



Humour Between the Students' Attitudes and Teachers' Beliefs: A Non-zero-sum Game at the Algerian Advanced EFL Classroom

Ridha BELABBACI*, Djillali Liabes University of Sidi Bel Abbas, Faculty of Languages, Letters and Arts, FLPATP Laboratory, Algeria.
ridha.belabbaci@univ-sba.dz

Article history

Received : 19-05-2021

Accepted : 04-11-2021

Published : 15-05-2022

Abstract

Keywords

EFL classroom, EFL learners' attitudes, target humour, humour and gender differences, teachers' beliefs

Humour is probably among the most authentic and universal speech acts in people's everyday discourses. The primary aim of this study is to investigate university EFL learners' perceived benefits of using humour in the classroom. 109 second-year Master's students, enrolled in the University of Tlemcen at the department of English, participated in the study, in addition to 5 of their teachers. Both samples were solicited through normative and meta-cognitive approaches using two instruments, the questionnaire and in-depth interviews respectively. However, inferential analysis, using ANOVA (f) Test, indicated that female students were more positive than their male peers. In contrast, the teachers' beliefs consolidate the students' attitudes despite the emerged new themes during the interviews. The findings significantly support and attest the pre-existing theories about the multifaceted benefits of using humour in the EFL teaching-learning process. This study belongs to the scant number of studies that draw attention to the potential benefits of using humour in Algerian education in general, and EFL classroom in particular. Accordingly, the results encourage EFL practitioners for the systemic implementation of humour, not least humour of the target language. Furthermore, the findings yielded pedagogical implications that recommend further investigation of such phenomenon through more experimental-based methodologies.

* Corresponding author

1. Introduction

Education is often deemed to be as a serious matter. Nonetheless, educators have started in recent decades to adopt more enjoyable and relaxed approaches in the teaching process; Furthermore, and despite the very early publications on the benefits of humour in the classroom at the beginning of the last century; it was only up till the 1970s when substantial psychological studies began to take place showing the benefits of humour in the learning environment. Berk (2003) noted that humour is constantly used as a teaching device in college classrooms infrequently, and through unplanned manners. Put another way; instructional humour is most often used in an improvised casual way by the teacher, rather than to be purposefully practiced in a systematic manner for particular pedagogical objectives (Berk, 2002). As far as foreign language teaching is concerned, and while the use of humour has incrementally prevailed over all aspects of educational settings in general as a teaching device; its use has been adopted evidently in the EFL college classroom as well. In fact, up till the mid-twentieth century, rigid classical language classes based on structural approaches such as traditional grammar-translation began to fade against more humanistic, behavioural, and cultural models. The then new approaches entailed more flexible teaching methods that incite creativity and interactive learning. Ever since, humour has made its way into the teaching-learning process at language learning classroom, mainly by means of the delivery of the teaching materials. Concerning foreign language teaching (FLT), it was till up to the early 1980s when academics had not earnestly paid that much attention to humour and its implementation in the classroom (Askildson, 2005; Ziyaeemehr, 2011). Recently, nevertheless, “humor remains an important instrument for the improvement of educational contexts in general, and language educational contexts in particular” (Askildson, 2005, p.49).

Despite of the aforementioned, However, and because beliefs motivate actions and function as guides and filters of both students’ and teachers’ perceptions; the potential benefits of using humour in the teaching-learning process is primarily conditioned upon what the learner and the teacher believe about the use of such a pedagogic instrument (Fives & Gill, 2015). Accordingly, exploring the existing beliefs of both EFL learners and teachers is a *sine qua non*, particularly for educational innovation.

2. The Study Objectives

In light of theory on using humour in education in general and EFL in particular, and regarding the scarcity of research on humour and education in the Algerian context; the current study endeavours to explore a number of investigative foci.

2.1 Investigative foci

The study seeks first to examine university EFL students’ attitudes towards the benefits of using humour in the classroom. Furthermore, it tests the students’ attitudes in accordance to their major studies and their gender. Finally, the study explores the teachers’ beliefs about the use of humour in the classroom, and cross-check the findings with those of the students.

2.2 Research Questions

Using mixed-method design that includes both quantitative and qualitative methods, the researchers addressed the following main research questions:

- a) What attitudes do EFL learners hold towards the use of humour in the EFL classroom?
- b) What beliefs do EFL teachers’ espouse about the use of humour at the EFL classroom in contrast to their learners’ attitudes?

3. Theoretical Background

Humour is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond any attempts at concluding

finite definitions. When Goodman (1995) quoted Stephen Leacock's notion of humour as "the kindly contemplation of the congruities of life and the artistic expression thereof"; he also claimed that there are probably over five hundred concepts including definitions, notions, and interpretations of humour (Goodman, 1995, as cited in Berk, 2002, p.11).

3.1 Theories of Humour and Learning

According to Foot and McCreddie (2006), there are probably more than one hundred theories concerning humour. Besides, numerous theories of humour have been proposed in different domains of study by philosophers, psychologists, linguists and other theorists (Martin, 2007). Nonetheless, most of the theories can be brought within few major categories (Ruch, 1998). Three main recognized theories upon which psychologists and philosophers have put forward trying to decipher the phenomenon of humour (Morreal, 1983; Fuszard, 2004, as cited in Lowenstein and Bradshaw, 2004). Lowenstein & Bradshaw (2004) lays out these theories in short as: the Superiority, Incongruity, and Relief theory. However, regarding the context of this study, the Instructional Humor Processing Theory (IHPT) is one of the most recent theories concerning the use of humour in education. Proposed by Wanzer and his associates in (2010), this theory draws upon the incongruity approach explaining the relatedness of the teacher's humour to the positive or negative impact on students' learning. The IHPT approach functions "...as a framework to understand how humorous messages are cognitively and affectively processed to potentially affect student learning in the classroom context" (Wanzer et al., 2010, p. 6). In a nutshell, the IHPT postulates that the positive or negative impact of using humour in the classroom on the students' ability of resolving, recognition, and interpretation

of the script delivered by the instructor, i.e., students' sense of humour.

