

Suggested Educational Principles for Integrating Humor inside Classes of English at Birzeit University Based on the Relief Theory

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine (1) how students and teachers perceive humor inside English classes in terms of decreasing tension and anxiety, (2) how students perceive their instructors of sense of humor, (3) how humor influences the atmosphere inside classrooms, (4) as well as to suggest some educational principles for using humor inside English classes at BZU. This type of research is qualitative research with a developmental descriptive design. The participants in the study are 200 students, who were placed at Unlock English remedial courses at BZU, in addition to 5 instructors at Languages and Translation Department. Data collection method is done by a qualitative survey and instructors interviews. Based on the results of the data analysis, students and instructors indicated that humor does decrease the tension inside English classes and creates a caring atmosphere. Instructors of sense of humor are perceived approachable and humane. Besides, some educational principles and practices of humor in teaching a foreign language were generated from the obtained data after being confirmed and reviewed by 8 experts. Based on the results, some recommendations were stated.

Keywords: Integrating Humor ;Birzeit University.

1. Introduction

Learning a second or a foreign language is considered to be one of the most causes of anxiety and stress. Yet, worse comes to worst when we discuss the adult's foreign language learning. Most university students usually join their English introductory classes with being stressed and demotivated, since such classes may impact their self-esteem and cause kind of hurt when they look "foolish" as a result of committing mistakes or looking awkward. As a result, English classes usually are full of tension, fear of failure and demotivation. Therefore, it is so demanded to provide a safe, positive and supportive environment by teachers and instructors, through using different strategies and techniques. At universities, instructors have a very crucial role in facilitating students' language learning, and they also need to trigger students' interests and get their attention, which can be reflected on creating positive and emotionally warm classrooms.

One of the strategies that has been strongly connected to positive English classrooms is humor. Regardless the various definitions, humor has been proven to have a very positive effect on education in general, and in learning a foreign language in particular (Aboudan,2009). It was also shown that humor enhances the students' success and captures their interests and attention (Collen,2016). Besides, humor also causes students to laugh, which creates a friendly atmosphere and could be considered as an invitation to be involved and engaged in learning the language, as it tends to decrease the social distance (Truett,2011). As well as, research results revealed humor as a secret of comprehension, inspiration and motivation in English classes (Collen, 2016).

On the other hand, traditionally, humor had a bad reputation in philosophy and in education, which is referred back to the Superiority Theory, that it says that laughter or humor comes from the enjoyment of feeling superior than others, since people laugh when something indicates that they are winning a competition. Afterwards, two theories of humor

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came up and criticized this negative perspective towards humor by enhancing the importance of humor in education. These two theories are the Incongruity Theory, that states that the essence of humor is the enjoyment of violating mental patterns and expectations, and the Relief Theory, which suggests that laughter is a release of nervous energy (Morreall,2014).

Although new theories were stated to enhance the important role of humor in education and learning, many educators still believe in the negative attitude towards humor. Yet, some viewed humor in classrooms uncontrolled, unprofessional and undignified (Collen,2016). This view deprives students as well as teachers from one of the key attributes that enhances students' success in learning a foreign language, and which breaks boundaries among learning and life. Besides, it was suggested that humor tends to increase student-teacher rapport, facilitate learning and create real-life experience ((Loomax and Moosavi,1998; Provine,2002 cited by (Aboudan,2009)). Thus, the value of humor is still as in the past not acknowledge by some instructors at universities, as it may affect their dignity in front of their students.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Inside English classes, students' fear and anxiety can be detected obviously by their instructors, especially if the students are placed at beginner level or at remedial courses. This is may be caused by facing the challenge of the material, which makes them feel threatened, particularly when they had fear of making mistakes and looking irritated in front of their classmates. As an English instructor, the researcher always detects this fear and tension inside her classrooms, especially when students confront an instructor who speaks with them English all the time. Thus, integrating humor as a strategy may help in decreasing this anxiety and may make students more comfortable and motivated, which can be reflected on students' achievement in their English courses. Thus, humor as a psycho strategy may assist students to learn English, as a foreign language, more effectively especially when they start feeling safe and comfortable.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Based on the researcher's experience, it is important to mention that this paper may be considered to be from the first initiatives in suggesting educational principles that integrates humor effectively in teaching English. Since humor is rarely addressed in literature in the context of teaching a foreign language. Thus, this paper hopes to give a new insight about humor and its benefits to teaching and learning. In other words, this paper aims to examine the positive impacts of using humor in teaching English for beginner students at Birzeit University (BZU), Palestine, based on the Relief Theories. In addition, this study aims to suggested practices and principles of integrating humor inside English classes, to be adopted by teachers and instructors in their classes, since it is believed that this psychological technique may assist them to reach out their students, and positively affect their progress and academic achievement.

