

Potent Roles of Humor in EFL Classes in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study of Lebanese Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper focuses on scrutinizing the attitudes and opinions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors and learners on the use of humor in higher education in Lebanon as a pedagogical tool in classroom contexts. It is used in building a harmonious relationship between instructors and students, lowering affective barriers to learning, keeping students attentive to class activities, developing creativity and increasing instructional effectiveness as well as students' learning. It also aims to describe the instructors' experiences in employing it in their classrooms and to determine the students' perspectives on its potent roles in learning. In this exploratory study, a mixed-method design and a convenient sampling of participants were utilized. A total of 13 EFL instructors, working at 1 public and 4 private universities in Lebanon, and 86 EFL students participated in the study. To describe and quantify their perceptions of the potent roles of employing humor in EFL classes, two online surveys of two sets of questions each, including closed-ended and open-ended, and four focus group discussions were administered. The overall qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data indicated that Lebanese EFL instructors and students have positive attitudes towards integrating humor as a pedagogical tool and as a fundamental part of the teaching strategies in EFL higher education classes. This is because it creates an open communication climate, captures students' interest in the subject matter, boosts attention,

reduces anxiety, makes the instructor more approachable, and yields better instructor evaluation. The findings of this study also revealed the need to train teachers to use humor artfully.

Keywords: Humor, EFL, Lebanon, Higher Education

Introduction

The global nature of humor and its effect has been investigated and emphasized by various scholars in many fields such as sociology, philosophy, anthropology, psychology, linguistics, literature, and education (Attardo, 1994; Berwald, 1992; Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011). Trachtenberg (1979) describes humor as a universal form of language throughout the world. Freud (1967) defines it as a sort of defense mechanism that allows one to face a different situation without becoming overwhelmed by unpleasant emotions. Leftcourt and Martin (1986) hold that it is a mechanism that allows people to encounter stress and anxiety in everyday life situations. In 1991, Booth-Butterfield developed the Inventory of Humor orientation to measure humorous traits across a variety of situations. Years after, based on incongruity theory, Wanzer, Frymier, and Irwin (2010) developed the instructional humor processing theory (IHPT) and claimed that learners need to perceive humor and then resolve the bizarre elements. They asserted that this strategy improves students' learning and increases instructional effectiveness. Goodboy, et al. (2015) extended their research and asserted that instructor humor in colleges remained a positive predictor for learner's cognitive learning, participation, and out-of-class communication.

Earlier studies conducted by Baysac (2017), Banas, et al. (2011), Lems (2011), Skinner (2010), Garner (2006), James (2004), and many others have documented the positive pedagogical effects of humor at a variety of educational levels.

The use of humor as a viable pedagogical tool has been on the rise in almost every discipline (Jones, 2014). Studies conducted on integrating humor in classrooms have revealed its positive impact on instructional efficiency and learners' psychological well-being. Chiasson (2002) contended that humor is a vital communicative attitude that characterizes effective teachers. McNeely (2016) reveals that humor fuels engagement and helps students learn. Some other studies indicated that humor also contributes in creating an open communication climate in the classroom (Fadel & Al-Bargi, 2018).

A study was conducted by Lu'mu, et al. (2023) on the effect of humor on teacher-student relationship quality (TSRQ) and student engagement. The results confirmed the mediating role of TSRQ and concluded that the sense of humor positively presided over the relationship between perceived related humor and TSRQ, as well as perceived related humor and student engagement.

Another study was conducted by Weisi and Mohammadi (2023) to investigate the effectiveness of the use of humor by EFL teachers in a private language institute in the context of Iran. The results indicated that using humor in classes acts as a relaxing, comforting, and tension reducing device. Also, it increases student interest and enjoyment, enhances learners' concentration and motivation, and improves the quality of learning.

Students appear to have a strong desire for entertainment, not just in their engagement with social media and technology, but also in their approach towards education (Dotson, 2016). Recently, Bahous, et al. (2011) have reported that motivating Lebanese EFL students to develop in the target language seems quite complex. In another study, Bacha and Bahous (2011) added that their motivation is highly affected by their different attitudes towards foreign language. Accordingly, instructors must strive to positively impact students' attitudes by providing learners with opportunities to interact freely (Ghaith, 2003) and to overcome anxiety since it may hinder their abilities to learn English (Krashen, 1987). Nonetheless, the related literature and research indicates that no studies have been conducted on the instructor's and the students' perception on the use of humor in higher education in Lebanon.

This study aims to scrutinize the attitudes of university EFL students and the opinions of EFL instructors on the use of humor in higher education in Lebanon. It also aims to describe the EFL instructors' experiences in employing different forms of humor and the students' perspectives on its potent pedagogical roles in EFL university classes in Lebanon.

Statement of the Problem

Learners in different contexts may face a swarm of academic stress and anxiety towards the subject matter being taught, and thus they may feel demotivated and resist active participation. A study, conducted in 2015 by the Center of Research and Development (CRDP) in Lebanon, indicated that students demonstrate lack of motivation when studying English and tend to graduate with minimal command of the English language. Later, Komayha, et al. (2018) investigated the factors that affected students' motivation in the Lebanese context in EFL classrooms and found that the teachers' instructional strategies and practices is one of them. They recommended that teachers should help their learners to find motivation in the areas where they do not expect. With due consideration of all previously noted factors, some instructors tried to overcome these challenges and spice up their lectures by exploiting many trends, of which humor is a part of. Despite the overall high level of agreement on the potent roles of integrating humor in classroom, there was a clear indication that the actual use of humor was somehow limited (Huss & Eastep, 2016). Thus, some perceive it as undesirable and ineffective.

Literature Review

Humor is a phenomenon that can be viewed from different points of view depending on its specific context of use. Banas, et al. (2011) considered it as an intentional message that yields laughter and amusement through incongruous meanings. Instructors' use of humor has been linked repeatedly to positive functions in general educational contexts, such as higher instructional effectiveness (Englert, 2010; Wanzer, 2002), improved perceptions of the teacher (Scott, 1976), higher teacher evaluations (Bryant, et al., 1980), enhanced quality of the student-teacher relationship (Welker, 1977), and affective learning (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999), including lower student anxiety and more relaxed classroom environment (Neuliep, 1991).

Humor is also identified as verbal and non-verbal or a combination of both. Verbal or word-based humor type that plays an important role in EFL classes includes wordplays, funny stories, puns, content related jokes, comic irony, metaphor, hyperbole, metonymy, riddles, funny examples/stories, etc. (Baysac, 2017). Examples of non-verbal or slapstick types of humor comprise funny facial expressions, gestures, and making faces. Combined verbal and nonverbal forms may include impersonation, parody, satire, monologue, and skit (Hativa, 2001). Numerous studies have investigated the types of humor and their potent roles when employed by teachers in the classroom (Aylor & Oppliger, 2003; Bryant & Zillman, 1988; Davies & Apter, 1980; Frymier & Wanzer, 1999; Frymier & Weser, 2001; Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Sadowski et al., 1994; White, 2001).

Gorham and Christophel (1990) asked learners to record a thorough journal of the humorous actions and words the teachers employed in class, and then sorted them out into 13 categories that range between appropriate and inappropriate humor. A year after, Neuliep (1991) explicitly examined the appropriateness of the humor categories identified by Gorham and Christophel, and confirmed the existence of humor categories. Also, Bryant et al. (1980) and Torok, et al. (2004) examined a group of college students' and teachers' perceptions of typology of classroom humor. They concluded that there are seven appropriate types of humor which range from funny stories, funny comments, jokes, to professional humor, pun, cartoon, and riddles.

A study conducted by St-Amand et al. (2023) used the instructional humor processing theory to find out how different humor subtypes are employed by teachers, such as course-related, course-unrelated, self-disparaging, other-disparaging pertain to students' well-being, sense of belonging, and engagement. Thus, it was concluded that humor in the classroom should be course-related since it supports students' emotional well-being, sense of belonging, and engagement.

