

# Humor as a Teaching and Learning Strategy in a Language Classroom

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## Abstract

This study using the mixed method design aimed to find out the social and psychological effects of humor as a teaching and learning strategy of language teachers to college students, as well as how and when teachers integrate humor in teaching. Participants included sophomore students and language teachers from a state institution in Western Visayas, Philippines. A researcher-structured and validated questionnaire transformed into a Google form was employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Results revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that humor, when used as a teaching approach, helps build a positive student-teacher relationship. They reported that they feel more relaxed when humor is used in teaching, highlighting its effectiveness as a tool to reduce anxiety while learning, enhance their participation and contribute to their final grade in English. Teacher-participants mentioned that humor is used within the class discussion to sustain attention. The most popular humor used are jokes, funny experiences, and puns. Sarcasm and visual jokes are rarely injected. However, the application of humor in a classroom setting should be approached with caution and sensitivity. While humor has the potential to create a more relaxed learning environment and aid in the learning process, boundaries should be established to avoid causing offense. Using humor as a teaching and learning strategy has a positive impact on college students' language learning experience, if used appropriately. Despite the occasional drawbacks, the benefits of using humor in the language classroom outweigh its limitations.

**Keywords:** *humor, teaching-learning strategy, mixed method, social and psychological effects*

## Article History:

*Received:* October 12, 2023

*Accepted:* December 18, 2023

*Revised:* December 18, 2023

*Published online:* December 23, 2023

## Suggested Citation:

Isagan, K.R., Enecito, V.R., Ungsod, J.S., Nagal, C.R. & Biray, E.T. (2023). Humor as a teaching and learning strategy in a language classroom. *The Research Probe*, 3(2), 13-21. <https://doi.org/10.53378/trp.12232>

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## **Introduction**

Teaching is a profession that should not to be taken lightly for it is a job where the future of students is on the line. It is the process of equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare them for the future. Teaching strategy is the umbrella term for the methods, techniques, procedures, and processes that a teacher uses during instruction. Teachers employ a variety of teaching strategies to ensure that the learning objectives will be met. These instructional strategies help students meet their learning goals by encouraging active participation in the classroom (Persaud, 2021). Without the use of a strategy, teachers would be aimlessly projecting information that does not connect with learners or engage them (Bouslog, 2019). They must be appropriate for the topic being studied, the learner's level of expertise, and the stage in their learning journey (Anikumar, 2022). According to Deiter (2000), students prefer teachers who have a sense of humor over those who either don't have one or do not display it in class. Students do not expect teachers to act like clowns or comedians; however, they do want teachers to make learning more fun and entertaining. Teachers who use humor inside the classroom impact the learning of students (McGhee & Lloyd, 1982, in Hegstad, 2022). While humor is an important educational tool, too much of it can lead to distraction from the subject matter (Lei et al., 2010). This study was anchored on Relief Theory which argues that an incongruous use of humor is more likely to induce laughter which can act as a reprieve from anxiety, tension, and worry (Alsop, 2015). Hence, this aimed to find out the social and psychological effects of humor as a teaching and learning strategy by language teachers to the class participation and performance of college students in a government-funded institution in Western Visayas. It also looked into how and when teachers integrate humor in teaching. Both the perceptions of teachers and students have been considered in coming up with the results. The findings are assumed to assist the educational stakeholders in developing desirable and appropriate integrative strategies for advancing language students' learnings within a language classroom, as well as furthering strategies from a mere traditional setting.

## **Methodology**

Mixed method design was chosen for this study to find out if the integration of humor in classroom instruction by the teachers was effectively necessary as perceived by the

students, and the explanations shared by the language teachers on how and when do they inject humor in their discussions. This research design combines and integrates qualitative and quantitative methods in a single research study (Molina-Azorin, 2016). Purposive sampling method was used as it included all the 42 sophomore college students in a language class as respondents. Total population sampling is a type of purposive sampling where the whole population shares a customary characteristic (Lavrakas, 2008). Qualitative data were provided by four (4) college language instructors as participants. A researcher-made survey questionnaire validated by non-participant teachers and tested for reliability among students not included as respondents was used to gather quantitative data. It was transformed into a Google document and sent to respondents through Messenger. This two-part tool consisted of 15 items with a 5-point Likert scale of response choices from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, and information about students' grade and preferences as to when and how humor should be used in teaching. A face-to-face interview with the college language instructors was conducted using an interview guide. Data were analyzed using frequency count, rank, and percentage distribution.

## **Findings**

As to social effect, majority of the sophomore college students strongly agreed that humor in the classroom can help them create a positive student-teacher relationship, and agreed that they develop socialization skills among and between their classmates because of the non-threatening classroom atmosphere provided by the teacher. They also agreed that they do not feel uncomfortable when the teacher uses jokes in the classroom. However, they disagreed that the use of humor by the language teachers in class would undermine the authority and respect to the teachers nor would it contribute to a culture of disrespect or disregard for rules in the classroom. On the psychological effect, more than half of the total respondents strongly disagreed that humor is distracting in class. In fact, most of them strongly agreed that they feel energized and motivated to attend classes of teachers who have sense of humor, and feel relaxed than being tense when teachers use funny examples during discussions. This suggests that the use of humor sparks students' interest, makes the classroom environment livelier, and helps reduce anxiety by creating an atmosphere of ease and comfort for learning (Al-Duleimi & Aziz, 2020). They also disagreed that the use of humor by the teacher to deliver lessons would make them feel awkward. As regards learning

efficiency, the biggest number agreed that students remember lessons when humor is injected in discussions, understands complex lessons when humor is used in explaining concepts, and become more participative in class. Indeed, concept-related humor appears to be one of the variables that influence teaching quality and student learning as it has a positive impact on both instruction and student acquisition (Bolkan et al., 2018). They added that when a teacher uses humor, it always captures and sustains their attention. This confirms the findings made by Henderson (2015) which linked humor to the improvement of motivation and long-term memory among students of all ages. As a result, most of the students had attained grades from 1.51 to 2.00 equivalent to 87-95 and described as Very Satisfactory because of the inclusion of humor in class instruction. It was noted that language teachers who used humor in 70-80% of class discussion were the most liked teacher by the respondents. It was also established that these teachers frequently insert humor during the discussion, sometimes after discussion, and rarely before the discussion of lessons. This proves the findings of Kaur (2021) which holds that using positive forms of humor during lessons fosters positive relationships between teachers and learners, maintains discipline within the classroom environment, promotes creativity, and boosts concept retention. Jokes were found to be the most used humor in class. This was followed by telling funny experiences, sarcasm, and puns. Rarely were visual jokes injected. Chowdhury (2021) reminds, however, that teachers should carefully use verbal, visual, and audio humor in the classroom setting to attain fruitful outcome. It should never target any individual or group in the class.

## **Conclusion**

Indeed, using humor as a teaching and learning approach for language learning is effective. Through humor, both students and teachers can experience a stronger sense of connectedness. It promotes active participation during class discussions because teachers with sense of humor push students' learning engagement to a higher level. Additionally, it lessens academic stress concerning the English language due to the supportive and student-friendly learning environment it fosters. However, because it is difficult for students to relate to jokes that are unfamiliar to them, teachers must pay attention to their interests. Even though teachers use humor in their instruction, their authority remains unaffected. On the contrary, it fosters a sense of community in the classroom and strengthens their bond with

students. But one must always know where and when to draw the line to ensure that respect will always be present.

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