3.2 Benefits of Humour at University EFL Classroom

There is a growing interest in the literature recently suggesting that benefits of using humour with foreign language learners, and advanced learners in particular. The bulk of research indicates that humour can generate key factors for students' academic success (Bell & Pomerantz, 2014). Unlike the substantial body of research found in psychology, sociology, and many other disciplines; a few decades ago, humour was barely investigated and discussed among language teaching academia.

3.2.1 Affective or pedagogical Benefits of Humour

One of the most celebrated benefits of using humour in FLT classrooms in general; is its efficiency of reducing anxiety; an impediment that is always associated with the EFL academic classrooms (Neuliep, 1991; Kher et al., 1999; Bruner, 2002). EFL classrooms often have a verbal interaction and communicative nature, hence, the employment of humour enables the teacher to reach out to introverted students, who feel intimidated or shy of expressing themselves in the second language. Further, the teacher's use of humour involves students with no concerns of being "exposed or lose face" (Chiasson, 2002, p.3). Likewise, humour engenders positive attitudes towards learning, and enhances motivation alongside (Gorham & Christophel, 1992; McCroskey, et al., 2006). Furthermore, humour confirms student-teacher connection (Neuliep, 1995) creating a friendly attitude, a sense of empathy and care, as if the teacher is telling the student: "you are important" (Bruner, 2002, p. 3), as much as encourages students to be engaged in the teaching-learning process; by making initiatives, eventually increasing their

attendance to classes (Berk, 1998; Arlen, 2004; Berk & Nanda, 2006; Garner, 2005; Martin, 2007; Robert, 2007).

3.2.2 Linguistic Benefits of Humour in EFL Classroom

The positive effects of using humour extend to reach the linguistic aspects of English learning due to the peculiar nature of the language per se. For instance, Schmitz (2002) posits “puns and play of words are characteristic of English and part of the culture” (Schmitz, 2002, p. 99). By the same token, Deneire (1995) suggested humorous examples that may illuminate for students some of the phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic ambiguities in English, which are often introduced to students in rigorous and unappealing way. Put differently, because English has funny traits; it should be learned in funny ways. The implementation of such examples through entertaining activities like games, stories, jokes, puzzles, riddles, puns, and even pictures and sketches contributes considerably to the EFL learners’ linguistic and sociolinguistic development in the target language (TL) (Bell, 2007, 2009). According to Deneire (1995), such authentic humorous content implies a shortcut for learners to significant cultural and pragmatic knowledge of the target knowledge (TL) and “an interesting way to teach language and culture to students at all levels of instruction” (p. 193). The following examples put forward by Deneire (1995) and Schmitz (2002) illustrate humourously some linguistic issues at the different levels of linguistic analysis of the English language:

1. Phonology

An American in a British hospital asks the nurse: “Did I come here to die?” The nurse answers, “No, it was yesterdie.”

2. Lexicon

A: “Waiter, do you serve crabs here?” asks a customer”.

B: “We serve everybody. Just have a seat at this table, sir. The waiter Answers.”

3. Syntax

Student 1: “The dean announced that he is going to stop drinking on campus”

Student 2: “No kidding! Next thing you know he’ll want us to stop drinking too”

4. Syntax + lexicon

Question: “How do you make a horse fast?”

Answer: “Don’t give him anything for a while” (Deneire, 1995: 290)

5. Semantic

Wife: “do you love me still”

Husband: “I might if you’d stay still long enough” (Schmitz, 2002, p. 98)

Such instructional device could be used impliedly as an implicit strategy for pedagogical purposes such as “correcting reading difficulties, building vocabulary, and *teaching foreign languages* [emphasis added]” (Martin, 2007, p. 350). It is “one of the most powerful instructional resources” (1986, as cited in Martin 2007, p. 350). The above-mentioned materials helps develop EFL students’ both sense and sensibility to the funny aspects of English language, i.e., humour of the language. It is an amusing and instructive strategy for those students “who plan to deal with literary criticism in their university studies will benefit a great deal from contact with humour in the foreign language courses for the comic is a basic element in literature” (Schmitz, 2002, p.100)

For advanced EFL learners in particular who are pursuing advanced courses in English literature, dealing with authentic humorous materials would be useful for them to ameliorate their literary criticism. Advanced literary materials, such as Shakespeare’s plays and sonnets, contains a great deal of puns and wordplay and requires a linguistic sense of humour of the English language to appreciate and

enjoy such literary texts. EFL students must realize and taste the humour within because comedy is one of the intrinsic features in literature (Schmitz, 2002). While humour in the EFL classroom has cognitive, psychological, and pedagogical positive effects; it can also facilitate constructing students' communicative, and intercultural competence by offering "...significantly more benefit to the language educator as a specific and *targeted* illustrative tool of the linguistic, *discoursal*, and *cultural elements* [emphasis added] of the language being taught" (Askildson, 2005, p. 49).