Wanzer, et al. (2006), in line with the prior researchers by Bryant et al. (1980), Gorham and Christophel (1990), also asked students to recall and

construct examples of both appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor by their teachers. They identified four broad categories, namely: related humor, unrelated humor, self-disparaging humor, and unplanned humor. For the present investigation, there is an attempt to extend Wanzer's, et al. (2006) research by attempting to elicit instructors' and students' perceptions on appropriate types of humor that were employed and could be employed in EFL classes in a Lebanese university context.

How do university EFL students in Higher Education in Lebanon feel about the use of humor in EFL classes? What are the perceptions of the university students on the potent roles of employing humor in EFL classrooms in Lebanon? What are the university EFL instructors' opinions on the use of humor in EFL classes in Higher Education in Lebanon? How do EFL university instructors employ humor in their classes in Higher Education in Lebanon?

Methodology

According to Halcomb (2018) and Creswell et al. (2011), mixed-method research allows researchers to employ creativity in integrating quantitative and qualitative elements to have better answers to the research questions. In this study, a convergent parallel mixed methods research design was adapted. Hence, both qualitative and quantitative data were assembled and analyzed separately, but the findings were conjointly interpreted. The data for this study were collected from two teacher/student online surveys of two sets of questions each, including closed-ended and open-ended, and four focus group discussions.

1. Sample Selection

The work group of the present research was selected by using convenient sampling technique based on the willingness to participate. A total of 86 EFL students out of 200 and 13 EFL instructors out of 20 from the public university in Lebanon (The Lebanese University) and 4 other private universities (Lebanese International University, Beirut Arab University, Islamic University of Lebanon, and The University of Saint Joseph) enthusiastically participated in the study. They completed two online questionnaires of closed and open ended questions, making the response rate 45%. Willingly, 40 out of the 86 students who responded to the online questionnaire joined two online semi-structured focus group discussions which took place via ZOOM meetings on February 20 and March 1, 2022. Enthusiastically, on March 3, 2022, the 13 EFL instructors who responded to the survey also joined 2 other semi-structured focus group discussions conducted in an informal setting, outside any university premises.

2. Instruments

Comprehensive 3-point Likert-scale questionnaires were designed to elicit the attitudes and opinions of university EFL students and teachers on the use of humor in higher education in Lebanon. As Bolarinwa (2015) noted, it is highly important to validate an adapted questionnaire before making any claims. The development of the questionnaires employed in this study started with a comprehensive literature scan. Among the studies that used a humor questionnaire to investigate its potentials in EFL classrooms were Alduleimi and Aziz (2016), Askildson (2005), Gonulal (2018), Lucas (2005), Mantooth (2010), Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2011), and Wanzer and Frymier (1999).

Necessary changes and edits were employed on these previously used questionnaires to cover a wide range of aspects of classroom humor in university EFL classroom. The final versions of the two questionnaires included a demographic profile part, 10 items for students, and 15 items for instructors. Here, respondents were given three levels of choice ranging from “agree” to “disagree” or “neither agree nor disagree”. The students’ questionnaire was piloted with 10 Lebanese EFL students, and the teachers’ questionnaire was piloted with 5 EFL instructors. To describe the EFL instructors’ experiences in employing different forms of humor and the students’ perspectives on its potent pedagogical roles in EFL university classes in Lebanon, another form of data collection was included. The researcher added to the questionnaires open-ended questions in 2 sets, 6 questions each: one set for instructors and one for students.

Subsequently, the survey questionnaires data were supported with 2 teachers’ focus group discussions which lead to great insights on how they employ the different forms of humor to illustrate any particularity of language in their EFL classes at a university level. Furthermore, two (2) students’ group discussions were held to tell more about their perspectives on the potent roles of humor in university EFL classes.

Data Analysis

For investigating EFL learners’ and instructors’ beliefs and experiences of humor in English language classroom, data generated from the qualitative and quantitative data were tallied, encoded, tabulated, and jointly interpreted using descriptive statistics/statistical analysis.

After conducting the questionnaire data collection phase, statistical analysis has been employed based on the analytical description that appears in the form of charts that Google forms instantaneously create according to the respondents' input on each item.

Additionally, the qualitative data obtained from the focus group discussions were analyzed by the researchers through a phenomenological lens in which descriptions for the common meaning for the participants’ lived

experiences of a concept or a phenomenon were considered (Creswell, 2011). The researchers paid attention to the participants' words and expressions, explored the experiences of each participant, and identified commonalities in the ways they made sense of the concept under investigation.

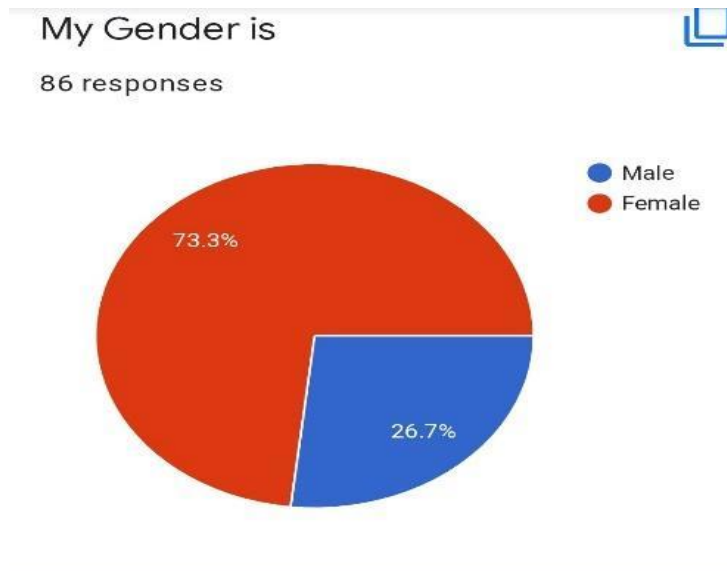
This methodology was quite appropriate since it provided an in-depth description and deeper understanding of Lebanese EFL learners' beliefs about the use of humor in English classes. Furthermore, a conversation analytic approach was used for the analysis.

Results and Findings

1. Students' Survey Analysis

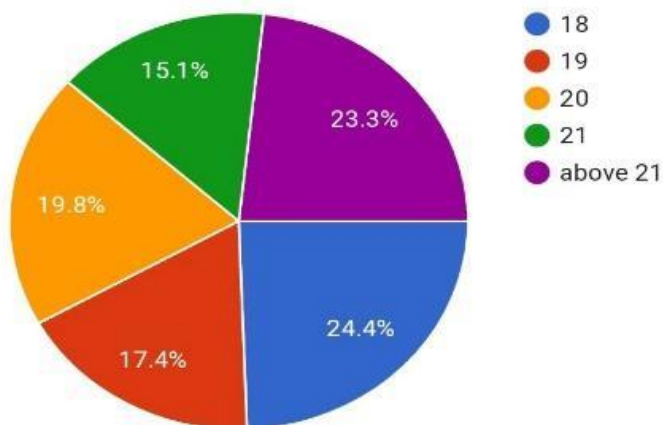
1.1 Demographics

The students' respondents are 73.3 % females and 26.7% males. The age of the students falls into the range of 18 and above: 24.4% 18 years, 17.4% 19 years, 19.8 % 20 years, 15.1% 21 years, and 23.3% above 21. Furthermore, the results show that 89.5% of the respondents are in private universities and 10.5% in the public university in Lebanon. The figures below depict the results.



