3) Sensitivity to human feelings and emotions.
- 4) Active student involvement in learning and in the way learning takes place.

Stevick (1980) may be the most important figure for humanistic approach. He (1980) points out that in a language course, success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom. From humanistic approach, there arise three prominent methodologies: the Silent Way, Suggestopaedia and Community Language Learning.

The Silent Way originated from Gallengo (1972), and it means that the teacher remains as silent as possible when the learners are involved in learning, but the teacher still remains the firm controller of the class. Suggestopaedia is founded by Lozanov (1979) on the principle that people are capable of learning more if their minds are clear of other things and also free of anxiety. Community language learning was developed by Curran (1972), on the basis of counseling, that is, the learners sit in a circle as a community and decide what they want to say. Despite considerable differences in approach and in the technique used, all these shared three central beliefs: (1) the need to provide a non- threatening and congenial learning environment; (2) the need to get students involved directly in the learning process; and (3) the need to establish a climate of amicability between teacher and students. The founders of these methods consistently reported that a learner who feels comfortable and a contributing participant in the learning process is bound to acquire skills easily. They have been pivotal in pointing out the importance of taking “the student’s emotional needs into direct account in FLT” (Danesi, 2000, p.11).

However, according to Williams and Burden (1997, p.38), rather than seeing what humanism has to offer to FLT as one or other of these ‘fringe’ methods, we see the value of

humanism in language learning as informing and enhancing the teacher's practices in variety of ways, no matter what methodology the teacher is following.

To summarise the points made so far, humanism has a number of messages for the language teacher:

- Create a sense of belonging
- Make the subject relevant to the learner
- Involve the whole person
- Encourage a knowledge of self
- Develop personal identity
- Encourage self-esteem
- Involve emotions and feelings
- Minimise criticism
- Encourage creativity
- Develop knowledge of the process of learning
- Encourage self initiation
- Allow for choice
- Encourage self-evaluation (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 38).

1.2 Affective Factors

As the humanistic approach develops, affect in education gains more and more attention. Some humanistic educators, such as the learning and cognition specialist Hilgard (1963, p.267, as cited in Arnold, 1999) set out the ideas that the development of the whole-person must be based on the connection of cognition and affect, hence purely cognitive theories of learning will be rejected. He recognized the need for an integrative approach “purely cognitive theories of learning will be rejected unless a role is assigned to affectivity” (p.7). According to Oxford (1990) “the affective side of the learner is probably one of the most

important influences on language learning success or failure” (p.140). However, for a long time, English teaching has excessively laid special emphasis on cognition and neglected affective factors on English learning. Teachers attach importance to standard and practical value of knowledge and teaching aims are only confined to mastery of knowledge. As is known to all, teaching activities are international between teachers and students. Most of learning in classroom is heavily cognitive and teachers almost totally neglect students’ affective and emotional development, and they solely consider their professional skills and the contents, they seldom observe students’ affective experience (Richardson, 2011, p. 30). It means that there is an invisible wall between teachers and students so that students cannot communicate their ideas and feelings with teachers hence, it is very hard to embody the essence of teaching affect (Weiner, 2003).

For effective teaching process, affective factors of students in English learning should be concerned. Teachers should develop students’ positive affection of learning English, ensure participation of teachers and students and make them develop harmoniously in English teaching and learning. In the current situation of advocating the learner-based teaching, it’s not enough for teachers to be close to students. They should go further into students’ affective world (Arnold, 1999).

1.2.1 What is Affect?

The term affect has to do with aspects of our emotional being; however, as Fehr and Russell (1984) have noted, “Everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition” (p.464). According to Arnold (1999), “affect is considered broadly as aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude which condition behaviour” (p.1). The word affect following Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) in saying that ones’ affect toward a particular thing or action or situation or experience is “how that thing or that action or that situation or that experience fits in with ones’ needs or purposes, and its resulting effect on one’s emotions.

The inclusion of emotion along with needs and purposes is not surprising when we consider that emotions are commonly responses to how one's various needs and purposes are or are not being met" (p.44)

According to Arnold and Brown (1999), affect refers to emotion or feeling. The affective domain is the emotional side of human behavior, and it may be juxtaposed to the cognitive side. They added that the development of affective states or feelings involves a variety of personality factors, feelings both about us and about others with whom we come into contact. Affect was extensively discussed in the 1960s when humanistic psychologists were concerned with the tendency for educational institutions to focus on the cognitive aspects of learning only. For these psychologists, both cognitive and affective variables are essential for more effective learning (Arnold & Brown, 1999).

These two variables have been viewed as complementary, not contradictory domains. According to Arnold (1999), "the affective side of learning is not in opposition to the cognitive side" (p.20). In fact, consideration for both affective and cognitive variables would result in a better understanding of learning process. Furthermore, Arnold adds that, "a broad understanding of affect in language learning can lead to effective language learning" (p.21). Krashen (1982) describes the relationship between affective variables and language learning in his Affective Filter Hypothesis. He claims that learners with high affective filters will poorly receive any language input. This is because high affective filter resists input from reaching the Language Acquisition Device. This happens when the learner, for example, lacks motivation or confidence. In this regard, Krashen states that the main foundation of individual differences in language learning is the level of their affective filter. Language teaching, as entailed by Affective Filter Hypothesis should take into account the situation that promotes a lower filter.

1.2.2 Influence of Affect on Educational Context

Affective teaching is defined as the aspect of the teaching process that is concerned with the attitudes, feelings, beliefs and emotions of students as well as with the development of their interpersonal relationships and social skills (Lang, 2002). Affective education is not only a kind of teaching mode which can inspire students' temperament to develop towards positive side but also a kind of teaching aim that English teachers train students' well-formed outlook on life and good attitude towards life. So, caring for affective education has a profound significance in English teaching.

The influence of affective factors on how well a FL is acquired has been discussed by a number of scholars in the field. Krashen (1985), for example, advance the notion of an 'affective filter'. Those "affective factors that screen out certain parts of learners' language environments" (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 46). This means that the amount of linguistic input learners receive can be reduced by such factors as low motivation, which in turn may adversely affect their acquisition of the target language (TL).

Krashen (1985) considered that providing students a lot of suitable language input does not mean that students can learn TL very well. The process of second language acquisition is also influenced by affective factors. Language input can change into language intake only through affective filtration. Students learn language more quickly in a low stress environment. Affective filtration describes the effects of stress on a student's performance. When the students feel nervous or threatened, they are less able to soak up new language. Stress filters out comprehensible input. When the students are relaxed and their affective filtration is low, they can absorb language and learn faster. That is to say, in the process of language input that enters brain language acquisition device, affective factors play a positive or negative role.

Positive affection plays a simulative role in English learning (Arnold, 1999). Optimistical personality helps students actively take part in language learning activities and get more

learning opportunities. Teachers bring students with positive affective experience, which helps change boring learning into pleasurable and willing learning. Because students' affection development causes positive thinking, students' intelligence is developed and also knowledge is grasped (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003).

According to affective teaching notion, teachers must think much of not only knowledge but also affection in the teaching process. Research shows that if students like the content of learning and accept it actively, affective filtration will become little and the learning effects will become productive. Strong will and confidence help students overcome the difficulties in English learning. Negative affection can restrain intelligent activities, affect students' normal usage of learning potentiality and reduce language learning effects (Krashen, 1982).

1.3 Some Important Affective Factors

Generally, affective variables are said to have an effect on language learning (Baily, 1983). However, researchers find it troublesome to identify, control and measure affective variables because those variables are, most of the time, intangible (Coates, 1999, p.37). Affective factors in language learning include self-esteem, motivation, memory and anxiety. It is worth mentioning that these are not the only affective variables in language learning. However, these are going to be heavily related to this study and its objectives.

1.3.1 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one of the primary affective elements (Oxford, 1996). It is a self-judgment of worth or value, based on a feeling of efficacy, a sense of interacting effectively with one's own environment (Tesser & Cambell, 1982). According to Arnold (1999), self-esteem is:

A basic requirement for successful cognitive and affective activity. We derive our notions of self-esteem from our inner experience and our relationship with the external world. The foundation for our concept of Self is laid in early childhood. As we incorporate beliefs, attitudes and memories, new experiences and ideas will be affected by the

previously existing notion of who we are and by our need to protect this fragile Self.
(p.12)

Coopersmith (1976, p.4, as cited in Brown, 2000) defined self-esteem as:

By self-esteem, we refer to the evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. In short, self esteem is a personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individuals hold towards themselves. It is a subjective experience which the individual conveys to others by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior. (p. 145)

Drawing on Ehrman (2009), self-esteem begins with the approbation and reliable attachment of important others but is eventually internalized so that it can be maintained relatively independently of the outside world. Teachers can build on this phenomenon with students of any age. Canfield and Wells (1994) suggest that:

The most important thing a teacher can do to help students emotionally and intellectually is to create an environment of mutual support and care. The crucial thing is the safety and encouragement students sense in the classroom...Further, they must recognize that they are valued and will receive affection and support. (p.5)

In the context of language learning low self-esteem can have serious consequences. According Arnold (1999), students who suffer from low self-esteem are greatly incapacitated for reaching their learning potential. They may avoid taking the necessary risks to acquire communicative competence in the TL, they may feel deeply insecure and even drop out of the class. Taking these effects into consideration, in the language classroom it is important to be concerned with learners' self-esteem.

1.3.2 Memory

Another affective variable that should be taken into consideration is memory. This is indeed the essential component to recall facts of the past and, as a result, to store information in the mind. As Stevick (1996) highlights, “what is important and emotionally charged tends to be more rapidly stored in memory than that which is emotionally neutral or unimportant” (p. 6). It is clear, then, that emotion plays a key role in an individual process such as learning, and this leads to the conclusion that affective data belong to the sphere of cognitive data of memory. In this context, more specifically, Stevick (1999) speaks of long-term memory, which is depicted as “the vast score of factual knowledge” (p.49), and which corresponds to the learner’s inner resources. He distinguishes it from the so-called working memory or Worktable, which is designed to assimilate the most immediate information from the outside world (visual, verbal, auditory and olfactory data) and afterwards to process it and store it in the long-term memory.

Thus, the affective data, according to Stevick (1999) “which are stored along with all the other kinds of data, play a strategic role when processing new data, as they are able to activate corresponding items in the networks of long-term memory and change their shape or state according to the feedback - either cognitive or affective - the learner’s brain receives” (pp.47-55). However, if teachers want to help learner’s memory to become more functional, so that given data can be impressed on her/his brain more successfully, they must not neglect a very crucial factor like motivation.

1.3.3 Motivation

Studies show that motivation is of crucial importance in the classroom (Hedge, 2002). Brown (2000) states that “motivation is probably the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any and complex task. It is easy to assume that success in any task is due simply to the fact that someone is motivated” (p.160).

As individuals usually tend to remember and thus to learn what they think is worth learning. However, Lightbown and Spada (1993 as cited in, Macaro, 1997) state that “ It is not easy to determine what precisely creates motivation in the classroom, the research cannot indicate how motivation is related to learning and whether it is the motivation that produces successful learning or successful learning that enhances motivation” (p.181). There is no doubt, however, that this affective aspect involves the learner’s choices and reasons for attempting to acquire a FL.

More specifically, researchers make a distinction between purely academic motivations and life motivations. The former may compromise the effectiveness of any teaching goals, because they have only to do with practical reasons for language learning, such as getting a promotion or avoiding punishment (Brown, 2000). On the contrary, the latter refer to the deeper and more intrinsic learners’ needs and essentially depend on the presence of security and predictability, on the condition of being socially accepted within the class as well as on the ability to do those things that will maintain and improve one’s standing in the group (Brophy, 2010). These motivations can drive students to be curious and interested in the learning process and communicative purposes, and to search for enjoyable and pleasant experiences during classroom activities.

To the learners’ benefit, therefore, it is extremely important that the language teacher develops their intrinsic forms of motivation (Lins, 2007). It is important for the teacher to learn about the students’ motivation so that he/she can create successful experiences to revive motivation to make students study harder and persist longer. His/her own personality and outlook may provide students with fresh motivation. If he/she has genuine interest in students and their welfare, if he/she often smiles and gives praise when deserved, if he/she responds to students’ difficulties, if he/she shows faith in students’ abilities they will try harder to succeed in learning English (Lins, 2007).

So far the most important positive variables that contribute to obtain more successful outcomes in the language classroom have been explored. Yet there is another variable which relates to the learner's personal sphere as well, but which may have a negative connotation and may represent an obstacle to a complete learning process: anxiety.

1.3.4 Anxiety

Anxiety in general has many definitions. Cattell (1960, as cited in Nishimata, 2008) defined it as “the result of all unfulfilled needs and the degree of uncertainty” (p.11). In 1983, Spielberger (as cited in Nishimata, 2008) advanced in the definition by stating that, “it is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (p.11). In FL learning, MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) looked at anxiety as a response to negative experiences is a response to early experiences and that it can increase until the whole process of learning is badly affected. Teachers and learners generally acknowledge that anxiety inhibits FL learning (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Successful learning depends generally on lowering anxiety (Oxford, 1999). Anxiety is, perhaps, the most obstructive factor in the learning process. Anxiety makes learners nervous and afraid and thus contributes to poor performance. According to Eysenck (1979), the feelings of fear and nervousness are intimately connected to the cognitive side of anxiety or worry, and worry will waste energy that should be used for memory or processing on a type of thinking which in no way facilitates the task at hand.

Coleman and Klapper (2005) state that anxiety is probably the most influential factor in language learning. It can reduce both learning capacity and performance by requisitioning cognitive processing resources and preventing memory from operating properly. Anxiety is more evident in communicative classrooms because of the reliance on speaking, which

obliges vulnerable learners to rely on an inadequate vehicle in front of their peers, and on meaningful communication which involves greater personal investment.

Language anxiety falls into two categories: state/situational anxiety and trait anxiety. Brown (2000) claimed that state/situational anxiety appears in responses to a particular situation or event. For example, a student is asked to perform an action or to make an oral speech before the class. At this time, the anxiety is in a passing state. Ideally, as time goes on, this anxiety will diminish in degree. But if it occurs repeatedly, then it becomes a trait anxiety. Once the anxiety becomes a trait one, it will hinder language learning. Brown (2000) reported that the teacher has a crucial role for that anxiety to be reduced. He argues that:

FL anxiety can probably be alleviated by a supportive teacher who will acknowledge students' feelings of isolation and helplessness and offer concrete suggestions for attaining FL confidence..... We must recognize, cope with, and eventually overcome, debilitating FL anxiety as a factor shaping students' experiences in FL learning (p.132)

From Krashen's Second Language Acquisition, Duran (2006) stated that:

Second language learners gain knowledge of content while they are exposed to comprehensible input in a low-anxiety environment. Teachers need to modify their instructional methods and teaching materials in a way that allows students learn the content with low anxiety (p.38).

Researchers have widely investigated the reasons leading to anxiety in the classroom: they usually talk about *harmful anxiety*, which prevents students from participating actively in the oral and/or written production. This can be due not only to objective language performance difficulties or lacks and to negative attitudes and beliefs but also to some other factors, such as shyness, low self-esteem and reduced risk-taking ability, all factors that inhibit forms of communication in the classroom TL and make learners passive. In order to limit such episodes of anxiety in the language classroom, the role of the teacher turns out to be essential again, as she/he can adopt several strategies and techniques to encourage

students to find ways to overcome this negative factor. Avoiding correcting their errors every single time, reducing competition among peers, enabling them to recognize their anxiety symptoms and helping them assess their performance are some good examples of desirable teaching strategies (Arnold, 1999, p 67).

1.4 Role of the Teacher as a Facilitator

What has been previously stated shows how even in a learner- centred approach the role of the educator is not less important than in the past and must not be disregarded, rather her/his function is strategic and meaningful for language acquisition.

As Arnold (1999) emphasizes when talking about English teachers:

We should be considered fortunate in having at our disposal a broad range of possibilities for teaching our subject. We can opt for teaching the language in a way that may teach the structure of English, but certainly nothing more [...]; alternatively, we can teach it in a way that, while practising the same forms, permits students to share part of themselves with others, and in the process perhaps learn more about themselves and each other. (p. 235)

This citation well epitomizes the new features a teacher should have and her/his relationship with the other participants of the language classroom according to an affective perspective. Seiji Ozawa (as cited in Keifer, 2007), the great symphonic conductor, once said, “Conducting an orchestra is like pulling on a heavy weight with a rubber band. If you do not pull hard enough, you get no movement. If you pull too hard, the band breaks”. Student-centered teaching is a little like conducting an orchestra (p.220). The skillful teacher/facilitator seeks a balance between leading and simply supporting the students. Among the main task of the teacher/facilitator is to maintain an emotional climate in the classroom that promotes learning, that is, one that is relaxed, curious, playful, enthusiastic, energetic, and confident (Keifer, 2007, p.222).

Many studies have presented a variety of strategies to reduce anxiety. While the signs and causes of anxiety have been identified, the importance of low-risk climate was stressed (Ehrman & Oxford, 1990) and strategies to reduce FL anxiety received considerable attention. They can be categorized into what teachers and learners do. In this study, teachers are being the focus of the investigation, hence, we are more interested in what teachers should do in order to reduce FL anxiety and create a positive classroom environment conducive to learning.

1.4.1 Creating Psychological, Comfortable and Safe Learning Environment

Shields (2005, as cited in Zajda, 2010, p. 172) states that “a positive classroom culture, not overly structured or rigid, is critical in creating an anxiety-free atmosphere”. One thing that teachers can do to reduce FL anxiety is to create a positive classroom environment to encourage students to take linguistic risks (Ely, 1986, as cited in Dornyei, 2001, p. 364). Young (1990, 1991) suggests communicative approach using warm social environment, having friendly teachers with a good sense of humour, making students feel comfortable, encouraging students to speak, and creating a friendly, relaxed, patient, atmosphere of cordiality, commonality, and friendships among the students themselves.

Several studies provide concrete tips for teachers to create a relaxing environment. Scarcella and Oxford (1992) recommended that teachers: 1) be aware of the possibility of learning anxiety itself; 2) be respectful toward students such as learning their names quickly and correctly; 3) encourage students to engage in positive self-talk (e.g., “I can do a good job!”); 4) reward students for quality work performance; 5) give them greater choice in selecting activities; 6) have them alternately tense and relax major muscle groups or to engage students in quiet, visual meditation; 7) encourage extracurricular student/support groups; 8) allow students the opportunity to redo tests and assignments; 9) invite a facilitator

or a student who has been in country a longer period of time for students to share concerns and get some advice.

In addition, there is a teaching method specifically designed to reduce anxiety using counselling techniques. Samimy and Rardin (1994) recommend the Community Language Learning, which is characterized by teachers' non-judgment attitudes, group cohesion, and personally relevant activities in which learners participate. Community Language Learning is not only intended to remove unnecessary emotional barriers, but to enhance language learning. In a Community Language Learning, a teacher works as a counsellor who understands learners' anxiety and is empathic regarding the expected emotional, threat in FL learning. This counsellor role of teacher resonates with Foss and Reitzel (1988) who claimed the importance of recognizing irrational beliefs and fears, and the teacher discussing with students. However, reactions of learners were not uniform. Some learners who preferred traditional methods to Community Language Learning reacted negatively to it.

1.4.1 Cooperative Learning

According to Jacob (1999), "Cooperative learning is a diverse group of instructional methods in which small groups of student work together and aid each other in completing academic task" (p.13). An impressive body of experimental research has found cooperative learning to be an effective instructional method (Jonson, Maruyama, Nelson & Skon, 1981; Sharan, 1980; Slavin, 1990, as cited in Jacob, 1999, p. 13).

Cooperative learning is gaining broad acceptance in a multitude of language learning classrooms, principally because of its contributions to improving the overall climate of the classroom and its potential for providing supportive and expanded opportunities for learners to use the language. Long and Porter (1985, as cited in Arnold, 1999) state that "cooperative learning, like other group work, creates a more positive affective climate in the classroom, while it also individualizes instruction and raises student motivation" (p.233).

Research demonstrates that cooperative learning environments promote higher achievement levels and greater peer support among students (Woolpert et al., 1998, p. 111). Students acquire important emotive gains and social skills from cooperative classrooms. They tend to know and like their peers better, which increases their motivation to learn. They acquire valuable communication skills when they incorporate diverse viewpoints into their understanding of the subject matter. In small group settings, students learn to work together regardless of individual differences. Cooperative learning situations teach individuals to care about other group members and provide them with empowering skills that foster good working relationships throughout their lives (Wlodkowski, 2008).