3.2.3 Target Humour as Linguo-cultural Approach in EFL Classroom

The widespread shift towards Communicative-based syllabi and intercultural-oriented models in FLT, such as communicative language teaching and lingua-cultural approaches, has increasingly entailed the use of humour. In this respect, humour of TL or target humour (TH) is deemed to facilitate and refresh foreign language classrooms. The delivery of TH is a practical instructive strategy for intercultural communicative goals in FLT. By being frequently exposed to humorous authentic materials, EFL learners are likely to develop positive attitudes towards the target culture (TC), reflect on their own, and eventually build their intercultural communicative competence incrementally. Because the use of TH catalyzes this domino effect on the learners' linguistic and intercultural proficiency; it makes it a pedagogical device that can be integrated with any language teaching approach (Schmitz, 2002).

Furthermore, the learners' appreciation of TH is a positive indicator that their learning process is reaching a progressively higher level of mastering the TL, as well as its cultural aspects. One of the collateral effects caused when different

cultures collide is humour, which is an excellent pedagogical device (Deneire, 1995). For an EFL learner, to be able to appreciate and have a sense of humour in the TC is its own reward. This effect functions as a positive reinforcement for students to anticipate and solicit more of such materials, hence, more engaged learning. Notwithstanding the aforementioned, as a ubiquitous phenomenon across all cultures; this cultural aspect is not given much attention in intercultural pedagogy in general and foreign language classrooms in particular (Deneire, 1995; Zabalbeascoa, 2005, Bell and Pomerantz, 2015). In addition, by putting humour as a central point in examining intercultural issues, "it is possible to explore humour usage in various culture for the purpose of understanding the conventions, rules, techniques, expectations, methods and taboos" (Andrew, 2010, p. 25). Furthermore, making use of humour in education serves bridging the gaps between differences among languages and cultures (Byram, 2008). However, students must know that what might be humorous in their native culture, might not be necessarily as well as in the TC, if it would not be hostile or offensive. Because people have different perceptions of the world, they do not find the same things incongruous and funny. Eventually, they often misconstrue humour of one another. At which point, a joke is unlikely to remain funny once translated to another language (Morreall, 1983, p. 61). However, and despite all the previous arguments of the importance of humour in culture and language teaching; there has been an unsettled debate about when and how TH should be used in the classroom regarding the students' level of proficiency.

On the one hand, some theorists argue that Humour should not be introduced before students reach high proficiency and competency in the English language and culture (Deneire, 1994, p. 286). Along similar lines,

Deneire (1994) claims that humour should only help to illustrate and reinforce the learners' proficiency in TL and should not be primarily used as "a technique to introduce linguistic phenomena and cultural knowledge" (p. 294). On the other hand; however, other theorists do not share the same view. Nonetheless, Schmitz (2002: 95) argues that it is better off for teachers not to hold back entirely from the use of TH, mainly linguistic humour, till later stages in the learner' instruction process. Despite his disagreement with Deneire, Schmitz's assertions on introducing TH at all levels of students' proficiency depend on one condition: "the humorous material has to be selected to fit the linguistic competence of the students" (Schmitz, 2002, p.95), and recommends the use of linguistic and culture-based humour mostly with advanced learners where TH works at his best. Schmitz (2002) Also recommends that humorous authentic materials should be selected, scrutinized, and planned by the teacher prior to use it in the classroom, and to never implement them casually or practice it as "by the way" activity (p.94).

In more postmodern-oriented models of language teaching, humour and language play have gained more attention by practitioners. In fact, the focus on humour in FLT reaches beyond just the "fun factor as an instructional goal" to "serving to develop learners' meta-linguistic awareness and communicative/interpretive repertoires" (Bell & Pomerantz, 2014, p. 40). Bell and Pomerantz (2014) revisited the concept of language education and communication in recent theories by making humour, particularly linguistic forms of it, a pivotal component in language teaching, by which, the use of such a pedagogical tool through authentic materials is likely to increase learners' meta- linguistic awareness, and broaden their communicative repertoire. Predicated on the rather postmodern

conceptualizations of language and communication, Bell and Pomerantz (2014) further humour in language teaching to be, not only an improvised technique or instructional device in the classroom, but even as an approach in its own right to language teaching, with the full weight and meaning of the term "language education".

4. Research Methodology and Design

In accordance to the research questions of this study, and following the objectives of investigation, the adopted approaches entail quantitative and qualitative strategies in collecting and analyzing the data.

4.1 Participants

Being the two agents in the teaching-learning process; both students and teachers were solicited to participate during the data collection process. A questionnaire was administered with 2nd year master EFL students. 166 students were enrolled in 2nd year master in the English department at the University of Tlemcen. Students major in two specialties: Language Sciences and Literary Studies, with two groups each. Gender distribution, as reported by participants in the questionnaires included 131 females and 35 males. The intention of the researchers was to conduct the instrument with all students; nonetheless, there were 109 students present out of 166 during the process due to absences. The second population approached was the teachers. The researchers solicited 5 teachers (4 males and 1 female) who were deemed to participate in the study. With an experience that ranges from 17 years to 32 years of EFL teaching, the teachers had been in charge of teaching the participant students in a number of different courses during the five years they spent studying at the department. Participant teachers were Associate and Full professors, all holding a doctorate degree in English language in a variety of disciplines, namely, Didactics, Sociolinguistics; British Literature; Intercultural Studies, and TEFL and

Language Skills.