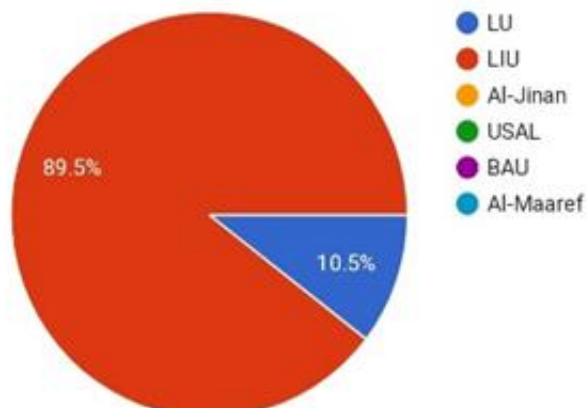
My age is

86 responses



I am a student at

86 responses



1.2 Roles of Humor in Language Learning

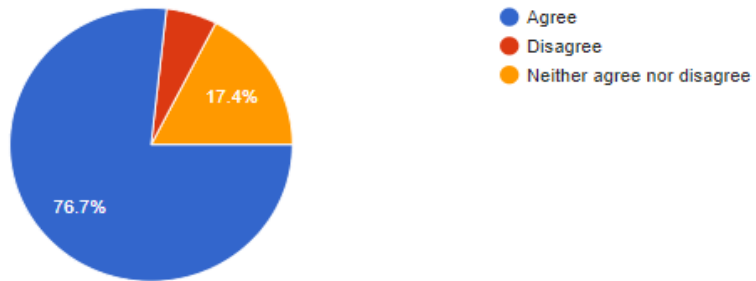
Respondents were asked if their stress level decreases or they feel less anxious when the English language instructor uses humor in class, and their responses were very close.

However, the overwhelming response of 76.7% of the respondents was that humor class decreases the stress level, while only 17.4% neither agree nor

disagree. Moreover, 16.3% disagreed that they feel less anxious when the English language instructor uses humor in class. Thus, these questions assert the importance of humor in reducing learners' anxiety. The figures below depict the results.

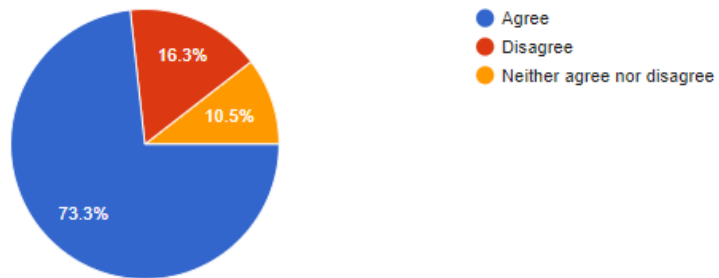
1. I feel my stress level decreases when the English language instructor uses humor in class.

86 responses



2. I feel less anxious when the English language instructor uses humor in class.

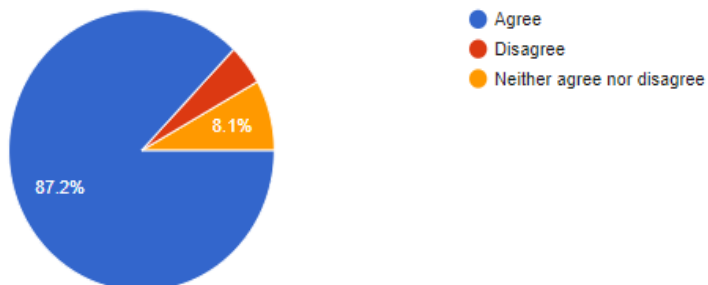
86 responses



When the respondents were asked if they feel more interested and attentive when the English language instructor uses humor in class, the results showed that majority agreed that humor makes them more interested (87.2%) and more attentive (77.9%). This is as opposed to 10.5% who confirmed that they feel more distracted when the English language instructor uses humor in classroom.

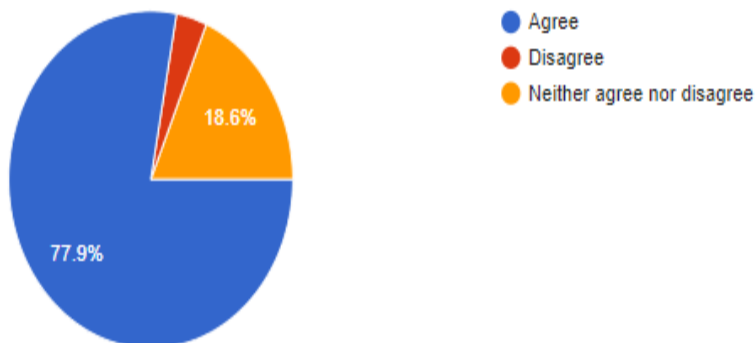
3. I feel more interested in learning English when the English language instructor uses humor in class.

86 responses



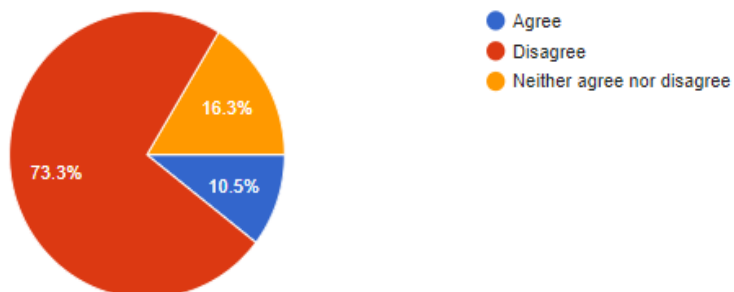
4. I am more attentive in class when the English language instructor uses humor.

86 responses



5. I feel more distracted when the English language instructor uses humor in classroom.

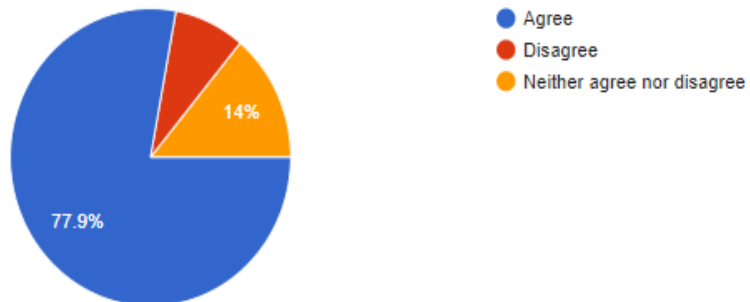
86 responses



Other results depicted the students' responses to the statement "I do not feel afraid to ask questions when the English language instructor uses humor in class". 14% provided a neutral stance to the statement, 8.1% disagreed, while 77.9% approved the claim.

6. I don't feel afraid to ask questions when the English language instructor uses humor in class.

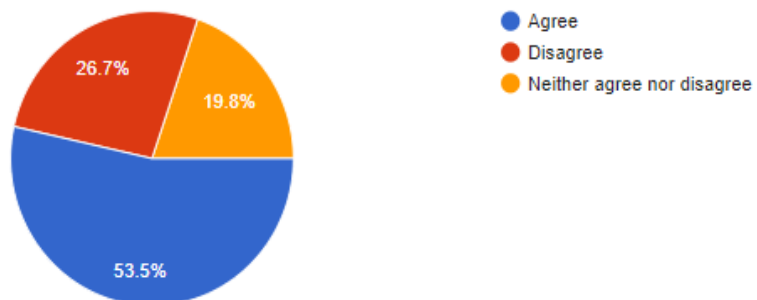
86 responses



While question 7 depicts the responses to the statement "I do not feel afraid of making mistakes in classroom where humor is used frequently", the minority of 19.8% provided a neutral response, followed by 26.7% who disagreed, and 53.5% who agreed.

7. I don't feel afraid of making mistakes in the classroom where humor is used frequently.

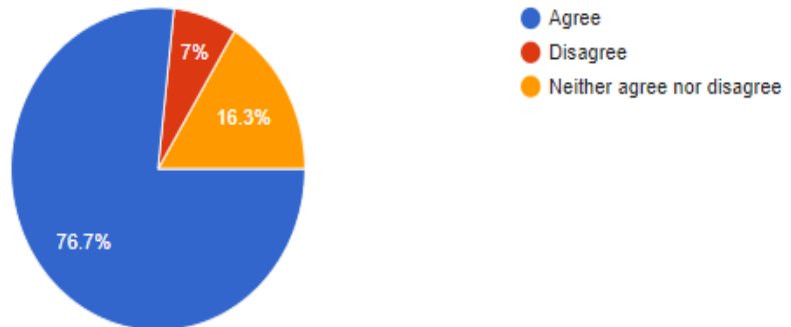
86 responses



When the students were asked whether they feel self-motivated to learn English and are encouraged to attend the class because of class humor, the overwhelming majority agreed. Therefore, this result confirms the potent roles of humor in learning.

