

## USE OF HUMOR AS A TEACHING STRATEGY IN THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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### ABSTRACT

*This study determined the Junior High School English teachers' use of humor as a teaching strategy in the classroom. The subjects of the study were the 31 English teachers and 318 Grade 10 students of Batangas National High School. It also sought to find out if there is a significant difference between English teachers' use of humor in the classroom and students' perception on the advantages and disadvantages of humor in the English classroom. The descriptive method of the study was utilized by the researchers with self-administered questionnaires which served as the primary data gathering instrument. Frequency, percentage, weighted mean, and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were the statistical tests used to achieve the objectives of the study. The results have shown that there is a significant difference in the English teachers' use of humor in the classroom when grouped according to years of teaching experience and educational attainment. Additionally, there is a significant difference in the students' perception on the advantages of humor in the classroom when students are grouped according to their sex and academic performance. There is no significant difference in the students' perception on the disadvantages of humor in the classroom when they are grouped according to their sex. However, there is a significant difference when students are grouped according to their academic performance.*

*Keywords: Humor, Teaching Strategy, Instances*

### INTRODUCTION

Humor is a response that is characterized by positive emotions of amusement, the consideration that something is funny, and the tendency to laugh. It is often related to comedy and jokes since these two evoke laughter. Yet, all jokes are comedy, and all comedy is humor, but not all humor is comedy and certainly not all jokes. Anything that causes the body to relax, people to breathe a little, causes a smile, or brings happiness is humor. Laughter helps ease tension (Woo, 2010). It increases confidence (Martin, 2010) and enhances mental functioning (Lefcourt, 2012).

Moreover, humor in the classroom and educational setting is not a new concept as teachers continue to find ways for better communication and help the students in the learning process. If incorporated in teaching, it may employ positive effects on student learning. It could help teachers reduce students' stress, anxiety, and tension. It could also facilitate student attention, motivation, and comprehension and makes the topic more interesting thus, improves student learning. It is valuable to learning, but it may be

also difficult to understand how humor influences learning.

Humor in the classroom, if misused, can be more devastating than the advantages that could be gain by both the teacher and the students. One of the biggest dangers of using humor in the classroom is that it may happen spontaneously and that the current limit of any teachers may not realize that their humor may bring offense to a member of the class.

Ağçam (2017) reminded that when humor is used irrelevantly to the subject matter, it may cause loss of valuable class time and poor class management. He also suggested that teachers should never joke about a student's name because of the potential damage to the student's self-esteem; teachers should recognize when humor is inappropriate. Teachers should not simply tell jokes in class but should keep their humor relevant to the instruction since this reduces class time.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted to find out if Junior High School English teachers' use of humor as a teaching strategy in the classroom is advantageous to the students. Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the instances wherein English teachers use humor inside the classroom.
2. Ascertain the advantages and disadvantages of teachers using humor in the English classroom as perceived by students in terms of: Psychological Effects; Social Effects; and Instructional Effects.
3. Determine if there is any significant difference in the instances wherein English teachers' use of humor in the classroom when grouped according to years of teaching experience and educational attainment.

## METHODOLOGY

The researchers used the descriptive method to assess the profile of the teacher-respondents such as years of teaching experience

and educational attainment as well as the profile of the student-respondents such as sex and final grade in English (Grade 9) which helped them determining the advantages and disadvantages of using humor in the classroom. This method of research is known to be the most applicable for this study for the purpose of presenting the data gathered in the observations and surveys conducted that are concerned with the advantages and disadvantages of using humor in the classroom as described by the responses of the subjects under this study.

This study used two groups of respondents. The main subjects of the study were the Junior High School English teachers and Grade 10 students of Batangas National High School which is the largest junior high school in Batangas City. The respondents consisted of a total population of 31 English teachers and a sample population of 318 Grade 10 students. The teachers were asked about the instances wherein they use humor in the classroom. On the other hand, the students were asked about their perceptions on the teachers' use of humor during their English class.

The primary instrument that the researchers used in this study was self-administered questionnaires. There were two sets of questionnaires used in the study to collect the respondents' profiles and other relevant data to bring about the desirable results. The questionnaires were both a 4-point Likert scale survey questionnaire that was helpful in gathering the necessary data from the teachers and students.

First, the questionnaire for the teachers is composed of two (2) parts. Part I includes the personal and basic information of the teacher-respondents while part II contains the instances of teachers' use of humor in the English classroom. Second, the questionnaire for the students has three (3) parts. Part I states the personal and basic information of the student-respondents. Part II contains the possible advantages of humor for the students while part III contains the possible disadvantages of humor for the students. Both Part I and II of the questionnaires for the students has three sub-categories: psychological, social, and instructional.

