

A Double-Edged Sword of Humour: Students' Perspectives on Teachers' Use of Humour in EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Humour has varied functions in teaching and learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), particularly in enhancing classroom instruction. This study investigates EFL students' perspectives on their lecturers' use of humour, focusing on students from private universities. The study employed a mixed-method approach, gathering data through questionnaires from 122 students and conducting in-depth interviews with 5 students. This diverse sample included learners aged 18 to 45 years, offering insights into a broad age range. Findings indicate that humour in the EFL classroom positively influences students' learning experiences. It contributes to a relaxed learning atmosphere, fosters closer connections between students and lecturers, and enhances engagement with the material. However, it's crucial that the humour aligns with the adult status of the students, indicating a need for sensitivity and appropriateness. The study underscores humour's dual role in EFL education, akin to a double-edged sword with both positive and negative impacts. From the perspective of private university students, appropriate humour is key to effective learning, particularly for adult learners. The findings suggest that while humour can be a powerful pedagogical tool, it must be employed judiciously, considering the varied age and backgrounds of the learners. The implications extend to the broader context of EFL education in higher learning, highlighting the importance of lecturer-student dynamics and the careful integration of humour in educational settings.

1. Introduction

The use of humour in the educational setting continues to be a subject of debate among scholars. They condemn that humour plays multiple roles in the instruction and acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL). It encompasses strategic and pedagogical functions that support the teaching process (Petitjean & González-Martínez, 2015). Bell and Pomerantz (2016) define *humour* as 'a form of language play that evokes a sense of mirth' (p. 187), while Wanzer et al. in Minoo et al. (2021) elaborate that "humour within the academic context encompasses all elements perceived as amusing or enjoyable by the teacher or students" (p. 182). The definitions confirm that humour fosters a sense of amusement and positive effect between teachers and students, which can enhance their interactions within the context of the learning process. When employed pedagogically, humour cultivates student involvement and boosts their motivation and enjoyment of learning. Because of that, the ELF learning objectives can be achieved (Bakar & Kumar, 2019; Jakonen & Evnitskaya, 2020).

Furthermore, humour is a multifaceted communication style involving various components, including a speaker, audience, topic message, context, and feedback (Civikly, 1986, as cited in Bakar & Kumar, 2019). Martin et al. (2003) also identify a multidimensional of humour, especially concerning teacher humour. In this case, humour is acknowledged as having functions like improving oneself or social connections and whether or not using humour is harmful to oneself or others. Both influence the type of humour used and its effect. In line with this, Lovorn and Halloway (2015) observed that humour in the context of higher education 'can serve as an invaluable resource in the context of education' (p. 15). The existence of humour in teaching has been extensively examined through various studies. They encompass diverse perspectives and humour types, making it challenging to draw definitive conclusions. For instance, some research has connected instructors' use of humour to positive student learning outcomes, implying that humour can be an effective classroom communication strategy (Biegs et al., 2019) since the presence of humour in an EFL classroom is closely associated with the individual involved in the

classroom setting, namely the instructors and students. When instructors use humour in the classroom, it contributes to the establishment of a positive learning environment characterized by enhanced student engagement and motivation for the process (Daumiller et al., 2019). In this circumstance, the use of humour in teaching has been associated with improved perceptions of teachers, stronger student-teacher relationships, higher teaching evaluations, and enhanced affective learning, suggesting that humour can be employed appropriately in educational settings (Biegs et al., 2019; Wanzer et al., 2006; Waring, 2013).

Unfortunately, due to the inherent subjectivity of humour, numerous educational instructors maintain a sceptical stance against including comedic interactions within the classroom setting (Bakar & Kumar, 2019; Bolkan & Goodboy, 2018). The circumstance wherein students lacked respect for their teachers due to the use of humour in teaching was influenced by the personal assumptions held by the teachers, as discussed in the study conducted by Illés and Akcan (2017). Educators perceived the incorporation of humour in instruction as lacking professionalism, discipline, and dignity. As a result, individuals refrained from utilizing humour in speeches, social interactions, and presentations due to apprehension regarding potential perceptions of insignificance, lack of intelligence, or ignorance. Simultaneously, additional scholars in the field of education argue that the endorsement of humour in the process of acquiring a foreign language is excessively optimistic, mainly because there is a dearth of evidence establishing a correlation between the use of humorous techniques by instructors and the actual improvement of students' learning outcomes (Bolkan et al., 2018; Heidari-Shahreza, 2020).

A study conducted by Bolkan et al. (2019) shows the use of integrated humour and contagious humour linking lecturer humour and students' learning process. They investigated how integrated humour affects students' capacity to remember and apply knowledge from learning sessions. The finding indicates that students again exposed to the humorous condition did not perform as well on their examinations as those exposed to the regular cases. Having this result, Bolkan et al. (2019) affirm that using humour in the classroom can help students learn, but it needs to be done in a smart way. When teachers use humour as an example, they should be careful because the students might not fully understand what they are learning. In sum, consecutive humour can keep people from getting bored and boost their drive, but too much humour can make learning harder. Hence, in that circumstance, the effectiveness of teacher humour in classroom engagement heavily depends on how the students perceive and respond to it.