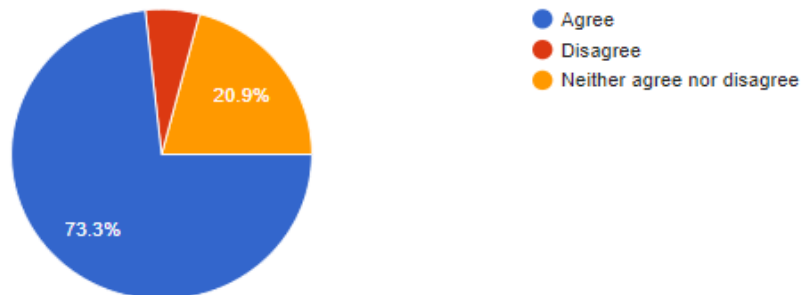
8. I feel encouraged on attending the class when the English language instructor uses humor in class.

86 responses



9. I feel self-motivated to learn English when the English language instructor uses humor in class.

86 responses



Respondents were also asked if they feel more likely to recall the lesson when the English language instructor uses humor in the classroom. 65.1% of the overwhelming majority agreed. Therefore, this result confirms the potent roles of humor in recalling.

10. I feel more likely to recall the lesson when the English language instructor uses humor in the classroom.

86 responses

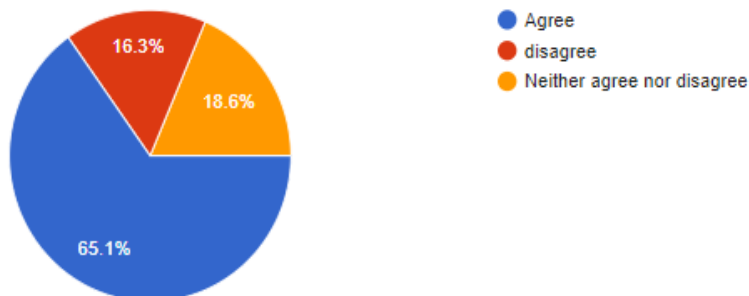


Table 1 shows the percentages of the students' responses regarding their feelings and opinions on the use of humor in EFL classes.

Table 1. Percentages of Students' Feelings and Opinions on the Use of Humor in EFL Classes

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. I feel my stress level decreases when the English language instructor uses humor in class.	76.7	17.4	5.9
2. I feel less anxious when the English language instructor uses humor in class.	73.3	10.5	16.3
3. I feel more interested in learning English when the English language instructor uses humor in class.	87.2	8.1	4.7
4. I am more attentive in class when the English language instructor uses humor.	77.9	18.6	3.5
5. I feel more distracted when the English language instructor uses humor in classroom.	73.3	16.3	10.5
6. I don't feel afraid to ask questions when the English language instructor uses humor in class.	77.9	14	8.1
7. I don't feel afraid of making mistakes in the classroom where humor is used frequently.	53.5	19.8	26.7
8. I feel encouraged on attending the class when the English language instructor uses humor in class.	76.7	16.3	7
9. I feel self-motivated to learn English when the English language instructor uses humor in class.	73.3	20.9	5.8
10. I feel more likely to recall the lesson when the English language instructor uses humor in the classroom.	65.1	18.6	16.3

2. Students' Focus Group Discussion Analysis

For the qualitative data collection, willingly, 40 out of 86 who responded to the online questionnaire joined the 2 online semi-structured focus group discussions which took place via ZOOM meeting on February 20, 2022, and on March 1, 2022.

Through these focus groups, the researchers wanted to gather information about the students' knowledge, attitudes, and recommendations regarding the need for humor as a potent teaching strategy for university students in Lebanon.

Statements were collected from the questions asked to the 40 members of the two focus groups and were interpreted accordingly. The responses are combined in the following outcomes and a sample of what was stated, whether they shared consensus or disagreed, was reported.

Outcome 1. To understand what "Humor" means to them

What is humor? What does the term "class humor" mean?

- Humor is the use of some funny words or words to change the atmosphere of the class and give some energy to the students.
- Humor means making fun in the class, telling a joke, watching a funny video, or telling a funny story.
- Humor is the quality of being funny and amusing. Class humor is when a teacher who makes appropriate jokes during the lesson or relates a certain concept to something funny. Of course not in sensitive times like tests, but when the time is right. Also, and most importantly, class humor has its limits.
- It is a way to add a fun dimension to education so that the student is drawn to the course. Thus, he/she does not feel bored and falls in love with continuing the lesson until the end.
- Humor is a kind of fun that makes anyone attractive. Class humor is used to make one enjoy their class and subject.
- When the class is not as serious and when the instructor is funny and does not take it too seriously, this does not make students too shy to ask and participate.
- When the students or the instructor are not stiff or strict, and they allow themselves to throw a polite joke every now and then to make almost everyone laugh; in addition, to relieve some stress and anxiety that students may have.
- Humor is anything that causes amusement and makes sense of fun.
- Class humor means that the instructor uses humor in order to make the class more energetic with a calm atmosphere.

- Humor uses jokes as a means of getting hard information across. Also, it means to be sarcastic about the information that is hard, which makes it to be easily remembered.
- Humor involves using some funny notes, or telling funny stories related to the lesson, in addition to avoiding being strict or boring.

Outcome 2. To check if humor in class promotes better understanding
Which class environment promotes better understanding: humorous or serious? Why?

- Humorous because students do not pay attention all the time; they need some time for a break to laugh and then they continue studying. The instructor will be loved when they use humor in the class, and students will not be afraid of anything in the class. They will say, “it is ok if I make a mistake; the teacher is very good with us.”
- I think humorous because students feel stress-free. When the environment is serious, students focus on trying not to make any mistakes, thus pressuring themselves too much. Learning does not have to be serious and boring.
- Of course, humorous, because it relieves stress.
- Humorous because it creates a positive classroom atmosphere and it breaks down barriers.
- Both should be presented because at some point some students get bored and need a funny moment to recharge.
- Both promote learning, but a humorous environment may help the students feel more comfortable in the class and makes them like the course which leads them to attending, participating with the instructor, and feeling more comfortable when asking or answering questions.
- Both at the same time, because seriousness keeps us on track, and humor relieves stress and anxiety
- A class should be a mixture of both. If a class is totally humorous, then students might not take the class seriously or they might focus on jokes more than the lesson; yet, if the class is only serious, it might become so boring. So a bit of both worlds is the best choice.
- Serious. While a bit of humor never hurts but seriousness in class aids in class activities, learning, understanding, and detecting problems if present, in addition to saving time.
- Being serious makes the class more organized by warning students to the limits of the class they are attending.

However, the majority agreed that there is a need to use humor in classes to have better understanding. Few reported that being serious aids in learning,

delivering class activities, and saving time. Thus, it fulfills the purpose of organization and management.

Outcome 3. To find out if humor is a communicative and learning device or a disturbing tool that leads to a waste of time

From your experience, is humor a communicative and learning device or a disturbing tool that leads to a waste of time?