The researchers visited various libraries to obtain and gather data and information from books, magazines, journals, and theses to support the study. The researchers had visited various schools and libraries such as Westmead International School, De La Salle University- Manila, Colegio ng Lungsod ng Batangas, and Capitol Provincial Library in Batangas City.

The questionnaires were constructed by the researchers and had it checked by their adviser and was validated by four different experts in the field of English education. The researchers then revised the instruments incorporating the given comments and suggestions of the validators and of their adviser.

In obtaining and gathering the necessary data, the researchers constructed a letter addressed to Dr. Donato G. Bueno, the Division Superintendent of Batangas City, requesting for the list of junior high schools in Batangas City. Through the data obtained, it was concluded that the largest junior high school in Batangas City is Batangas National High School. The researchers had also sought permission from his office to conduct a survey in the said school.

The request letter, as well as the survey questionnaires, was submitted to the principal of Batangas National High School and to the head of the English department. Upon the approval of the request, the researchers distributed the survey questionnaires to the English teachers and Grade 10 students with the assistance of the department head.

After the survey was conducted, the answers of the respondents were tabulated and interpreted. The results of the findings were used to formulate conclusions and recommendations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Instances of the English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom

Results of the conducted survey for the study revealed that English teachers often use humor in the classroom as attested by the acquired area mean of 3.10. The instances where the English teachers mostly used humor in the

classroom is to relieve tension in the learning environment and to increase student performance and participation in class. On the other hand, teachers least likely use humor to review a lesson in a funny way.

The result of the conducted survey for teachers is supported by the study of Hismanoğlu et al. (2016) which pointed out that teachers perceive the use of humor as important and has positive effects in the EFL classroom. Students also indicated a high level of agreement on the positive role of humor in classroom teaching.

Additionally, according to Jener (2014), humor arouses curiosity, maintains attention, develops critical thinking, develop communication skills, eliminates boredom and enhances socialization.

### 2. Advantages and Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom as Perceived by Grade 10 Students

In this study, the perceived advantages and disadvantages of English teachers' use of humor in the classroom were categorized into three such as psychological effects, social effects and instructional effects.

#### 2.1. Advantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms Psychological Effects

Table 1 highlights that the student-respondents agreed to the advantages of English teachers' use of humor in the classroom in terms of its psychological effects. From the table, it can be seen that the 3rd item (I feel energized and motivated to attend class of teacher who has a sense of humor.) has the highest weighted mean of 3.56 with verbal interpretation of Strongly Agree. Meanwhile, item number 4 (My fear and academic stress towards English is reduced when the teacher uses humor.) has the lowest weighted mean of 3.28 with verbal interpretation of Agree.

Based on the result, students are more energized and are more motivated to attend the class if their teacher uses some humor in teaching. Their academic stress is reduced and they become



more attentive listeners and class participants. Humor in the classroom helped the students become more at ease and less tensed making them more willing to engage in the teaching-learning process.

**Table 1**  
*Advantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Psychological Effects as Perceived by Grade 10 Students*

Psychological Effects	WM	VI
1. I become more engaged in the topics when my teacher uses humor.	3.43	A
2. I feel less tensed and less anxious during classroom discussions when my teacher uses funny examples	3.46	A
3. I feel energized and motivated to attend class of teacher who has a sense of humor	3.56	SA
4. My fear and academic stress towards English is reduced when the teacher uses humor.	3.28	A
5. I become attentive during discussions when my teacher employs different types of humor such as riddles, puns, comic strips, memes, and funny videos	3.50	SA
<b>Area Mean</b>	<b>3.45</b>	<b>A</b>

According to Kelley (2015), humor reduces stress in the classroom, increases creativity, reduces negative talk, creates more memorable lessons, leads to more work being completed, and leads to fewer discipline problems. Moreover, humor motivates and relaxes learners, reduces stress, anxiety, and tension, creates a friendly classroom environment and, makes language learning more entertaining and interesting (Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011).

**2.2. Advantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms Social Effects**

The area mean of the advantages of the teachers' use humor in the classroom is 3.35 and this shows that the student-respondents agreed with the advantages of their English teachers' use of humor in the classroom in terms of its social effects. Item number 1 (I think the class feels livelier whenever my teacher uses humor.) has the

highest weighted mean of 3.37 with verbal interpretation of Agree.