Some researchers from different backgrounds have explored the use of humour in higher education in the EFL classroom. For example, teacher humour is used in Thailand (Forman, 2011; Embalzado & Sajampun, 2020) and Vietnamese (Petraiki & Nguyen, 2016), the USA (Bolkan et al., 2018), New Zealand (Bakar, 2019; Bakar & Kumar, 2019), and China (Tong & Tsung, 2020). Most of the studies focus on the beneficial aspects of the role of humour embedded in the teaching process. Still, no evidence suggests that any previous contextual studies were carried out at a private university. In contrast, the only correlated study was carried out by Yen (2023), whose research focused on private university students. As a result, she found that students employ self-enhancing and affiliate humour as their safe place if appropriately used.

Concerning this study, those studies have not comprehensively uncovered the students' perception of teacher humour used in a private university, particularly in Indonesia. Humour has a double-edged nature, which can be counter-productive if not used correctly. Students at Indonesian private universities are not homogenous in terms of age and maturity. Therefore, classroom discourse should be performed sensibly. Unlike having humour at a lower level of education, i.e., primary or secondary, creating mirth among adult students is not simple (Kruse & Prazak, 2006). In this circumstance, gender differences, age differences, and cultural background play essential roles for adults to deal with sources of laughter (Kruse & Prazak, 2006). Anchor with this situation, it undoubtedly triggers further scientific investigation, particularly in this study context.

Based on this premise, the main objective of this study is to examine private college students' perspectives on educators' use of humour in the context of the learning process in higher education. In particular, this study aims to identify the benefits and disadvantages that can occur with the use of humour during the learning process since humour functions as a double-edged sword. With this study, educators' understanding may increase in maximizing the effective use of humour integrated with language instruction, especially at higher education levels. The study additionally contributes to the field of EFL in Indonesian higher education regarding humour used in the classroom discourse.

2. Literature Review

The present research focuses on students' perspective toward teachers' verbal humour as it provides further insight into the mechanisms by which humour is attained through language utilization in the classroom discourse. The following section will review the concept of humour used by the lecturers and related previous studies concerning to its application in EFL classrooms.

2.1 Humour and Language Play

Humour, whether in real-life or educational settings, can manifest in verbal and non-verbal expressions, such as gestures, looks, and visual aids. Although the definition of humour is still debatable (Alemi et al., 2021; Heidari-Shahreza, 2020; Petraki & Nguyen, 2016; Rianita, 2022), Tong and Tsung (2020) explain that GTVH is a framework that defines humour by emphasizing the semantic and pragmatic substance of amusing utterances and texts rather than their paralinguistic or prosodic elements. The emergence of humour can be identified by the existence of the resolution of incongruity, which is relevant to humorous narratives in diverse styles and situations (Attardo, 1985 in Rianita, 2022). Petraki and Nguyen add that "humour is recognized as one aspect of language play" (p.99). Bell (2011) additionally described humour as a particular mode of communication in which something is said with the intention of amusing.

Meanwhile, according to Weisi and Mohammadi (2023), humour in the classroom is defined as an action executed by any participants (i.e., students or teachers) using linguistic or non-linguistic methods. Having humour in the classrooms can potentially entertain students and teachers, foster a favourable learning atmosphere, and alleviate test-related stress. However, an uneven usage distribution could endanger achieving desired learning results. Also, humour can be a potent tool for relieving tension while augmenting pupils' curiosity and pleasure.

2.2 Research on Humour in EFL Classroom

Research on the use of humour in higher education is essential to identify humour's fundamental characteristics and functions, including its various manifestations, its essential role for teachers, and its profound influence on students. Petraki and Nguyen (2016) conducted one of the studies. They observed the perspectives of Vietnamese English language teachers regarding the incorporation of humour in the classroom environment. Then, they found that teachers understand the importance of humour in fostering interpersonal relationships and show an open attitude toward using humour as a language teaching tool. However, it was noted that the use of humour by these teachers lacked a systematic approach. Even though the teachers often participated in fun activities, their comprehensive research on teacher-created and teacher-supported humour indicates that they usually used humour strategies that did not explicitly focus learners' attention on specific aspects of language (Bell & Pomerantz, 2019).

A study by Olajoke (2013), whose participants were selected from a tertiary institute in Nigeria, uncovered the function of gender-based humour in a classroom. The researcher concluded that humour

significantly influences class activities and also found that the effectiveness of humour in promoting class interactions and its appropriateness depends on students' perceptions and their expressed views regarding the range and diversity of humour used in the classroom. In that case, students' perspectives hold significant sway in determining the suitability of comedy, offering English teachers a valuable framework to steer clear of employing inappropriate forms of humour within their instructional settings. Consequently, she highlighted the potential for educators to employ adaptive measures in their conduct and utilization of humour within the educational setting.