- According to my experience, I feel interested in the course when the instructor uses humorous communications because it removes the stress and anxiety of the students and improves their participation, creativity, and memory.
- I think that humor is a communicative and learning device since it allows the students to feel more comfortable in the class; thus, they can concentrate more.
- In my opinion, I think that humor is a communicative and learning device since it enhances the students' confidence, so they would ask more questions about the subject without any hesitation.
- It can help in drawing the attention of the students and making them concentrate with the teacher knowing that there is time for both humor and studying. Sure it needs to be controlled by the teacher so he/she will not lose control over the class.
- It is a communicating and learning device that takes the student away for a few seconds from the "normal studying scene" into a safer environment where communication with the teacher is enhanced.
- It is a communicative and learning device that improves the concentration and learning in class.
- In my opinion, humor is a communicative and learning device because when the students are happy during the session, this will encourage them to pay more attention.
- No, I think that humor is a communicative and learning device because I see that being serious will break my concentration and block my thinking.
- Humor is a communicative and learning device. It soothes the relationship between the teacher and the students. It is a win-win situation.
- It is a communicative and learning device because, simply back in school, the classes that were humorous were my favorite and I did well in those classes unlike the classes that were strict.

- Our instructor knows exactly when to put her humorous sense, and that made me love the session and have a main cause to improve in English language.
- For me, humor is a communication tool that breaks down barriers and obstacles between the teacher and the students; thus, the students feel comfortable in asking questions instead of feeling shy. This helps in transmitting all the ideas to all the students. In addition to that, the students' love for the teacher adds to their love for the subject, and this is what jokes and humor make where they strengthen the relationship between them. So, humor is a communicative and learning device.
- For me, humor is a device to break the boredom of the individuals and restore their focus. Many times, people get strayed if they receive a lot of information at once. A small joke from time to time brings them back to talk and focus.

Few reported that humor sometimes is a disturbing tool since it hinders the concentration of students and blocks thinking. It might become like a habit for them, and everything the teacher says might be perceived as a joke. Consequently, this will hinder them from learning.

**Outcome 4. To check if humor increases self-motivation and engagement
Do you feel self-motivated and more engaged to learn English when the English language instructor uses humor in class? Why?**

- It can encourage an atmosphere of openness, develop students' divergent thinking, improve their retention of the presented materials, and garner respect for the teacher.
- Yes, of course. Humans tend to be attracted to whatever lightens them up, so I believe I would feel self-motivated if the instructor uses humor but again to a certain extent; the instructor should not overdo it.
- Of course! Especially when it comes to language learning where we are trying to adapt to a foreign accent. I myself do not like boring people and routine or even sitting in places for a long time. As such, when the teacher uses humor in teaching, he/she adds some fun and attraction to the course, allowing us to follow to the end without any boredom. We make a lot of mistakes, so we need a cool environment.
- Actually, yes, I feel comfortable and confident when asking and discussing in class. The English language is highly important. For instance, it contains rich information and grammar, making it a bit complicated. Therefore, it should be taught in a simple and smooth manner. Additionally, there should be discussions and interactions with the instructor and classmates. If the instructor is too serious,

students may not engage in learning English and might prefer not to talk because they fear making mistakes while speaking. However, on the topic of making mistakes while speaking, instructors who use humor sometimes make fun of these mistakes, which can be considered as bullying. Students who made mistakes may feel bullied and sad.

- When students start learning a new language, the teacher should employ various methods to connect them with the material. One of these approaches involves using humor. However, it is not necessary to use it all the time. This method attracts students to learn the language because they perceive the teacher as approachable, rather than constantly serious. This signifies the teacher's pride in their students.

Therefore, the majority agreed that humor increases self-motivation and engagement.

Outcome 5. To find out if humor improves the ability to retain/remember information

Does humor improve your ability to retain/remember information?

Explain.

- Humor will help me, as a student, to remember the information better. The jokes or funny notes used during teaching will stick in my mind alongside the information, making it more memorable compared to traditional and boring teaching methods.
- Yes, when I recall the funny moments from a class with a humorous atmosphere, the entire information explained during that class comes back to my mind.
- Yes, it does. Humor is more easily recalled by students than the learned information itself. So, students may unconsciously use this to remember the given information by recollecting that moment or remembering what was happening at that time.
- Yes! Jokes are easier to remember than a theory. Thus, if a theory is presented in a fun way, the chances of forgetting it are almost nil.
- Yes, of course, since we remember funny situations easily.
- Yes, sometimes. When I am studying, I start remembering what the instructor said, so I never forget it. In addition, I share a joke or something funny that happened in class with my friends or parents.
- Yes, humor improves our ability to remember information and certain situations. For example, I remember what we learned in that situation.
- Yes, because the humor effect is a cognitive bias that causes people to remember information better when they perceive it as humorous. For

example, when students are taught a new concept in a humorous way, such as through a funny story, they are generally more likely to remember that concept compared to when it is taught in a non-humorous manner.

- Humor activates the brain's reward system, stimulating goal-oriented motivation and long-term memory. This means that humor can enhance retention in students of all ages.

Outcome 6. To explore the humorous activities that university instructors employ in EFL classes

Think of a teacher whom you find funny and amusing. Recall surprise communication/ inconsistencies / spontaneous humor/humorous questions/humorous examples/humorous games/riddles/comics/content related jokes/ humorous video clips/wordplays/funny examples, stories, or experiences or any action that occurred in EFL classes and provoked amusement.

- I can recall a teacher named Maryam. She was young and funny, always incorporating bits of humor into her PowerPoint presentations to keep the students engaged. She also frequently referenced lines from English and Arabic movies, and she had a flexible personality that could handle a light-hearted joke without feeling offended.
- In an English class, the teacher once shared a true story from her private life, which made me more immersed in the class and the story. She told us that her husband, one day before leaving the house, accidentally took the first dose of medicine for his illness (a non-serious illness). As a result, he felt nauseous on his way home and got lost on the way. He had to call his wife to come and pick him up because he couldn't open his eyes properly.
- There's an instructor who always begins every class with a riddle. Additionally, when someone appears distracted or daydreaming, he calls their attention in a way that makes them laugh. He does not shout at students or scare them; he simply uses humor at the beginning, during, and at the end of the class.
- I had a teacher who consistently started each session by presenting a fun riddle for us to solve. Another teacher encouraged us to act out the actions and facial expressions of characters in a story we were reading. Yet, another teacher would share content-related jokes to capture our attention.
- The famous pun involving the numbers 789: "Why is six afraid of seven? Because Seven Eight (sounds like 'ate') Nine." This was also used as an example of homophones in linguistics.

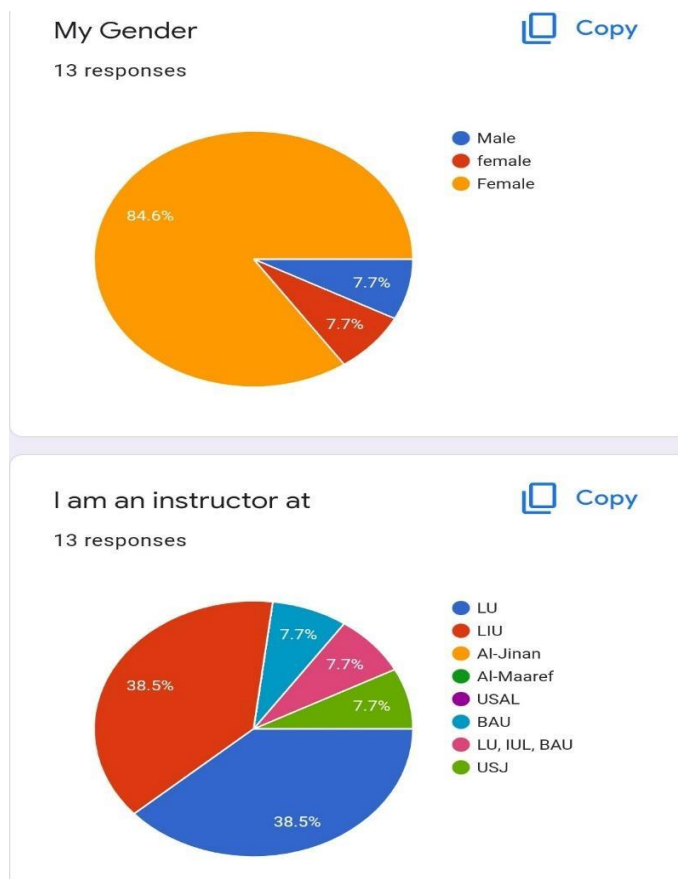
- While reading the question, the concept of the "burger" bumped into my mind. Dr. Nadine's explanation was structured like a burger, with supporting details and a thesis statement, and so on. I will always remember this "burger" analogy in every piece of writing I create, and it will bring a smile to my face.