**Table 2**  
*Advantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Social Effects as Perceived by Grade 10 Students*

Social Effects	WM	VI
1. I think that the class feels livelier whenever my teacher injects humor.	3.37	A
2. I feel that I can easily approach my teacher because of humor used in the classroom.	3.32	A
3. I can easily establish bond or relationship with my teacher and others because of the humor injected in class.	3.36	A
4. I develop socialization skills among and between my classmates because of the non-threatening classroom context provided by my teacher.	3.32	A
5. I learn to appreciate difficult classroom situations because of the humor used by my teacher.	3.36	A
<b>Area Mean</b>	<b>3.35</b>	<b>A</b>

According to Lujan and Di Carlo (2016), humor is a magical pill that reduces tension and works as a treatment for boredom. Socially, humor creates strong bonds between peers as well as with the teacher, enhances students' cultural knowledge, and enhances interpersonal interaction (Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011).

**2.3. Advantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms Instructional Effects**

The table above illustrates that the advantages of the use of humor inside the classroom as perceived by the student-respondents have an area mean of 3.37. The students agreed that humor when used during the class can help them have longer attention span and remember the lessons better.



**Table 3**  
*Advantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Instructional Effects as Perceived by Grade 10 Students*

Instructional Effects	WM	VI
1. My attention span is longer when teacher uses funny examples during our discussion	3.49	A
2. I understand a complex lesson in English when my teacher uses humor in explanation	3.35	A
3. I easily remember lessons when humor is interjected during classroom discussions	3.29	A
4. I develop critical thinking skills through funny yet meaningful conversations and dialogue	3.40	A
5. I become more expressive of my thoughts and ideas through humorous encouragement of my teacher	3.31	A
<b>Area Mean</b>	<b>3.37</b>	<b>A</b>

Further, it can be noted that item 1 (My attention span is longer when teacher uses funny examples during our discussion) has the highest weighted mean of 3.49. On the other hand, item 3 (I easily remember lessons when humor is interjected during classroom discussions) has the lowest weighted mean of 3.29 and with verbal interpretation of Agree.

Based on the Instructional Humor Processing Theory (IHPT), there is a positive correlation between the use of humor related to instructional content and the student learning. Furthermore, humor develops comprehension and learning of the second language, enhances the retention of the learning materials, and increases student performance (Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011).

Overall, the perceptions of the student-respondents on the advantages of their teachers' use of humor inside the classroom in terms of its psychological, social, and instructional effects are as follow. The student-respondents strongly agreed that they feel energized and motivated to attend the class of a teacher who has a sense of humor as well as they become attentive during discussions when the teacher employs different types of humor such as riddles, puns, comic strips, memes, and funny videos. The student-

respondents perceived that humor when used as a teaching strategy in the English classroom can actually help them with their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and learning.

### 3. Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom as Perceived by Grade 10 Students

The following tables illustrate the disadvantages of English teachers' use of humor in the classroom as perceived by Grade 10 students.

#### 3.1. Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Psychological Effects

**Table 4**  
*Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Psychological Effects as Perceived by Grade 10 Students*

Psychological Effects	WM	VI
1. I find teacher's humor as sarcastic and offensive remark to students' answers	2.62	A
2. I feel discouraged to participate in class when my teacher makes fun of our answers	2.51	A
3. It feels awkward when my teacher tries hard to use humor in the delivery of lessons.	2.41	D
4. I feel uncomfortable when complex and sensitive lessons are taught with humor	2.47	D
5. I feel demotivated when it seems that my teacher's humor is rehearsed and unnecessary	2.48	D
<b>Area Mean</b>	<b>2.50</b>	<b>D</b>

Table 4 presents the disadvantages of humor as perceived by the student-respondents with an area mean of 2.50 and verbal interpretation of "disagree". Item 3 (It feels awkward when my teacher tries hard to use humor in the delivery of the lesson.) ranked first with a weighted mean of 2.41 with the verbal interpretation of "disagree", followed by items 4 and 5 with weighted means of 2.47 and 2.48 consecutively. However, items 1 and 2 with weighted means of 2.62 and 2.51 both have verbal interpretations of "agree". It can be inferred that students find teachers' humor as sarcastic and offensive remark to students' answers and that they are discouraged to participate in class when their teacher makes fun of their answers.



Poirier et al. (2014) examined that a wrong approach in delivering humor can hurt students deeply and sometimes humor loosens group cohesion and causes isolation.