However, in their study, Illés and Akcan (2017) found a different situation. They claim that students in Turkey and Hungary are advised to avoid or stop irrelevant talk, such as joking, because it is considered irrelevant. Irrelevant tone in learning is often seen as evidence of failure in classroom management and lack of teacher control. With classroom management guidelines issued by schools, prospective teachers are educated to acquire good classroom manager skills to prevent undesirable situations, such as students' behaviour engaging in spontaneous and non-serious conversations that they should be able to engage in outside the classroom. This situation differs from Waring et al., (2016) findings, who stated that experienced teachers often use humour, especially the ironic type of humour, to redirect student contributions that they consider "off-task". This aims to promote, organize, and facilitate student-centred communication to make it more meaningful. Similarly, Heidari-Shahreza (2018) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the utilization of verbal humour and language play by EFL teachers in Iranian language teaching settings. The research findings demonstrated the utilization of several micro-level verbal humour strategies. The study additionally revealed that EFL teachers commonly employed puns, allusion, and irony as their primary methods. The most prevalent forms of humour were comedy in-jokes or witty remarks, humour conveyed through visual elements, and humour expressed through bodily movements or gestures.

Daumiller et al. (2019) delineate two distinct features of the utilization of humour by teachers in their instructional practices, namely content-related humour and content-irrelevant humour. The first aspect is to improve the delivery of the educational content by including an appropriate humorous anecdote. Teachers' use of this particular style of humour offers more benefits to students, as it is more practical and has been linked to enhanced academic achievements among students (Wanzer et al., 2010). In contrast, the latter pertains to humour that lacks any association with educational material and humour that is executed by targeting others or oneself. Utilizing this particular humorous approach may be

considered damaging to the overall quality of instruction and is frequently met with student resistance (Liu et al., 2017).

From students' perspectives, the application of humour in the L2 learning process has prominently signified the positive impacts (Ahn, 2015; Bell & Pomerantz, 2012; Daumiller et al., 2019; Petitjean & González-Martínez, 2015). Empirically, Ahn (2015) investigated naturally occurring interaction in a Korean adolescent English immersion program. She indicates that learners might demonstrate their language awareness and pragmatic ability as bilinguals through fun episodes of language usage, particularly those that require simultaneous manipulation of Korean and English. Ahn's (2015) study emphasizes the need to consider the role of comedy not just as a cognitive strategy tool for developing language awareness but as a type of conversation that highlights the specific, pragmatic elements of bilingual encounters.

In line with this, Bell & Pomerantz (2012) initially found out that the significant function of humour in L2 classrooms is as a 'safe house' for learners. Observing humour in a Spanish FL classroom, they identify that students might use this method of communication to build a safe house in order to renegotiate linguistic norms, classroom identities, and power relationships. In this case, although the learners are frequently aware of the symbolic possibilities of language, participation in spontaneous comical acts can provide rich chances for language use and growth that go beyond what is typically available in more strictly controlled settings. Furthermore, actions that would have been considered illegitimate or disruptive in a severe context could be made freely, demonstrating how humour can be used to establish safe havens that transcend time and location. Referring to both studies conducted by Ahn (2015) and Bell & Pomerantz (2012), they suggest that showing humour in L2 classrooms compulsorily affects students' enjoyment of learning foreign languages and simultaneously improves their motivation during their L2 learning development.

Despite the favourable impacts of humour on the effectiveness of L2 learning in the classroom, Bolkan et al. (2018) also show that the placement of humour in the learning process still needs particular attention, especially in higher education settings. They identified the use of humour, which can generally be identified in two ways: contagious humour or integrated humour. The former occurs when the humour used is not closely related to the topic of the instructional lesson, separated from it by time, and can be connected or unrelated to the underlying subject. In contrast, the latter happens when funny information is inserted into the issue of teaching materials and embedded in the classroom or instructional activities. Both types of humour occurrence certainly provide different impacts. While

continual humour may drive people to engage in their educational environments, integrated humour may serve as a source of disruption for students.

Considering the information presented earlier, this study was conducted to ascertain university students' perspectives on the teachers' use of humour in the classroom, either contagious or integrated humour. In particular, we explore university students' perspectives on their lecturer's humour, essential aspects of their lecturers' instruction in class (teacher-student relationship, interestingness of instruction, clarity of instruction) and aspects of their own learning (enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, elaboration). According to Bieg and Dresnel (2019), student perception can be understood as a synthesis of objective environmental conditions, which are processed through perceptual bottom-up processes, and subjective information processing, which is influenced by individual characteristics. This perspective further enhances our understanding of the role teachers play in the study of educational humour.

3. Method

3.1 Research Site and Participants

The purpose of the study was to investigate the perspectives of EFL college students toward humour used by their lecturer. The study was conducted in a private university in Riau – Indonesia and involved 122 students from the second semester in the targeted private university. The participants were selected since they took the General English subject taught by the researcher in the prior semester. The age distribution of students pursuing a bachelor's degree in this university varies from 18 to 45. This broad age range is due to the absence of age restrictions for those seeking admission. As long as they possess a senior high school diploma, they are eligible to continue their study at the tertiary level.

Furthermore, by the time they had attended college, they were required to take English courses as a mandatory subject. It is noteworthy that the participants had previously studied English as a compulsory subject during their time in high school and junior high school, with a duration of three years for each level of education. Therefore, it can be said that they had been exposed to English for a considerable period of time, approximately six years. This situation, at least, makes them familiar with English lessons, and more or less, they have an idea about learning English at the university level.