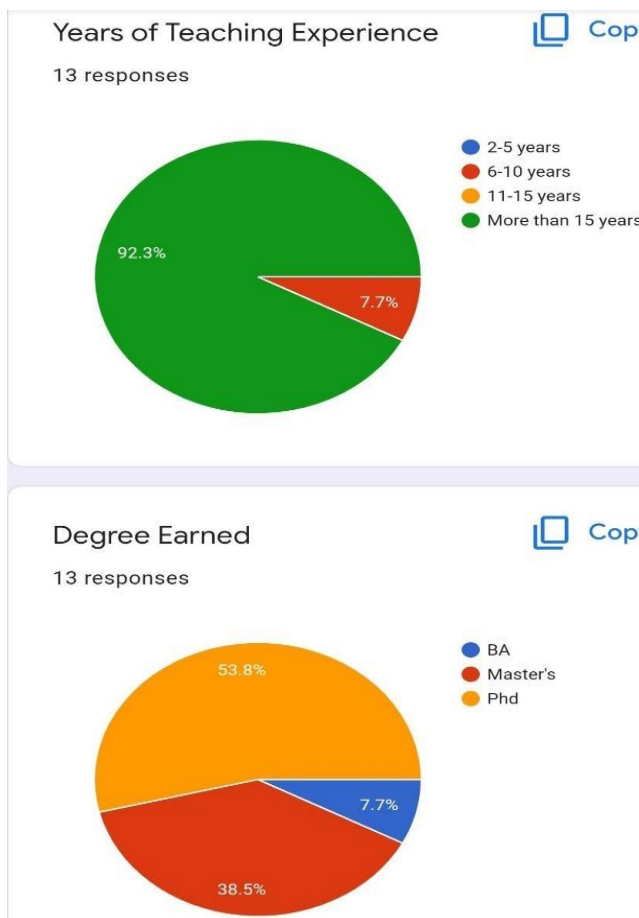
Consequently, almost all participants are well aware that teachers try to infuse humor when teaching.

3. Instructors' Survey Analysis

3.1 Demographics

The results show that the respondents are 84.6% female instructors and 7.7% male instructors. 38.5% instruct at a public university, while 45.12% instruct at private universities in Lebanon. 53.8% are PhD holders, 38.5% earned their master's degree, and 7.7% are BA holders. 92.3% have been instructing for more than 15 years, while only 7.7% have 11 to 15 years of experience.





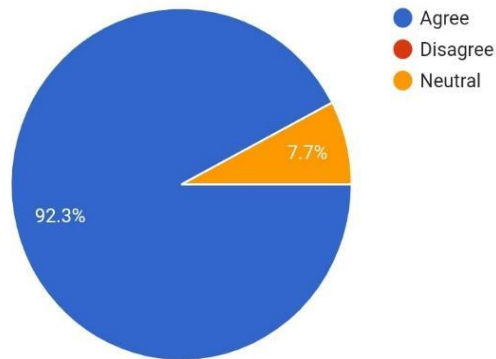
3.2 Roles of Humor in Language Learning

Respondents were asked to state if humor is a fundamental part of their teaching strategy in EFL classes and to state if humor is a vital communicative attitude that characterizes an effective teacher. The results show that 92.3% agree that humor is a fundamental part of the teaching strategy in EFL class and is a vital communicative attitude that characterizes an effective teacher, while 7.7% have neutral responses. The figures below depict the results.

1. Humor is a fundamental part of my teaching strategy in EFL class.



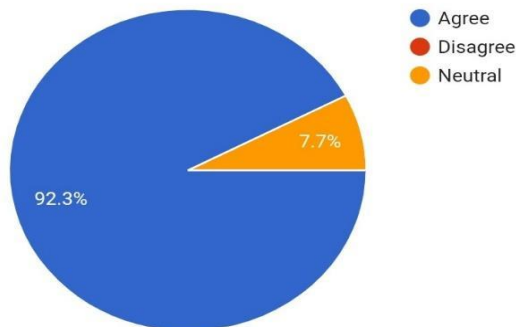
13 responses



2. Humor is a vital communicative attitude that characterizes effective teacher.



13 responses



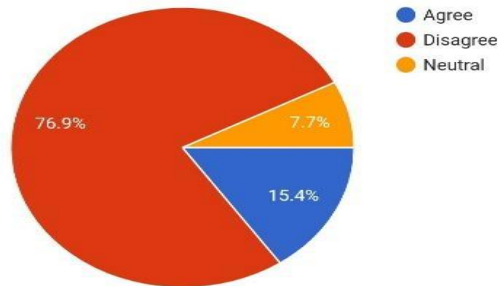
When the respondents were asked if humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education is virtually a waste of time and a form of distraction that if used too frequently or inappropriately might cause learners to think that an important topic is trivial, only 15.5% agreed that it wastes time and 7.7%

considered it as a form of distraction. However, the majority agreed that it neither wastes time nor distracts students. The overwhelming majority of 84.6% affirmed that if it is used too frequently or inappropriately in the EFL class, it might cause learners to think that an important topic is trivial.

3. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education is virtually a waste of time.



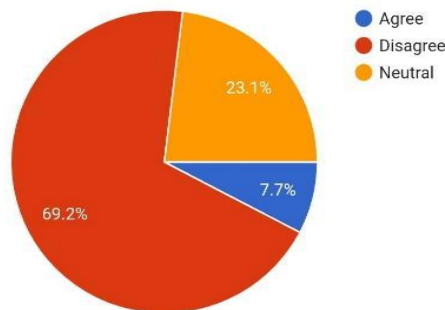
13 responses



4. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education is a form of distraction.



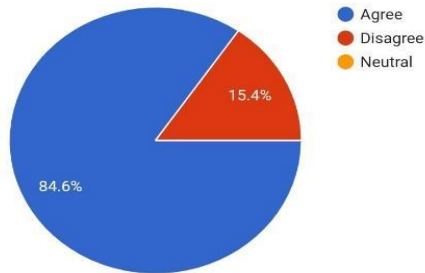
13 responses



5. Humor that is used too frequently or inappropriately in EFL class might cause learners to think that an important topic is trivial.



13 responses

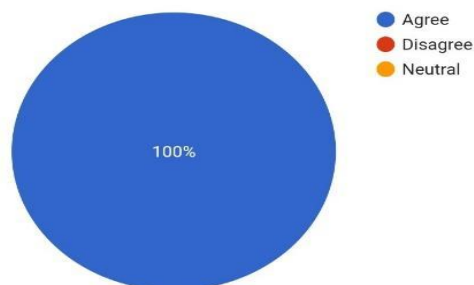


Respondents then were asked if humor in EFL classrooms in higher education creates an open communicative climate for students that increases cohesion, captures interest in subject matter, increases students' attention, and reduces anxiety and tension. Hence, the overwhelming response of 100% agreed that it aids in creating a communicative climate, increases cohesion, and reduces anxiety and tension while dealing with difficult material. Moreover, the majority of 92.3% affirmed that it increases students' attention, while 76.9% agreed that it captures interest in subject matter.

6. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education creates an open communicative climate for students.



13 responses



7. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education increases cohesion and leads to a more meaningful relationship.