Oxford and Ehrman (1993) include cooperative learning as a classroom procedure which can lower anxiety in the language classroom because it helps students work in a group thus, the focus of attention is diffused among group and there is more possibility of providing a correct or acceptable answer. Students have more time to think, more opportunities to rehearse and receive feedback. In group work, students are very patient and helpful with each other as they try to think of what to say and how to say it. They all work for the honour of the whole group. Even if a mistake is made, the pressure is shared and no student in the group will suffer from loss of face, so they are also more likely to succeed (Jacob, 1999). Lower level learners benefit from interaction with somewhat higher level learners. Higher level learners benefit because they help themselves to better understand what they already know in trying to explain something (Ohta, 2001). So cooperative learning reduces anxiety and can result in increased participation and language learning.

2. Teacher Characteristics

Another essential factor, which is not necessarily strategic but may provide some implications for relaxing environment, is teacher characteristics. Grandcolas and Soulé-Susbielles (1986) found that students' primary concerns were teachers' personality and

attitude. Some teachers wish nothing but the best for their students. They wish to foster an environment in which students feel valued and motivated to learn. High expectations and positive interactions are the focus of these teachers' thoughts.

Unfortunately, not all educators have the same goals. Some lose sight of what brought them to the field in the first place. These teachers are negative in their interactions with students and make them feel dissatisfied. They show no apprehension for how students view their behaviour in their classroom. Students do not perform when they are in an environment that is not favourable to their wishes. A significant amount of research has consistently proven that teacher behaviour may be a powerful influence on students. In an article written for teachers on "Cultivating a Healthy Classroom", Glasser (2001) implies that healthy oral, facial and body expressions set the tone that facilitate emotionally stable and eager students. She urges educators to address students in a manner in which they themselves would prefer to be addressed.

Negative behaviour qualities of teachers result in, but are not limited to, reprimanding and use of disapproving remarks in the classroom. Reprimanding is a verbal or non-verbal behaviour reflecting hostility or negative feelings of the teacher, including negative feelings of the teacher's evaluation of student behaviour, expressing anger or criticism (Beaman, 2000). Students also view attitudes that are strict and coercive to be negative. Reprimanding directions according to Glasser (2001) diminish students' self-confidence and illustrate negative teacher behaviour.

When observing two classes with different types of teachers, Cohen and Norst (1989, as cited in Robinson, 2002, p. 67) reported that one extremely anxious student in one class became less anxious after she/he was transferred to another class with a more supportive teacher. Another student whose former teacher was unsympathetic, and who used ridicule, and even physical abuse with learners, needed some time to recover, even after switching to a

class with a much more positive environment, still feeling embarrassed at every attempt to make FL sound. So, what do students prefer? seems to be an appropriate question. In a study conducted by Chiew (1997), results showed that a positive classroom environment that is free of anxiety includes students and teachers who are cohesive, or cooperative. Chiew (1997) argues that cohesion and satisfaction are dimensions that strongly in all classes. Strict and coercive attitudes by teachers were associated with an increase in the perception of competition, a climate which was treated extremely low among students (Byrne et al., 1986). Sinclair and Fraser (2002) study the classroom environment of urban middle schools and report that students prefer a classroom with high levels of cooperation, teacher empathy, and task orientation. In addition to these qualities, Byrne et al., (1986) report that being “friendly” and “makes the classroom pleasant” are also teacher qualities that students reported to prefer. These qualities together create a classroom that is more cohesive. In a study conducted by Rodriguez (2008), he interviewed the students about the most qualities they prefer in their teachers in a relaxing classroom environment that is free of anxiety. Three characteristics of quality teachers emerged. They include: (1) quality teachers are fun, (2) quality teachers are caring, and (3) quality teachers are flexible. This study shows how teacher characteristics are important for the formation and reduction of anxiety as well as the state of it even after the instruction is over (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 21).

Conclusion

To facilitate students’ learning, teachers need to create a relaxing and humanistic atmosphere in which students do not have much anxiety or worry. Teachers need to create a motivating and a positive atmosphere in which students are not afraid of using the TL. They should always bear the affective factors in their minds and put students in the first place, and then they may achieve the success in language teaching.

Affection and language teaching is a kind of bilateral and interactive relations. Highlighting affection can improve the quality and effect of language teaching. On the other hand, language teaching helps students develop positive and healthy affection. This shows that studying affective factors in class has great significance for both theory and practice of S/FL acquisition. It is the general trend of modern education development that the role of affective factors and affective teaching are paid great attention to, and rational and irrational factors are mixed together. The development of high technique calls for the affection of high quality. It is absolutely necessary for teachers to carry out affection principles in English teaching. In this chapter a clear image has been introduced to elaborate some important affective variables which help to create a positive and enjoyable atmosphere for the smooth acquisition of the language. For that end, teachers can adopt many teaching strategies and techniques. What is important to mention here is that each time we mention what teachers should invoke to create such a classroom environment, the use of humour was not mentioned with the same parallel as to those other teaching techniques. It seems that most scholars outlined in this chapter make light of the use of humour in the classroom in order to reduce anxiety and create a positive affective environment. For that reason, chapter two was opted for in order to gain adequate knowledge of this subject and its relation to teaching and learning world.



CHAPTER TWO

HUMOR and TEACHING

Chapter Two: Humour and Teaching

Introduction.....	31
2.1 Humour Definitions.....	32
2.2 Theories of Humour.....	33
2.2.1 Incongruity Theory.....	33
2.2.2 Superiority Theory.....	35
2.2.3 Relief Theory.....	36
2.3 Humour Styles and Cultural Issues in the Classroom.....	37
2.3.1 Affiliative Humour.....	37
2.3.2 Self-enhancing Humour.....	38
2.3.3 Aggressive Humour.....	38
2.3.4 Self-defeating Humour.....	39
2.4 Effects of Humour.....	41
2.4.1 Effects of Humour on Students’ Classroom Physical Disposition.....	41
2.4.2 Effects of Humour on Students’ Classroom Psychological Disposition	42
2.4.2.1 Stress, Anxiety and Self-esteem.....	42
2.4.2.2 Attention and Engagement.....	44
2.4.2.3 Motivation.....	46
2.4.3 Cognitive Effects of Humour.....	48
2.4.3.1 Comprehension and Retention.....	48
2.4.3.2 Creativity and Critical Thinking.....	49
2.4.4 Effects of Humour on Classroom Setting.....	51
2.4.5 Humour as a Communication Facilitator in the Classroom.....	54



2.4.6 Negative Effects of Humour.....55

2.4.7 Effects of Humour on Teacher Immediacy.....57

2.4.8 Teacher Immediacy and Effective Teaching.....60

2.4.9. Implementing Humour in FL Class.....62

Conclusion.....64

Introduction

There is no doubt that humour and laughter make us feel good. They are an integral part of human behaviour and everyday life. Humour can be a dynamic interaction between individuals that would portray a positive message and engagement. Humour is characterized by behaviours that connote kindness and geniality, and carries a message of affection, caring, and humanness. However, when humour is used inappropriately, such as sarcasm, it can have detrimental effects on interactions between individuals.

A critical role of educators is to foster a learning environment in which the learners can apply their knowledge in a non-threatening environment where they feel comfortable and enjoy the learning process. Humour as a teaching tool allows the teacher to engage in building trusting relationships with the learners and helps to break down barriers in classroom communication.

The literature on the topic of humour results from research across a wide variety of disciplines. These disciplines include education, business, psychology, medicine, and public speaking. This chapter examines the literature relating to humour in education. It highlights definitions of humour, theories of humour, humour effects on physical, psychological and cognitive learning and teaching variables, humour and its effects on the classroom environment, the negative effects of humour in the educational setting.

Berk (2002) states that there are two basic reasons for using humour as an instructional tool (1) to build the professor-student connection and (2) engage the students in the learning process (p.4). “The potential of humour as a teaching tool to change attitudes, decrease anxiety, and increase achievement is unlimited and, at this point, largely unrealized” (Berk, 1996, p.88).

2.1 Humour Definitions

Humour is a complex and multi-dimensional concept (Cooper, 2005; Hughes, 2005; McRoberts & Larson-Casselton, 2006) and can be defined in different ways (Duncan, 1982). Appropriate humour can be even more difficult to define (Buck, 2005). Humour is a verbal or nonverbal action or a behavior with incongruous elements (Miczo & Welter, 2006) intended to obtain a positive mental or emotional response from the targeted individual or group (Crawford, 1994). Martin (2007) suggested the multi-faceted definition of humour involves perception, cognition, and affective responses including anything that a person says or does perceive as funny, cognitive processes to create or perceive amusing stimulus, and positive affective responses involving enjoyment.

According to Romero and Pearson (2004) humour is “amusing communications that unite, direct and energize people in ways that benefit the individual or the group” (p.53) and “an amusing communication that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, or int the group” (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006, p. 59).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines humour as “that quality of action, speech, or writing which excites amusement, oddity, jocularly, facetiousness, comicality, fun”. It goes on to say that humour is also “the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition, jocose imagination or treatment of a subject” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p.486, as cited in Martin, 2007, p.5).

It is evident from these definitions that humour is a broad term that refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny and tends to make others laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the affective response involved in the enjoyment of it (Martin, 2007).

No definition of humour found can account for all forms and styles of humour, nor has any attempt to define humour been able to cover all possible situations and scenarios in

which humour takes place. For the purposes of this study, humour will be defined as “the attempt to create positive feelings of amusement and/or laughter in another person.” This study will focus on explicit humour created for the purpose of increasing enjoyment in students during an instructional situation.

Definitions change according to the perspective and focus of the person creating the definition. Theory defines humour (Hughes, 2005). Understanding theories of humour is more important than constructing a specified definition of humour (Brooks, 1992). Researchers use multiple theories to provide a means to organize information, explain phenomena, and create models and hypotheses (Martin, 2007).

2.2 Theories of Humour

While there are over one hundred identified humour theories (Foot & Mc Creddie, 2006, as cited in Fasset & Warren, 2010, p.223), three theories are considered seminal and often are delineated in humour studies. These theories are (1) arousal relief or relief theory (Berlyne, 1969), (2) incongruity theory (Berlyne, 1960), and (3) disparagement or superiority theory (Wolff, Smith, & Murray, 1934, as cited in Fasset & Warren, 2010, p.223).

2.2.1 Incongruity Theory

According to Deckers and Kizer (1975), incongruity can be defined as the divergence between an expected and actual state of affairs and has long been recognized as a condition for humour. This divergence –or incongruity with what was expected- results in humour. Something is perceived as incongruous when it is interpreted as being in an unusual or unexpected combination with something else (Hill, 1988). Jonas (2004) states that incongruity theories “explain humour as unexpected or surprising experiences, words or activities that happen. Strange, absurd, inappropriate consequences or endings are examples of incongruity theories” (pp.57-58). Shade (1996) posits that the basis of incongruity theory is when we are expecting one thing and suddenly presented with another. The humour results

as an outcome of these verbal or visual incongruities. Rothbart (1976) added to the aforementioned definitions of incongruity theory: "...although perception of an incongruous or unexpected event may lead to laughter, perception of an unexpected event may also lead to fear, curiosity, problem-solving, or concept learning" (p. 38). From that perspective, humor certainly has a place in education.

The scholars mentioned above basically agree on the definition of what the incongruity theory of humour is. Additionally, they agree on the driving force behind it, cognitive development. With specific reference to the classroom, Berk (2002) points out that the cognitive processes used in understanding a joke are similar to what is involved in problem solving. Specifically, this mental processing occurs in the right hemisphere of the brain, where creativity and problem solving lie.

When discussing cognition, Piaget's cognitive development model must be acknowledged. The stages that Piaget developed are sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational (Gredler, 2001). The concrete operational stage is where humans begin to understand incongruous humour, because an understanding of reality is usually achieved by this stage (Martin, 2007). This is imperative because an understanding of reality is necessary before one can accept any distortion of reality, and therefore, incongruous humour (Gredler, 2001).

While incongruity theory accounts for the cognitive piece of the puzzle, it does not entirely account for academic achievement. There are several studies where the use of humour has been shown to increase academic achievement. Crump (1996) and Garner (2006), for example. However, there are also studies that show humour as a contributing factor to academic achievement rather than the sole predictor.

The incongruity theory of humour has its basis in problem solving, or in the cognitive arena. But learning is broader than just the cognitive realm (Martin, 2007). The superiority

theory of humour takes that cognitive aspect of humour a step further into the affective realm. Superiority theory of humour is still very much cognitive in that it requires the same recognition of incongruent stimuli. However, the humour comes from more than just the resolution of said incongruent stimuli (Morreall, 1983). Humour is an effective instructional technique because it joins the cognitive and affective realm of learning.

2.2.2 Superiority Theory

According to Cornett (1986), the superiority theory of humour is based on the idea that:

Humans derive pleasure from seeing themselves as better off than others. We can safely laugh at those who make mistakes we never would. We can learn to laugh at our own past mistakes because we feel superior to who or what we were back then. Things that represent forms or classes lower than ours are often found humorous: clowns, caricatures, puppets, and impersonators. On the flip side, when something “indignant” happens to someone or something that is afforded great respect or dignity, it is often seen as funny – as long as you are not that person! There is one important caveat, however. Defects in others are humorous as long as they are not harmful to the victims (p. 26).

Centuries ago Plato and Aristotle cited superior feelings as a source of laughter. According to Hill (1988) “We laugh maliciously when we possess superior knowledge over the people we ridicule. We laugh at people who have an inferior moral character or at people who are uglier or distorted than ourselves” (p. 40). According to this theory, we sometimes laugh at people or situations out of fear, ignorance, or lack of power and control.

Shade (1996) suggests that this type of humour is often a less-obvious form of prejudice. Many of the jokes told to make one feel or appear superior involve one of the following groups as the “butt” of the joke: religions, nationalities, races, occupations, etc. In an effort to inflate our own ego, or deflate the status of someone else, we sometimes pick on another person or group of people. Due to the heterogeneous make-up of many classrooms, using this type of humor as an instructional technique could alienate students.

2.2.3 Relief Theory

Relief humour theory is based on the idea that humour is used to release tension and stress. Freud (1905-1960, as cited in Gayle, 2006, p.298), extended humour relief theory with his description of relief humour as both a healing release of pent-up tension and disguised aggression. Morreall (1991) described two strategic uses of humour linked to relief theory: promoting health by reducing stress and acting as a social lubricant. Spencer (1986, as cited in Charney, 2005, p.642) is generally considered to be the originator of humour relief theory. He argued that laughter represents a release of nervous energy that has no where to go after an unexpected event distracts from emotionally tense mood, or after an expectation of a need for emotional energy is frustrated. He compared the release of pent-up laughter to a safety valve on a steam pipe.

Proponents of the arousal theory or relief theory argue that individuals experience humour and laughter in response to some stressful or difficult event or situation (Seaward, 2006; Morreall, 1983). Working from this theory, humorous reactions result primarily from the cathartic release of pent-up emotions or tensions. Thus, when a teacher tells a humorous joke or a story at the beginning of the lecture, students may laugh subsequently pent-up anxiety or stress.

According to Lowenstein and Bradshaw (2004), the relief theory of humour:

Incorporates a physiological viewpoint in which laughter is seen as a venting of nervous energy. Freud supported this theory of humour. He believed that psychic energy is used in humorous situations and, as it becomes overabundant, is released as laughter, a physical process. Relief theory explains that laughter occurs because of the release of pre-existing energy and the release of energy built up by the humorous situation itself. Freud felt that the pleasure experienced in humour was derived from psychic release and that humour served healthy and adaptive functions. (p. 55)

Research to support and test these proposed theories has increased over the last 40 years. Although these theories represent philosophical views, they are relevant to the understanding and application of humour in the classroom environment (Lowenstein & Bradshaw, 2004). Despite the body of knowledge generated on such theories of humour, researchers have not developed a theory that addresses humour in the classroom/learning context. Recently, Wanzer, Frymier and Irwin (2010, as cited in Fasset & Warren, 2010, p. 224) advanced an integrative theory to explain the humorous message/learning link. Instructional Humour Processing Theory draws from incongruity resolution theory, disposition theory, and the elaboration likelihood model the first step in Instructional Humour Processing is that students must recognize and resolve any incongruity in a teacher's humorous message. If incongruity is not resolved, students will be distracted or confused by the message, rather than perceiving its humour. Because humour is arousing, students' attention will be increased. However, for the humour message to have a positive impact on learning, it must increase motivation and ability to process the instructional message (Fasset & Warren, 2010).

2.3 Humour Styles and Cultural Issues in the Classroom

Humor styles vary according to ethnicity, and the difference can be significant (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). Based on a review of past theoretical and empirical literature, Martin (2007) hypothesized four main styles, two of which were considered to be relatively healthy or adaptive (affiliative and self-enhancing humour) and two relatively unhealthy and potentially detrimental (aggressive and self-defeating humour).

2.3.1 Affiliative Humour

Affiliative humour, according to Beebe (2007) is, "the tendency to say funny things in order to amuse others" (p.34). Martin (2007) defined affiliative humour as:

Affiliative humour refers to the tendency to say funny things, to tell jokes, and to engage in spontaneous witty banter, in order to amuse others, to facilitate relationships, and to reduce interpersonal tensions (e.g., "I enjoy making people laugh"). This is

hypothesized to be an essentially nonhostile, tolerant use of humour that is affirming of self and others and presumably enhances interpersonal cohesiveness” (p.211).

Studies of humour within couples (Martin et al., 2003; Campbell et al., 2008, as cited in Gournelos & Greene, 2011), have found that “when people use more affiliative humour during a conflict discussion, their partners feel closer to them and feel that they were more successful at resolving conflicts” (p. 216).

2.3.2 Self-enhancing Humour

This is another type of healthy and adaptive humour. According to Earleywine (2010), “People who use self-enhancing humour are less depressed, less anxious, and higher in self-esteem. Their friends and families are likely to note to tell jokes and have an amused attitude” (p.43). Martin (2007) states

Self-enhancing humour refers to the tendency to maintain a humorous outlook on life even when one is not with other people, to be frequently amused by the incongruities of life, to maintain a humorous perspective even in the face of stress or adversity, and to use humour in coping (e.g., “My humorous outlook on life keeps me from getting overly upset or depressed about things”). (p. 211)

McGhee (2010) found that these two humour styles mentioned above are positive because they “strengthen a more playful, positive and optimistic mood, while reducing depression, stress and negative affect in general. They also boosted a perceived sense of self-efficacy and sense of control over one’s internal states”. (p. 132)

2.3.3 Aggressive Humour

This style of humour is believed to be the “the tendency to use humour for the purpose of criticizing or manipulating other” (Beebe, 2007, p. 34). Martin (2007) defined aggressive humour as:

The tendency to use humour for the purpose of criticizing or manipulating others, as in sarcasm, teasing, ridicule, derision, or disparagement humour, as well as the use of potentially offensive (e.g., racist or sexist) forms of humour (e.g., “If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it”). It also includes the compulsive expression of humor even when it is socially inappropriate. This type of humour is viewed as a means of enhancing the self at the expense of one’s relationships with others. (pp.277-278)

According to Gournelos and Greene (2011), “When people use aggressive humour their partners feel less close and ...that the discussion do not contribute to resolving a conflict” (p. 216). Hence, it is apparent that this type of humour is to be avoided because it is relatively unhealthy and potentially detrimental.

2.3.4 Self-defeating Humour

According to Andrews (2009), “Self-defeating humour involves using humour in an excessively way and allowing oneself to be the butt of others’ jokes” (p.115). Martin (2007) states that:

Self-enhancing humour involves the use of excessively self-disparaging humour, attempts to amuse others by doing or saying funny things at one’s own expense, and laughing along with others when being ridiculed or disparaged (e.g., “I often try to make people like or accept me more by saying something funny about my own weaknesses, blunders, or faults”). It also involves the use of humour as a form of defensive denial, to hide one’s underlying negative feelings or avoid dealing constructively with problems. This style of humour is seen as an attempt to gain the attention and approval of others at one’s own expense. (p.122)

Self-defeating humour is “uniquely predictive of depressive symptoms above and beyond coping and defence contributions” (Erickson & Feldstein, 2007, p. 286). Further, self-defeating humour “involves enhancing one’s relationship with others to the detriment of the self. This humour is particularly common during adolescence as children work to create bonds with their peers” (Erickson & Feldstein, 2007, p. 286).

Humour styles vary according to ethnicity, and the difference can be significant (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006). The Humour Style Questionnaire assesses individual differences in the four styles mentioned above. Empirical studies undertaken in diverse cultures (Kazarian & Martin, 2004; Martin, 2003; Saroglou & Scariot, 2002, as cited in Beebe, 2007, p.35), supported the ‘cross-cultural stability of the Humour Style Questionnaire and the stance that “expressions of humour take different forms in different cultures” (Kazarian & Martin, 2006, p. 216).