Before participating in the research, the targeted students were given information about ethical issues, the study's objectives and the research process. The discussion was conducted in the first meeting in the second semester. The students were reminded that they would evaluate the humour used by their lecturer during the previous semester. During the discussion, I also brought up the subject of power relationships

since the researchers was the lecturers. I explained that their participations is necessary for improving EFL class, so that there should be mutual trust between the participants and researchers. After having an agreement, the following stages were conducted.

3.2 Design and Procedures

The data collection process was carried out by distributing questionnaires using the Google Form application to reveal their perception of humour used by their teachers in the classroom. The questionnaire given was accompanied by an explanation of this research and its implications for the further development of EFL classroom management. The questions related to the pedagogical humour questionnaire were adapted from Askildson's (2005) framework since it primarily represents the aim of the study. For example, there were fundamental questions about using a humour-integrated learning process. Some of the questions were related to how often their lecturers expressed humour in delivering teaching material and how they appraised their lecturers' performance in teaching English. In this case, the student participants were provided several alternative responses based on the Linkert Scale. Since Askildson's questionnaires are in English, all the questions were translated into Bahasa Indonesia to help students comprehend them.

After having the questionnaires, another instrument conducted was in-depth interviews lasting 60 up to 90 minutes with 5 (five) students selected based on their critical answers to the questionnaire. Not only that, but their active involvement during the learning process also became a consideration. In this circumstance, the interview process can considerably deepen students' views on the use of humour in the EFL classroom and triangulate the collected data. All of the interviews were carefully documented through the process of recording and transcribing. Pseudonyms were employed instead of actual names to ensure the preservation of secrecy. Some interview questions are open-ended questions, such as: 1. How would you grade your lecturers' overall performance? 2. To what extent do you like your teacher's humour during the learning process? 3. Does the instructor's humour benefit you?

3.3 Analysis Procedures

In line with the objective of the research, the analysis of the data was conducted by identifying themes because the thematic analysis encompassed many vital steps, which involved transcribing the interviews, thoroughly evaluating and analyzing the collected data, coding and identifying patterns within the data, constructing overarching themes, critically reviewing and defining these themes, and finally, reporting the findings (Arifah Drajadi et al., 2023). Hence, as the initial steps, getting familiar with the

data is compulsory. After that, the annotation was created to construct the potential themes.

As a result of the participants' responses, there are two major themes: 1. The advantages of humour used by the lecturer for the students and 2. The disadvantages of humour used during the EFL learning process. These were obtained since the responses indicate the evaluation of the impact of the instructor's humour from two aspects.

4. Results

The current study uncovers the perspective of EFL students in higher education toward the double-edged sword humour used by their instructors. Particularly, it identifies the positive and negative aspects of teacher humour. In this part, the results from the questionnaires definitely provide the general description of students' opinions according to each of the questions. In general, the existence of humour delivered by lecturers has a positive impact as seen in the following sub-section.

4.1 The beneficial aspect for Using Humour in the EFL Classroom.

4.1.1 To Increase of Students' Interest in Learning English.

Scholars claim that humour can help students to increase and sustain interest and attention in learning topic (Bieg & Dresel, 2018; Bieg et al., 2019; Daumiller et al., 2019). The response of the questioner also confirms the statement. The following chart indicate the students' perception on humour' influence on their learning English.

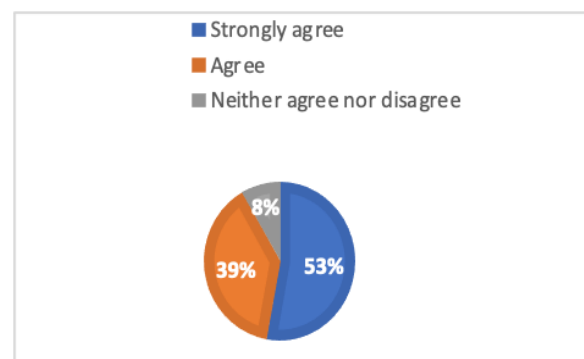


Chart 1. Using Humour Increases Students' Interest in Learning English

The table above shows that most students strongly agree that the use of humour by their lecturers can increase their interest in learning English (50%), followed by those who agree (44.8%). While 5.6% who responded otherwise. One student, Sara, highlighted that learning English on campus is much different from what she experienced in high school when the answers to the above questionnaire were followed up with her as one of the selected students. As to her opinion:

The instructors exhibit a high degree of humour and creativity in their instructional approach. Mrs. Y shows a lack of self-regard during her instructional sessions. She consistently positions herself as an exemplar, regardless of whether she commits errors. Listening to her story decrease our boredom and makes the class become enjoyable.'

By expressing her opinion, Sara clearly demonstrates her enthusiasm for having English class. Teacher humour used by her English lecturer is a kind of self-degrading humour align her with her lecturer. She implied that even their lecturer had challenges to master English during her school time, and this experience inspired him to acknowledge that individuals must undergo a learning process to get intelligence.