4.2 Instrumentation

The students' questionnaire includes 14 items with ordinal qualitative variables in the form of close-ended statements under each (see Appendix A). Students were asked to respond by: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree by marking the corresponding choice for each item (Likert-scale Questionnaire). Each of the 5 choices was given a score from 5 to 1, respectively on a descending scale. This frequency scale will facilitate quantifying data, hence, measuring the attitudes. Additionally, the questionnaire also included two other binary qualitative variables, namely Major and Gender of the student. As a normative approach, the use of fully close-ended questions in the questionnaire was, first, due to the large sample of students. Second, is to allow the comparability of answers in inferential statistics concerning to the two qualitative variables (Gender and Major), and finally, to ensure that the students' responses are to be within the course of the themes investigated in this study. The questionnaire was developed based on the relevant literature concerning the benefits of humour in the EFL classroom.

As for the second sample, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 teachers. In this meta-cognitive method, participants generate their own discourses, introspectively reflect on and elaborate their experiences, and report their beliefs accordingly. 8 main open-ended questions were a priori drafted for the interview with the possibility of follow-up questions and probes during the interview, to help clarify and deepen the participants' answers (see Appendix B). The rationale underlying the use of this instrument with the teachers was to cross-check the data yielded by the questionnaire, i.e., the interviews are to highlight issues not observed within the

questionnaire findings. The interview instrument addressed to the EFL teachers yielded qualitative data triangulated with the quantitative data obtained from the students' questionnaire. In fact, the interview questions were designed after retuning back and analyzing the students' questionnaire.

4.3 Procedures

Facilitated by the teachers, questionnaires were distributed among students and collected at the beginning of the course to ensure a higher rate of responses. The process took an average of time of 15 minutes, and the return rate was 100 % in all sessions. Teachers were asked to co-construct the narrative and pursue issues that are related to the study; when more explication is needed; or new information is revealed, follow-up questions were asked for further information and to extend and deepen the interviewees' accounts. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed later to facilitate analysis. As a strategy, piloting the study, earlier with a number of participants from both populations to test the instruments, allowed for a smooth study proper before, during, and after data collection.

Facilitated by the teachers, questionnaires were distributed among students and collected at the beginning of the course to ensure a higher rate of responses. The process took an average of time of 15 minutes, and the return rate was 100 % in all sessions. Teachers were asked to co-construct the narrative and pursue issues that are related to the study; when more explication is needed; or new information is revealed, follow-up questions were asked for further information and to extend and deepen the interviewees' accounts. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed later to facilitate analysis. As a strategy, piloting the study earlier to test the instruments, with a number of participants from both populations, allowed for a smooth study

proper before, during, and after data collection.

4.4 Data Analysis

4.4.1 Students' Attitudes

Based on the literature on the benefits of humour in the classroom, the questionnaire was designed mainly to quantify and explore the students' perceptions through their attitudes towards the affective, cognitive and pedagogical benefits of using humour in the classroom. Thereupon, the 14 items within the questionnaire can be categorized into three rubrics that address those three beneficial aspects respectively as follow: Rubric 1 includes the results of item (2), (11) and (14); rubric2 includes the results of item (5), (8), (9) and (10),and rubric3 which includes the results of item (1), (3), (4), (6), (7), (12) and (13). The results of the questionnaire were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics using the SPSS software, version20.

It must be pointed out that the most eminent remark noticed after analyzing the findings throughout the three rubrics of the questionnaire is that the highest rates of answers were totally within the columns "agree" and "strongly agree" jointly as an approving choice for the benefits of humour. Moreover, the results show that the most positive attitudes towards the beneficial aspect that humour could have in the classroom is the pedagogical effects. Nonetheless, the total Mean of the three sections of the questionnaire was equal to 3.94, a tendency that endorses the frequencies that students have overall positive attitudes towards the use of humour in the classroom (see table 1).

Table 1
Frequencies and Means of Students' Attitudes in Rubrics

Attitudes	Affective	Cognitive	Pedagogic
Strongly agree	33.03 %	30.05 %	34.34 %
Agree	1.50 %	47.02 %	43.91 %
Neutral	15.29 %	17.89 %	15.33 %
Disagree	17.74 %	4.59 %	0.46 %
Strongly	2.45 %	0.46 %	0.66 %

disagree			
Means	3.78	4.01	3.94

Concerning students' attitudes towards the use of humour regarding the two qualitative variables: Gender and Major; the ANOVA (F) test was used to determine the effect of such variables on students' attitudes and whether there were differences in the attitudes between: first, male and female students and second, between students of literary sciences and those of language sciences. Before running the inferential analysis, the two null hypotheses were put forward as follows:

H₀ 1: There is no significant difference between female and male's overall attitudes towards the use of humour in the classroom.

H₀ 2: There is no significant difference between attitudes of students in Literary Studies and their peers in Linguistic Studies.

a) Humour and Gender

When the ANOVA(F) Test was calculated, the level of significance was inferior to 0.05 (P = 0.02), the results that do not support the first null hypothesis (N₀2), and approve that the general attitude of students with regard to this qualitative variable showed differences between males and females' attitudes towards humour in the classroom (see table 2).