13 responses

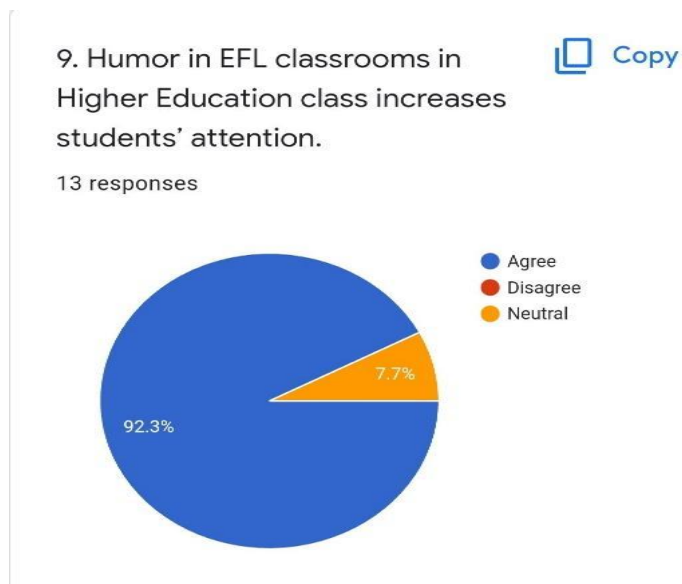
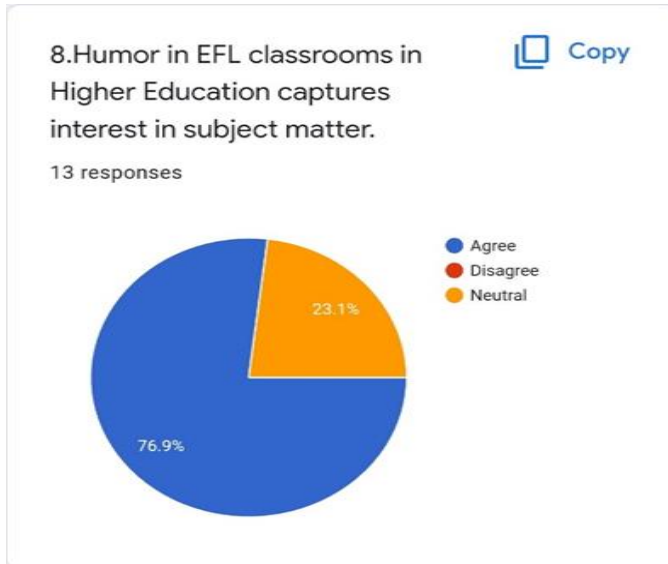


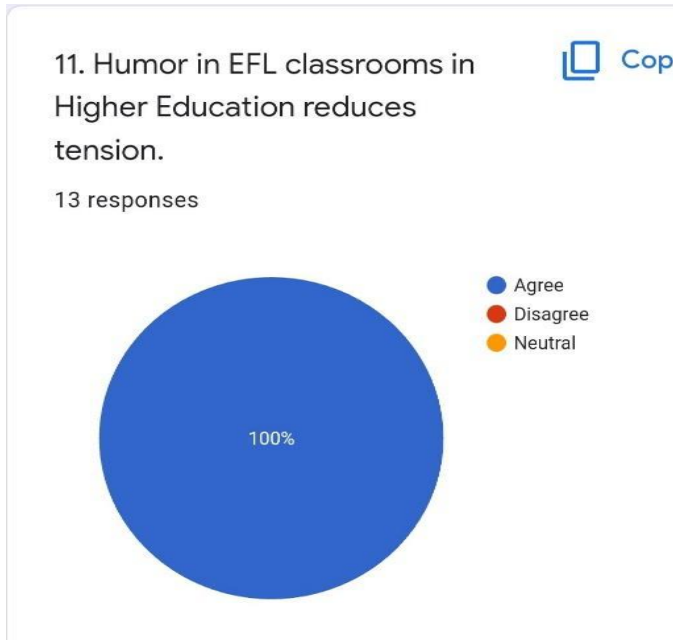
10. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education reduces anxiety in dealing with difficult material.



13 responses







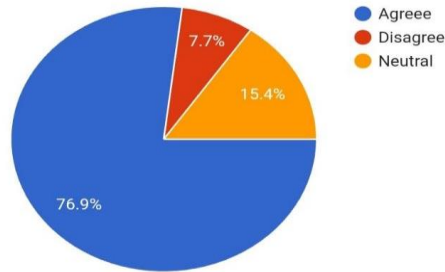
Subsequently, other results depicted the instructors' responses to the assumption that humor in EFL classrooms fosters the students' critical thinking and assists in retention. Only 46.2% agreed that it encourages critical thinking, while 38.5% provided a neutral stance to the statement. Regarding the impact of humor on retention, the majority of 76.9% agreed that it assists in memorizing the information being presented, while 7.7% disagreed. The figures below depict the results.



13. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education class assists in retention.



13 responses



Furthermore, when asked if the use of humor in higher education class makes the instructor more approachable to students and yields higher evaluation to the instructor, 61.5% agreed, while 38.5% provided a neutral stance. However, none disagreed. Surprisingly, 92.3% affirmed that they have not received any training on how to use humor in EFL classes.

14. The use of humor in higher education EFL class makes me more approachable to students and yields higher instructor evaluation.



13 responses

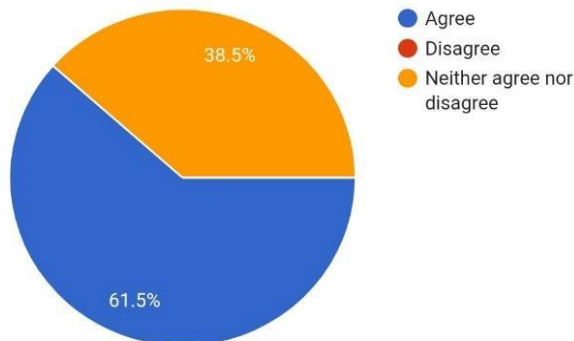




Table 2 shows the percentages of the students' responses regarding their feelings and opinions on the use of humor in EFL classes.

Table 2. Percentages of Instructors' Perspectives on the Use of Humor in EFL Classes

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
1. Humor is a fundamental part of my teaching strategy in EFL class.	92.3	7.7	0
2. Humor is a vital communicative attitude that characterizes effective teacher.	92.3	7.7	0
3. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education is virtually a waste of time.	76.9	7.7	15.4
4. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education is a form of distraction.	69.2	23.1	7.7
5. Humor that is used too frequently or inappropriately in EFL class might cause learners to think that an important topic is trivial.	84.6	0	15.4
6. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education creates an open communicative climate for students.	100	0	0
7. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education increases cohesion and leads to a more meaningful relationship.	100	0	0
8. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education captures interest in subject matter.	76.9	23.1	0
9. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education class increases students' attention.	92.3	7.7	0

10. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education reduces anxiety in dealing with difficult material.	100	0	0
	100	0	0
11. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education reduces tension.	100	0	0
	46.2	38.5	15.4
12. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education class encourages critical thinking.	76.9	15.4	7.7
13. Humor in EFL classrooms in Higher Education class assists in retention.			
14. The use of humor in higher education EFL class makes me more approachable to students and yields higher instructor evaluation.			

4. Instructors' Focus Group Discussion Analysis

For the qualitative data collection, willingly, 13 instructors who responded to the online questionnaire joined the 2 online semi-structured focus group discussions which took place via ZOOM meeting on February 20, 2022, and on March 3, 2022.

Through these focus groups, the researchers wanted to gather information about the instructors' knowledge, attitudes, and recommendations regarding the need for humor as a potent teaching strategy for university students in Lebanon.

Statements were collected from the questions asked to the 13 members of the two focus groups and were interpreted accordingly. The responses are combined in the following outcomes and a sample of what was stated, whether they shared consensus or disagreed, was reported.

Outcome 1. To understand what "Humor" means to the instructors What does humor mean to you? Are you familiar with the term classroom humor or instructional humor? Elaborate.

- Humor is a way to break the ice with students, and it should be used in specific contexts.
- Humor is the act of drawing the student's attention by using funny expressions.
- Humor creates positive vibes and reduces tension.
- Humor means finding amusement and the ability to enjoy funny things, as well as seeing the humorous side of a situation.
- Humor is a dynamic context that utilizes fun words/ expressions between students and teachers.
- It is a way to make students enjoy learning. It could reduce anxiety and capture student's attention.
- Humor allows one to turn tension into relaxation.