### 3.2. Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Social Effects

**Table 5**  
*Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Social Effects as Perceived by Grade 10 Students*

Social Effects	WM	V.I.
1. I feel disturbed when my teacher uses old jokes from the students cannot relate to	2.41	D
2. I feel embarrassed and upset when my teacher gives humorous comment about people, religion, and preferences	2.55	A
3. I am displeased when my teacher picks on particular student as laughing stock (object of ridicule)	2.57	A
4. I feel bad when my teacher's humor includes disturbingly violent or sexual content	2.69	A
5. I become irritated when my teacher uses slang or the young generation's lingo as part of humor	2.39	D
<b>Area Mean</b>	<b>2.52</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 5 shows the perceptions of the student-respondents on the disadvantages of using humor in the classroom in terms of its social effects. Student-respondents disagree that humor makes them feel disturbed when the teacher uses humor which they cannot relate to (Item 1) as well as they disagree that it is irritating when the teacher uses slang or the young generation's lingo as part of humor when they are in class (Item 5). According to Wilhelm (2014), humor is a binder in creating the emotional relationships between students and teachers.

However, the respondents agreed that humor makes them feel embarrassed and upset when the teacher gives humorous comment about people, religion, and preferences (Item 2). They also agree that they are displeased when the teacher picks on particular student as laughing stock (object of ridicule) (Item 3) and that they feel

bad when my teacher's humor includes disturbingly violent or sexual content (Item 4). According to Lei, Cohen, and Russler (2010), teachers must be aware of humor that may hurt their students and result in damage of their self-esteem. Similarly, Poirier et al. (2014) examined that a wrong approach in delivering humor can hurt students deeply and sometimes humor loosens group cohesion and causes isolation.

### 3.3. Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Instructional Effects

**Table 6**  
*Disadvantages of English Teachers' Use of Humor in the Classroom in terms of Instructional Effects as Perceived by Grade 10 Students*

Instructional Effects	WM	VI
1. I get distracted and lose focus on the lesson itself because of the jokes	2.38	D
2. I feel that I have wasted my time listening when my teacher tells a lot of jokes unrelated to the lesson	2.26	D
3. I view my teacher as unprofessional because of the jokes made during in class discussions	2.11	D
4. I feel that teacher is just taking much of the class time leaving us feeling unaccomplished	2.20	D
5. I think that the teacher looks foolish for using humor and references that we do not care about	2.21	D
<b>Area Mean</b>	<b>2.23</b>	<b>D</b>

Result denotes the disadvantages of humor in terms of instructional as perceived by the student-respondents. The student-respondents disagreed that the use of humor in the English classroom by their teachers is disadvantageous. It can be inferred that humor helps the student-respondents have a clearer understanding of a difficult lesson and have a more enjoyable classroom discussion.

Moreover, the respondents disagreed that their teachers' use of humor inside the English classroom makes them feel awkward, uncomfortable or demotivated. They also disagreed that it makes them feel disturbed or irritated when the teacher uses humor in teaching



complex lessons. Additionally, the student-respondents did not agree that their teachers' use of humor in the English classroom negatively affects their learning.

Students find humorous teachers interesting to be with. Humor was also proved to play a significant role in building a harmonious relationship between teachers and students. It was also pointed out that humor sets the mood of the students making them ready for the class and it helps students to be awake and attentive in class (Ashipaoloye, 2013). Also, Henderson's study (2015) revealed that high retention was achieved in the lectures with content-related humor and that learners experienced more enjoyment.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. It was found out through the results that humor in the classroom used by their English teachers is advantageous.
2. There is a significant difference in the instances where English teachers use humor in the classroom when grouped according to their years of teaching experience and educational attainment.
3. When grouped according to their profile, the advantages of English teachers' use of humor inside the classroom have no significant difference. On the other hand, there is no significant difference between the responses of the male and female student-respondents when it comes to the disadvantages of humor inside the classroom. However, there is a significant difference on the disadvantages of English teachers' use of humor inside the class when the student-respondents are grouped according to their final grade in English 9.
4. This study has proven that Filipinos are gregarious in nature. They are able to use their sense of humor to lighten up situations, bring in a positive or establish bond with one another. This was shown on how teachers have thought to incorporate and to use humor as a teaching strategy in teaching English.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Teachers must know how and when it is appropriate to use humor in the classroom.
2. Humor can also be used as a teaching strategy in other subject areas. It is recommended that teachers of other subjects can also try using humor in executing lessons of the subjects they teach.
3. Teachers' and learners' humor styles must be considered as part of the process of using humor in the classroom. By becoming aware of their students' humor styles, teachers can develop better insights into how they can take advantage of the benefits the use of humor provides in the language classroom.
4. Future researchers need to expand the scope of the study to have more reliable resources. This can be done by conducting the study in both private and public schools.

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