Table 2
Students' Overall Attitude due to Gender (P (Sig) = 0.05)

Variable	Differences	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
*Gender	Between Groups	1	1,821	9,941	,002
	Within Groups	107	,183		
	Total	108			

As shown in table 3 below, the differences in the Means between females and males indicate that, regardless their gender, all students have positive attitudes

towards humour, yet, females were more positive however. (Females = 4.0471, Males= 3.7351).

Table 3
Students General Means Due to Gender

Gender	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Male	3,7351	24	,51872
Female	4,0471	85	,39961
Total	3,9784	109	,44538

B) Humour and Major

Unlike what the ANOVA test revealed about the students' attitudes in accordance with their genders; there were no significant differences in the overall attitudes between students in Literary Studies and their peers in the other specialty, i.e., the value P was greater than 0.05 (P = 0.844), as indicated in table 4 below.

Table 4
Students' Overall Attitude Due to Major (P (Sig) = 0.05)

Variable	Differences	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
*Gender	Between Groups	1	,008	9,941	,002
	Within Groups	107	,200		
	Total	108			

In addition, the general Mean values between the two groups, Linguistic Studies (LING) and Literary Studies (LITE), were approximately the same as it is shown in table 4 (LING= 3.9851 vs. LITE= 3.9677). In both, table 4 and table 5, the findings do support the second null hypothesis (H₀₂).

Table 5
Students General Means Due to Major

Major	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
-------	------	---	----------------

LITE	3,9677	24	,38906
LING	3,9851	85	,48005
Total	3,9784	109	,44538

4.4.2 Teachers' Beliefs

Through an iterative process of labeling, coding, and categorizing, and using a constructivist strategy to code the teachers' answers (Charmaz, 2006), the interviews' findings ran through 3 main themes: The overall benefits of humour in EFL classroom, humour and foreign Language classroom Anxiety, target humour and learning the target language, and not least the risks of using humour in classroom.

As an introductory opening discussion about humour in life, overall, all teachers showed positive attitudes towards humour, and how such quality helps people feel at ease and relax in their interpersonal relationships. One teacher described as it spices daily lives to accommodate through. This "lifestyle", as called by another teacher, gives so much sense to life to the point that another interviewee added: "we cannot live without humour in such a tensed and stressed world".

a) The Overall Benefits of Humour in EFL Classroom

Starting with the first question about whether using humour in the classroom has any benefits at all for students, all the interviewees agree that it does have. In this regard, two of them explain that classrooms are places of stress and anxiety, and humour can ease and help students to relax. Besides, one respondent added that humour in his classes with is a "restful technique" for both the students and the teacher as well. "Classrooms are places of enjoyment while learning", as described by an interviewee. Another informant argues that humour helps him break the routine of learning process and he illustrated making the analogy that learning is like being on the high way and people need some breaks

every now and again to rest, using humour is that break. He added that humour is used when dealing with rather serious matters like preaching. While all the interviewees consider humour to be beneficial in the classroom; one teacher mentioned that it should not be exaggerated though.

Having used humour to illustrate concepts or issues is what all respondents do with the teaching materials most of the time except for one interviewee who uses such a “*pedagogical device*”, as he described, in a moderate way. This belief echoes what another teacher described it as “*triggering bored students*”. For two other interviewees, personal experiences are among the materials delivered, because it draws students’ attention as described by one of them. The other teacher claims that the materials he uses in his classes (Intercultural Communication) are already humorous; because all intercultural encounters “*tend to be funny*”. Along similar lines, a teacher mentioned that he has continuously observed during his experience as a teacher that humour played an important role for students to enjoy their learning and easily to grasp what he described as “to figure out a particular situation or an ambiguous concept”.

On the one hand, and while all informants stated that they use humour most of the time, only one teacher who claims that he uses humour spontaneously and does not plan it in advance, nonetheless, all the other informants practice it in both manners, spontaneously and purposely. Two teachers claimed that they are mostly spontaneous in using humour in the lectures because it is “*their nature*”. However, a teacher pointed out that some students do not need humour to be engaged in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, the degree of using humour, for her, depends on whom he is teaching. Although humour is used in both ways by most of the interviewees, it is much more practiced by them in an improvised manner than in a systematic way.

b) Humour and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

All the five interviewees agreed that humour in the classroom made their students at ease, relaxed, and less anxious. A teacher said that it makes him more comfortable before it makes his students so, and he likes it when he draws a smile on his students’ faces. In the same vein, another teacher described his students being relaxed “*to the degree of showing their teeth, and the impact shows on their body language*”. Additionally, two teachers claim that humour eases criticism without harming the students. In this vein, an informant told an anecdote of correcting a student on how to properly read a poem by telling him: “*listen to your classmate, your voice is as bad as mine*”. According to her, in such a humorous and round-about way to correct, the students are unlikely to feel offended because, first, it is their bad voices and not their reading skills, and second, the students’ reading parallel even their teacher who is supposedly the best reader in the classroom.

When asked about being more approachable to students by being humorous, all the teachers shared the same opinion that they feel that connection; humour breaks the ice between them. An informant said that he strongly noticed that his humour in the classroom made him a “*respectful friend*” to his students. However, two teachers doubted their attitudes towards this issue as to be subjective. They referred to as it is up to students to determine whether or not their teachers being approachable to them. When telling a joke, “*a teacher is no more a teacher for students but rather a person*”, as a teacher explained.