Research Questions

The questions that have guided the current study were:

1. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from students' perceptions?
2. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from teachers' perceptions?
3. How do students perceive their instructors of sense of humor?
4. Does humor create positive foreign language classroom for BZU students?
5. What are the suggested educational principles for using humor inside classes of English at BZU?

2.3 The Definition of the Terminologies:

- **Educational Principles:** Can be procedurally defined as teaching practices and principles that can be embedded in the lesson plans, and conducted by the educators or instructors to manage the material effectively.

- **Humor:** this study adopts the humor typology that is suggested by Greger (2016), in which humor is divided using different criteria; first, humor might be either teacher-produced or learner-produced. The second criterion was

the language of humor, that it might be the first language (Arabic in the current study) or the foreign language (English). The third is the level of humor's spontaneity (planned or unplanned) from the teacher's sides. The fourth criterion of humor is relevance of humor to the subject. In other words, the humor that is adopted in this study refers to simple spontaneous humoristic remarks that occur in the communicative teaching of English as a foreign language. Those remarks are associated with the subject that is being taught and explained (English skills), planned or spontaneous and should be teacher-produced.

- **Relief Theory:** the current study adopted the definition of this theory as suggested by Morreall (2012), which states that laughter is a release of nervous energy, and it decreases the tension.

2.4 Delimitations of the Study:

The range of the study was as following,

- Subject: This study investigated some suggested educational principles of using humor inside classes of English as a foreign language.
- Place: This investigation targeted Birzeit University in Ramallah, Palestine.
- Time: The study was conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2018/2019 at Birzeit University.
- The Population and the sample: the population of this study is BZU students at remedial Unlock courses, which their number in the second semester was 1500 students. As well as, the Instructors of English language at the Languages and Translation Department (35). Whereas the participants were 200 students, who were surveyed, and 5 instructors were interviewed in the process of collecting data.

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1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review.

Humor and its importance in education got a negative reputation throughout history. This negativity can be summed up by Morreall (2012), when he suggested that educators used to send the child of musical talent to the musical room, and others to the arts room, whereas the child with a good sense of humor was being sent to the principal's office. This neglect sprang from different variables in the western culture ended with the Superiority Theory of Humor, which was replaced later with two positive theories: The Incongruity Theory and the Relief Theory. These theories will be discussed in the following section, with highlighting the significance of the Relief Theory in terms of this study.

2.1 Humor and its Theories.

The Superiority Theory of Humor

This theory perceives humor as a negative sign, in which it indicates feeling superiority over others. Thus, humor is defined as "an expression of a person's feelings and superiority over other people" (Morreall,1983, p:4). The essence of this theory came from different influential thinkers, who perceived humor as a negative act. Thomas Hobbes (1839), for example, is one of those who established the roots of the Superiority Theory of Humor, in which he stated that human beings are self-centered and competitive, so people laugh when something indicates that they won the competition and others had lost. Hobbes had got the seeds of this idea from Plato, in which laughter or humor was considered to be enjoying the feeling of being superior than others (Morreall,1983). On the other hand, this theory of humor was dominant until the mid of the eighteenth century. Afterwards, it started to be criticized and challenged. Accordingly, two other theories of humor were born, which were: The Incongruity Theory and the Relief Theory.

The Incongruity Theory of Humor

The synonyms of incongruity are being "abnormal" and "strange ". This theory was found in the eighteenth century. Humor is defined in it as "an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical or inappropriate" (Morreall,1983, p:15). To some philosophers, we laugh sometimes to odd figures of speech, even without thinking of ourselves. Accordingly, humor is generated when the violation of people's mental patterns or expectations has occurred. Therefore, this school views humor as a response to something irrelevant and inappropriate. But it was also criticized that not each moment of incongruity(strangeness) may trigger laughter or be humorous (Halula,2013).

