
Humor as a Pedagogical Tool in Theory and Practice of ESL

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Children come into this planet as mere intricate masses of human potentialities. It greatly depends upon the teachers to unleash their creativity and shape their lives and destinies. Donna C. Crossman, (2013) visualize that for the surety of all the children to make progress towards the learning goals, new and innovative strategies will have to be tried in terms of teaching –learning and consequently in preparing and supporting teacher According to UNESCO global monitoring Report (2013),” To solve the learning crisis all children must have teachers who are motivated, trained and enjoy teaching; who can identify and support weak learners and who are backed by well-managed systems”.

Ever since the educational paradigm shift from teacher-centred to learner-centred instruction in the last decades of the past century, there has been a continuous debate and dialogue among researchers, educators and educational psychologists alike on how to enhance teaching and learning processes in order to make them more effective, i.e. more beneficial for student learning. Consequently, teachers have been urged to explore better and alternative ways of teaching to improve their practice and break away from traditional methods of instruction, which are commonly understood to be counterproductive for the development of skills and practices that enable learner autonomy and independence

National Curriculum Framework (2005) requires a teacher to be a facilitator of children’s learning in a manner that child is helped to construct her knowledge. It is well known that quality and extent of learner achievement are determined primarily by teacher competence, sensitivity and teacher motivation thereby leading to larger social transformation. Teachers are the real warriors who have to win the war (effective teaching) with their weapons (teaching techniques). “Classroom in which laughter is welcome help brings learning to life”.

Traditional instruction, based on automated rote learning, creates a sense of boredom, dulls the students’ appetite for learning, and hinders retention of information and development of learning skills. Since traditional teaching methods make the classroom a dreary place where the students feel bored. Therefore, the use of jocular Instructional Strategies is suggested to create an atmosphere of fun, humour and laughter which is considered a break from the rigidity of the old methods. Besides, these humorous methods bring the students closer to their teachers, make them happier in the classroom and more open to learning, thus creating a healthy environment where teacher and students cooperate and participate in the learning process. It is believed that teachers have ability to spark students’ interest in classes and humour acts as fuel to ignite the students’ interest by turning the classroom into laughter theatre(Bala ,2016) .

Kelly (2005) argues that the teacher’s main job is to help students fall in love with the content and their own learning. Jokes could be used in a class to motivate the students so that they start taking interest in reading and writing activities

Here is what the Australian Medical Publishing Company (1999) says about the role of humor in teaching:

- Enhances student learning
- Improves rapport between teachers and students
- May enhance teachers’ status with students
- Helps student-teacher interaction
- May seduce students into believing that teaching is of high quality

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- Entertains students as compensation or reward for their attendance
 - Improves general social interaction, without educational connotations

This paper is intended to stimulate interest in the implications of pedagogical humor in the hope that researchers and teachers alike will recognize the multiplicity of benefits inherent in both general classroom humor as well as use of humor in English as a foreign language .

It is said, smile is a universal language, it speaks much better; it is a key to open good transaction of ideas; humour could be a tool used by the teacher to teach language effectively. Robinson (1977) puts it that humor can ease the “tension of a troubled world”.

Since 80's of 20th century exists an International Society of Humor Studies, engaged with applied and theoretical researches in the subjects for humour and laughter. Although the efforts of this small team of researchers for some decades this area is still not so respected in the scientific environments. The humour is shown by Peterson Seligman, (2004) as one of the 24th most important characteristics of the temper of the person. Reader's Digest always recommend the Laughter as the Best Medicine

Kruger (1996) and Trachtenberg (1979) gave their views on humor that it acts as a bridge, links pupil and teacher, makes classes interesting, participatory and better understanding. It is “an icebreaker or affinity-seeking strategy.

Provine (2000) feels that laughter is generally subdued during conversation. Speech will dominate and laughter serves as a phrase break creating a punctuation effect in language

The area called “humourology” is still in its embryo. According to Psychology today (2012): “The humour is taken as an unserious subject. The scientific researchers care always their work to be respected and the researches for the humour are considered to be not enough prestigious. People think that there are many other really important issues which we have to try to solve but with humour it is easier to survive in comparison with stress and psychological burden .Cornett (1986) adds that humour for educators is the “most powerful resource to achieve a wide range of beneficial educational outcomes.”. Four factors may be considered when we discuss humour as part of teaching: class, teacher, subject and Task.