According to another teacher, “*Engagement is the key in learning*”. However, this participant never forces his students to be involved in the lesson. For him, using humour decreases the social distance between him and his students, and the teacher loves his students that he shares

that moment of humour with them. This informant further claimed that he, during his years as a student, “*never learned with a tough teacher who does not even smile*”. Additionally, another interviewee argued that using humour to illustrate prompts his students to be engaged in further analyses of the materials and fully involved in the discussion. Be it positive or even negative, a teacher averred that when making students respond to his humour, “*I’m already winning in favour of students, and never take it personally*”, because they are engaged in the conversation.

c) Target humour and learning the target language

All respondents strongly approved that instructive humour can improve the students’ learning through engaging them by creating a more comfortable conducive learning environment; even the teacher who stated that he would not practice it excessively. Furthermore, an informant believes that humour is among her teaching strategies to draw her students towards her even if that humour is irrelevant to the lesson context. Concerning the issue of using TH that and students’ intercultural competence; all interviewees agreed and confirmed that being aware of the native humour of English can be an efficient access to the culture of TL, hence, a deeper understanding and communication in TL. There was ample support for this claim by an interviewee who argues: “*when students are faced with TH, they would show more awareness and more readiness to learn and know how humour is expressed and used in the target context*”.

Likewise, for the teacher of intercultural studies, knowing the TH of TL is almost inevitable. This interviewee asserted that teaching the cultural aspect of the FL is among the modern approaches adopted in FLT, and since TH is a cultural aspect; FL learners must be aware of it. Along similar lines, an informant added that in cross-cultural communication, it is so crucial for

one to know TC, to get TL native speakers appreciating his humour because what is humorous in the students’ culture is not necessarily funny in the TC, if it might not be offensive. These interviewees made a recap of the idea that having a sense of humour in the TL is, in one way or another; learning that culture which eventually enhances the learner’s communicative competence in the TL and TC.

As proposed by another teacher, limericks are good examples of TH as teaching materials to be delivered and studied in the classroom. The teacher gave the example of some of “*Charles Dickens or Walter Scott’s works*”. She further recommended that if humour was to be an ELT approach, then, “*selecting from George Bernard Shaw’s texts would be a great deal of humorous authentic materials*”. Regardless, another teacher believed that the use of TH would succeed in favour of TL students’ learning “*only if they understood the cultural message conveyed through it, but most of the time, students do not*”, as this interviewee claimed.

Only one teacher did not notice that his students communicate through English language. Nonetheless, the remaining teachers reported that students did so, but rarely. These teachers think that students do not lack a sense of humour, but it is due to either their lack of proficiency in English or being afraid about the timing and the appropriateness of using humour. On the contrary, one teacher said that students in his classes showed humour through commenting on each other’s participation and even towards him. Yet, the teacher encouraged them to do so in English.

d) The Risks of Using Humour in Classroom

This theme, in particular, kept emerging across the teachers’ answers as the interview proceeds since the first question.

All the interviewees assert that the use of humour in the classroom may have risks. The teachers stated that the risks depend on what kind of humour, the students is used with, and not least when. According to two informants, some students may misinterpret humour or cross the lines and misbehave. In that case, the teachers would stop using humour for some time in order for these students to reconsider their behavior. However, these types of students are very few though. Another teacher also mentioned that some other students might not understand the teacher's humour; consequently, they either did not react or even accepted it.

Not having feedback from students is the risky side of humour for an interviewee. In such cases, she said that she has to save the situation swiftly. Also, the interviewee pointed out that she failed once in having a response from a group to the point that it was not easy to teach them after that. Besides, she added describing failing humour as a "*pedagogical handicap*", especially if it was planned purposefully in advance. Equally, another informant claimed that if a teacher failed using humour, he might be rejected by students as a person first, eventually as a teacher. In this respect, two informants prefer not to use humour than to do and fail. In contrast, another informant claimed that he would challenge and take the risks of using humour, because risk-taking, according to him, "*is part of the hard job of teaching*".

As for illustrative humour in the practicing, and while all the interviewees ratify that TH is a practical aspect for learning of the targeted culture and language, the teachers recommended it to be selective. Two interviewees pointed out that nowadays, classrooms are international and multicultural settings, "*so the teacher should be sensitive about of the composition of his classroom, because some TH in the material delivered might be offensive for some students*", one teacher elaborated. Therefore, the teacher would

rather "*avoid humour about minorities, religion and ethnicity for instance*", he recommended. Additionally, two other respondents stated that exaggerated use of humour might take a wrong course, and deviate from the teaching purpose. Therefore, students must know that the session is funny but serious, i.e., the teacher should show his students the rigor of the learning matter. In this vein, an informant suggested not to rely on humour in teaching, and "*the use of humour should be judiciously implemented*", added another teacher.

5. Discussion of the Findings

Despite the findings in the differences in the students' attitudes regarding their genders and specialty, the available evidence from the results obtained suggests that both the questionnaires and interviews' results show that students and teachers as well had positive perceptions towards the use of humour in the classroom. Not only did the majority of the surveyed respondents indicate that humour in the classroom has significant affective and cognitive impact, but also considerable pedagogical benefits. These results strongly support the views about the beneficial effects of using this instructional tool in the EFL classroom as suggested in theory (Deneire, 1995; Schmitz, 2002; Askildson, 2005).