It stands to reason therefore, that if humour is to be used effectively in the classroom, “it must be used sensitively and with regard to cultural and language barriers to its understanding and appreciation” (Ziegler, 1998, p. 347). Schmitz (2002) noted that “schools are complex entities and classrooms are public spaces populated by different students with different values, attitudes and views of the world” (p. 91). Certain cultures may not recognize humour as socially acceptable (White, 2001, p. 338), and humour acceptable to one individual may not be another (Garner, 2006; Robinson, 1991; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Schmitz, 2002; White, 2001; Ziegler, 1998). In addition, some cultures may perceive an individual as weak when the individual uses self-defeating humour (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006, p. 65). Although humour is a universal phenomenon that is practiced across different countries, religions, ethnic groups, nationalities, and tribes across the world (Apte, 1985), teachers must not be blind to the “varied kaleidoscope of cultural differences and emphasis in humour production and appreciation (Kruger, 1996, p.12). Care must be taken in a multicultural classroom to use humour as an instructional tool to engage students and create an enthusiastic and positive environment, not to alienate or offend (Beebe, 2007, p. 35). The four styles of humour and different manifestations of each type are shown in the figure below.

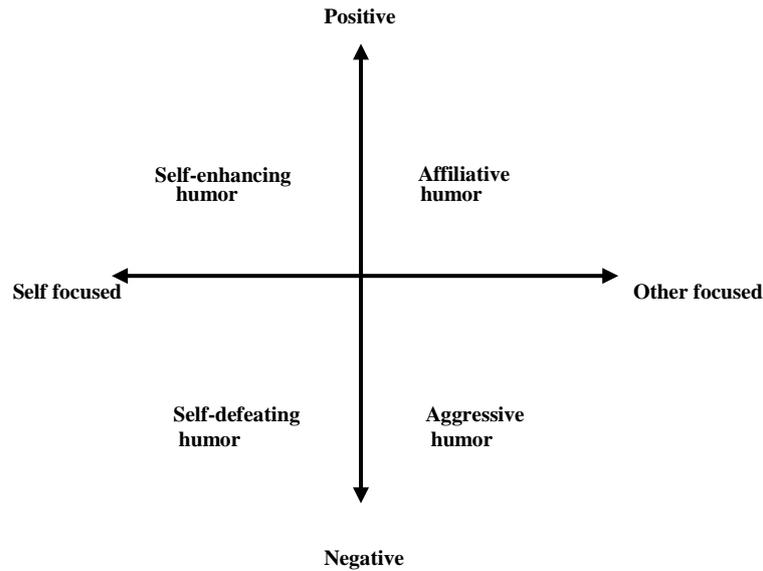


Figure 2.1: Two-dimensial Model of Humour as cited in Langan-Fox and Cooper, 2007, p. 221.

2.4 Effects of Humour

2.4.1 Effects of Humour on Students' Classroom Physical Disposition

A brief summary on the physical benefits of humour and laughter includes the following: humour can serve to relax muscles, stimulate circulation, improve respiration and to exercise the lungs and chest muscles, to decrease serum cortisol, depec, and epinephrine levels in the blood (all three control effects of stress on the body), to increase immune system's ability to protect the body, and to increase the production of endorphins, lower pulse rate and blood pressure (Berk,1996; Caron, 2002; Mahoney, 2000). When we laugh we use parts of our anatomy that we do not use any other time.

One of the prominent contemporary researchers on the subject of humour as an instructional technique is Ronald Berk. He (2002) suggests and expands 8 physiological benefits of laughter. Two of which have a direct relationship to classroom/learning: Improves Mental Functioning (e.g., increases responses, alertness, and memory), and Decreases Stress.

It has been said that laughter is the best medicine. The summary of the research cited above seems to prove just that by clearly asserting the physical benefits of humour and laughter. However, humour as an instructional technique offers more than just physical benefits.

2.4.2 Effects of Humour on Students' Classroom Psychological Disposition

Psychological effects of humour and laughter include: decreased anxiety and stress, improved self esteem, increased motivation, and higher perceived quality of life (Berk, 1996; Cornett, 1986). Laughter has been shown to help people cope with stressful events, and help improve morale (Anderson & Arnoult, 1989; Philareatou, 2006; Stambor, 2006). Laughter has shown therapeutic qualities such as relieving tension, increasing curiosity and comprehension, and reducing stress (Bennett, 2003; Garner, 2006). Because laughter helps us stay mentally healthy, it is even called the “safety valve for sanity” (Weiss, 1993).

2.4.2.1 Stress, Anxiety and Self-esteem

Stressful situations can produce psychological symptoms such as anxiety and feeling of distress, and decreased self esteem (Hurren, 2006). Abel (1996) posited that learners with high self-esteem will be less affected by stressful situations because they may feel less vulnerable. Students with low self-esteem are more likely to demonstrate greater distress from stressful situations. Students with low self-esteem are likely to react to stress differently than students with high self-esteem. And if a learner views the classroom as a stressful situation, then a student's self-esteem can be critical to his success in that classroom.

The classroom environment can positively or negatively influence a student's pre-existing self-esteem. For example, Mitchel et al., (2008) stated that support structures (the classroom can be viewed as a support structure) can serve as buffers against high levels of stress. A teacher who effectively uses humour as an instructional tool would positively

influence students with low self-esteem, and that high self-esteem and decreased stress levels are associated with improved academic performance.

According to Roedelein (2002), humour also serves as an adapting and coping mechanism by allowing students to temporarily detach themselves from the current situation, which is especially helpful if they view the classroom as a source of stress or even a threat. Humour can allow the students to reframe the situation (exam, quiz, homework, etc.), and reduce negative feelings and control negative emotional reactions. Humour also promotes objectivity, which can buffer those negative responses (Berk, 2002). According to Page and Page (2010), “nothing dissipates the stress more quickly than humour. Humour can reduce pain, diffuse anger and anxiety, buffer the amount of stress experienced, and give one a sense of power in the middle of chaos” (p. 142).

When the going gets tough, finding some humour in the situation is not uncommon and is often beneficial. Empirical evidence showing that humour moderates the impact of stress has been accumulating over the last 25 years (Lefcourt, 2001). For instance, in one influential study, Lefcourt and Martin (1986) found that a good sense of humour functioned as a buffer to lessen the negative impact of stress on mood.

According to Casto (2004), “Laughing is a great way to be happy, so, develop a good sense of humour. Laughter is often the best medicine for stress relief” (p.90). Perhaps the ultimate rest for the body and mind is humour. Laughter decreases stress, it can temporarily lift anxiety and depression, relieve stress, and help us connect with others. More importantly, humour helps us perceive life differently. Seeing the humour in situations makes the situations less threatening and lowers our stress (Hyman & Pedrick, 2006, p.66). Recent research on humour and its pedagogical utility shows how humour can help to reduce several types of anxiety in the classroom. This research indicates that humour “can be a powerful

classroom tool to reduce stress and anxiety that can often accompany the learning process (Shade, 1996, p. 98).

2.4.2.2 Attention and Engagement

Humour as an instructional technique is used to engage the learners, and an essential factor in learning is student engagement. In order for a teacher to engage a student, that student must pay attention to what the teacher is saying and the activities occurring in the classroom (i.e. the lecture). To engage the students, some teachers made good use of humour in their classes (Benner et al., 2010, p.74). Attending to the classroom activities is another key factor in determining learners' success in the classroom (McKeachie, 1994). Humour is highly effective in gaining and holding one's attention. One of the main reasons to use humour as a teaching tool in the classroom is "to gain students' attention and keep their interest in the material being presented" (Deiter, 2000, p.20).

Attention is the first step in the information processing theory. Before information is interpreted and stored in the long term memory, it must first be attended to sensory register, then processed through the short term memory or working memory (Forbes et al., 2006). Using humour as an instructional tool, classroom material can be presented in such a manner as to engage students' attention, and thereby begin the learning process (Deiter, 2000).

McKeachie (1994) believes that:

Because the learners' minds wander so easily, it is paramount that the teacher be able to keep and maintain attention. While he does not specifically refer to humour, he has this to say about lectures: "keeping lectures to student interests, giving examples that are vivid and intriguing, building suspense toward a resolution of a conflict- these are all techniques of gaining and holding attention. (p.58)

McKeachie also cites as the primary characteristics of teachers appreciated by students "enthusiasm and willingness to make the course worthwhile (p.25). A teacher' use of humour in the classroom is an indication of enthusiasm, and enthusiasm and humour are two qualities

of master teachers. Teacher' use of humour should be intended to make learning enjoyable and, therefore, memorable (Skinner, 2001). Kher et al., (1999) refer to humour as “classroom magic” when all educational elements converge and teacher and student are both positive and excited about learning” (p.1). This “magic” creates an open classroom with mutual respect between teacher and learner, keeps the focus on the learner, and creates an overall positive learning environment.

Teachers frequently note that humour enhances students' interest in their lessons and focuses attention on the materials to be learned (e.g., Bell, 1987; Civilky, 1986). Highet (1963, as cited in McGhee, 1989, p. 59) notes that of the many purposes humour serves, “The most obvious one is that it keeps the pupils alive and attentive because they are never quite sure what is coming next”. Baughman (1979) finds that many students are bored because they are required to attend classes in which they have no interest; therefore, he advocates using humour to enhance their interest. His underlying rationale is that “interested pupils learn better than uninterested ones” (p.26). Davies and Apter (1980, p.57, as cited in McGhee, 1989) note that humour may play multiple roles in the attention-enhancing process “it may in the first place help to attract attention to the teacher and to what he is saying. It may then, help to maintain that attention over a period of time” (p.238).

Zillmann, Williams, Bryant, Boynton, and Wolf (1980, as cited in McGhee, 1989), developed theoretical rationales to support such claims based on physiological concomitants of attention and on a vigilance explanation. They summarize:

In practical terms, this reasoning leads to the prediction that the comparatively inattentive student can be “alerted” through humorous stimuli and that once the student is made more vigilant, his or her alertness will extend into portion of a message that otherwise would be received and processed under inferior conditions of vigilance (p. 172)

According to Vance (1987, as cited in McGhee, 1989), “humour may serve to raise flagging levels of arousal, attention, and interest to levels which support optimal information

processing” (p.85). Moreover, McGhee (1989, p. 58), in reviewing the effects of humour on persuasion, draws on the findings of four studies to conclude that humour makes serious messages more interesting. Nicewonder (2001) argues that the teacher should use humour in the classroom, for the students will not be bored...but more importantly because “it creates an atmosphere in which learning is more likely to occur, encourages student involvement, and holds the students’ attention” (p.2).

2.4.2.3 Motivation

Forbes et al., (2006) define motivation as a “state that energizes, directs, and sustains behaviour” (p. 424). Motivation can be exemplified by personal investment of time, energy and engagement toward an activity. Student engagement is one of the most critical components to student motivation during the learning process. Successful efforts by students in the classroom can be directly linked to the level of student motivation (Beeland, 2002).

Prominent motivational theorists such as Wigfield and Eccles (2002) state that there are three motivational questions that many students ask when faced with a new task: (1) Can I do this activity? (2) Do I want to do this activity? (3) What do I need to do to succeed? This author believes that students ask themselves very similar questions each time they begin a new class, or perhaps, each time they enter a classroom. According to McKeachie (1994), the teacher is “one of the major sources for student stimulation in the classroom. The teachers’ enthusiasm and values, along with verbal and nonverbal communication, have much to do with your students’ interest in the subject matter” (p.355) .While the teacher cannot control a student’s motivation. He can certainly influence it through humour. Unmotivated, underachieving students pose a huge challenge for teachers. One way to motivate and stimulate student interest in a topic connections is to use humour (Gilbertson, 2006). Humour can help students make new connections in learning and improves retention of information (Garner 2006).

In Garner's (2006) study, 117 undergraduates in a distance education environment were divided into two groups. Each group received a series of three 40-minute lectures on research methods and statistics (because statistics is often rated as a "dreadful" course). One group's presentation was in a humorous format (stories, examples, metaphors) and the other group's presentation was not infused with any purposeful humour. The results demonstrated that the humor group had higher ratings for the overall opinion of the lesson and how well the information communicated the lesson, and the humour group retained and recalled significantly more information than the non-humorous group. Additionally, the humorous group had a higher rating of the instructor.

Garner (2003, 2005) stated that humour as an instructional technique provides new perspectives and novel insights. Humour also sustains student interest, facilitates instructor immediacy, increases class attendance, and increases self-motivation. That translates to potential success in the classroom, even in classes that may contain subject matter of little interest to the learners. Students can be supported to develop interest and to work with subject content for which they initially have a less-developed interest (Renninger & Hidi, 2002, p.173). The teacher can facilitate that interest and motivation through using humour as an instructional technique (Beebe, 2007).

Most of students enjoy a lecture more if humour is incorporated. Fun is motivating, and motivating uninterested learners is one of our challenges as middle school and high school teachers. Humour has been found to be a motivator for those most difficult to motivate: students with behaviour disabilities (Gore, 2004, p.76).

In School Science Review, Hawkey (1998, as cited in Gore, 2004) noted that humour not only increases student motivation, but also increase learning. Moreover, in his review of the literature, James (2001, as cited in Gore, 2004), found that "when teachers filled their classes

with relevant humour, students perceived them as interesting, high in support, and affirming” (p.76).

2.4.3 Cognitive Effects of Humour

2.4.3.1 Comprehension and Retention

Many studies indicate that humour has benefits for learners. The cognitive theory outlines the development of a sense of humour as corresponding to the stages of intellectual development (Jalongo, 1985; Tamshiro, 1979). Humour when used appropriately and effectively, helps students learn in some way. Reluctant students’ attention may be maintained by a lighter, humorous touch delivered by the teacher (Pollack & Freda, 1997). Students tend to remember teachers who take the trouble to express their messages in unusual ways. Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack (1995) tell the story of a student who remembers his teacher, Mr.C becausee he has a special way of thinking that catches his students’ attention. He makes brains think, and he says things in a way that students just cannot forget. Csikszentmihalyi and McCormack (1995, as cited in Glasgow & Hicks, 2003, p. 28), indicate that the only after a student has learned to love learning does education truly begin. What student does not reflect fondly on a teacher who used stories, analogies, or amusing anecdotes to enhance learning and aid in the retention of knowledge? According to Quina (1989, as cited in Csikszentmihalyi & McCormack, 1995):

If teachers and learners can laugh together, they can most likely work together as well. In these days of standards and high-stakes accountability, if students are comfortable and enjoy the learning process, they are more likely to remember more of the material presented. Enthusiastic teachers spend time thinking about ways to present information in positive ways that will be memorable for students. This light touch affects not only attention-getting goals, but also creativity, ingenuity, participation, and pride of ownership. (pp.27-28)

Chenfeld (1990) cites a clinical psychologist as well as her own teaching experience in claiming that, in classes where teachers encourage laughter, students learn and retain more information. Helitzer and Shatz (2005), state that:

The planned, systematic use of humour can enhance instruction, humour can be either an educational lubricant or irritant. When used appropriately, humour can reduce student anxiety, enhance comprehension, and promote critical thinking. But humour that is derogatory or ridiculing has no place in an educational setting, and too much humour is distracting and unnecessary. The judicious, developmentally appropriate, and timely use of humour makes learning memorable and enjoyable. students are more likely to remember the joke than the concept. (p.316)

A study by Davies and Apter (1980) incorporating humorous versus non-humorous slide tape presentations reveal that students learn more in the humorous presentation. A similar study by Kaplan and Pascoe (1977) examines the effects of humour and humorous examples upon the comprehension and retention of lecture material. A test of comprehension and retention was given twice, immediately following the lecture then six weeks later. Results indicate that immediate comprehension was not facilitated by the use of humorous examples. Upon resting, however, retention of concept humour material was significantly improved by viewing a lecture with humorous examples illustrating concepts. Vance (1987) likewise studied the effect of humour on recognition and recall information. He discovered that humour is an effective aid, but only when humour is contiguous to the instruction.

2.4.3.1 Creativity and Critical Thinking

Many researchers indicate that humour can help to improve students' creativity. This is what Gryskiewics (1993) clearly states "humour helps bring creativity in us, there is a direct connection between fun and laughter and creativity. When people are having fun, creativity naturally follows" (p.7). Morrison (2008) argues that:

Creativity is the ability of the brain to bring together diverse ideas that will generate the thinking necessary for complex problem solving. Humour and creativity are great companions, each a perfect complement for the other in nourishing thinking. Risk taking is the nucleus of creativity and of humour: the freedom to express wild ideas activates spirited conversation and sparks the imagination. The creative process flourishes when accompanied by a sense of humour. Humour increases the potential for divergent thinking and the ability to solve complex problems. By linking previously unconnected areas of the brain, humour forges new associations involving existing concepts, Voila: creativity flourishes. (p.3)

Ziv (1979, 1981, 1984, & 1994, as cited in Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006, p.308), has focused on the psychology of humour investigated the relationship of humour and creativity, and found that humour can enhance both learning and creativity. In experimental study, Ziv (1976b, as cited in Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006) found that “adolescents who listened to humour performed significantly better on creative thinking, as measured the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (Torrance, 1996), than those who did not” (p.308). Ziv concluded that a humorous atmosphere enhances creativity. After many studies, Ziv (1988, as cited in McKeachie et al., 2002, p .74) described two projects designed to foster creativity in adolescents, in which he encouraged teachers to use humour in their classroom instruction in order to enhance creativity. Overall, Ziv’s work made an important contribution to the understanding of the influence of humour on creative thinking (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2006).

Whitmer (1986) is more specific in advocating humour to develop students’ critical thinking skills. Humour is shown to develop higher-order thinking skills and create modes of thinking that are investigative, seeking, grasping, and filled with trial and error (Nilsen, 1987). Humour, while breaking down stress, acts as an elixir which soothes the mind into thinking more clearly about higher order relationships (Herbert, 1991). Alice Isen, a psychologist at the University of Maryland in Baltimore, believes that humour can bridge the right and left hemispheres of the brain, converting a “Ha-Ha” into “Aha!” (Herbert, 1991).

Sullivan (1992) suggests encouraging students to use topic-related puns and humorous comments which require higher level thinking skills, thus challenging students to think.

2.4.4. Effects of Humour on Classroom Setting

It is well known that students are more willing to participate in classrooms that allow them to feel supported. As with all learning, learning a FL requires a particular positive atmosphere in the classroom. (Kristmanson, 2000) emphasizes the need to create a ‘welcoming classroom for language learning, so that the learning environment does not feel threatening or intimidating and humour has always been connected to positive classroom management.

Many teachers claim that the main problems in their schools involved discipline (Loomans et al., 2002, p. 153). However, attentive students will engage in fewer discipline problems. To that end, Tauber and Mester (2007) state that “classroom management is enhanced by teachers making regular and effective use of the various acting skills including humor to keep students engaged. When humour is used as a supplement to teaching, its most positive benefits to classroom management come forth” (p.156). Walter (1990) reported that students who laugh have less disturbing outbursts in the classroom. Powell (1985) and Proctor (1994) reported that humour communicates issues to classroom management without either lessening teacher’s authority or embarrassing in the class.

Regardless of what evidence there may be, we all have personal views on what constitutes a ‘positive affective’ environment for learning a FL. For many teachers, a positive environment in the classroom is the most important where the students are encouraged not to be afraid to use their FL (Kristmanson, 2000). Chiasson (2002) reviewed humour used in the language classroom by using cartoons with multiple panels as they provide appropriate material for communicative questioning and discussion, which something certainly fitting for

FL classroom. Chiasson (2002) states, “.....the choice of cartoon that you choose to demonstrate a particular point will naturally depend on the theme, grammatical or cultural component you are teaching or examiningAsk yourself the question, “what knowledge do I want the students to demonstrate by interpreting this cartoon?” (p.5). the humorous cartoons allow Chiasson to focus on intonation, stress certain syllabus, and work on vocabulary words. Chiasson concludes by stating that the cartoons allow language to be seen as authentic in everyday situations. The classroom is open and students are able to express themselves freely.

It is important to note, however, that when using humour in the classroom, Chiasson (2002) suggests guidelines that may make a teacher more successful in engaging students in the classroom and to achieve better learning outcomes.

1. Do not try too hard. Humour must flow naturally from the teacher.
2. Do what fits your personality. Students may view forced humour as awkward and consequently it will be ineffective.
3. Do not use private humour or humour that leaves people out. Humour should be used to create unity within the classroom and not divide by exclusion of some.
4. Make humour an integral part of your class rather than something special. This way the humour is more likely to flow naturally.
5. Humorous material should be related to what is going on in the classroom.
6. The extent that humour is used will vary. Instructors must be willing to differentiate their approach. Student discussion and interest could guide the amount of humour to be used and when.

According to Garner (2006), when a classroom is led by a teacher who uses humour, the potential of learning is high. A teacher like that engages the learners through a positive social and emotional environment. Defences are lowered and learners can focus and pay attention to

the information being presented. Wanzer and Frymier (1999) said that a teacher who uses humor creates a classroom that is more enjoyable and has students who are less anxious and more willing to participate in class. Basically, it creates an environment more conducive to learning.