4.1.2 To Enhance Students' Engagement to Learning Activity

Students' enjoyment of a teacher's humour is a multifaceted phenomenon (Martin et.al, 2003). Particularly, it is depicted by the positive emotional response and overall sense of delight that students experience when humour is skilfully integrated into the classroom environment. It indicates a range of interconnected elements (i.e., laughter, joy and amusement) that contribute to a more fulfilling and engaging learning experience.

The subsequent figure shows the inclinations of students in relation to the utilization of humour by lecturers during instruction.

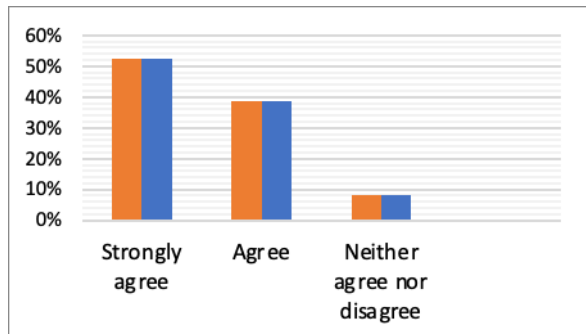


Figure 1. Students' Enjoyment of Teacher's Humour

Most participants responded favourably, with 60.7% strongly agreeing and 38.5% agreeing. The proportion of individuals who abstained from expressing their views constituted 8%. This result indicates that humour conducted by the lecturer provides emotional experience for the students, and to some extent can improve student-teacher-relationship.

4.1.3 To improve of Teacher's Affinity

Humour can make teachers more approachable by breaking down barriers and humanizing the educational experience. When teachers use humour appropriately, it creates a relatable and non-intimidating environment (Berk, 2004). Students perceive approachability when they see their teachers as not only knowledgeable educators but also as

individuals with a sense of humour (Andarab & Mutlu, 2019). This approachability can lead to improved communication, trust, and ultimately, a more effective learning environment (Gorham & Christophel, 1990). In vain to that, the following figure describe students' perception of humour that can help the bridge communication with their lecturer.

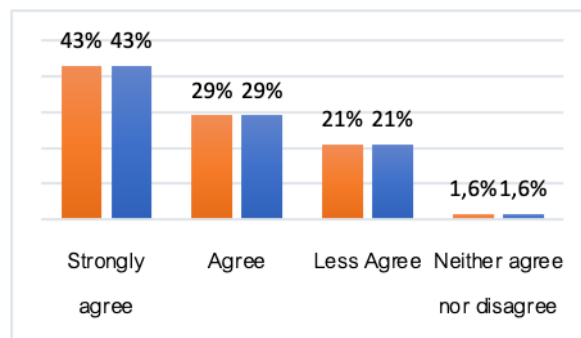


Figure 2. Humour can improve teachers' approachable.

This noteworthy observation refers to the utilization of humour by educators, which has the capacity to build a sense of affinity among students. The graphic above illustrates the significant impact of humour in fostering familiarity between lecturers and students. The statement received high agreement from 49.2% of respondents and agreement from 28.7% of respondents. In contrast, a notable proportion of 20.5% expressed disagreement, while a smaller fraction of 1.6% refrained from clearly stating their opinion.

Overall, the students' response show that humour fosters a connection that goes beyond the traditional teacher-student relationship, making students more comfortable approaching their instructors with questions, concerns, or even personal matters.

4.1.4 To Boost Students' Courage

From the previous section, it can be confirmed that teacher humour in the classroom holds significant importance as it enhances the overall learning experience by creating a positive and engaging environment. It can capture students' attention, boost their motivation, and reduce stress and anxiety (Bakar, 2019). This situation is expressed by one of the interviewees, Johana:

It's not easy for me to speak English. It's very difficult. The way of speaking is difficult. But with Mr. X's style of teaching, I feel more relaxed and courageous to try completing the assigned tasks. Mr. X's teaching style is pleasant and student-friendly, so my friends and I are happy to learn.

Excerpt 1. (in-depth interview)

This statement implied that instead of having fright stage and silence, they prefer to have humour in the classroom, especially when the initiator of the funniness is their lecturers. For them, it is one way to

encourage them for practicing the language learned. In line with that, the figure (3) depicts the student-participants' reaction.

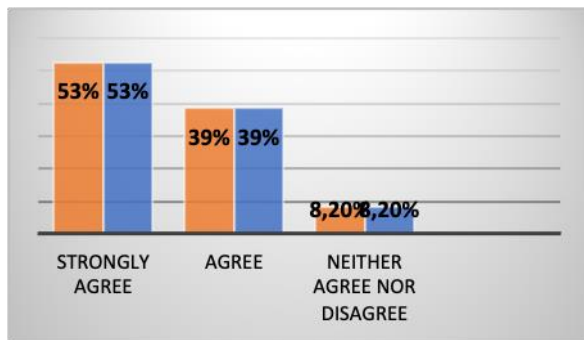


Figure 3. The importance of having humour in the classroom

Overall, this figure demonstrates a positive perspective on the evaluation of teacher effectiveness by the students. It has been determined that, once more, a favourable viewpoint is shared. It can be seen obviously that 49,2 % participants strongly agree with the importance of humour use. It is followed by 32, 8 agree and 13.1% less agree. Only 4,9 % declared neither agree nor disagree. When used effectively, humour can make complex concepts more accessible and memorable, aiding in information retention and comprehension (Bieg et al., 2017). Not only that, having humour as the part of learning instruction is considered can help students to face their challenge when they practice a foreign language.