- You might smile if a student says something funny, and if something in the text relates to a humorous situation, you can share it with students if appropriate.
- Incorporating gamified elements into lessons, such as simulations and role-play, and personalizing topics.
- Humor in language classes can be employed but not excessively. Yes, it is a means of capturing students' attention and reinforcing information because when used appropriately, it helps students remember important concepts.
- Humor is a way that leads to a positive class room environment.
- I admire humorous teachers from whom I have learned a lot. I used to enjoy their classes, so I took them as role models and followed their footsteps. Also, from my experience, I noticed that students pay more attention as humor draws their focus back to the discussion. Laughter serves as a stress reliever and fosters metonymy...
- Making a convenient class atmosphere for learning

Outcome 2. To understand their evaluation of “Humor”

Based on your experience, do you consider the use of humor in higher education as a disturbing tool that leads to a waste of time or disrespect? Provide examples of instances where you believe humor was inappropriately used in your EFL class.

- I have not encountered such a case.
- Humor is inappropriate in case it changes to sarcasm.
- The use of inappropriate or offensive humor can lead to disrespect and a waste of time.
- It does not lead to distraction if the instructor is in control and is capable of redirecting the class.
- It should be appropriately used in the right place for the right objective.
- Humor is important to change the serious mood in the class.
- When used appropriately and in a relevant context, humor is not a distraction. However, if a student uses impolite language to elicit laughter from their peers, it is considered inappropriate.
- This depends on the type of learners.
- When used appropriately, humor is not considered a waste of time. On the contrary, it fosters a classroom environment with a low affective filter, and its proper usage positively influences the relationship between students and teachers.
- No, it is not.

- Indeed, it does. If humor is used ineffectively or becomes uncontrollable, it can be disruptive. I have had teachers who overdid it, making excessive jokes and wasting time on trivial matters, which was truly annoying. When students become excessively humorous, it can also lead to distractions. An instructor should employ humor effectively and with a clear purpose.
- Humor has nothing to do with disrespect.

Outcome 3. To understand their attitude of “Humor” in creating a conducive learning environment

From your experience, do you consider humor in higher education EFL classes a communicative strategy that creates a more conducive learning environment? Why?

- Humor breaks the ice and pushes students to express themselves freely.
- Yes, it is a good tool to break the ice.
- Of course, it facilitates communication and breaks the ice.
- Yes, it would enhance students' learning.
- Students require a comfortable classroom environment in every course, especially in English classes, where maintaining a low affective filter is essential for facilitating higher language acquisition.
- It depends on how humor is utilized and incorporated into the teaching and learning process.
- Yes, it helps students to feel relaxed.
- Yes, because students see you as a human being sharing with them jokes and funny personal experiences.
- Yes, because it encourages students to be involved as they share real life experiences.
- Absolutely, I refer to this as 'hot cognition.' Using humor effectively and at the appropriate moment can help convey specific ideas to students and make them more memorable. However, when overused, it can become a hindrance. Additionally, not all teachers know when or how to employ humor, which can be a concern. The teacher's personality is part and parcel.
- Of course. Students will feel that their instructors are close to them.
- Sure. It opens up opportunities for more discussion in a more comfortable way. This improves communication.
- It highly does.

Outcome 4. To understand their attitudes towards “Humor” as a strategy in promoting students’ learning

From your experience, do you consider humor in higher education EFL classes a strategy that aids in learning and promotes your students’ understanding and performance? Why?

- Incidents with funny encounters are more memorable, and humor motivates students to participate more and take risks.
- Yes, it aids in making the lesson less stressful.
- Yes.
- Yes, because when students find that the ambiance is funny, they tend to pay more attention to the subject and remember it in the long run.
- While it may have some influence on a small scale, it is not a decisive factor.
- It is possible. It could enhance learning and make it more engaging for students. While I don't necessarily do it intentionally, I strive to make learning enjoyable by incorporating games that allow students to experience humor.
- It may vary as students have different learning styles.
- When you make them laugh and feel relaxed, they will learn much better.
- Again, not necessarily. It might not work all the time with all learning styles.
- I would not call it a strategy. It is rather a means to break the routine. It makes some ideas memorable.
- Yes, as it eases the process of teaching and learning.
- Yes, I do. It is a strategy to draw attention, to involve students, to kill boredom, etc...
- It does as it is an ice breaking tool.

Outcome 5. To understand how they explain the lesson in a humorous way

What do you do in your class to explain the course material in a humorous way?

- Reflect it to daily life situations
- Jokes
- I smile and make students feel that I care for them. We even laugh at certain matters.
- I tell a joke related to the topic under study.
- Short stories, anecdotes and/or light jokes.

- I start with a riddle that is based on a funny story or hilarious cards (Why if...).
- Give funny examples.
- Sometimes, I ask tricky questions or tell them about a funny answer an ex-student had given.
- Anecdotes, jokes, riddles, images and stickers, relevant humorous movies, cartoon strips and captions
- I might share a humorous incident from my own life to illustrate that the theory I am explaining is meaningful and relevant to real-life experiences. My purpose in using humor is to capture their attention and make the concept more memorable so that they can easily recall it later.
- Maybe I can tell them a joke or something funny.
- At times, I spontaneously take on the role of a character from a novel or real life to engage students. I may share a funny personal experience, encourage students to share theirs, make a relevant joke, or provide a humorous comment. Sometimes, it happens by accident.
- I encourage students to take on the role of explaining, and eventually, some of them may become teachers themselves. This, in itself, fosters a humorous atmosphere.

Outcome 6. To know whether they use humorous examples in their classes
In your class, have you used humorous examples, humorous games, riddles, content related jokes, humorous video clips, funny stories, or any action to illustrate grammar, vocabulary, or any other particularity of the language. Provide examples.

- I have utilized humorous videos and prompted students to use the present continuous tense to describe actions taking place in those videos.
- Riddles
- Yes, especially funny stories as an introduction
- Funny stories and jokes
- Not really
- Yes, I have used cards with humorous questions like: 'Would you rather be too short to hide in holes or too tall to see everything from above? Would you rather lick the bathroom floor or eat from rotten garbage...?'
- I have a list of humorous 'Would you rather' scenarios.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study findings, along with the academic references, strongly support the idea of using humor effectively as a tool to aid learning in the classroom. Consistent with studies published by Weisi and Mohammadi (2023), Lu'mu et al. (2023), Baysac (2017), Banas, et al. (2011), Lems (2011), Skinner (2010), Garner (2006), and James (2004), the overall qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data indicated that Lebanese EFL instructors and students have largely positive attitudes towards integrating humor as an operative pedagogical tool. Hence, they affirmed that it is a fundamental part of the teaching strategies in EFL higher education classes that characterizes effective teachers.

In line with Chiasson (2002), who argued that humor is a crucial communicative aspect defining effective teachers, and McNeely (2016), who asserted that humor enhances engagement and aids student learning, the findings support the notion that humor is not a trivial communicative element but rather vital, as it neither wastes time nor distracts. Nonetheless, it creates an open communication climate, increases cohesion, captures students' interest in the subject matter, boosts attention, and reduces anxiety and tension. Furthermore, the study showed that the use of humor makes the instructor more approachable and yields better instructor evaluation. In addition, the findings also revealed the need to train teachers to use humor artfully.

It is anticipated that the outcomes of this study will fill in the gap and provide teachers, educators, and training program designers with a well-informed basis for understanding the potentials of using humor in Lebanese university EFL classrooms from the instructors' and the students' perspectives. The study is also expected to encourage teachers at the university level to reconfigure the ways they interact with students and, thus, undergo a shift from the instruction paradigm to the learning paradigm that includes instructional humor. By so doing, curriculum developers and material designers have to provide materials which include some humorous elements.

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Human Studies: Appropriate approvals were obtained from the participants of the relevant educational institutions and the ethical guidelines were followed.

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