A study by Burbach and Babbitt (1993) looked at how wheelchair-bound college students use humour as a coping mechanism. This study revealed that humour (among other things) is used by these students as a way of building group solidarity, blurring group differences, and removing barriers between groups. How does that affect the classroom? “In the process of sharing a laugh they were also reducing the social distance between the two groups” (p.9). A shared laugh can shorten the distance between students and between the teacher and students. These types of behaviour are referred to as teacher immediacy behaviours, which have been shown to increase student attention in the classroom. Teacher immediacy will be discussed further in the next section.

Hashem (1994) stated that humour can help avoid negative situations and consequences by improving the classroom atmosphere and developing relationships among students. Additionally, a classroom with humour aids in focusing student attention, invites students to be more open with their teachers and to approach them first when confronted with a problem.

Berk (2002) is a proponent of active learning, cooperative learning, and, more specifically, teaching strategies that are designed to elicit higher order thinking skills from the learners. His goal is to engage more than just the students' minds; he wants their entire person to be present and actively involved in his classroom experience. Berk (2002) agrees with Gardner (2006) , who says, “... nearly every topic can be approached in a variety of ways, ranging from telling the story, to a formal argument, to an artistic exploration, to some kind of ‘hands-on’ experiment or stimulation. Such pluralistic approaches should be encouraged” (p.66).

A teacher's use of humour in the classroom can serve to facilitate a connection among the class members and between them and the teacher. Humour can help the shy student contribute and feel part of the class (Chiasson, 2002). Humour enhances the classroom environment and aids the learning process (Garner, 2003). Teachers who use humour in the classroom are building that ever-important bond between themselves and the students.

2.4.5 Humour as a Communication Facilitator in the Classroom

Using humour to build and maintain relationships is an invaluable skill. Emotional Intelligence, the ability to perceive, assess, and influence one's own and other people's emotions is essential for knowing when and how to use humour effectively (Goleman, 1998, as cited in Morrison, 2008, p.4). The ability to use humour as a part of interpersonal dialogue requires confidence in one's own humour strengths, a fun-loving playful spirit, and the willingness to risk the extraordinary (Morrison, 2008).

Humour generates trust among people and can facilitate a reduction in tension, fear, and anger. According to Berk (2003), teachers who have the ability to assist the students in seeing the "humour" in difficult situations can nurture communication and ease tense situations. Berk (2000) argues that "teachers can use humour as a device to facilitate a shift in context. This shift encourages both teachers and students to think creatively through shared humor (p.9). Laughter can quickly disperse tension and increase the capacity for communication (Morrison, 2008). Moreover, humour is "one of the most effective forms of emotional communication" (Berk, 2003, p.9).

However, the use of humour as a tool in communication is rarely taught. It is a skill requiring multifaceted levels of knowledge and ability. Purposeful humour integration provides a distinct advantage in conversation in the classroom (Morrison, 2008). Since teachers shape and control communication in a classroom, it is up to them to create a safe environment to introduce and manage the cues for the use of humour strategies in the

learning process, and to serve as a model to the children. Humour is generally seen as a facilitator of social competence. The latter might successfully be remedied by the teachers' deliberate use and encouragement of humour as a means to cope with the acquisition of a second language (Bergen, 2006, as cited in Norick & Chiaro, 2009, p. 50).

2.4.6 Negative Effects of Humour

Using appropriate humour in a purposeful way in the classroom yield numerous benefits (Beebe, 2007, p.34). However, as with most things in life, the benefits are accompanied by potential costs (Shade, 1996, as cited in Beebe, 2007, p.36). What about when classroom humour results in negative evaluations? Is there ever a time when humour should not be used in the classroom? Because humour can be subjective, personal, and unpredictable it can be problematic, one cannot always know how it will be received. Garner (2003) said "We identify it as a 'sense of humour' and, like other senses such the sense of taste, people have many different preferences" (p.3). Moreover, when humour is being used as a teaching tool to facilitate learning it is essential for the instructor to establish boundaries for its use in the classroom. Unless the subject of instruction, the use of profanity, put-downs, ridicule, sarcasm, sexual innuendo, profanity, and vulgarity is inappropriate, unnecessary, and has no place in academia (Berk, 2002, pp. 14-18). Among other things, differences in culture, gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and age should be considered (Garner, 2003; Garner, 2005; Garner 2006). Therefore, humour in the classroom should be used cautiously, or sometimes not at all. Powers (2005) suggests four things that should be considered when using humour in the classroom: (1) the subject, (2) the tone, (3) the intent, and (4) the situation.

Certain subjects are off-limits and should not be used as humorous materials in the classroom. Sexual assault, eating disorders, death, substance abuse, and abusive relationships are example of topics that should be avoided as sources of humour. It is very possible that

there are students in that classroom struggling with any one or more of those issues. Making light of those situations could alienate them and negate the original purpose of the humour.

How you say something is just as important as what you say, and never is that truer than when infusing humour into a situation. For example, sarcasm is appreciated by some and loathed by others. The root of the word sarcasm gives some insight to its potential harmful effects: *sarkasmos* – Greek word meaning “to tear flesh” (Torok et al., 2004). Although the study by Torok et al., (2004, p.17) noted that sarcasm was considered an appropriate form of humour by a number of students, this finding conflicted with the notion that sarcasm is a harmful form of humour. Shade (1996), in his book, *Licence to Laugh: Humour in the classroom*, he noted that Sarcasm is brutal. Even the word itself has an appealing root meaning- from the Greek *sarkamos*, to tear flesh! self-esteem is invariably wounded by the use of this knifing form of wit. However, students should be taught how to recognize and analyze sarcasm, and it should be suggested to them they should avoid its use. Sarcasm humiliates, mocks, and makes fun of its victims and immediately puts them on the defensive, often leading to poor attitudes and deep resentments (Shade, 1996, p. 87). Hence, the tone of the teacher when delivering humour can be the difference between success and failure. The intent or purpose of humour in the classroom is learning. If the intent of humour is to embarrass the student(s) or elevate the status of one group over another (including the instructor), then a different strategy is necessary (Powers, 2005). A teacher should always be cognizant of the situation.

The inappropriate use of humour, such making an individual the target of ridicule or referring to ethnicity or disability, may, not surprisingly then, result in a “variety of negative consequences in the classroom and can even turn students away from an entire field of study” (Kher et al., 1999, p. 403). According to Basu (1999), “humour is never ‘innocent’. It always involves a measure of evaluation and criticism, even derision” (p.387). Humour is a double-

edged sword (Meyer, 2002; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006) “because it can be perceived as humorous by one person yet quite offensive to another person” (Romero & Cruthirds, 2006, p.65). There are instances however, when the use of particular forms of humour are decisively unacceptable.

Aggressive humour such as ethnic and sexist jokes, insults, humiliation, and malicious ridicule have a negative effect on the classroom climate (Kearney et al., 2002; Kher et al., 1999; Korobkin, 1988; Romero & Cruthirds, 2006; Torok et al., 2004; Wanzer, 2002). The use of such inappropriate humour can be punishing and non-productive and can create a hostile learning environment that quickly stifles communication and self-esteem (Kearney et al., 2002; Korobkin, 1988; Loomans et al., 2002, Bruner, 2002). Most would agree that there is no place in the classroom for any form of hostile humour. As with cultural issues of humour in the classroom, care must be taken to ethically employ humour as an instructional tool to foster an enthusiastic and positive environment.

2.4.7 Effects of Humour on Teacher Immediacy

Teacher immediacy is loosely defined as the distance –perceived or real- between a teacher and a student (Stephen & Stephen, 2005). Immediacy conceptualized as a “set of verbal and nonverbal behaviours that enhance closeness to and nonverbal interaction with another” (Weiner & Mehrabian, 1968, as cited in Fitzgerald et al., 2004, p.122). In other words, immediacy behaviours bring about a sense of psychological and /or physical closeness between people. Mehrabian’s (1971, as cited in Novais et al., 2011) ‘principle of immediacy’ states that:

People are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly, and prefer; and they avoid or move away from things they dislike, evaluate negatively, or do not prefer. Thus, when a person uses immediacy behaviours he/ she positively affects the level of psychological distance with others, and teachers who engage immediacy behaviours have a positive influence on students and learning outcomes. (p.64)

Thomas, Richmond, and McCroskey (1994, as cited in Wankel & Kingsley, 2009, p.102), noted that nonverbal immediacy behaviours include moving around the classroom, making eye contact with students, smiling, gesturing, speaking without a podium, use of range of vocal techniques, and appropriate touching.

Crump (1996) states that “immediacy behaviours reduce the physical and psychological distance between interactants and enhance closeness to one another” (p.4). Crump conducted a study of 70 students enrolled in communication courses. They were given questionnaires that sought to measure eight nonverbal immediacy behaviours (eye contact, dynamic delivery, physical appearance, friendliness or smiling, vocal variation, time spent outside the class, appropriate touch and physical distance). The questionnaires also measured four verbal immediacy behaviours (use of humour, learning student names, using words like “our” and “we”, and using personal examples). This study revealed humour as the most effective teacher immediacy behaviour. Crump (1996), further states, “humour and laughter are indeed like an invitation, it aims at decreasing social distance” (p.13).

According to Campbell (1992), humour is a tool teachers should use to create a positive and productive learning environment. Humour has been positively linked to teacher effectiveness and immediacy. In her qualitative study, Campbell (1992) goes on to state that in a teaching style preference hierarchy survey given to students, “friendly and attentive” were ranked as the most satisfactory aspects of teaching styles. The teacher that Campbell studied used “humour with insight and direction to not only facilitate enjoyment, but to make social commentary, account for behaviour, hold attention, increase his own likeability, create solidarity, exert control, give vivid examples and motivate his students” (p.24).

If that is how humour in the classroom affects the students, what does it do for the teachers? Humour breaks down the communication barriers between teachers and learners and facilitates effective communication of course material (Berk, 1996). Myers and Bryant (2004)

stated that teachers are gauged by credibility by how they demonstrate that credibility through their competence, character, and caring. One of the hallmarks of teacher character is immediacy. “Immediacy relates to approach and avoidance behaviours and can be thought of as the perceived distance between people” (Roca, 2004, p.186). According to Zhang (2005), teacher immediacy has been positively associated with teaching effectiveness and learning outcomes.

Kher et al., (1999) state that it is the teacher’s job to establish a connection between the student and the teacher. It is the teacher who has majority control over the quality of the learning experience and the learning environment. The students’ perception of the teacher is vital in that process of creating a positive learning environment. If the students perceive the instructor as unapproachable, distant, uncaring, and disconnected (no immediacy established), it is unlikely that a positive learning environment will occur. On the other hand, a teacher who displays a sense of humour in the classroom creates an environment that is open, respectful, and enjoyable.

If the students in the classroom feel good about themselves and connected to their environment (including the teacher), retention rates and ratings for the teacher effectiveness both increase. Torok et al., (2004) agree by stating that “perceptions in the amount of humour used in the classroom positively related to perceptions of how much students feel they learn and how positively they feel about course content and the teachers” (p.15).

Crump (1996) and Hashem (1994) both conducted research in communication courses. Crump’s focus was the teacher’s immediacy, and humour was found to play a pivotal role in teacher immediacy. Hashem’s focus was play and humour as a teaching technique. Hashem (1994) discovered that humour and play allowed learners to practice communication (speaking and listening), collaboration, and cooperation; all key components to an interpersonal communication course. Hashem (1994) also found that learners in the

classroom where play and humour were used excelled and approached their tasks positively and eagerly.

In educational settings, immediacy has been applied to interactions between teachers and students, if a teacher can increase the sense of psychological closeness with students through the use of immediacy behaviours, educational outcomes can be affected positively. Teachers who use certain nonverbal and verbal behaviours are perceived by students as more immediate (e.g., Andersen, 1978, as cited in Wankel & Kingsley, 2009, p. 102). Specifically, researchers have found a positive relationship between teacher immediacy and student motivation and affect. For example, Witt, Wheelless, and Allen (2004, as cited in Wankel & Kingsley, 2009, p. 102) conducted a meta-analysis of student learning and teacher immediacy in which they examined 81 studies conducted between (1979) and (2001). These 81 studies reported that teacher immediacy was associated positively with increased cognitive learning, positive evaluations of instructors, and increased student affect (e.g., liking the course material and the teacher). Gorham, 1988; Kelly and Gorham, 1988; Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey, 1987, Andersen, Andersen and Jensen, 1979, (as cited in Wankel & Kingsley, 2009, pp. 102-103), argued “that smiling is an essential component in creating a sense of immediacy”.

2.4.8 Teacher Immediacy and Teaching Effectiveness

Berk (2005) distinguishes two types of decision-making styles for teaching effectiveness: formative and summative. “Formative decisions use the evidence to improve and shape the quality of teaching, and summative decisions use the evidence to “sum up” overall performance or status to decide about annual merit pay, promotion, and tenure” (p. 48). What is this evidence that Berk references? There are twelve sources of evidence, but Berk gives the most credence to student ratings. Even with the debate and discrepancy surrounding the quality of student ratings. Berk (2005) still cites them as “the most

influential measure of performance used in promotion and tenure decisions at institutions that emphasize teaching effectiveness” (p. 50).

Check (1986) studied the positive traits of effective teachers and the negative traits of ineffective ones. He discovered through surveying 747 college students, 104 senior high school students, and 93 eighth graders that a teacher’s use of humour in the classroom is a desirable trait. There were seven traits that were rated the highest and “using humour, jokes, and witty remarks effectively” was ranked fifth. It was ranked behind understanding of student and their problems, knowledgeable in subject matter, ability to relate to students, friendly, interested in them, and ability to communicate on level of students. There were eight negative traits that surfaced, with “no sense of humour and unenthusiastic” ranking seventh behind inability to communicate and deliver the subject, boring and monotonous, lack of knowledge, uninformed in subject; disorganized, insensitive to students and their needs, and aloofness and arrogance.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) state that when it comes to improving subject matter learning, active student involvement (i.e. humour as an instructional technique) is more effective than traditional instructional formats (i.e. lecture and recitation). Furthermore, effective teachers explain concepts more clearly, including examples and analogies pertinent to subject matter, understand and enthusiastically present the subject matter, and have good rapport with the students.

Teacher expressiveness is classified as teacher immediacy. One example of teacher expressiveness is the use of humour as an instructional technique. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) cite a study where two randomly assigned groups of students were shown videotaped lectures. One tape showed an expressive form of instruction (eye contact, voice inflection, physical movement, and content-relevant humour), and the other tape showed an inexpressive form of instruction. A post-test designed to assess retention and conceptual

understanding was administered and revealed the students who received the expressive instruction scored 34% higher than their counterparts. Other works cited by these researchers revealed that expressive instruction increases motivation to learn and memory encoding.

A review of Pascarella and Terenzini's (2005) work comes forth with a few major points validating humour as an instructional technique. The more a student is engaged in the academic work and experience, the greater the level of knowledge acquisition. There is also a clear link between student learning and the teacher behaviour. More specifically, the two most prominent teacher behaviours that predicted student learning were teacher skill and course structure-organization. Interestingly, it was also stated that these skills are learnable.

2.4.9 Implementing Humour in the English FL Class

Humour can be used very effectively in a number of ways and for different reasons in FL learning. Notwithstanding that some FL teachers ignore humour simply because they consider it not serious for teaching purposes, others use it only to provide entertainment, refresh the students, and give them some kind of break from the tiring, monotonous class work. Jokes and other types of humorous materials, however, can offer far more than mere entertainment in a language class (Sheidlower & Vossler, 2011).

Deneire (1995) suggests that humour be integrated harmoniously into existing language teaching approaches. The advantage of humour is that it could be used with any language teaching approach or method. Humorous material can add variety to the class. Providing a change of pace, and can contribute to reducing tension that many learners feel during the learning process. But the use of humorous texts in classes should be planned by the teacher. It should give learners the impression of being spontaneous but yet be an integral part of the course instrumental in building language skills. Watson and Emerson (1988) state:

When humour is planned as part of the teaching strategy, a caring environment is established, there is an attitude of flexibility, and communication between student and teacher is that of freedom and openness. The tone is set allowing for human error with

freedom to explore alternatives in the learning situation. This reduces the authoritarian position of the teacher, allowing the teacher to be a facilitator of the learning process. Fear and anxiety, only natural in a new and unknown situation, becomes less of a threat, as a partnership between student and teacher develops. (p.89)

Based on Long and Graesser's (1988, as cited in Jay, 2000, p. 183) categories, Schmitz (2002) proposes, for the purpose of language learning, the division of humorous discourse into three basic groups. The first group includes humour that obtains mainly from the context and the general functioning of the world. To be more precise, this type of joke might be labeled the universal (or reality-based joke) for in theory jokes belonging to this group would continue to be humorous in translation from English into other languages. The second group is the cultural joke or culture-based joke. The third group is the linguistic joke or word-based joke based on specific features in the phonology, morphology, or syntax of particular languages. Schmitz also argues that the cultural or linguistic jokes may not always be humorous in translation.

Schmitz (2002) believes that humorous discourse should be introduced from the initial stage of language instruction and continued throughout the language program. He maintains that the humorous material should be selected in a way to gear the linguistic competence of learners. He suggests that the implementation of humour should start with universal humour towards other humorous discourse. Yet, he does not propose any criteria to clearly identify the three groups of humorous discourse.

The literature on the use of humour as a relief maker stresses the importance of humour as a means of enhancing student motivation to learn English. As mentioned before, Dulay and Burt (1977) introduced the concept of “affective filter”. Krashen (1982) as mentioned before noted that a low affective filter corresponded to high motivation, self-confidence, and a lack of anxiety. He explained that the Affective Filter Hypothesis implied that our pedagogical goals should not only include supplying comprehensible input, but also creating

a situation that encourages a low filter. In this respect, humour can help lowering that affective filter, reducing anxiety in the class, and encouraging students' desire to take part in what is being said in the class.

Humorous materials are funny, give pleasure, and relax tension. They, may, therefore, be utilized in the classroom to keep both the students and the teacher entertained. In addition, sharing a joke with the students is a very pleasant and friendly experience that would help the teacher to maintain a good rapport. Claire (1984) stresses the importance of humour by saying that “the nature of the subject-humour insures enthusiastic student involvement in class conversations. No other subject generates such lively participation, covering so many different linguistic skills” (p. v).

Psychologically speaking, people tend to pay more attention to and later remember what interests them more easily rather than what they are forced to learn. Humour is common to all cultures and is appreciated by almost all people. Therefore, it can serve as a very powerful stimulus in language teaching to motivate students to have active participation in the class (Medgyes, 2002). The application of humour would provide a combination of learning and fun. Students would learn much that is useful from jokes without much conscious, painstaking effort. Even the least enthusiastic student would willingly sit in the classroom through the break to listen to a joke. Maurice (1988) states that “humour can easily be seen as a way of activating motivation and directing attention, but it can also be used in other events as well, from stimulating recall to eliciting performance and providing feedback” (p.20).

Conclusion

The review of the literature examined the literature related to humour as a teaching tool and its effects on the educational context in general and in the FL classroom in particular. Areas of attention included definitions of the concept humour, theories of humour, the use of humor by teachers and learners to communicate, humour and effects on the classroom

environment, when and where to use humour and the situations that discouraged the use of humour in the classroom, etc.

In this study, we focus on the effects that humour can have in the teaching and learning experiences. This investigation aims to figure out whether teachers in an Algerian context are actually aware of these effects and to what extent they perceive the use of humour as a teaching tool. For that reason, we opted for a qualitative collection data which is the interview in order to get explanations and understanding of the attitudes and perceptions of the middle school teachers concerning the relationship between humour and some learning and teaching variables.



Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology



Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction.....	67
3.1 Research Design and Procedures: Selecting a Methodology.....	67
3.2 Rationale for Qualitative Research Paradigm.....	68
3.2.1 Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research.....	70
3.2.2 Generalizability.....	73
3.3 Data Collection Instrument.....	73
3.4 Data Collection Procedures.....	74
3.5 Description and Administration of the Interview.....	77
3.5.1 Procedure.....	82
3.5.2 Participants.....	83
3.5.3 Data Analysis.....	84
Conclusion.....	85

Introduction

It is obvious that we need some methodology without which the objective we aim to achieve would be impossible. In this chapter, the research design for this study is presented including the recruitment of the participants, data collection instruments and procedures. Choices of qualitative research design are also discussed along with the case study. The main sources of data collection for the study are in-depth interviews.

3.1 Research Design and Procedures: Selecting a Methodology

According to Mouton and Marais (1996), the research methodology focuses on the manner in which the research was planned, structured and executed in order to comply with scientific criteria. For Leedy (1993), research methodology forms an integral part of any research that is undertaken. Methodology therefore assists in explaining the nature of the data, and highlights the methods employed that will lead to the generation of appropriate conclusions through applicable data processing.