4.1.5 To Create a Positive Learning Atmosphere

Lecturer humour has a notable impact on the classroom environment and student outcomes. Research within the past decade has consistently shown that humour can enhance student engagement (Nussbaum & Zamora, 2019). In this study, more than half of the participants acknowledge the influence of their lecturer's humour during the learning process. The precise description can be seen in the following figure.

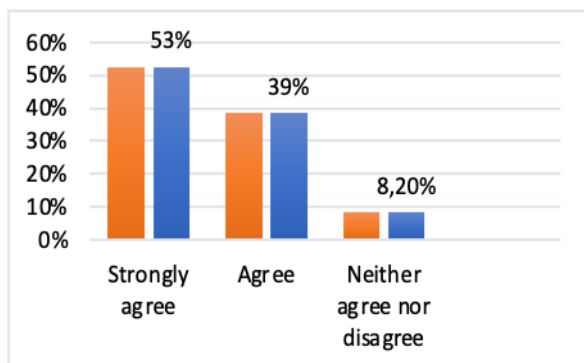


Figure 4. The significant of Lecturer's Humour

The included graph demonstrates how the use of humour in classroom settings has an effect on students' ability to absorb information. Participants often acknowledge that the use of humour by their lecturers has a substantial influence on the level of involvement they have in the process of improving their English language abilities. The following affirmative responses, totally agree, have a 52% response rate, while agree has a 38.5% response rate. In this particular situation, the students interviewed admitted that the instructional methodology for learning English that they were exposed during their time in college was somewhat different from what they had been taught previously. The interviewees exhibit a significant amount of enthusiasm for their efforts to improve their command of the English language. On the other hand, just 8.2% of respondents gave a different answer. The respondents who took part in the English course believe that their instructor's use of humour unnecessarily influence the English language learning process.

The humour-related topic is another factor that affects students' acceptance of lecturers' humour. When the results of the questionnaire above were followed up on to determine the correlation between the topic of the lesson and the humour used by the lecturer, most students acknowledged that lecturers always correlate the jokes they use to describe lecture material with self-deprecating humour. This finding is different from Bolkan et al. (2018) concluding that comedy connected to the subject matter (integrated humour) by teachers would cause learners to lose interest. Consistent with the results of this finding, Bakar & Kumar's (2019) research indicates otherwise. the latter agree that the integration of humorous and self-deprecating teaching methods together with instructional materials enhances students' comprehension of the subject matter and dissolves the distance between them and their instructors. The following chart indicates the students' responses.

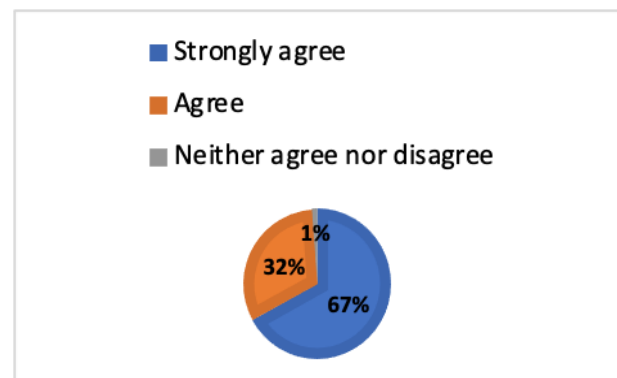


Chart 2. The relevance between humour and the subject course

Further, most of the students get the impression from this kind of self-deprecating humour that their lecturer also went through the same learning

experience, which in turn makes them feel connected to the lecturer and gives them the confidence to put the tasks they are given into practice. This description is accurate, as Daffa (pseudonym), one of the students, stated in the interview:

“Learning from Mr. X is enjoyable for me because he always keeps the classroom atmosphere light-hearted and humorous. Even though I struggle with English, I am inspired to attend Mr. X’s class because of the method he teaches by setting an example for us to follow in the form of himself.”

Excerpt 2 (in-depth interview)

The statement made by Daffa confirms the figure (3) and chart (2), which indicates that the vast majority of learners are at content with a method of learning that incorporates comedy elements into the content they are being taught. In line with this, humour undoubtedly creates a positive emotional atmosphere, fostering happiness and relaxation, which in turn reduces students’ stress and anxiety (Sterling & Loewen, 2015). In addition, humour can aid in knowledge retention and comprehension by making complex topics more accessible and memorable (Tong & Tsung, 2020), and it contributes to improved teacher-student relationships, enhancing the perceived approachability of educators (Gorham & Christophel, 1992). Ultimately, in combination with increased student motivation, results in a more enjoyable and effective learning experience can be gained.