As for the use of TH to reach linguistic and intercultural competencies in the TL, the results of both samples go hand in hand with what was suggested in theory in the literature that implementing authentic humorous material (TH) within the teaching-learning process enhances the learners' targeted linguistic competencies as much as sensitizing them to the targeted cultural knowledge loaded within (Andrew, 2010; Bell & Pomerantz, 2014). There is overwhelming evidence in the results that corroborate that students are aware of the complementary relationship between culture and language instruction,

and how TH augments it. Accounts obtained from both samples highlight the significance of TH, as a cultural aspect of the TL, to be an efficient instructional device for both the teacher and the learner in understanding the integral model of intercultural communicative competence. The model encompasses linguistic and cultural aspects in the EFL learning (Byram, 2008). In light of the nowadays increasing process of globalization, foreign language teaching necessitates such a model than ever before, not least in the case of English as a foreign and global language.

The strong positive attitudes shared by both the students and their teachers towards the pedagogical, linguistic, and cultural utility of using humour, particularly TH, is a plea, primarily, for EFL practitioners to consider a systematic implementation of such pedagogical device in their classroom, not least when alignment of learners and teachers' beliefs is crucial in an effective teaching-learning process (Richards & Lockhart, 2007). Against this background, further experimental research is recommended to scrutinize the relationships between using TH and students' learning achievement, despite their learning strategies, styles, and even attitudes.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, there was a statistically significant consensus in the students' attitudes suggesting that not all kinds of humour used by the teacher are acceptable. The majority of students think that some humour could be pernicious. This focal of the study, in particular, is worth investigating in further research. Along similar lines, the teachers further elaborated this issue during the interviews. They highlighted the risky side of the inappropriate use of humour, not only for students' well-being but for the teachers themselves and the whole teaching-learning process in general. This emergent theme in the findings is a promising focal area for further investigation of when and

what aspects of humour can be beneficial or detrimental to the teaching-learning process.

6. Conclusion

The query, put forward at the beginning of the current study, unfolds in two main investigative foci, to explore, by and large; the learners' attitudes towards the use of humour in the classroom, and second, target humour in particular. In contrast, the second endeavour was to induce the teachers' beliefs about using humour in their teachings. While students in both specialties showed overall positive attitudes towards the use of humour in the classroom; further inferential analyses revealed that females had stronger propensity towards the use of humour than their male peers. In contrast, the teachers' beliefs revealed that humour in the classroom could be a double-edged sword if implemented inappropriately. However, the teachers argued that the significant effects of humour in favour of the classroom at large make the risks are worth taking. As for TH in specific, the cross-checking of the teachers' beliefs with the learners' attitudes indicate that both samples confirmed that TH, as an aspect of TL, is an engaging content for students to primarily improve their awareness of both the structural and cultural characteristics of the target language, and eventually, their intercultural communicative competence.

Despite the nature of the current study, as a case study, which poses challenges to the findings to be generalized to other contexts, the results obtained encourage further extensive research, not only at the level of higher education but also at the other educational stages of formal EFL learning in Algeria, namely, middle and secondary school. Also, extensive research will decide whether or not humour, in particular target humour, is worth being systematically implemented

as an integrated model in the EFL courses from early stages of student's learning, and suggest overall innovative designed models to approach academic EFL teaching in Algerian classrooms through funnier, intercultural-oriented, and engaging delivery of the curricula.

- References

Andrew, R. (2010). Intercultural Communication and the Essence of Humour. *Journal of the Faculty of International Studies, Utsunomiya University*. 29, 23-34. Retrieved from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/80551011.pdf>

Arlene, J. L., and Martha J, B. (2004). *Fuszard's Innovative Teaching Strategies in Nursing*. 3rd ed. USA: Jones & Bartlett, Inc.

Berk, Ronald A., and Joy P. Nanda. (1998). Effects of Jocular Instructional Methods on Attitudes, Anxiety, and Achievement in Statistics Courses. *Humor. International Journal of Humor Research*, 11 (4), 383-409. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1998.11.4.383>

Berk, Ronald A. (2002). *Humor as an Instructional Defibrillator: Evidence-based Techniques in Teaching and Assessment*. Sterling, VA. Stylus Publishing.

Berk R. (2003). *Professors Are from Mars, Students Are from Snickers: How to Write and Deliver Humor in the Classroom and in Professional Presentations*. Sterling, VA. Stylus Publishing.

Bennett, J., Bennett, M., & Allen, W. (2003). *Developing Intercultural Competence in the Language Classroom. In Culture as the Core: Perspectives in Second Language Learning*. USA. Information Age Publishing.

Bell, N. (2007). How native and non-native English speakers adapt to humor in

intercultural interaction. *Humor - International Journal of Humor Research* 20(1), 27-48.

Bell, N. Pomerantze, A. (2015). *Humor in the classroom: A guide for language teachers and educational researchers*. London: Routledge.

Bell, N. (2009). Learning about and through humor in the second language classroom. *Language Teaching Research*. 13(3), 241-258.

Bell, N. Pomerantze, A. (2014). Reconsidering Language Teaching Through a Focus on Humour. *Euro American Journal of Applied Linguistics and Languages.1* (1), 31-47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21283/2376905X.1.15>

Bruner, R. (2002). Transforming Thought: the role of Humor in Teaching. *Social Science Research Network*. Retrieved from: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Data_Integrity_Notice.cfm?abid=298761

Byram, M. (2008). *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Charmaz, K. (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage.

Chiasson, E, P. (2002). Using Humour in the Second Language Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 8. Retrieved from: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Chiasson-Humour.html>.

Deneire, M. (1995). Humor and foreign language teaching. *Humor*, 8, 285-298. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.1995.8.3.285>

Fives, Helenrose., and Gill, M, G. (Eds.) (2015). *International Handbook of Research on Teachers' Beliefs*. New York: Routledge.