Various scholars argue that there are many and diverse pragmatic influences on choice of research method. Polkinghorne (1992, p.233, as cited in Garner et al., 2009), states that:

There is no single method that is privileged in the production of knowledge about human existence. Each method, including those that employ numeric procedures and those that employ qualitative procedures, is a lens that can bring into focus particular aspects of human being...Choice of method for a particular project depends on which is most useful for addressing the research question. (p.68)

According to Silverman (2009), “In themselves techniques are not true or false. They are more or less useful, depending on their fit with the theories and methodologies being used, the hypothesis being tested and/or the research topic that is selected” (p.110). As Denzin and Lincoln (2003) stated, the researcher’s choice of research method depends on the research questions. According to Crotty (1998):

The research method can be either qualitative, quantitative, or both, regardless of the type of research that is engaged in. The author further emphasizes that “as researchers, we have to devise for ourselves a research process that serves our purpose best, one that helps us more than any other to answer our research question. (p.216)

Within the scope of the present study, a qualitative research paradigm has been adopted aiming at obtaining and determining the opinions of a group of people towards a particular issue at a particular time (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995).

3.2 Rationale for Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative research uses naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomenon in context-specific settings, such as ‘real world setting where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest’ (Patton, 1990, p.39). Unlike the quantitative researchers who seek causal determination, prediction, and generalizability of findings, qualitative researchers seek instead illumination, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). Qualitative research focuses on the qualitative aspects of human nature in order to describe, explain, predict and control behaviour. According to Rubin and Babbie (2001), the qualitative method pursues a deeper understanding of the human experience, especially when observations and theories cannot easily be reduced to numbers.

The method of qualitative research is inductive as opposed to deductive. Rubin and Babbie (2001), indicate that inductive research involves the developments of generalizations from specific observations. A qualitative approach therefore enables the researcher to observe subtle events that may be difficult to measure through other methods.

The qualitative research paradigm is founded on the following assumptions:

- Humans are complex and experience life in individual ways.
- Truth is subjective and depends on the context.

- The researcher can investigate life experiences and perceptions of other people by observing them or communicating with them.
- The researcher is an instrument of the research and cannot be entirely objective; bias is acknowledged and reflexivity is used.
- A valid sample can be obtained if the researcher selects informants who are living the experience under study and continues with data collection until data saturation occurs.
- Qualitative research involves being with people in their normal environment.
- Qualitative research involves description of human experience derived from analysis of data (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 1998, pp. 255-257).

As we began delving into the literature on humour in teaching and how it might enhance the learning and teaching outcomes, it became clear that my research question could be addressed most effectively using a qualitative research method. This primary reason is that I am dealing with the topic of humour as a teaching strategy which is still relatively unclear in our classrooms. As Merriam (1998) states, the goals of a qualitative research investigation are “understanding, description, discovery, meaning, and hypothesis generating” (p.9). These are among my goals for this dissertation in that I am seeking to discover and understand the essence of humour in middle schools through the description of the teachers attitudes that have been involved in this study that serve as my case study.

we chose case study as the specific qualitative research method to use for this dissertation. Different scholars define case study somewhat differently, though usually with some overlap. Creswell (2007) defines case study research as:

A qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, interviews, audiovisual

material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p.73)

Yin (2003) defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a cotemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p.13). Generally, case study involves an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system” (Merriam, 1998, p.12).

3.2.1 Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

By its nature, qualitative research has a strong subjective element due to the fact that the researcher- a human being- is the primary instrument for conducting research. For the same reason, the results of qualitative research are generally not reproducible by other researchers. More generally, as Merriam (1998) notes “one of the assumptions underlying qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, discovered, observed and measured as in quantitative research” (p.202). Given these characteristics of qualitative research, works on qualitative research usually address the issue of whether qualitative research findings can be considered valid.

The concept of validity itself, however, somewhat variable in the context of qualitative research, and definitions of validity range from being fairly technical and involving multiple categories (Lee, 1999, pp. 148-153) to being more commonsensical. Maxwell (2005) refers to validity as “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or some other account” (p.106). Similarly, Merriam (1998) states that “internal validity deals with the question of how research findings match reality. How congruent are the findings with reality? Do the findings capture what is there?” (p.201)

Drawing upon qualitative research literature and her own experience, Merriam describes strategies by which the validity of research can be enhanced:

- “Triangulation- using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings”.
- “Member checks- taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them in the results are plausible”.
- “Long-term observation at the research site or repeated observations of the same phenomenon”.
- “Peer examination- asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge”.
- “Participatory or collaborative modes of research-involving participants in all phases of research from conceptualizing the study to writing up the findings”.
- “Researcher’s biases-clarifying the researcher’s assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study” (p.204).

Another important strategy to add to this list is “searching for discrepant evidence and negative cases” (Maxwell, 2005, p.112). This involves “rigorously (examining) both the supporting and the discrepant data to assess whether it is more plausible to retain or modify the conclusion...” (p.112)

In the case of my research, we relied on triangulation as the primary strategy for enhancing the validity of my findings. The following are the ways in which we employed triangulation:

- we conducted research at the different middle schools in Ain Azel;
- we interviewed a number of different middle school teachers at each middle school.
- In addition, we interviewed a number of different middle school students.

In addition to triangulation, we have tried to discipline myself in the analysis phase to recognize and assess discrepant data. As an outsider conducting case study research at the different middle schools, we took both a sympathetic and a realist approach to my research.

Creswell (2007, pp, 69-70) describes realism in the context of an ethnography, but it applies as well as to case study.

While our personal interests and values are in line with the implementation of humour in teaching, we have also tried to present our research findings as objectively as possible through a careful analysis of interview material to identify consistent themes. Due to time constraints, we have not been able to utilize the other strategies listed above to further enhance the validity of our findings, and this admittedly may detract somewhat from the ultimate validity of the findings.

The concept of “reliability”, which is derived from experimental research, is also mentioned in qualitative research literature, though not as frequently, it appears, as its companion “validity”. According to Merriam (1998), “Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the study is repeated will it yield the same results?” (p.205). Merriam notes that the concept of reliability, applied to qualitative research in education, is of questionable value “achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible” (p.206). Rather than focusing on the reproducibility of results by other researchers, Merriam states-referencing a work by Lincoln and Guba (1985)-that reliability can be thought of as “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p.206). The strategies for achieving consistency are triangulation and “describing in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p.207). From this perspective, the concept of reliability and the means of enhancing it overlap with the concept of validity. As noted above, we incorporated triangulation in a number of ways into our study design. In the following section, we will describe how and why we chose our case study and the participants in the interviews. Moreover, to seek reliability and validity into this research, we attempted to control our bias by bracketing any preconceived beliefs and opinions about the phenomenon

under study. Bracketing is the cognitive process of putting aside ones' own beliefs and remaining open to the data. By bracketing preconceived ideas, the researcher is demonstrating credibility by controlling for researcher bias (Merriam, 1998).

3.2.2 Generalizability

There is some question within qualitative research literature whether-and to what degree-the findings from a single case or a few cases can be generalized beyond the cases themselves and, if so, in what way (Merriam, 1998, pp. 207-211). While some scholars take the view that generalizability is not possible in the context of qualitative research, it appears that most seem to accept that generalizability is possible to some degree. In the context of qualitative research, a number of scholars refer the concept of “naturalistic generalization” (Creswell, 2007, p.163; Merriam, 1998, p.211). Lee (1999) defined this concept as follows:

With naturalistic generalization, judgement about the generalizability of a qualitative study's results to another context is based on the researcher's personal experience. In particular, this judgement derives from the researcher's tacit knowledge about participants, operations, and activities, and how they affect one another. Almost certainly, most persons would acknowledge that at least some meaningful generalization can occur naturally. (p.158)

Another way of looking at generalization is the idea that qualitative research can lead to development of “working hypotheses”- though this too can be seen as problematic (Merriam, 1998, p.209). Hence, we understand that there are limitations in making generalizations when utilizing qualitative research method which will be discussed in the final chapter with other several limitations that are specific to this study.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

In the qualitative research, the researchers have come to embrace their involvement and role within the research. Patton (2001) supports the notion of researcher's involvement and immersion into the research by discussing that the real world are subject to change and

therefore, a qualitative researcher should be present during the changes to record an event after and before change occurs. However, the qualitative researcher needs to test and demonstrate that their studies are credible. In qualitative research the credibility depends on the ability and effort of the researcher.

In this study, the researcher was the instrument for data collection. According to Polit and Hungler (1999), “the researcher helps the informant to describe experiences without leading the discussion. Through in-depth conversations, “the researcher strives to gain entrance into the informants’ world, to have full access to their experiences” (p.246). According to Polit and Beck, (2004), the concept of researcher as an instrument is frequently used in qualitative research.

The teachers were asked to participate in structured interviews and to respond to the closed/open ended questions that were used to elicit the data and initiate discussion (Appendix 1). The open ended question was asked to encourage the participants to discuss their ideas and intentions in detail.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

we started our research investigation with a focus group discussion. It consists of a small group of people usually between eight and twelve in number, who are brought together by the researcher to explore attitudes and perceptions, feelings and ideas about a topic (Denscombe, 1998, p. 115). According to De Vos (1998, p. 313), the researcher uses the focus group discussion as a means to elicit information from participants. The focus group discussion is according to Witkin and Alschuld (1995) “a structured process of interviewing a small group of individuals. Obtaining consensus is not a goal. Rather, it is to elicit how the participants feel about the topic and how to identify the range of perspectives regarding it”. (p.171)

Focus group discussions can elicit contributions from interviewees who might otherwise be reluctant to contribute and through their relatively informal interchanges, focus groups can lead to insights that might not have come to light through the one-to-one conventional interview.

The focus groups discussions allow the researcher to observe a process that is often of profound importance to the qualitative investigation namely interaction (Krueger, 1994). Moreover, focus group discussions allow researchers to access the substantive content of verbally expressed views, opinions, experiences and attitudes and provide a means accessing intentionally created conversations about research topics. Focus group discussions are low on cost and provide speedy results (p. 38). Focus group format is flexible in that it allows the researcher to write down problems in order to understand the research questions so as to ensure clarity and to allow the participants in their own situation to reconstruct their experiences (Hennink, 2007, p.7).

To that end, we started this study using focus group interviews with both middle school teachers (See Appendix 3) and focus group interviews with the students (See Appendix 2) to find out how both teachers and students feel about humour phenomenon in the classroom and to diagnose the issue of whether humour is taken seriously in our schools in order to get a first understanding of this issue. We can say that these focus group discussions are as a pre-test of the problem. Actually, most students who participated in the focus group interview reported that they find the class atmosphere bad, most of the lessons are boring, most teachers are strict, unpleasant and not humorous, and they feel bored in the classroom. However, they clearly showed their enthusiasm to have teachers who display humour while teaching, because according to them, this would create a positive classroom environment, in which they can communicate freely, do not feel threatened, and strong empathic bonds would be established between teachers and students, and the joy of learning would also prevail. On

the other hand, most middle school teachers said that they are frustrated because their students appear bored, disinterested and inattentive most of the time in class and, get discouraged about the course. When they were asked about whether humour can be used in the classroom in order to avoid such problems, they expressed their doubts and resistance toward its use in the educational setting. After gaining clear understanding of the issue, data collection procedures were presented.

The methodology chosen to address the research question as mentioned earlier was predominantly qualitative in nature. we relied on interviews as the primary mechanism for conducting the study. As Stake (1995) states, “Two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others....Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities”. (p.65)

There are a variety of potential interview formats, ranging from “highly structured/standardized” to “semi-structured” to “unstructured/informal” (Merriam, 1998, p.73). For the purpose of this study, we opted for a structured interview. This form of interview can be likened to a sort of “verbal questionnaire”, in that the researcher prepares a list of questions which the interviewee then answers (Newell & Burnard, 2006, p. 60). we chose to use a structured interview format mainly because it is less time-consuming, and the same information is collected for all respondents (Polgar & Thomas, 2008, p.109).

Moreover, in this structured interview format, we drafted questions which vary in detail depending on the situation and the need for quantifiable data. The questions involved in the structured interview are both open-ended questions and closed-ended questions. we tried to avoid questions generally understood to be unproductive in the context of qualitative research- “multiple questions” and “yes-or-no questions” (Merriam, 1998, p.79). We also tried to word the questions in such ways as to increase the likelihood that the respondent

would provide information directly pertinent to our research question. The following are the main characteristics of the closed/opened-ended questions:

- Closed-ended questions can:
 - limit the scope of responses,
 - be binary (i.e. use “yes/no” questions),
 - be scaled (e.g., "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree"),
 - yield quantifiable data more easily than open-ended questions,
 - involve gathering less in-depth data,
 - be more easily administered to large numbers of respondents,
 - assist in reviews of internal controls,
 - provide strong confirmation of findings using other methods.
- Open-ended questions can:
 - broaden the scope of possible responses,
 - assist in formulating other more specific questions,
 - tend to collect qualitative rather than quantitative information,
 - sometimes be quantified using content analysis,
 - involve gathering fairly in-depth data from a few respondents,
 - provide a context for deeper understanding of responses,
 - often be used during management and performance reviews (Merriam, 1998).

3.5 Description and Administration of the Interview

Teachers may adopt different strategies and techniques of drawing students’ attention to the classroom material and keep them motivated and interested. The interviews were devised to investigate middle school teachers’ attitudes and perceptions toward the use of humour as a teaching strategy.

The interviews were handed out to the 20 middle school teachers of English in Ain Azel. The interview questions as mentioned before consisted of open-ended and closed-ended questions for the purpose of gaining deeper explanations of the study at hand with its objectives. The questions in the interviews are comprised of 16 questions, most of them were closed questions based on the Likert scale. The latter was developed by Rensis Likert in 1932. It requires the individuals to make a decision on their level of agreement, generally on a five-point scale (i.e. Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) with a statement. The number beside each response becomes the value for that response and the total score is obtained by adding the values for each response, hence the reason why they are also called 'summated scales' (the respondents score is found by summing the number of responses). Dumas (1999) suggests this is the most commonly used question format for assessing participants' opinions of usability. The advantages of this scale are mainly simple to construct each item of equal value so that respondents are scored rather than items, likely to produce a highly reliable scale, easy to read and complete, they are easy to analyse, they are easy to collect data and they are quick. On the other hand, it has many disadvantages as the lack of reproducibility, absence of one-dimensionality or homogeneity, and validity may be difficult to demonstrate. However, many analysts feel that the Likert-type Scales provides more advantages than disadvantages (McNabb, 2008, p.147).

Concerning its reliability and validity, Likert scale measures are fundamentally at the ordinal level of measurement because responses indicate a ranking only. Interestingly, Dyer (1995) argues that the attitude scales do not need to be factually accurate; they simply need to reflect one possible perception of the truth.[respondents] will not be assessing the factual accuracy of each item, but will be responding to the feelings which the statement triggers in them. According to Tittle and Hill (1967), the Likert scale is the most widely used method of scaling in the social sciences today. Perhaps this is because they are much easier

to construct and because they tend to be more reliable than other scales with the same number of items. But there still seems to be some contention within research as to whether Likert Scales are a good instrument for measuring attitudes and perceptions. Gal and Ginsburg (1994) suggest that the Likert-type scales reveal little about the causes for answers.....it appears they have limited usefulness. Helgeson (1993), states that major reviews repeatedly point to two problems: lack of conceptual clarity in defining attitudes. Technical limitations of the instrument used to assess attitude. The scholar suggests that some of these 'major' reviews have taken place prior to 1993, and along with the progress in technology, the reasons for measuring attitude may have also changed. It should also be taken into account that this type of scale is not developed to provide any kind of diagnostic information that shows underlying issues of concern to the individual respondents. There are now also researchers who are in favour of using Likert Scales, Robson (1993) suggests that Likert Scales can look interesting to respondents and people often enjoy completing a scale of this kind. This means that answers are more likely to be considered rather than perfunctory; Neuman (2000) who states, 'the simplicity and ease of use of the Likert scale is its real strength'.

In this study, we opted for this type of questions because they can be scaled (e.g., "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree"), and yield quantifiable data to figure out to what extent the middle school teachers of English perceive the effects of humour in the educational context. The second type of questions was open-closed question. It was actually one question, the rationale for that is to reach out better answers to our research question as to figure out how those middle school teachers perceive the use of humour in teaching and why. Hence, in order to gain adequate answers, the closed questions would not allow the participants to give such in-depth insights, that is why we opted for the open-ended question which invited the participants to provide their own answers that present qualitative

data. Although this question is more difficult to analyse, it can produce in-depth responses to what the participants actually think and believe rather than being restricted by categories. The interview questions as mentioned before comprised of closed questions and open question, divided into six sections. These sections were analyzed following two stages: the first one contains the closed-ended questions that mainly deal with to what extent teachers perceive the different humour effects. The second one is devoted to the data analysis and interpretation of the open-ended question. The questions were divided into sections as follow:

Stage One: Closed-ended Questions

Section 1: Perception of Humour Psychological Effects (From Question 1 to 5)

In this section, teachers were interviewed to determine the extent of their agreement or disagreement toward the effects of humour on students' classroom psychological disposition.

Section 2: Perception of Humour Cognitive Effects (From Question 6 to 9)

In this section, the questions seek to determine to what extent teachers perceive the effect of humour on the students' cognitive variables.

Section 3: Perception of Humour Effects on the Classroom Setting (From Question 10 to 12)

This section deals with teachers attitudes toward the humour effects on the classroom atmosphere, management and classroom communication.

Section 4: Perception of Humour Negative Effects (Question 13)

This section contains one questions that deals with teachers' attitudes toward humor and its negative effects.

Section 5: Perception of Humour on Teacher's Immediacy and Effectiveness (From Question 14 to 15)

This section is about teachers' perspective toward humour and its impact on teaching immediacy and effectiveness.

Stage Two: Open-ended Question

Section 6: Humour as a Supplementary Teaching Tool (Question 16)

The second stage is devoted to the data analysis and interpretation of the open-ended question that would provide in depth-answers to the issue of why those teachers perceive the use of humour as a teaching strategy the way they do.

For obtaining more accurate data, a trial interview is required as Cargan (2007) states:

Interviews require much preparation: careful design and layout of the questions of being utilized, selecting the actual means used for collecting the interview data, securing permission to conduct the interview, making arrangements to visit the respondent, and note-taking. All these factors indicate that it is essential to conduct a pre-test of the material, to note if any changes are necessary. A pre-test or pilot study is a means of checking whether the survey can be administered and provide accurate data. More specifically, a pilot study is designed to answer the following questions: Are there enough directions for those conducting the survey to administer it, collect it, code it, and report it? Is the necessary information being provided? Are the questions being asked appropriate for the people being surveyed? Is the information being obtained consistent?" (p.116)

For that reason, we opted for a pre-test or a pilot study to test the interview questions in order to figure out whether it can provide us with the necessary information, and whether the questions are comprehensible and appropriate for the sake to avoid any confusion and ambiguity for the participants, and therefore make modification where necessary. The pilot study was performed in introductory communications class at the local community Ain Azel

to verify the appropriateness and ability to collect the intended data. we selected five (5) teachers as a sample for the pilot study that is similar to those that will participate in the survey and large enough to produce meaningful results. After collecting the necessary information from the pilot study, the teacher interviews were handed out to the twenty (20) teachers of English in the middle schools in Ain Azel.

3.5.1 Procedure

The participants were interviewed by first reminding them of the topic to be discussed and its goals because they should be told at the outset what to expect in terms of procedure (Reis & Judd, 2000, p.304). we respected the participants' pace whenever they take pause or they are silent. we did not make any judgements on them in order to keep the interview focused on our topic.

Concerning the way how to record data, it is highly recommended that interviews be taped (with a digital or other type of tape recorder), even if they will not be transcribed in full. The researchers have a choice of whether to take notes of responses during the interview or to tape record the interview. The latter is preferable for a number of reasons. The researcher can concentrate on listening and responding to the interviewee and is not distracted by trying to writing down what has been said. In note taking there is an increased risk of researcher bias because the researcher is likely to make notes of the comments which make immediate sense or are perceived as being directly relevant or particularly interesting. Tape recording ensures that the whole interview is captured and provides complete data for analysis so cues that were missed the first time can be recognized when listening to the recording. Tape-recording which is the obvious choice for us to collect data which is objective, naturalistic and can be reanalysed after the event as agreed by Nunan (1992). That is why we have opted for an audio recording using the cell phone device to guarantee objectivity. Note that taping

has done with the prior approval of the respondents. The interview was conducted in English since the respondents are English teachers.