Research conducted within the past decade sheds light on this situation. Firstly, humour in EFL classrooms fosters a positive and enjoyable learning environment, which directly impacts students’ perception of the learning process. When instructors incorporate humour into their teaching methods, students often perceive the class as less daunting and more engaging. This positive perception can lead to increased motivation and a more favourable attitude toward learning English as a foreign language. The following chart proves that most of students admit that lecture’s humour makes EFL learning process more interesting. The following chart indicate students’ perspective on learning English.

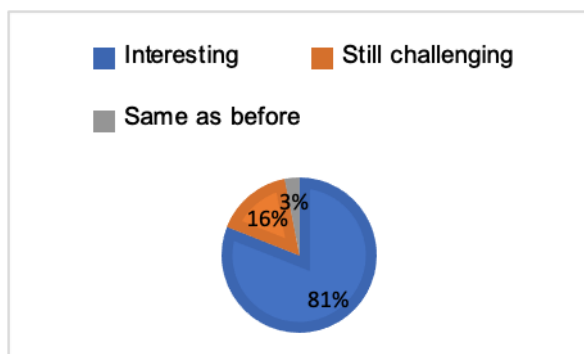


Chart 3. The Students’ Perception of EFL Learning Process

As the graph shows, 81% of the students gave positive responses, while 16% of the participants still think that learning English is still challenging and 3% confirmed that it is still the same as before, when they were in high school.

4.2 The Disadvantage of Using Humour in the Classroom

The following table shows the no positive response toward the existence of humour in the EFL learning process. Despite the limited occurrence of non-positive feeling shown by the questionnaire findings, the results remain significance.

Table 1. Students’ negative perspective

No	Name	Information	%
1	Chart 1	Using humour increase	8
2	Fig. 1	Students’ enjoyment of teacher’s humour	8
3	Fig. 2	Humour can improve teachers’ approachable.	1.6
4.	Fig.3	The important of having humour in the classroom	4.9
5	Fig. 4	The significance of lecturer’s humour	8.2
6.	Chart. 2	The relevance between humour and the subject course	1

From the table below, there is indication that some participants do not have completely pleasant sentiments towards the hilarious situation or the in the classroom. When being interviewed for more information regarding his response, Danu (pseudonym) clarified:

I could not comprehend your statement due to my weak English proficiency. I frequently experience astonishment when observing my friends’ laughter in response to your narratives as I struggle to understand their humour.

Excerpt 2 (in-depth interview)

Danu acknowledged his anxiety or dread of unfamiliar English vocabulary by expressing his emotions. It made him feel insecure to observe his companions handling the situation comfortably. This situation exemplifies the drawback of incorporating humour into the classroom environment: it alienates students who need help comprehending the language employed.

5. Discussion

This study examines the advantages and disadvantages of humour usage from the standpoint of EFL students. Through utilising learners' responses in the Google Form and open-ended questions for unstructured interviews, the researcher successfully delved further into the subject matter to obtain insights about the research objective, namely the dual-edged nature of humour as a learning tool in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Teachers who use humour effectively can create an engaging and fun environment that encourages active participation and reduces stress (Bakar & Kumar, 2019; Bieg et al., 2018). However, the subjective nature of humour means that its impact varies from student to student (Bolkan et al., 2018).

Results from this study indicate that the response given by participants is generally dominantly positive. In this case, they confirm some previous studies on the advantages of lecturer humour. Introducing humour into the classroom offers a range of benefits that can positively impact the learning experience. Firstly, humour enhances student engagement and participation (Cahyadi & Ramli, 2023). When instructors incorporate humour into their teaching methods, it captures students' attention and maintains their interest, making the classroom more enjoyable. Students are more likely to participate in discussions actively, ask questions, and willingly participate in class activities when they find the learning experience engaging and fun. This circumstance heightens engagement, which can lead to a deeper understanding of the subject matter and improved retention of information. For many, humour bridges the intimidating realm of language acquisition and a more relaxed, welcoming classroom atmosphere. In this regard, students view lecturers who use humour positively, as it eases the inherent tensions of language learning.

Moreover, students' appreciation of humour in the EFL classroom can reduce stress and anxiety (Alemi et al., 2021; Jakonen & Evnitskaya, 2020). Learning a new language can be daunting, often accompanied by self-doubt and apprehension. Instructors who incorporate humour help alleviate these negative emotions. Laughter releases endorphins, providing students with a more positive emotional experience and reducing the stress associated with language challenges (Bieg et al., 2019). Students' perspectives often highlight humour as a means of creating a safe, supportive environment that encourages risk-taking and participation. It helps them cope with the uncertainties and potential embarrassment of language learning.

Humour can help reduce stress and anxiety in the classroom. Learning can be stressful, especially in challenging subjects or new language environments. Laughter and light-hearted moments in the classroom

serve as stress-relief mechanisms, alleviating the tension associated with academic challenges. By reducing anxiety, humour can contribute to a more conducive learning environment where students feel comfortable making mistakes, taking risks, and actively participating in their education. Concerning this, Bolkan et al. (2018) emphasise that humour that is suitable and pertinent to the subject matter of the course inherently elicits favourable emotions from the students. This, in turn, enhances their capacity to comprehend the lessons and maintains their interest.