- Foot, H., & McCreddie, M. (2006). Humour and laughter. In O. Hargie (Ed.), *The Handbook of Communications Skills* (293-322). New York: Routledge.
- Garner, R. L. (2005). Humor, analogy, and metaphor: H.A.M. it up in teaching. *Radical Pedagogy* 6 (2). Retrieved from: https://radicalpedagogy.icaap.org/content/issue6_2/garner.html
- Gorham, J., & Christophel, D. M. (1992). Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors as motivating and demotivating factors in college classes. *Communication Quarterly*, 40, 239-252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379209369839>
- Kher, N., Molstad, S., & Donahue, R. (1999). Using Humor in the College Classroom to Enhance Teaching Effectiveness in 'Dread Courses'. *College Student Journal*, 33(3), 400-406.
- Martin, Rod, A. (2007). *The Psychology of Humor: an Integrative Approach*. California: Elsevier Inc.
- Morreall, John. (1983). *Taking Laughter Seriously*. State university of New York: State university of New York Press, Albany.
- McCroskey, J. C., Richmond, V. P., & Bennett, V. E. (2006). The relationships of student end-of-class motivation with teacher communication behaviors and instructional outcomes. *Communication Education*, 55(4), 403-414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520600702562>
- Nanda, J & Berk, R.A. (2006). A randomized trial of humor effects on test anxiety and test performance. *International Journal of Humor Research*.19 (4), 425-454. <https://doi.org/10.1515/HUMOR.2006.021>
- Neuliep, J. W. (1991). An examination of the content of high school teacher's humor in the classroom and the development of an inductively derived taxonomy of classroom humor. *Communication Education*, 40, 343-355.
- Lowenstein, A. J., & Bradshaw, M. J. (2004), *Fuszard's Innovative Teaching Strategies in Nursing*. Jones & Bartlett learning.
- Richards, J. C., (Ed.) & Lockhart, C. (2007). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Robbert, T. Tauber, and Cathy Sargent Mester. (2007) *Acting Lessons for Teachers: Using Performance Skills in the Classroom*. USA, Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Ruch, W. (1998). *The Sense of Humor: Exploration of Personality Characteristic*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Shade, R. A. (1996). *License to laugh: Humor in the Classroom*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood publishing.
- Schmitz, J.R. (2002). Humor as a Pedagogical Tool in Foreign language and Translation Courses. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 15(1) 89-113. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.2002.007>
- Zabalbeascoa, P. (2005). Humour and Translation- an Interdiscipline. *Humour*. 18 (2), 185-207. <https://doi.org/10.1515/humr.2005.18.2.185>
- Wanzer, M. B. et al. (2010). An Explanation of the relationship between Instructor Humour and Student Learning: Instructional Humor Processing Theory. *Communication Education*. 59 (1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520903367238>
- Ziyaemehr, Ali. (2011) Use and Non-use of Humor in Academic ESL Classrooms. *English Language Teaching*. 4(3), 111-119. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n3p111>

- Appendices

Appendix A: The Final Draft of the Students' Questionnaire

The following questionnaire is part of a study that explores the benefits of using humour in the EFL classroom through students' attitudes. Based on your experience as an EFL student at university, you are kindly asked to choose between the 5 values by marking a cross under the corresponding one: **1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree.**

GENDER: Male Female

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I would likely to avoid classes where the teacher is not using humour.					
2. I feel more comfortable (less anxious and stressed) in the classes where the teacher uses humour.					
3. The use of humour in the classroom makes me more motivated.					
4. I am more interested in lessons where they are delivered with humourous materials.					
5. I would likely pay attention to the teacher when he/she uses humour.					
6. I more engaged in the classroom if the teacher uses humour during the teaching.					
7. Teachers who use humour are more approachable than those who do not.					
8. Humourous authentic materials improve my understanding and communicative competence in the target language.					
9. I am more to remember lectures when they are delivered through humourous way.					
10. I would think more about and analyze issues concerning the lecture if they are introduced in funny examples :(jokes, puns, videos, funny stories, etc).					
11. I am more comfortable to ask the teacher who uses humour questions than to that who does not.					
12. Illustrative authentic humour in subject like grammar, vocabulary, cross-cultural studies, semantics, pragmatics, improves my learning and understanding of difficult concepts.					
13. Being aware of the native humour of English is very important to learn the culture of that language.					
14. I would never feel offended by the teachers when they use some humour.					

Appendix B: The Teachers' Interview Initial Layout

<p>1. Do you think that the use of humour in the classroom have any benefits in any way at all on students?</p>
<p>2. How often do you use humor (jokes, witticisms, humorous facial expressions, proverbs, idioms, funny stories, etc) to illustrate any particularity or concept in the lectures, and how do you use it, purposefully or spontaneously?</p>
<p>3. To what degree does humor make your students feel more relaxed (i.e. less anxious) in the language classroom?</p>
<p>4. In what ways does your use of humor improves your students' ability to learn a language?</p>
<p>5. Do you notice that you are more approachable to your students when using humour?</p>
<p>6. Do you think that your students learn more about the culture of the target language by being exposed to Target humour of that language and culture?</p>
<p>7. Do your students use humor to communicate through English during the classes? If they do, how often?</p>
<p>8. Do you see any risks in using humour in the classroom? If so, would you explain how?</p>