The Relief Theory

In this theory, humor is explained as a release of pent-up energy of nervous system. This nervous energy might be repressed by different psychological pressures, and the moment of humor vented that energy through a laughter. The roots of this theory belong to Sigmund Freud, that presents laughter or humor as a release of repressed emotions, such as fear and tension. It is worth mentioning that in a time that Superiority Theory focused on emotions involved in laughter, whereas Incongruity Theory focuses on the ideas causing laughter, the Relief theory came to address why does laughter occur? (Morreall,1983).

In the context of discussing the theories of humor, there is no precise definition of this terminology, but it is important to address humor as a psychological process that may express a release of repression. Thus, the Relief Theory of humor is significant in this study, in the context of learning a foreign language, where tension, fear of failure and fear of making mistakes are dominant and beginner English students tend to get anxious and worried.

2.2 Learning a Foreign Language (English) and Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the most common psychological phenomena in the context of learning a foreign language. It is actually the subjective feeling of tension, worry and nervousness (Zheng,2008). Inside classes of a foreign language, different sources of anxiety can be spotted. This is resulted in by the communication apprehension, the fear of evaluation and sometimes the difficulty might come from personal perception of language aptitude, public speaking and perfectionism (Zheng,2008). Sparks and Ghanschow (1993) stated that foreign language anxiety is caused by the difficulty of processing the language input. Thus, the affective (emotional) variables and anxiety are so fundamental in the language development and they resemble the engine that drives or prevents the ability of learning a foreign language.

In other words, learning a foreign language is a complex process involves many variables, (Hu & Wang,2014). An important factor that causes difficulty in the learning process is mainly linked with negative feeling, such as frustration and tension.

Moreover, it is cited that students under relaxed conditions benefit more from the foreign language classes than the anxious ones. Besides, it is also stated that students under anxiety practice the feeling of worry with problems of concentration and being forgetful (Conway,2007). As result, the main purpose of the current study was to develop educational principles using humor in teaching English, which may assist releasing such negative tension and anxiety inside English classes as a foreign language context.

2.3 Humor and Foreign Language Learning

Positively, humor can affect the students' motivation. In literature, different studies cited positive correlation between humor and the "warm" effective classroom environment. It is also confirmed that humor may improve learning a foreign language, since it promotes understanding and it decreases tension inside classrooms (Gregar,2016). Instructors of a foreign language are advised to adopt new techniques, such as humor, as it can create a relaxed positive teaching environment, in which students tend to learn more with fun and demonstrate better comprehension and retention (Aboudan,2009).

Moreover, in literature different studies have been showing the benefits of using humor in teaching. In Pedde (1996), for instance, students behaved comfortably in the classrooms with teachers with sense of humor. Students by laughing feel less stressed and it is beneficial to establish caring relationships between teachers and student, Based on the Relief Theory. This comes in line with (Greger,2016) that using humor makes students more enthusiastic and optimistic. In a study conducted by Backman (2010), that 10 professors who had a reputation of using humor in their classrooms were interviewed, he concluded that using humor creates student-centered learning environment and keep the subject fresh and fun.

Furthermore, some researchers displayed different advantages of humor categorized into physiological, psychological and social benefits. These benefits are achieved because humor tends to assist pain reduction, that when students laugh and find humorous material, the hormones of happiness, such as endorphins would be generated (Sambrani, Mani, Almeida, & Jakubovsk,2014). As for the psychological benefits, it is cited that using humor inside classrooms improves students learning and memory. It is also confirmed that humor gives the teacher an advantage,

when the class is veered away from the seriousness, besides when students' interest of the subject increases and they often learn better (Truett,2011).

2.4 Appropriate and Inappropriate Humor

Humor is considered to be a very wide concept with unlimited definitions. It is also composed of many forms, some of them are appropriate, whereas others are classified to be not valued (Truett,2011). There are different types of humor, such as jokes, riddles, stories, nonverbal expressions. However, the appropriate humor that is addressed in the current study is the type that positively affects student' attitudes and reduces tension inside classrooms. As for the age, it is not recommended as some studies revealed to use humor in the elementary education, as it is not so beneficial as it is in the higher education (Halula,2013). Besides, there are some cases humor should be avoided, particularly when it is offending. Some researchers enhanced the idea of avoiding sensitive topics such as gender, religious, races as well as avoiding using a bad language. It is also confirmed that teachers should not make fun of learners' ignorance or beliefs, which may increase the tension ((Greger,2016); Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszyk, & Smith,2006)).