Brown, (2007) says that the teachers' roles are “often described in the form of metaphor: teacher as Manufacturer, teacher as doctor, teacher as judge, teacher as gardener, and others.” Others may include teachers as joke tellers or people with a sense of humour. These two or more roles are primarily needed within the scope of the subject of the grammar that is discussed in the classroom to make dull grammar rules easily and smoothly perceived, of course, under the teacher's control. Davis (1997) stated that the job of the teacher is to get students laughing, and when their mouths are open, to give them something on which to chew. a panel of cartoons creates humour, secondly provides space for pupils' creativity which is in favour of a positive psycho climate in the work of grown up. Humour plants positive effect, reducing anxiety levels, increasing focus and rapport among the co-learners in the classroom.

Ruggieri(1999) feel that humor can be the avenue by which one grabs the attention of disinterested students and those who claim they dislike, subject and task. The amount and types of humour utilized depend on the teacher. Personality, mood, usage of humour, immediacy and amount of dialogue interaction also English. Not only can interesting, fun activities and creative teaching approaches spark students' interest, but such activities can also promote learning and help students gain new perspectives on old concepts.

The main argument for implementing humour in the foreign language classroom is based on Krashen's popular Input Hypothesis (1985), which he developed within the context of second-language learning in the later decades of the past century. According to Krashen, a student's feeling of anxiety builds up an affective filter, a mental block which makes the individual generally unreceptive to language input. Thus, the learner cannot utilize “the comprehensible input he receives for language acquisition”, which keeps him or her from making further progress in that specific target language. Over the years, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis has been verified by several scholars, including Horwitz et al. (1986) who examined the effects of student anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Their observations show that anxious students are “uniquely unable to deal with the task of language learning”.

Anxiety and the students' inability to perform in a foreign language very often lead to bad test results and grades and the teacher's misinterpretation of the students' actual language ability, as highlighted by Horwitz et al (1986). The resulting poor test performance and inability to perform in class can contribute to a teacher's inaccurate assessment that the students lacks either some necessary aptitude for learning a language or sufficient motivation to do the necessary work for a good performance. Due to these greater consequences and the vast degree of emotional stress that some students are claimed to experience while learning a language that is not native to them, it becomes particularly important for the teacher to employ specific techniques that help to create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere and "allay students' anxiety". Humorous discourse employed by the teacher, either through humorous materials, infused in teacher-student interaction or as a general conversational tone among the students themselves hence becomes an effective classroom management tool that is able dissolve an authoritative and tense classroom atmosphere.

Krashen (1987) wrote about the negative effect of anxiety on the student's ability to learn ESL. For a dreaded course like English especially in an ESL environment, humour can help increase motivation, self-confidence and bridge gap between teachers and students. By means of humour, the students can maximize ESL lessons through easy understanding and long term retention.

Deneire (1995) points out, within the English as a foreign language classroom, humour can both be used "as a technique to introduce linguistic phenomena and cultural knowledge" and "as an illustration and reinforcement of already acquired cultural and linguistic knowledge".

Chiasson (2002) feels that Humour can contribute a great deal to the second language classroom. Language is seen in authentic and real life situations. Humorous situations allow your students to express themselves without fear of ridicule and criticism. Anxiety and stress is reduced and your students are encouraged to take more risks in using their second language

Munoz-Basols (2005) observed that "the devices that we can use to add humor to a language class range from idiomatic expressions, riddles or proverbs, pronunciation games, comics, jokes or typical grammatical errors". Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2011), who studied the use of humour in the teaching of world languages, focus on the numerous advantages which humour has in the context of foreign language teaching. The authors are convinced that "research in world language education has revealed the importance of the use of humor in lowering student anxiety and in the learning of pragmatic skills of foreign language students". Reves and Roman (2014) focused on the uses of humour in second language acquisition learning and the instruction of world literature. They made the research on humour as a teaching tool as well as the impact of low-inference teaching behaviours. Also, it elaborated on the cultural differences found in language and world literature classrooms, and it encouraged instructors to use humour to overcome cultural and language barriers. Humour, the authors stressed, is a safe teaching technique for both the instructor and the student by which the classroom comes together in a respectful environment. Abdullah and Akhter (2015) considered humor as an important element to reduce the anxiety factor and boredom in an English language class. It make English language class more effective and interesting. It creates a learning environment in such a way in a language class that helps the students to perform even better.

Neulip (1990) comes out with his findings regarding the use, effect of humour among language tutors. He says that humour is "a strategy for increasing student comprehension and learning". Humour should be viewed as the 'pedagogical instrument' and also serves as double edged knife which can harm or serve in the classroom atmosphere.