The interview took place in the respondents' usual classroom. We were sitting side by side and not face to face with the interviewees to make the interview more cooperative. In support, Walkner (1985, as cited in Nunan, 1992) said: "sitting side by side can often result in a more productive interview than sitting face to face (sitting side by side can convey the message that the interaction is meant to be cooperative rather than confrontational)" (p. 152). Interviews are time consuming; the time taken for interviewing is likely to last in ten (10) to fifteen (15) minutes not more as Genesee and Upshur (1996) agree on. However, it takes nearly the whole morning to conduct my interview because teachers were not available all the time.

3.5.2 Participants

A key aspect of qualitative research is that "generalization in a statistical sense is not a goal of case study", and therefore "probabilistic sampling is not necessary or even justifiable", thus, "a nonprobabilistic sampling is the method choice for qualitative research" (Merriam, 1998, p.61). Merriam further notes that "the most common form of non-probabilistic sampling is *purposive* or *purposful*" (p.61). Purposive sampling or selection means simply that the researcher "selects individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon of the study" (Creswell, 2007, p.125). Under normal conditions, it is neither possible, nor desirable to study whole populations. Thus a representative sample would be selected to undergo the investigation. Polit et al., (2001) add that "Sampling involves selecting a group of people, events, behaviours or other elements with which to conduct a study. When elements are persons, they are known as subjects are selected from the delineated target population in a way that the individuals in the sample represent as nearly as possible" (p.234). However, in this study,

the participants are already a limited population, hence; they are all given the interview. These participants are English middle school teachers in Ain Azel, Sétif, whose total number is twenty (20) teachers.

Concerning the choice of middle school teachers, it is primarily based on the fact that middle school students are primarily adolescents. Rowat (2001) argues that “teachers hold a central role in adolescents’ development. By attitudes, classroom procedure, and specific comments, teachers can make or break a youth’s image with some groups” (p.115). Students in middle schools need to be treated in a more sensitive ways by their teachers who should take care of their feelings and emotions. According to Rubinstein (1994), in middle schools, “teachers do need to help, guide, support, and encourage students learn, to understand how to access and use information, to succeed in school, and, above all, to enjoy learning” (p.1).

Moreover, research on perceived social support underscores the important role that students’ perceptions and interpretations of their teachers’ behaviours plays in their active pursuit of appropriate classroom goals (cf, Zakriski & Coie, 1996, as cited in Weiner, 2003, p. 248). It is on these grounds that middle school teachers have been chosen for this study.

3.5.3 Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed according to its basic objective developed from the research question: how and why middle school teachers of English perceive the use of humor as a teaching strategy. In other words, their perceptions and justifications for not using humor in the classroom. The grounded theory approach was used to analyse data .The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using the grounded theory approach. The latter was developed by Glasser and Strauss (1967, as cited in Heppner et al., 2008) is an attempt to challenge the dominant trend of “excessive reliance on the quantitative testing of hypotheses derived from a small number of grant (totalizing) theories, typically through numerical

survey and other statistical approaches” (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003, p. 132, as cited in Heppner et al, 2008, p. 263). According to Charmaz, (2000, as cited in Heppner, 2008):

Grounded theory methods consist of systematic inductive guidelines for collecting and analyzing data to build middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data. Throughout the research process, grounded theorists develop analytic interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which they use in turn to inform and refine their developing theoretical analyses”. (p.263)

According to Davidson (2002), its primary objective is “to expand upon an explanation of a phenomenon by identifying the key elements of that phenomenon (humour perception), and then categorizing the relationships of those elements to the context and process of the experiment” (p.1). The following is a brief summary of the steps involved in analyzing the data from the structured interview. we transcribe and reread the tape recordings which itself is a process of data analysis and interpretation (Gillham, 2005, p.121), in addition to the notes that have been made during the interview. Since transcribing recordings in their entirety can be fairly cumbersome task, a compromise solution was to simply identify and write down the main themes that emerge as we were listening to the tapes. We identified the most important points outlined by the participants.

Conclusion

The interviews are commonly used techniques for data collection. They involve the gathering of data through verbal interactions between persons. Despite the fact that interviews may face the problem of subjectivity on the part of the interviewer, interviews are good means for collecting data. They have advantages as well as disadvantages as the other means of research methods. One advantage, for example, is that it allows for greater depth and more insights than with other methods. To that end, we opted for this means for collecting data as they were presented in this chapter concerning the attitudes of English middle school teachers toward humour as a teaching technique.



Chapter Four

Findings and Discussions



Chapter Four: Findings and Discussions

Introduction.....	87
4.1 Data analysis and Interpretations of the Teachers’ Interviews.....	87
4.1.1 Stage One: Results of the Closed-ended Questions.....	87
4.1.1.1 Perception of Humour Effects on Students’ Classroom Psychological Disposition.....	87
4.1.1.2 Perception of Humour Effects on Students’ Cognitive Development...	93
4.1.1.3 Perception of Humour Effects on the Classroom.....	97
4.1.1.4 Perception of Humour Negative Effects.....	101
4.1.1.5 Perception of Humour Effects on Teacher’s Immediacy and Effectiveness	102
4.1.2 Stage Two: Results of the Open-ended Question.....	105
4.1.2.1 Reasons for not Incorporating Humour in the Classroom.....	105
4.1.2.1.1 Lack of Motivation.....	106
4.1.2.1.2 Lack of Knowledge.....	107
4.1.2.1.3 Lack of Self-confidence.....	107
4.1.2.1.4 The Belief that Humour is Non-productive, Chaos- creating, and Time-wasting	109
4.1.2.1.5 Lack of the Sense of Humour.....	110
4.1.2.1.6 Disbelief in the Seriousness of Humour	112
4.1.2.1.7 Belief that Humour would Distract Students’ Focus on the Subject Matter	113
4.1.2.1.8 Teachers’ Credibility.....	113
Conclusion.....	115

Introduction

This chapter deals with the practical side of the study. Its main objective is to assess the gathered data that serve as persuasive proof for the already raised questions. The interview was designed to teachers in order to explore the phenomenon of humour as a teaching strategy.

The interview's objective is to gain better understanding of the middle school teachers' perceptions of humour as a pedagogical teaching tool. For conducting the actual investigation, we have adopted the Statistical Package for Social Scientists known as SPSS. The latter is a computer software package that is specifically designed to perform statistical operations and facilitate data analysis and is by far the most popular statistical package used by social scientists.

From the SPSS, we obtained the percentages of the closed-ended questions along with other descriptive statistics which are not the core of our study. Along with tables of frequencies and percentages, we include a histogram figure to each table to make it clear to the reader. This chapter also discusses the results of the open-ended question.

4.1 Data Analysis and Interpretations of the Teachers' Interviews

4.1.1 Stage One: Results of the Closed-ended Questions

4.1.1.1 Perception of Humour Effects on Students' Classroom

Psychological Disposition

1. Humour and Stress

Q1: Do you think that humour can be used as an adapting and coping mechanism that allows students to surmount stressful situations?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Number	0	3	12	5	0	20
%	0%	10%	65%	25%	0%	100%

Table 4.1: Humour and Stress

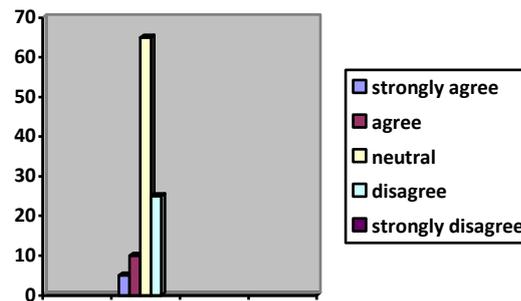


Figure 4.1: Humour and Stress

Learning a FL can be very stressful to the students. Teachers need to create a classroom atmosphere that would help surmount these negative feelings. When teachers were asked whether humour can be used as a coping mechanism in stressful situations, the Table above shows that more than a half 65% of the teachers respond by neither agree nor disagree. A sum of 25% opt for disagree category, while only 10% opt for agree and strongly agree category. It is obvious from these results that the majority of teachers are actually not quite sure whether humour can function as a buffer to lessen the negative impact of stress on students. This clearly shows that these teachers whether are not aware of these classroom stressful situations, or they consider that humour is uncommon and not beneficial to decrease stress levels.

2. Humour and Anxiety

Q2. Can humour be used as a means of lowering students' anxiety?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	1	9	9	1	0	20
%	5%	45%	45%	5%	0%	100%

Table 4.2: Humour and Anxiety

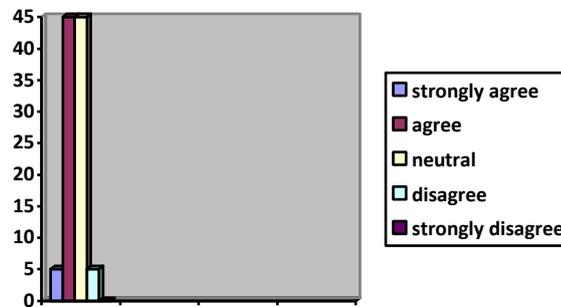


Figure 4.2: Humour and Anxiety

Anxiety is undoubtedly the affective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process and stressful situations in the classroom lead to anxiety. Although it is a major obstacle to learning, it can be reduced. Teachers can adopt different techniques to lift anxiety. When they were asked whether humour may lower students' anxiety toward the learning experience, a considerable percentage of 45% of the respondents opt for agree and an additional 5% chose strongly agree making the total of 50% of the teachers favourable responses. Whereas, 5% report that humour may not reduce anxiety by opting for disagree category. Meanwhile, 45% of the teachers gave a neutral point of view. From these results, it is quite apparent that there is a contradictory between these results and the previous question, and this clearly shows the teachers' confusion. May be because when they think of humour in

everyday life, they do perceive it as a reducer of stress and anxiety, but when it comes to the classroom, they are quite perplexed. Thus, the relation between anxiety and humour is not really clear for the majority of the teachers.

3. Humour and Students' Self-esteem

Q3. Do you think that humour can enhance students' self-esteem?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	3	12	3	2	20
%	0%	15%	60%	15%	10%	100%

Table 4.3: Humour and Self-esteem

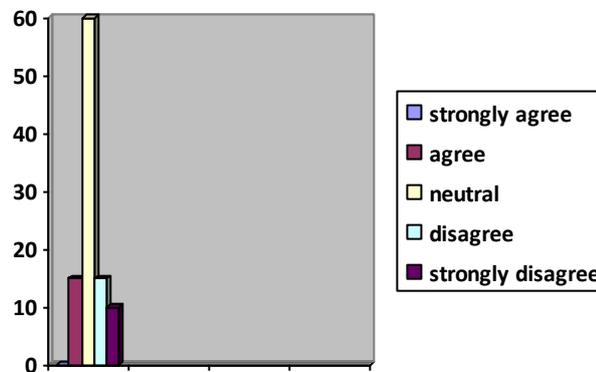


Figure 4.3: Humour and Students' Self-esteem

Self-esteem can greatly facilitate students' language learning process. Responses to the question whether humour in the classroom can contribute to enhance such a positive affective variable are as follow: the highest percentage equals 60% of the participants who opted for neutral category which means that they are not quite sure about the use of humour in order to enhance students' self-esteem. Moreover, 15% of the participants and a further 10% making

a total of 25% expressed their disapproval on this. However, the remaining 15% opt for agree slot. Again, teachers respond negatively to this question, this could be that they do not see a direct impact of humour on students’ self-esteem.

4. Humour as a Facilitator of Students’ Interest and Engagement

Q4. Do you believe that the use of humour increases students’ attention in and engagement for the material being presented?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	2	8	7	3	20
%	0%	10%	40%	35%	15%	100%

Table 4.4: Humour as a Facilitator of Students’ Attention and Engagement

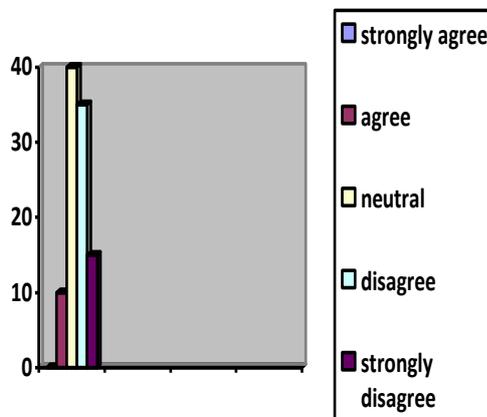


Figure 4.4: Humour as a Facilitator of Students’ Attention and Engagement

The fact that attention and engagement are key components for students’ learning, this would be a great concern for teachers. When it comes to the use of humour for that purpose, we have found that the teachers are in fact unsure whether humour can be implemented to

enhance students’ attention and engagement, in that, 40%, of the teachers opt for neutral category. Moreover, 35% and further 15% opt for disagree and strongly disagree categories. While, only 10% of the teachers opt for agree category. From these results, we can see that teachers are confused whether the use humour in the classroom have an impact on the students’ attention and engagement, this could be because teachers perceive humour as a disturbing teaching device that would obstruct the students’ learning and destruct their focus on the subject matter rather than gaining their attention.

5. Humour and Motivation

Q5. Do you think the teacher can enhance students’ motivation through using humour in the classroom?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	1	7	10	2	20
%	0%	5%	35%	50%	10%	100%

Table 4.5: Humour and Students’ Motivation

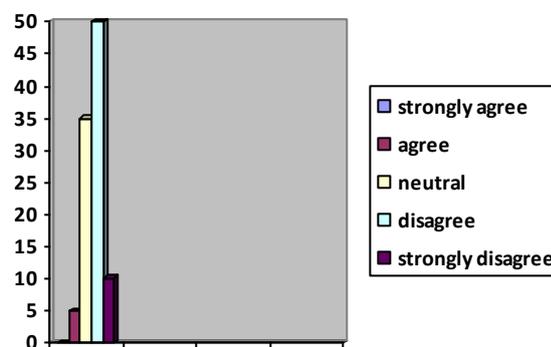


Figure 4.5: Humour and Students’ Motivation

Students’ motivation has always been a major concern for the teachers and they try their best to increase their students’ interest in what is going on in the classroom. Hence, they make call for different methods and strategies to enhance students’ motivation. When they were asked whether humour can be used to enhance students’ motivation, their responses were as follow: 35% of the teachers opted for neutral category. 50% and further 10% making a total of 60% of disagreeing responses. Whereas, only 5% of the participants opt for agree category.

From these results, we notice the teachers’ disapproval on this idea. This could be that the teachers themselves are not motivated to adopt such a technique and this could be that they are not enjoying the teaching process, or they are already satisfied with the other teaching motivational tools they use in the classroom.

4.1.1.2 Perception of Humour Effects on Students Cognitive Development

6. Humour and Students’ Comprehension

Q6. Do you think that the use of humour in the classroom can enhance students’ understanding of the material being taught?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	1	3	9	2	5	20
%	5%	15%	45%	10%	25%	100%

Table 4.6: Humour and Students’ Comprehension

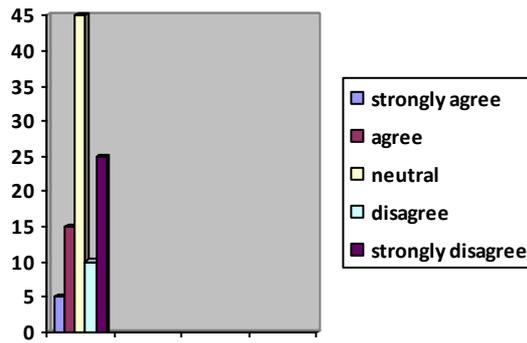


Figure 4.6: Humour and Students' Comprehension

Responses to this item concerning the question whether humour can actually help students to better understand the material being presented in the classroom were in fact not surprising, in that the highest percentage 45% gave a neutral position. Moreover, the percentage 25% goes down for those who strongly disagree and 10% for those who disagree. While, a sum of 20% opt for agree and strongly agree categories. This clearly shows the teachers' confusion toward the idea that humour can enhance students' comprehension. This could be due to the belief that, they do not perceive humour as a serious business that could have a major impact on such important cognitive variable in learning.

7. Humour and Retention

Q7. Do you think that information that is taught in humorous way is better learned and memorable than information presented in non-humorous way?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	3	12	5	0	20
%	0%	15%	60%	25%	0%	100%

Table 4.7: Humour and Retention

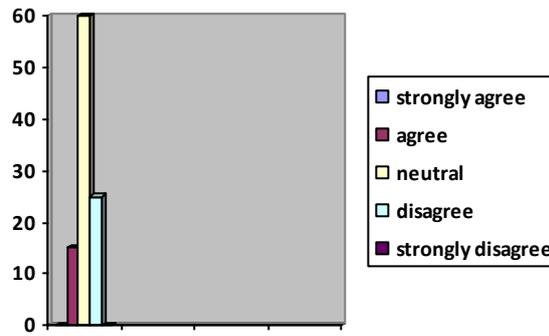


Figure 4.7: Humour and Retention

Responses to the question whether students can better recall classroom material that is presented in humorous way than in non-humorous one were not encouraging. The highest percentage 60% of the participants opt for neutral category. Whereas only 15% opt for agree category. The remaining percentage 25% opted for disagree slot. These results clearly show that teachers do not think that humour can enhance students’ retention of the material being presented in the classroom. This could be due to the belief that the use of funny material would obstruct students thinking and break down their concentration rather than facilitating their retention. May be humour for them is a distraction, something that could only detract from the serious nature of learning.

8. Humour and Creativity

Q.8 Do you think that humour can improve students’ creativity?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	2	13	3	2	20
%	0%	10%	65%	15%	10%	100%

Table 4.8: Humour and Creativity

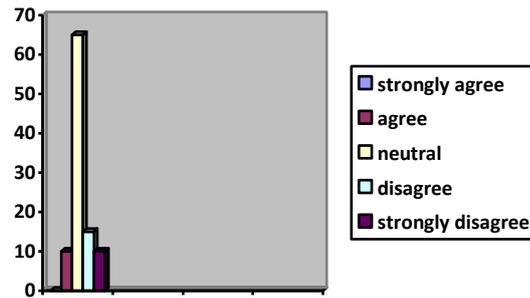


Figure 4.8: Humour and Creativity

Teaching has always been thought of as a creative performance to enhance learning. From Table 9, teachers again elaborate their confusion toward the idea that humour and creativity might be great companions, in that the highest percentage 65% of responses opt for neutral slot. In addition 15% and a further 10% indicated their disapproval making a total 25% of disagreeing responses. However, only 10% of the participants opt for agree category. From these results, it is quite clear that most teachers do not perceive humour and creativity as companions in the learning process, this may be because it is not clear for them how being funny and humorous teacher may yield to enhance this cognitive variable.

9. Humour and Critical Thinking

Q9. Do you think that the use humour can develop students’ critical thinking?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	2	6	10	2	20
%	%0	%10	%30	%50	%10	100%

Table 4.9: Humour and Critical Thinking

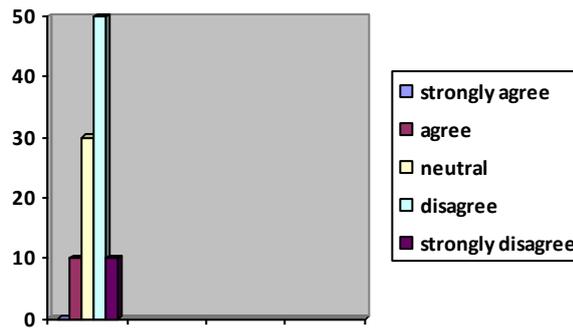


Figure 4.9: Humour and Critical Thinking

From the results shown in the Table above, teachers were not encouraged toward such an idea about whether humour can enhance students’ critical thinking. In that, 50% and a further 10% of the participants show their disapproval on the issue that humour may have a positive impact on such important cognitive variable in learning. Whereas, only 10% of the participants opt for agree category, and the remaining 30% opt for neutral slot. This attitude could be based on the belief that teachers do not see any direct relation between humour and students’ thinking. The same thing with the other cognitive variables as mentioned before.

4.1.1.3. Perception of Humour Effects on the Classroom

10. Humour and Positive Classroom Environment

Q.10 Do you think that humour can create a positive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	1	4	12	3	20
%	0%	5%	20%	60%	15%	100%

Table 4.10: Humour and Positive Classroom Environment

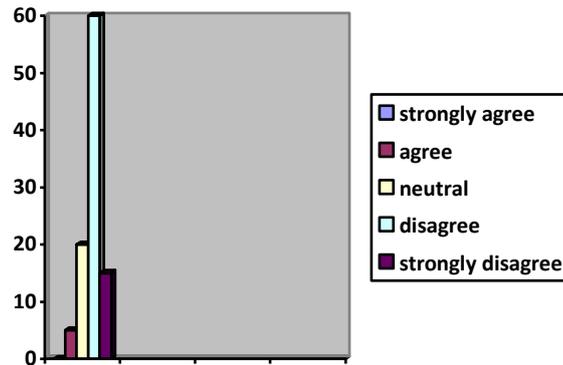


Figure 4.10: Humour and Positive Classroom Environment

To facilitate students’ learning, teachers need to create a relaxing atmosphere in which students do not have much anxiety or worry. Teachers need to create a motivating and an empathetic classroom environment where students are not afraid of failure. With regard to the use of humour in order to create such a positive classroom atmosphere, a sum of 60% opted for disagree category and 15% opted for strongly disagree category, making a total 75% of the teachers who express their disapproval. Whereas, only 5% of the teachers opt for agree category. The remaining 20% respond by neither agree nor disagree. From these results, it is apparent that the majority of the responses indicated their disapproval on this idea, mainly because teachers think that schooling culture should involve strict formality, seriousness, and rigidity. For them, the use of humour in the classroom would seem chaotic and undemanding, especially to those students who are used to this classroom culture.