Some also stated that professors who use humor inappropriately may make students feel that they are being hurt inside the classroom. Therefore, humor that is offensive, unrelated to the subject and viewed to be unpleasant should be avoided. Moreover, inappropriate humor is determined to be the verbal and non-verbal acts that are intended to belittle, ridicule and discriminate. Unrelated humor is also viewed as a distraction element that makes hard on students to be engaged in the material inside the classroom (Truett,2011). Thus, too much humor is not recommended, that teachers' role is not to be comedians (Abouda,2009).

2.5 The Current Study Under the light of Theoretical Framework and the Literature Review

Based on the reviewed literature, the Relief Theory of humor forms the theoretical framework of this study, that in the context of learning a foreign language (English), tension, fear of failure as well as fear of making mistakes can be exist in English classrooms, particularly with beginner English students, who do not have a well-based knowledge to use in their interaction with their instructor and classmates. The anxiety inside any foreign language classes was shown in the previous section, and students under tension and anxiety tend to be demotivated and forgetful. Besides, humor was cited to leave positive effects on students' motivation in creating a warm and caring environment and different studies were synthesized to support this theme.

The definition of humor, in general, cannot be found unified and universal. Thus, humor can be classified into different levels or typologies. The classification of humor that is adopted by the researcher in this study is the typology of Greger (2016). Thus, it is worth mentioning that the definition of humor that is adopted in this study refers to simple spontaneous humoristic remarks that occur in the communicative teaching of English as a foreign language. Those remarks are associated with the subject that is being taught and explained (English skills), planned or spontaneous and should be teacher- produced.

3. The Methodology

3.1 The design

This study was conducted in order to suggest some educational practices of humor, which may enhance students' learning and decrease tension inside classes of English at Birzeit University. The paradigm that shaped the theoretical framework of the current study was the Relief Theory of humor that is presented by Morreall (2012). The questions that guided this investigation are:

1. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from students' perceptions?
2. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from teachers' perceptions?
3. How do students perceive their instructors of sense of humor?
4. Does humor create positive foreign language classroom for BZU students?
5. What are the suggested educational principles for using humor inside classes of English at BZU?

To answer the proposed questions, a qualitative approach was implemented and developmental design was followed to suggest and develop educational principles in teaching English as a foreign language, in terms of using humor.

3.2 Participants and the Context

This study targets beginner learners of English at Birziet University (BZU) at remedial Unlock English courses in the second semester of the academic year 2018-2019. In is worth mentioning, that BZU offers introductory English courses for all students, for different levels starting from remedial courses moving to advanced ones. Students are being placed into different levels based on the placement test offered by Cambridge University. Therefore, the beginner students were selected because the tension that is resulted in by the language anxiety might be more dominant among beginner learners than advanced students (Naudhani, Jamil &Naudhani, 2018). In the current semester at BZU, the students that are enrolled in the mentioned courses are approximately (1500) students. Thus, from this population, the participants of the study were 200 students selected in a representative method that included choosing 20 students from 10 sections. Whereas, 5 English instructors from the Languages and Translation Department were interviewed, based on the students' suggestion and evaluation in the survey, as they have been asked to list top effective English instructors with sense of humor.

3.3 Data collection and Instruments

The Survey

This study is qualitative followed the developmental design, where two methods of collecting data were conducted: The questionnaire and the interviews. As for the questionnaire, the researcher modified two ready-made questionnaires prepared by Askildson (2005) from the University of Arizona to study the students' perceptions of humor usage and its effectiveness within the foreign/second language classroom. The second questionnaire was designed by Halula (2013) that students were asked to rank the top attributes of their instructors including the sense of humor. In other words, these two questionnaires were merged, adapted and slightly modified to collect data from students at BZU to answer the research questions related to students, which were:

1. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from students' perceptions?
2. How do students perceive their instructors of sense of humor?
3. Does humor create positive foreign language classroom for BZU students?

Moreover, the questionnaire that is applied in the current study was consisted of three parts. As for the first part, it is included 11 items with five numbered valued qualitative scale. The survey asked to circle one number out of 5 with its qualitative value on the scale. For example, the fourth question, asked student participants, "To what degree does humor make you feel more relaxed (i.e. less anxious) in your language classroom?" the participants were then offered 5 possible responses to choose from (See Appendix 1).

In terms of the second part, it was devoted to rate the traits/attributes/qualifications of a teacher of English according to the importance from (1-8) (lowest or least important) to the (highest or most important), as follows.