. Prosser's (1997) experiment validates their study. He makes a questionnaire distributed among 210 higher education teachers in order to collect opinions about the use of humour in adult education. The results show that 99% of the participants consider humour as an important tool in teaching. Langford (2005) in Vygotsky's 'development and education psychology' proposed that Teacher must use 'humour' as a 'chalk'. 'Without humor, second language learning creates the second language robots, not the users. Chabeli (2006) summarised that the use of humour can be seen to possess a dual-advantage with regards to the initiation and facilitation of learning processes. Humorous anecdotes told by the teacher or funny and entertaining teaching materials have the potential to "serve as a 'hook' for remembering important content".

Garner (2008) suggested that when properly used humour can be an effective tool to make a class more enjoyable, reduce anxiety and improve the learning setting. The ‘ha ha ‘of humour in the classroom may indeed contribute to the Aha!

Among all of the courses students take care in their language classes which one is super boring, ultra difficult and most anxiety producing (triple threat)? Since the studies have shown that English language learning especially writing skills and the use of grammar have forced the students to drag more negative baggage into their required introductory writing skill/grammatical skills than any other. This baggage may contain (1) Language anxiety associated with low language ability or self-esteem, (2) Writing skills anxiety due to lack of writing skills proficiency and experience and (3) Worst of all a little interest towards grammar resulting from their lack of interest in the subject, perceived uselessness of grammatical rules to their field or career goals and of course usually exaggerated horror stories about English Grammar told by their peers. All of this baggage can interfere with learning language and negatively affect their performance in the course. How can teachers get students to check their negative baggage at the door? In the never ending search for truth and an answer to this question, this study explores the humour as a systematic teaching strategy to increase interest, reduce anxiety, and increase achievement in English language course.

Grammar is one of those issues that do not have an easy solution. It is tricky and it is tough. Teaching English grammar to a group of students is a formidable job that requires outstanding skills and superlative efforts to make it successful.

One cannot escape from grammar; it is in every sentence you read or write, speak or hear. Grammar is simply the word for the rules that people follow when they use a language; without rules, we would not be able to communicate with other people.

A day without laughter is a day wasted” rightly said by the great artist Charlie Chaplin. He also mentioned “My pain may be the reason for somebody’s laugh, but my laugh must never be the reason for somebody’s pain.” Bala (2016) quoted in her study.

As the review of literature have demonstrated, the use of jocular instructional strategies in second language learning environment provides a wide range of opportunities for learning a foreign language. Therefore, teachers need to set aside time in order to develop jocular instructional strategies and infuse humour in their own teaching practice for the benefit of their learners as well as their own. In order to be able to use humour successfully, however, teachers should consider and be aware of the role that humour plays not only in the target language and as a pedagogical tool in the foreign language classrooms, but also in the students’ personal development. Because only then will the teacher be able to select the appropriate kind of humour from which students benefit both emotionally, socially and intellectually, and only then will humour become the valuable teaching tool and the “important spice to use in teaching” that Chabeli (2008) recommended. Researchers and planners have an obligation to its inclusion as both a pedagogical tool and a natural component of linguistic study.

One debatable question about use of humor in teaching is its association with negativity .Loomans (1993) writes about humour, “there are two distinct sides of the of the humour coin: the comic and the tragic, humour can act as a social lubricant or social retardant in the educational setting. It can educate or denigrate, heal or harm, embrace or deface, it’s a powerful communication tool, no matter which side is chosen”.

Wanzer (2002) suggested that in teaching generally exclude humour that “makes fun of students, humor based on stereotypes, failed humor, sexual humor, swearing to be funny, joking about serious issues, and personal humor”. To Chabeli (2008), however, “any humor that is intended to divide people, belittle or ridicule, discriminate, encourage negativity or be at another persons’ expense” is considered inappropriate in the classroom context. In contrast, the humour that should be used during teaching “should be constructive, understandable by all learners and be relevant to the content and compatible to the learning environment”

The research related studies described above support the view that humour can reduce anxiety, help relieve stress, increase mental sharpness and help students to learn difficult English grammatical subjects .This study will benefit teachers, students, parents as well as the entire nation as it will help to promote learning by

making the classroom atmospheres to be conducive, interactive, tension and anxieties free. The students will love learning, the teachers will love teaching, parents will witness improvement in their children's interest for learning and the nation will witness technological growth and advancement in other sectors of the economy

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