11. Humour and Classroom Management

Q11. Do you think that humour can help the teacher’s classroom management?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	1	2	7	9	1	20
%	5%	10%	35%	45%	5%	100%

Table 4.11: Humour and Classroom Management

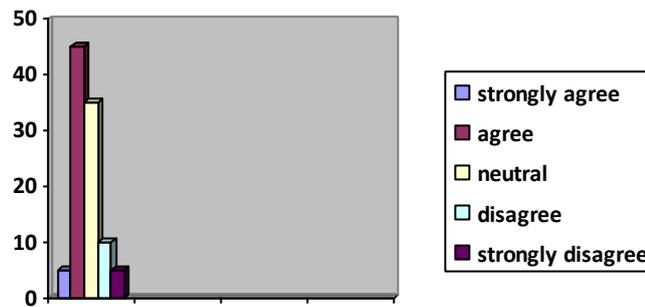


Figure 4.11: Humour and Classroom Management

Many teachers claim that the main problems in their schools involved discipline. However, attentive students will engage in fewer discipline problems. To that end, classroom management is enhanced by teachers making regular and effective use of the various acting skills including humour to keep students engaged. However, teachers’ responses to this item do not reflect such claims in that, 35% of the participants opt for neutral category; they were not sure whether humour in the classroom can help in managing the classroom discipline. In addition, 45% of the participants and a further 5% indicate their disapproval making a total 50% of disagreeing responses. Whereas, only 10% and a further 5% indicate their approval on this. From these results, it is clear that most teachers think that using humour in the

classroom cannot help them in making the classroom manageable. This is probably because most teachers tend to achieve a control over the whole class by strict discipline, control and punishment so that they can convey their instructions and the students can copy them down. The teacher needs a well-controlled and strictly disciplined class simply because he takes language teaching as a process of knowledge imparting and the use of humour would prevent them to establish such discipline!

12. Humour and Classroom Communication

12. Do you believe that humour can break down communication barriers between the teacher and the students and facilitate effective classroom communication?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	1	13	5	1	20
%	0%	5%	65%	25%	5%	100%

Table 4.12: Humour and Classroom Communication



Figure 4.12: Humour and Classroom Communication

As is known to all, learning English is to communicate. That is why English teachers attach great importance to the development of communicative skills. However, the results in the Table 13 clearly demonstrate that most teachers feel uncertain about the question whether humor can foster classroom communication. In that the highest percentage of the participants 65% opted for neutral category. In addition, 25% of the teachers opt for disagree category and a further 5% opt for strongly disagree category, making a total 30% of disagreeing responses. Whereas, only 5% of the teachers opt for agree category. These results clearly show that most teachers do not think that humour can act as a communicative device, may be because they approach humour as a disturbing device that would impede the students to focus on their knowledge acquisition. Teachers might be afraid of being inadequate or unable to tell jokes coupled with inexperience in the use of humour because humour is not taught or modelled in teacher preparation programs.

4.1.1.4 Humour Negative Effects Perception

13. Humour and Negative Effects

Q13. Do you think that humour might have negative effects on learning and teaching outcomes?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	1	13	5	1	0	20
%	5%	65%	25%	5%	0%	100%

Table 4.13: Humour and Negative Effects

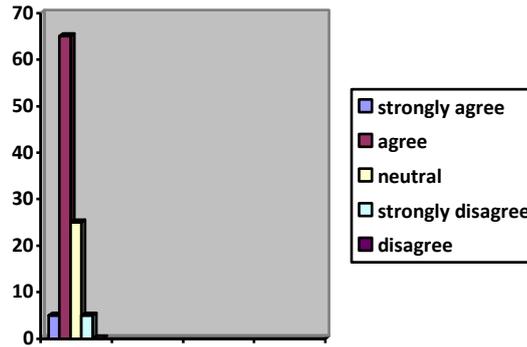


Figure 4.13: Humour and Negative Effects

Responses to the item above were not surprising in that the majority of the teachers clearly demonstrate their approval with this statement. In that 65% opt for agree category and 5% for strongly agree category. While, only 5% opt for disagree category. Moreover, 25% respond by neither agree nor disagree. These results clearly show teachers’ preconception with the belief that humour have negative effects on learning and teaching experiences. This could be that, in our schooling culture, teaching is always associated with seriousness where the idea of laughing and having fun in the classroom is not acceptable. So we have a culture that reflects most teachers’ fears by limiting their capacity to practice teaching and learning with joy.

4.1.1.5 Humour Perception on Teacher’s Immediacy and Effectiveness

14. Humour and Teacher’s Immediacy

Q14. Do you think that humour can create a sense of immediacy in the classroom

between the teacher and the students?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	2	12	4	2	20
%	0%	10%	60%	20%	10%	100%

Table 4.14: Humour and Teacher Immediacy

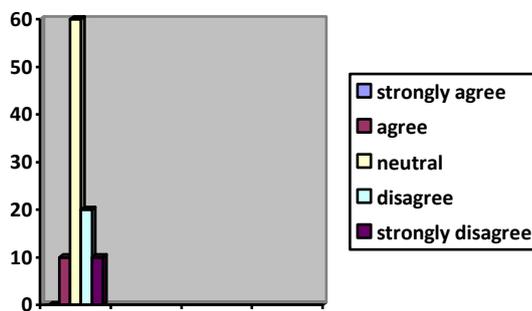


Figure 4.14: Humour and Teacher Immediacy

Teachers can shorten the distance between them and their students through immediacy behaviours and perhaps the effects of humour on learning are best understood and measured within the framework of immediacy behaviours. However, teachers responses to this item which addressed the question of whether the use of humour is an important aspect of teacher immediacy were not encouraging, in that the highest percentage of responses 60% was in the neutral slot, whereas 20% and a further 10% indicate their disapproval making a total 30% of disagreeing responses. The 10% remaining of the teachers opt for agree category. From these results it is apparent that the majority of the teachers are confused about whether the use of humour in the classroom can establish a connection and a sense of immediacy between the teacher and the students. This could be due to the belief that building rapport with middle school students through the use of humour or being humorous in the classroom could lead to

disrespect and crossing the line with teachers, so they prefer to draw this line in the classroom, simply because most teachers feel superior to their students in terms of knowledge and this is true, otherwise they would not teach. However, this superiority may create boundaries between teachers and their students, and this could create an obstacle to learning and hinder students from being connected to their teachers and to the classroom.

15. Humour and Teacher’s Effectiveness

Q15: Do you believe that one of the most important qualities of an effective teacher is humour?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
Number	0	1	2	15	2	20
%	0%	5%	10%	75%	10%	100%

Table 4.15: Humour and Teacher Effectiveness



Figure 4.15: Humour and Teacher Effectiveness

A focus on quality teaching has generated various techniques to try to improve teacher effectiveness. Responses to the question whether humour can be an effective technique for that

purpose are to some extent not encouraging, in that the majority of the teachers 75% opt for the disagree category. Moreover, 10% of the teacher opt for strongly disagree making the total 85% of negative responses. However, the percentage goes down to 5% for those teachers who agree. In addition, 10% of the teachers respond by neither agree nor disagree. The reason behind such perceptions could be that most teachers believe that, seriousness, knowledge of content, preparedness, and organization could be qualities of good teachers. For them, good teachers are not necessary funny teachers. Moreover, they may be afraid of losing professional credibility if they happen to be humorous and funny, and this could make students and colleagues perceive them as not serious teachers.

4.1.2 Stage Two: Results of the Open-ended Question

16. Humour as a Supplementary Teaching Tool

Q16: Do you think that humour can be used as a supplementary teaching tool in English language classes? Would you please say why?

4.1.2.1. Reasons for not Incorporating Humour in Teaching

Before dealing with this question, it is of paramount importance not to make light of the fact that the results obtained from the stage one of the interviews were to some extent unpredictable and not encouraging, in that the majority of the teachers approach the use and effects of humour on the educational context from a negative perspective, for the highest percentage 45.35% is concerned with those teachers who opt for neutral position. In addition, 41.42% represents those who opt for agree and disagree categories which demonstrate their disagreement toward the effects of humour on teaching and learning experiences. While, only 14.13% represents those teachers who display their agreement by choosing the agree and strongly agree categories. To that end, the ultimate objective of this stage is to figure out why the majority of teachers opt for neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree categories. Hence, the results gained from the open-ended question may provide us with deeper understanding and

hopefully with justifications of these attitudes which have been proven from the quantifiable data to be negative perceptions.

Teachers have long been aware that motivating students and lowering their anxiety are important. Most of them are passionate about creating a happy classroom, yet are hampered by many preconceptions. So why do not more teachers utilize humour in their classes? There are many answers to this question.

4.1.2.1.1 Lack of Motivation

The teachers appeared to be blaming the formal classroom environment and that too much burden has been put on their shoulders. With regard to this issue, a teacher expressed “*we are exhausted with the current focus on accountability, data, and unfunded mandates made you irritable*”. Another teacher said that “*there is no room for taking breath and have amusing time with the learners, because of the time constraint, barely we could finish the lesson in due time because there is much of linguistic knowledge*”.

Another teacher claimed that “*we are not hooked to use humour while teaching because the lessons themselves are boring*”. Moreover, one teacher clearly said “*I am, myself unmotivated, how I can motivate my students!*”. Such expressions of depression, exhaustion, unmotivation toward using humour in the classroom lend support to the previous research that the power of the teachers in the classroom is limited by the paperass they have to work on (Morrison, 2008).

Moreover, Bruner (2002) believes that the substance of what most teachers have to teach is problematic in itself and not funny to teach. A clear indication that teachers themselves are not enjoying their teaching process. Hence they are not motivated to use humour in the classroom. However, we have always seen the main aim of teaching as creating the culture for learning. The experience of schooling should be an everlasting memory for all those

involved in teaching and learning. This is where students feel good about themselves and teachers should enjoy their teaching process.

4.1.2.1.2 Lack of Knowledge

According to Bruner (2002), in order for humour to be effective, it must rely heavily on delivery, because humour can sometimes be very offensive to the learners if not delivered properly. This is how some teachers have justified their excuses for not adapting humour as a teaching strategy in the classroom. One of the teachers clearly declared *“I don’t know how to deliver humour in the classroom”*. Another teacher made it more clear by saying that *“we have not learned this kind of delivery in school nor was it part of our professional training* .Another teacher said that *“whenever I try to implement humour in the classroom, I found that although the whole classroom laugh but one pupil is upset or crying,; he is the pupil whom the whole class laugh at, then I realized that i use humour in the rong way, simply because I don’t know when and where to use it”*. And this is what Prodromou (1991) argues when he made it clear that most teachers avoid using humour as a teaching strategy in their classrooms simply because of their lack of knowledge on where, when and how to use humour.

Teachers must be careful not to use inappropriate humour that could be offensive or sarcastic or at the expense of students, and this requires knowledge of what way they can implement humour or whether it is appropriate to the classroom.

4.1.2.1.3 Lack of Self-confidence

Teachers have the need to be self-confident about what they do in the classroom. Anderson (2009) states:

Self-confidence is a personal attitude or feeling of assurance. It is belief in your ability to perform a task well. To be confident and control stage fright requires two prerequisites: knowledge of the subject and belief in your ability speak. You obtain knowledge of a subject through research and study. Belief in your ability comes from rehearsal and

experience. These requirements are entirely up to you to accomplish in your own way. (p.99)

It is the lack of self-confidence that most teachers believe it is behind their resistance toward the use of humour as a teaching strategy. Most teachers said that their biggest fear is the lack of self confidence when they use humour in the classroom. One teacher said *“I want to break down the ice in my classroom; I really feel that most students are bored during my classes, and I know that a little humour would have a magic impact but I am not quite sure whether I will do it in the appropriate way”*. Another said *“I avoid using humour in my classroom, because I think I would appear like a clown or foolish person”*. Moreover, another made it more evident by saying *“personally, I like to be humorous and I like to be around humorous people, I do not mind the use of humour in the classroom because I do believe it is a good thing. However, I am not quite sure how this could work for me”*.

From these teachers' statements, it is evident that we have a humour paradox. We are a society that claims to place a high value on humour, but the reality is that our fears keep us from initiating and sustaining humour practice in our schools. We can term this as homophobia. Most teachers have fear for not using humour in teaching and that is why they resist using it.

However, properly used, humour clearly sends a message that the teacher is confident, competent, comfortable, and in control. The fear of looking foolish when attempting humour should be, in part, offset by the following aphorism: “Education should teach us to play the wise fool rather than the solemn stupid” (Morrison, 2008). Moreover, Korobkin (1988) argued that the well planned use of instructional humour can bring the wonder of play, and wisdom into a classroom. Humor contributes positively to our perceived identity in the role of teacher—the “teacher-self”. One writer summarizes the teaching value of humour right in the title of her article: “He Who Laughs, Lasts” (winter, 2004). If you want to “last,” then laugh; if you want to “last” longer, laugh more often! (Tauber & Mester 2007).

4.1.2.1.4 The Belief that Humour is Non-productive, Chaos-creating, and Time-wasting

When I was a new teacher, I have been told by the colleagues: “Don’t smile, be rigid and every thing will be OK!” The implication is that if you are seen as fun-loving, you will not have classroom control and students misbehaviour will be the result. And this is pretty much the same responses given by the teachers who took part in this study. In that they claimed that humour in the classroom can be synonymous with chaos, disturbance and disorder in the classroom, one which makes the use of humour not significant or productive to the learning process. The majority of the teachers agreed that whenever humour and laughter used, they can be a disturbing device and hold the students from concentration. One teacher expressed *“our students are trouble makers, we are leaders, and we should keep discipline in the classroom, so we can teach peacefully”*. Another teacher said that *“a good teacher is the one who keeps his students silent and calm, because this is a sign of discipline and respect”*. According to those teachers, the major problem that threatens their job is discipline problems. Loomans et al. (2002) state that:

It is possible that a portion of discipline problems stems from a serious, heavily regulated approach to the learning process. Oftentimes it is the class clown or the disturbing student that teachers consider to be the biggest discipline problem in the classroom. And yet the rebel and the class clown both have something significant in common: they refuse to give in to the joyless grind of learning without spontaneity and laughter. Many of their disturbances arise from their innate desire for humour and stimulation in the classroom. This is something that many teachers fail to provide. (p.153)

One of the teachers added *“Once I started out a class using a joke related to the subject matter. All the students laughed, however, some thought they had now been given permission for a ‘free-for-all’*. It took me longer than I would like to admit to get the class back under

control again". Another one claimed *"I believe humour can destruct and give the appearance students are off-task, out of control, and not possibly learning anything"*. Another one expressed his concerns about the limited time, he said *"we are struggling to find the time necessary to deliver the lessons; we have deep concerns about accountability issues. Several administrators have expressed the worry that if they are seen goofing around, the perception will be that they are not working"*. From these declarations, it is quite evident that teachers worry that if they are joking and laughing with their class, they are not preparing for tests. The message is strong and clear. They do not have time for fun. However, if the teacher has enough knowledge how to use hum or appropriately, there would not be such problems in the classroom. Shade (1996) claim that the teacher with a good classroom management style and plan can help the students know what types of humour are appropriate in the classroom and what are not, as well as, when and how much is acceptable.

4.1.2.1.5 Lack of the Sense of Humour

In order for humour to take place in the teaching and the learning process, it is up to the teachers to decide; hence they have to possess a disposition and acceptance first. Anderson (2009) states:

You may be a sincere, confident, and enthusiastic teacher, yet still lack the humour needed for effective teaching. If you lack a sense of humour, you will seem unreal, inhuman, or conceited. Humour shows that you are, after all, just another human being and that you have a warm, lively interest in all that goes on around you. Having a sense of humour does not necessarily imply an ability to tell funny jokes, although tasteful, relevant jokes certainly have a place in good teaching. (p.99)

However, many teachers believe that for a teacher to use humour in the classroom, he should first have a sense of humour which is a personality trait. One of the teachers claims that *"I think it is my personality trait, and I think it is not a good idea to try to change one's*

personality trait". Another one said that "*we can not afford something that we do not possess at first place*".

According to Paterson (2005) "some teachers feel they lack any sense of humour and teach as if this were true. It is not. If you are a teacher, you have a sense of humour. Perhaps you just need to fine-tune it, for most certainly, a sense of humour is developed, not inherited. You should bring a sense of humour, a passion for student learning, and flexibility" (p.69). Moreover, Brown (2002) states "if you can laugh at yourself and with your students, then you will be much more successful getting past some of the silly things that we all do during our first years teaching. A sense of humour allows students to see that you do not think that you are better than they are and that you enjoy your job" (p.93).

Those teachers believe that using humour in the classroom is related to their personality, if it happens that a person is not funny and humorous, he will be not funny and humorous as a teacher. However, the use of humour is skill which can be acquired, and developed by teachers, that should not be part of their personality, because using games, stories and jokes does not necessarily require a funny person.

Effectively using humour in the classroom requires knowledge, art, and skill, all of which can be learned (Garner, 2005, 2006; Hellman, 2007; Hillman, 2001; Kher, 2003; Ziegler, 1998, as cited in Bradshaw & Lowenstein, 2007, p. 97). However, nearly the majority of the participants argued that humour is natural and not a skill that can be developed. For them, a teacher who use humour in the classroom he is certainly a funny person, and a teacher who does not use humour in his teaching simply because he has no sense of humour.

Humour is often considered an inherited trait rather than a skill that can be nurtured and developed. Humour skills as a part of teacher preparation are virtually nonexistent. In fact, since, we have been programmed to believe that play and fun are immature activities, our

ability to practice humour has been limited. The benefits of humour as outlined in previous chapter convince us that we need to develop humour confidence through humour practice.

4.1.2.1.6 Disbelief in the Seriousness of Humour

In fact the idea of the teacher as a performer may not sound professional to some of the teachers. And this is how some of the teachers have responded to the seriousness of humour in the educational context. One of the teachers simply said that *“I just don’t believe in the seriousness of humour in teaching”*. Another one seemed skeptical by ironically saying that *“are students really learning anything?”* Another one said that *“I am a teacher and not an entertainer; or performer. I don’t want to look foolish or clown”*. Well in fact, this is not true. Because, according to Tosta (2001), “the funny teacher is not a clown figure. He is serious, conscientious professional who believes in the meaningfulness and effectiveness of having fun while learning. Humour is also a way of saying something serious” (p.27). Moreover, Lowman (1994) claim that “if you are a teacher, then you are certainly a performer and a motivator. John Dewey, nineteenth century philosopher and educational theorist claim that “To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition” (Tamblyn, 2003, p. 196). Moreover, T. S. Elliot argued that “Humour is also a way of saying something serious”. However, the fact that most teachers take teaching too seriously, they overlook the role that humour can have in the educational setting, because they simply do not believe in the seriousness of humour (Bradshaw & Lowenstein, 2010, p. 97). This clearly shows that most teachers believe that humour and education are incompatible as oil and water. This could be that teachers think that students would undervalue the importance of the lesson when they use humour in the classroom or they will lose credibility. On the contrary, “good humour does not make you laugh as much as it makes you seriously think about the material” (Shor & Freire, 1987, p.162).

4.1.2.1.7 Belief that Humour would Destruct Student's Focus on the Subject Matter

A number of teachers we have spoken to have expressed one other concern over using humour in the classroom. One of them said *“I do not want to draw their attention to me. Students should focus on the subject matter at hand, their reasoning goes and not on the teacher”*. Some of these teachers also intimidated that they *“did not consider themselves to be specially interesting or remarkable people and that they avoid the spot light”*. In reply to every one who does not want to be singled out of the crowd, we have this to say to him: *“too late”*. Anyone who stands up in front of a class is already in the spotlight, whether he/she wants to think of it in that way or not. The students in our classes take inventory of the teacher and pay attention to him/her at least until they get distracted by the latest developments in their social lives. In this context, there is only one difference between the teachers who use humour and the ones who avoid it. The ones who use humour have chosen to take control of how they are perceived by their students. The ones who avoid humour have relinquished their control (Sheidlower & Vossler, 2011, p.xxii). Our students will put together first impressions of us no matter what we do, so it is best to do something that will help share that impression into something positive.