However, the use of humour in the classroom, while often beneficial, can also present several disadvantages that educators need to consider. The effectiveness of humour in EFL classrooms is not uniform, and students' perspectives vary. While some students may view humour as a valuable tool, others may find it distracting or irrelevant to their learning goals. As seen in the result of the questionnaire given, at least less than ten people responded positively or negatively. The subjective nature of humour means that what one student finds amusing, another may not (Bakar & Kumar, 2019). Humour can also create confusion and misunderstanding, particularly in culturally diverse classrooms (Tran, 2022). For students who struggle with language comprehension, jokes or wordplay may be lost on them, leading to frustration.

Not only that, but students' perspectives are also influenced by the appropriateness of the humour used. As mentioned before, the ages of the participants range from 18 to 45. Because of this condition, adult students' perspectives are undoubtedly different from those of their younger classmates. To some extent, given their different backgrounds, they probably perceived the lecturer's humour as inappropriate or overused. Sometimes, as Vivona (2018) asserts, learners' perceptions of what constitutes appropriate humour might differ widely, influenced by both their behavioural norms and their acquired experiences since they originate from various backgrounds. This situation is similar in Thailand, as described by Rhein (in Embalzado & Sajampun, 2020). According to Rhein's study, humour in Thai classrooms is not polite because there is a big difference between teachers and students because of power distance, unity, femininity, and uncertainty avoidance. This makes it less likely for students to talk to their teachers.

To avoid the failure to use humour in the classroom, instructors must exercise judgment to avoid humour that is perceived as inappropriate or offensive (Alemi et al., 2021; Vivona, 2018). For instance, students may react negatively when humour touches on sensitive topics, stereotypes, or controversial subjects. Similarly, humour can be highly culture-specific, which may lead to issues of inclusivity and misinterpretation. What one culture finds amusing might not resonate with another, potentially alienating students from diverse

backgrounds. This cultural sensitivity is crucial in a multicultural classroom to avoid inadvertently causing offence or excluding certain students based on their cultural perspectives (Bakar, 2019; Vivona, 2018). Moreover, humour that relies on cultural references, idiomatic expressions, or wordplay may create language barriers for EFL students, limiting their comprehension and engagement. In such cases, humour can hinder learning and undermine the trust and respect necessary for effective teaching and learning.

Eventually, the inappropriate use of humour can be detrimental to the learning environment. Educators must exercise caution to avoid humour that touches on sensitive topics, stereotypes, or controversial subjects, as this can create discomfort or even offend students (Alemi et al., 2021; Bakar, 2019; Vivona, 2018). Inappropriate content can undermine the trust and respect necessary for effective teaching and learning. Overreliance on humour can also detract from the seriousness of the educational content, potentially leading to a lack of academic focus and a failure to meet learning objectives (Bakar, 2019). Striking a balance between humour and educational goals is essential to ensure that humour serves as a supportive, rather than a distracting, element in the classroom (Bieg, et. al., 2018).

The research on students' perspectives of lecturers' use of humour in EFL classrooms carries significant implications for educators and the design of effective language teaching strategies. First, it highlights the need for educators to adopt a student-centred approach that recognises the diverse perceptions and preferences regarding humour. Lecturers must be attuned to student comfort levels with humour and adapt their instructional strategies accordingly. This circumstance implies the importance of creating classroom environments that encourage open communication, where students feel comfortable expressing their views on the use of humour. By doing so, educators can balance the advantages and disadvantages of humour, ensuring that it enhances the learning experience without alienating or distracting any group of students.

Secondly, the research underscores the critical role of cultural sensitivity and cross-cultural competence in EFL instruction. As humour often relies on cultural references and language nuances, educators must receive training and professional development that equips them to navigate these complexities effectively. This includes understanding their students' cultural backgrounds and avoiding humour that may be culturally specific, potentially offensive, or misunderstood. Instructors should aim to create inclusive and culturally responsive classrooms where all students feel valued and respected, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. In sum, the implications of this research call for a holistic approach to EFL instruction that recognises the

multifaceted nature of humour, student diversity, and the importance of cultural competence in creating optimal learning environments.

6. Conclusion

In summary, the use of humour in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom provides both advantages and disadvantages due to the double-edged sword-like nature of humour. Its efficacy and influence depend on the individual student's point of view and the particular situation in which humour is used, especially in the higher education. Humour can foster a pleasant educational atmosphere, as well as reduce stress; however, its use requires discretion and thoughtful cultural awareness. University lecturers must demonstrate careful awareness of the various viewpoints in their classes and consider possible misinterpretations or the potential for offending. Students' views on lecturers' use of humour in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes underscore the importance of striking a harmonious balance between fostering a fun and engaging learning environment while simultaneously ensuring the successful achievement of educational objectives in an inclusive manner. It is essential to acknowledge that the present study has several limitations. First, the study only focuses on one private university, which means that the description of the perspective of the students towards teacher humour is restricted. Meanwhile, important factors can be points for further research, like gender perspective or different cultural backgrounds, since Indonesia is well-known as a multicultural country. Another point that can be highlighted is the quantitative data that needs more exploration since this article only focuses on one aspect: the nature of the humour.

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