4.1.2.1.8 Teachers' Credibility

According to Powell et al., (2010), two primary dimensions are related to teachers' credibility:

Competence refers to content knowledge that the teacher possesses. Character refers to the trustworthiness of the person. The interplay of competence and character appears to be important in the classroom as well. Students seek teachers who have positive personal characteristics. Content competence is seldom the only factor influencing the choice to enrol in a particular class. At the same time, students form judgements about how well teachers present instructional information, clarify instructional goals, and

criticize student work. These judgements also influence the perception of teacher credibility. (p.145)

Frymier and Thompson (1992, as cited in Powell et al., 2010, p.145), identified twelve strategies and behaviours that relate to both character and competence, collectively these behaviours appear to shape a global judgement that a teacher is both knowledgeable and caring. Among these strategies; “facilitate enjoyment”, i.e., developing a classroom environment that is enjoyable, an environment in which learning is both interesting and entertaining.

However, almost all participants claimed to be apprehensive when using humour. They were afraid to lose their professional credibility among the students as well as among their colleagues. One of the teacher claimed that *“I am advocating the idea of creating humorous situations in the classroom, however, I am afraid that this would have a negative impact on my students perceptions as an effective teacher”*. Another teacher stated *“my colleagues would undervalue my professionalism”*. Actually, this is not the case. According to Shade (1996) *“if you engage in appropriate classroom humour you are not going to endanger your personal or professional credibility. In fact, in some ways, you may enhance it”* (p.85). Torok et al., (2004) claimed that the appropriate use of humour in the classroom increases perceptions of teacher credibility. Student evaluations and self-reports also suggest that humour can increase perceptions of teacher credibility (Frymier & Thompson, 1992), increase liking for that teacher (Torok et al., 2004), and improve student evaluations of the effectiveness of teachers (Bryant et al., 1980). On the other hand, some caution on the use of humour in the classroom was expressed by Kuhrik et al. (1997) who stated that the use of humour is wisely encouraged to facilitate classroom learning processes without endangering the teachers’ credibility. Of course, there are limits to determining what is funny and what is

not, and the mere inclusion of classroom humour does not automatically guarantee learning will take place, it must not exceed appropriate boundaries.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the analysis of the data collected from the different stages of the research. The data were obtained from the closed/open-ended questions of the face-to face interviews. All the closed-ended questions were analysed one by one and the responses were displayed in tables and graphs. The purpose of the graphs is to show how statistics compare with one another. Concerning this study, the analyses' results and the interpretations were displayed in bar graphs, in percentages as well as tables.

It is worth mentioning that the findings obtained from data collection tools need future research and further investigations to be confirmed or disconfirmed. Based on the findings and analyses of data, the fifth chapter is devoted to recommendations and suggestions for further research.

Chapter Five

Recommendations and Suggestions for

Further Research



Chapter Five: Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

Introduction.....	117
5.1 Recommendations.....	117
5.2 Suggestions for Further Humour Based-classroom Research in an Algerian Context.....	121
5.3 Limitations of the Study.....	122
Conclusion.....	123

Introduction

This chapter has two main sections: recommendations and suggestions for further research. A discussion of the recommendations is mainly based on the results gained from the discussion of the open-ended question in the interview which dealt with the reasons and that most teachers thought of as justifications for resisting and not incorporating humour in their teaching. Moreover, issues that could be dealt with in future studies are mentioned in the suggestions for further research section.

5.1 Recommendations

Given that humour as a teaching strategy can have a positive impact on teaching and learning experiences, teachers should acknowledge its importance especially in creating a positive classroom environment conducive to learning. However, some teachers tend to resist its use in the educational context in general and in the classroom in particular. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made.

- First and foremost, the teachers should acknowledge the importance of the affective side of the learners, and admit that their job is, in addition to be a knowledge provider, he also should be a humanistic teacher as well. They should apply appropriate strategies to help students counteract their negative feelings and attitudes toward learning experiences and more particularly toward the teachers themselves.

- In order to achieve such goals, the teacher should apply certain strategies, but before that, the teacher should first have the readiness to do so. This means that he/she cannot apply a teaching strategy in the classroom with his students unless he/she acknowledges and believes in the effectiveness of this strategy and its instructional outcomes. Thus, before implementing humour in the classroom, teachers should have to possess the disposition and acceptance first.

- Students should be learning in an environment where they feel free to express themselves and have open, caring relationships with their teachers. Teachers can strive to develop effective teaching characteristics and a learning environment for the class that is compatible with humour.

- With regard to teacher's lack of knowledge, it is essential for teachers to incorporate humour in their lessons, however they need to: (a) learn to know the main types of humour that can be used in the classroom; (b) build a database of humorous items; (c) adjust particular items from this database to their particular needs; and (d) learn how to present humorous material to others (Hativa, 2001). What some teachers worry about when using a humorous approach simply does not occur if humour is gradually introduced, intentionally planned, infused, and mutually.

- With regard to teachers' lack of self-confidence, we can say that in spite of the anxiety, sometimes terror that beginning users of humour might experience, it is worth the effort. Herbert (1991, as cited in Tauber & Mester, 2007, p. 2) argues that "humour, like sin, sun, and self-righteousness exists virtually everywhere people congregate". Teachers should get rid of their fear for incorporating humour. Emerson and Plank (1993, as cited in Tauber & Mester, 2007, p. 68) state: "Don't be afraid to use humour".

- With regard to teacher's lack of motivation, well, after noting all the benefits of humour, one would assume that humour studies should be a core component of educator's pre-service curriculum where the study of humour should be a fundamental skill and certainly not neglected as a topic for continuing professional development. The benefits of humour (chapter 2) should be studied in our teacher preparation programs and supported in our schools'

mentoring programs. Novice teachers desperately need the benefits that humour can provide for them. Awareness of homophobia and identification of these fears are crucial in the ability to create a culture that supports humour practice.

- With regard to the disbelief in the seriousness of humour, we can say that perhaps nowhere in the education arena is the need to nurture a sense of safety, openness, and respect more apparent than in the middle school classroom where teaching is inherently affective and a clear emphasis is placed daily on the advisory and advocacy elements of the holistic learning experience. So, teachers should take a trial. They should not be afraid to look or sound silly. They should break out of their routine and remind themselves why they became a middle grade teachers in the first place. It certainly was not for the peace and quiet! If only for the sake of allowing the students to truly enjoy the learning process and the uplifting environment in which the teacher allows it to take place.

- With regard to the lack of sense of humour in teacher's personality, they should not be afraid of adding a spoon of humour into their teaching process because the myth that one must be a comedian to use humour in a language classroom should be dispelled. One does not have to be a gifted humorist to reap the benefits of using humour in the classroom.

- With regard to teachers' credibility, this is an issue that make some teachers would like to exhibit some humour in their classes, but feel constrained by a sense that humour is incongruous with their own identity and style of teaching and their professional credibility (Hativa, 2001). However, because students so much appreciate humour, middle school teachers should make an effort to overcome any initial reluctance they may have to

incorporate at least some humour into their teaching and come to, view it as an important constituent in their repertoire of professional skills.

➤ According to Glasser (1998, as cited in Tauber & Mester, 2007, p. 26) fun (what humour generates) is of five basic needs that motivate human beings. It is no less important than the needs of survival, power, beholding, and freedom. Fun is nature's reward for learning. We agree. Students feel pain when a need is frustrated and pleasure when it is satisfied. Teachers are in a key position to help students experience the pleasure of having a need satisfied- including the need for fun. And because needs typically are never met once and for all, teachers need to create the conditions for having fun- for learning- on a continual basis. Believe it or not, it is all right to laugh in school!

➤ Humour must be a component of any learning theory. Instead of a relationship to one particular theory of learning, humour and laughter contribute to all of those necessary principles of learning regardless of the theory; enjoyment; creativity; motivation; a relaxed, open, warm environment; a positive student relationship; and decreased tension and anxiety. All of which are necessary for successful language learning. Humour can in some instances, help students form indelible memories. That kind of reward is worth some risk (Sheidlower & Vossler, 2011, pxxiii).

➤ Finally, what is suggested for teachers is to give themselves as well as their students the licence to laugh because when students are laughing it means that they are listening (Shade, 1996). However, teachers should be careful not to use extreme forms of humour that may hurt the students' feelings, sensibility and create a barrier between the teacher and the learner and between the learner and learning.

It is worth mentioning that, the recommendations on the basis of the some findings of this study are not exhaustive. In this study, the role of the teacher is deemed highly crucial and their particular beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards language learning and teaching process. Future researchers should attempt to explore teachers' beliefs and perceptions as well as those of the students in order to address more effectively the multi-dimensional construct of humour.

5.2 Suggestions for Further Humour Based-classroom Research in an Algerian Context

This study revealed many issues from the responses and views of the participants with regard to the use of humour as an effective teaching strategy. These issues would provide a framework for future researchers for further in-depth investigations.

The results obtained from this study clearly demonstrate the fact that some teachers tend to resist the use of humour in the educational context. Thus, a more detailed research is needed to better understand the reasons that make teachers hold such a position toward humour in the classroom. Moreover, the following issues emerged which require due attention of the future researchers.

- Replication of this study with a larger and more culturally diverse teachers population would provide further understanding and insights toward this issue.
- This study explores the attitudes and perceptions of middle school teachers toward the use of humour as a teaching strategy. Future researchers can study the attitudes and perceptions toward humour from the point of view of the students to see how these students perceive humour in their learning experience.
- The participants of this study expressed their negative attitudes and doubts with regard to humour in the classroom. Future researchers can investigate these attitudes by other

participants that would appreciate humour in the educational context and see to what extent this could have positive effects on teaching and learning experiences.

- In this study, humour appreciation was explored by the participants who were male and female teachers. Future researchers might need to study if exist a difference between male and female teachers' appreciation of humour as an effective instructional strategy.
- The reasons obtained from this study with regard to the fact that some teachers tend to avoid the use of humour in their teaching cannot cover all other different reasons. Future research could investigate more impediments relating to the incorporation of humour in the classroom.
- Future research would investigate ways to best incorporate humour related content into English curricula .
- Since humour is often extremely subjective and, and above all, very personal, its implementation as a teaching tool can be rather tricky. Hence, further research is required to find better ways of integrating humour more sensitively and effectively into language lessons. In order to do this, the teacher needs to examine further the perceptions students have of foreign language teachers. In this way, researchers can gain a clearer insight into how humour may affect the attitudes of the students and to what extent it actually has an effect on learning. A better understanding of these matters can perhaps help teachers to make their lessons more effective and memorable.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

FL classroom research is mainly based on observation of what goes on in the classroom or on analysing class activities systematically. The observation must be consistent and thus reliable. But, when dealing with human beings as subjects, it is hard to tell about the reliability and truths coming out from their analysis.

Usually researchers are concerned with the generalizability of their claims which requires a great deal of validity. As far as our work is concerned, it is hard to judge its reliability and validity for its findings cannot be generalized upon other works. Whatever the results, this work remains effective in a case similar to what we have studied. Still, the method and analysis by adopting interviews would be useful and efficient in other middle schools.

The size of the subjects was limited. The sample of the subjects was fairly small in size for the interviews consisting of twenty (20). For this reason and if we want more generalizable findings, we may need other studies with a larger number of subjects to confirm or disconfirm the tentative findings found in this study.

The data analyzed in this study has been collected from the interviews, and the results remain restricted to this particular group of Algerian middle school teachers in Ain-Azel, Sétif. It should be noted that the complexity of the phenomenon under investigation does not allow findings to attain any generalizability.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief summary of the results of the study that have been obtained from the qualitative research methods. Recommendations were drawn from these results were also discussed mainly based on the results obtained from the open-ended question that provided the different justifications and reasons for resisting the use of using humour in the educational context. Suggestions for further research were provided along with the limitations of this study.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Despite the recognition of the importance of humour, teachers have made little attempt to consciously or deliberately use humour in the educational setting. The planned use of humour in the educational process as a learning tool remains an uncommon occurrence. Unfortunately, the educational process has long been associated with formal discourse. teachers speak about the serious, apathetic student. Regardless of how good a teacher is at presenting, content alone is not necessarily going to keep student's attention and interest for the entire presentation. Using humour in the classroom enhances the learning process and fosters the student-teacher relationship, and can become the vehicle for developing the student's ability to relate in a warm and friendly way to others.

Humor can contribute a great deal to the FL classroom. It enables the teacher not only to create an affective or positive environment, but is a source of enjoyment for teacher and students. Language is seen in authentic and real life situations. Humorous situations allow the students to express themselves without fear of ridicule and criticism. Anxiety and stress is reduced and students are encouraged to take more risks in using their FL. As with all classroom activities care must be taken to prepare students before the activity and guide them along the way. Although the teachers may perceive the exercise as a lighthearted moment in the course of their lesson plan, humour should be an integral part of a positive learning classroom environment. Specific goals and objectives must be pre-established and clear in the mind of the teacher. Humor, along with encouragement and praise should be one of the many useful tools used by language teachers to make their classrooms more inviting and conducive to learning.

For that reason, we opt for this study, where a qualitative research design was used in order to explore and examine middle school teachers' perceptions toward the use of humour as a teaching strategy. The principles of the humanistic learning approach and some affective

variables along with the effects of humour on teaching and learning outcomes provided the theoretical framework for this study. In the humanistic learning approach, the humanistic philosophy of teaching and learning enhances personal growth in students by identifying environmental conditions necessary to facilitate learning (Pine & Boy, 1997). The existing research has provided valuable insights into middle school teachers towards the use of humour as an effective instructional strategy. However, and because of its complicated and multi-faceted nature, the humour phenomenon requires further investigation from a variety of perspectives. This study was an attempt to gain an understanding of this phenomenon through conducted interviews.

Unfortunately, the results of this study were not encouraging, for most teachers clearly indicated their skepticism toward using humour as a teaching strategy. They had in fact misconceptions and justifications for not applying humour in the educational setting. Almost all research subjects obviously indicated their resistance toward using humour in the classroom. According to these teachers, the use of humour as a teaching strategy is considered unscholarly, or even to whom a sense of humour as a personality trait, they believe that the subjects matter and accompanying lessons were supposed to keep all students interested. Thus the prevailing view was (and often still is), that to entertain is not to educate! If there is laughter in the classroom, then learning cannot possibly be occurring.

Moreover, they perceive humour as unnecessary, undignified, and completely contrary to the notion of the serious, classic, educational experience. Hence, the attitudes of the teachers toward laughter and humour are the notion that they are frivolous activities that detracts from what is important. If laughter and humour have any place at all it is not in the classroom.

Two basic terms emerged during the data analyses which are homophobia and humour paradox. Most teachers tend to resist incorporating humour in their teaching simply because they already possess preconceptions and fear about it. Fear of being silly, fear of loosing

credibility, fear of losing control over the class etc., were the major concerns of these teachers. However, some teachers believed that humour is a primarily good thing and they admit its positive impact on their private lives, but at the same time they acknowledge no need for its inclusion in the educational context (humour paradox). These attitudes are at least partially to blame for teachers' resistance to embrace humour, despite the advantages it offers.

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APPENDIX 1

Teachers' Interviews

1. Do you think the humour can help students cope with stressful situations in the classroom?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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2. Do you believe that the use of humour reduces student anxiety in dealing with difficult material or difficult situations?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

--	--	--	--	--

3. Do you think the teacher can increase students' motivation through using humor in the classroom?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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4. Do you believe that the use of humour increases student interest in and engagement for the material being taught?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

--	--	--	--	--



5. Do you believe that humour can enhance student's self-esteem?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

--	--	--	--	--

6. Do you believe that humour can increase students' comprehension?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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7. Do you think that the use of humour would enhance students' creativity?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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8. Do you think that students can remember better the material being presented in humorous context rather than in non-humorous context?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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9. Do you believe that students' critical thinking can be enhanced through using humour in the classroom?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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10. Do you believe that the use of humour can create a relaxing classroom environment for students?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

--	--	--	--	--



11. Do you believe that humour can help the teachers' classroom management?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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12. Do you believe that humour breaks down the communication barriers between the teacher and the learner, and facilitates effective communication?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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13. Do you think that humour may have negative effects on the teaching learning process?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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14. Do you feel that your humour can create sense of immediacy in the classroom between you and your students?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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15. Do you believe that one of the important qualities of an effective teacher is humour?

Strongly agree agree neutral strongly disagree disagree

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16. In your opinion, can humour be used as a supplementary teaching tool in English language classes? Why?

APPENDIX 2

Students' Focus-group Interview

- 1) Do you find the classroom typically boring?
- 2) How would describe your teacher? Does the word “funny” come up in your list of description?
- 3) Do you find that most of your teachers strict and have no sense of humour in the classroom
- 4) Would you prefer a teacher who make good sense of humour, funny and create a relaxed atmosphere?
- 5) Do you like to have a teacher who uses humour in the classroom? If yes, would you please say why?

APPENDIX 3

Teachers' Focus-group Interview

- 1) Do you find you students motivated and connected to the classroom?
- 2) What do you take as strategy to motivate and break down the ice in the classroom?
- 3) Do you consider humour as one teaching tool among the other strategies?
- 4) How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Does the word “funny” come up in your list of qualities?
- 5) Do you believe that the exigencies of adolescence and the accompanying challenges of teaching make humour a requirement?

Résumé

A travers cette recherche, on a pu étudier et analyser le phénomène du sens de l'humour comme stratégie efficace dans le processus enseignement –apprentissage par laquelle l'enseignant peut créer une atmosphère positive et motivante dans la classe. Cette étude a été menée auprès de vingt professeurs de langue anglaise, au sein de plusieurs collèges dans la commune de Aïn Azel, wilaya de Sétif. Dans cette recherche, il s'agit de points de vue des enseignants quant à l'usage du sens de l'humour ou la plaisanterie comme stratégie didactique efficace et la portée de son influence sur l'apprentissage et l'acquisition chez l'élève.

Les résultats obtenus étaient, à un certain points, imprévus car la majorité des enseignants avaient une réaction négative envers l'usage de l'humour en classe et à l'enseignement. On doit dire également qu'on a traité toutes les raisons que les enseignants pensent être derrière leurs échecs d'adopter le sens de l'humour parmi les autres moyens utilisés dans l'enseignement.

On avait conclu cette recherche par des suggestions dans l'objectif de changer les avis des enseignants envers l'usage de l'humour comme méthode pédagogique efficace. En ce qui concerne la méthodologie, on a choisi l'interview comme moyen méthodologique pour recueillir des données menues avec 20 professeurs.

Les résultats obtenus ont indiqué que les enseignants ont exprimé leur inquiétude et leur doute vis-à-vis de l'utilisation de l'humour en classe et les raisons avancés pour remédier à cette situation, des recommandations ont été proposées à ces enseignants.

ملخص

قمنا من خلال هذا البحث بدراسة و تحليل ظاهرة حس الدعابة (الفكاهة) كتقنية تدريسية فعالة في عملية التعليم و التعلم و التي يستطيع من خلالها الأستاذ خلق جو تحفيزي مريح و إيجابي داخل القسم .
أجريت هذه الدراسة على 20 أستاذ للغة الإنجليزية في متوسطات مختلفة ببلدية عين أزال و ولاية سطيف و يتعلق أساسا بالمواقف المختلفة بالنسبة لاستعمال حسن الدعابة أو الفكاهة كإستراتيجية تعليمية فعالة و مدى تأثيرها على تعلم الطالب و تحصيله.

النتائج المحصلة عليها كانت غير متوقعة إذ أن أغلبية الأساتذة كان لديهم رد فعل سلبي في ما يخص استعمال حسن الدعابة أو الفكاهة في التعليم عموما و داخل القسم خصوصا و يجدر بنا الذكر أيضا أننا تطرقنا في هذه الدراسة إلى مختلف الأسباب التي يعتقد الأساتذة أنها وراء عدم تمكنهم من تبني حس الفكاهة أو الدعابة ضمن مختلف تقنيات التدريس الأخرى التي يستعملونها .

لقد ختمنا هذا البحث باقتراحات من أجل محاولة تغيير هذه المواقف السلبية للأساتذة اتجاه استعمال الدعابة أو حس الفكاهة كطريقة تعليمية فعالة فيما يخص المنهجية المتبعة خلال هذه الدراسة فقد اخترنا وسيلة المقابلة لجمع المعطيات، التي أجريت مع 20 أستاذا. النتائج المحصل عليها أشارت إلى أن معظم الأساتذة عبروا عن قلقهم و شكوكهم حول حقيقة أن حس الدعابة يمكن أن يكون له تأثيرا إيجابيا على التلميذ في عملية التحصيل و التعلم وهذا راجع حسب تصريحاتهم لأسباب عديدة و مختلفة.