Table1: Rating the traits/attributes/qualifications of a teacher of English according to the importance from (1-8).

Topic	Rank
1. Subject Matter Knowledge	
2. Environment Conductive for Learning	
3. Answering Questions/ Interaction with students	
4. Discipline / Classroom Management	
5. Sense of Humor / A" Fun Classroom"	
6. Grading	
7. Teacher Possesses Advanced Degree	
8. Test Construction	

The purpose of this part was to answer the research questions, and to survey how students perceive their instructors in terms of the sense of humor. The third part of the survey was to ask students to list the top effective English teachers from their viewpoint.

Interviews

As for the instructors' interviews, data were gathered through individual interviews with 5 instructors of English at the Languages and Translation Department at BZU. The instructors were chosen based on the students' suggestions in the questionnaire, that it includes an item asking students to list top 5 effective English teachers from their perspectives. The interviews were semi-structured, lasted for 10-15 minutes each. In semi-structured interviews the researcher raises open-ended questions and giving the interviewees the time to explain their perspectives. The free questions were raised in order to answer the two research questions:

1. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from teachers' perceptions?
2. What are the suggested educational principles for using humor inside classes of English at BZU? .

3.4 The Instruments Trustworthiness (Validity)

As stated before, this study adopted two methods of collecting data. The questionnaire and the interviews. As for the questionnaire, the researcher modified two ready-made questionnaires prepared by Askildson (2005) from the University of Arizona to study the students' perceptions of humor usage and its effectiveness within the foreign/second language classroom. The second questionnaire was designed by Halula (2013), that students were asked to rank the top attributes of their instructors. Although, the face validity and the content validity were confirmed by the establishers of these two questionnaires, the researcher exposed the adapted questionnaire on 4 English language experts and one expert from the instructional and curriculum faculty. The survey was approved by all of them as a valid instrument that elicits authentic data. Some offered some modifications on the format, and one of them suggested to split one item into two parts that it carries two objectives (Item 4 and 5). The face validity and the content validity were confirmed at the end and their recommendations were taken into consideration.

3.5 Procedures

The students' questionnaire was conducted with the assistant of some colleagues at the Languages and Translation Department at BZU. The participants were selected based on a non-random sampling, where 200 students were selected from remedial courses. It is worth mentioning that through conducting the survey, some instructors needed to translate some items to students to make sure that students responses are valid and genuine. As for the interviews, the instructors were interviewed during their office hours, open-ended questions were raised, and each interview was taped and lasted between 10-15 minutes.

3.6 Data Analysis

In the survey, the collected data were analyzed based on the frequency of the responses of each individual item, in order to answer the research main inquiries related to the humor and tension inside English classes in addition to the students' perception to their instructors and English classes with humor. In the results section, the responses of the students in the first and the second ranks on the scales were considered one category, as well as the fourth and the fifth were also considered one in interpreting the findings. For example, "important" and "considerably important" in item 10 below are considered one category. Besides, "not at all" and "minimally" are also treated as one category.

10. In your opinion, how important is humor to language learning in the classroom overall?	(not at all)	(minimally)	(slightly)	(important)	(considerably important)
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Related to the interviews, data analysis was conducted by reducing the collected data into detailed themes, which were eventually listed into educational models and practices of humor in classes of English. The data analysis followed four stages: open coding, axial coding, selective coding and the development of the principles (Creswell, 2014).

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Questionnaire

The current study was conducted to answer the main questions related to using humor in side classes of English as a foreign language at BZU.

Regarding the Research Questions (1 and 2) “Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from teachers’ and students’ perceptions?” and “Does humor create positive foreign language classroom for BZU students?” The results of the questionnaire indicated positive correlation between using humor and decreasing the tension in teaching English as a foreign language, that the half of the responses on item 4 (50%) (99) agreed that humor does make them more relaxed and less anxious in the language classroom. This was shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: item 4, 5, 10 in the Humor Questionnaire

4.To what degree does humor make you feel more relaxed (i.e. less anxious) in your language classroom?	(increases anxiety) (17) 8.5%	(no effect) (16) 8%	(slightly relaxed) (68) 34%	(noticeably relaxed) (50) 25%	(considerably relaxed) (49) 24.5%
5.To what degree does humor in the foreign language increase your interest in learning that language?	(decrease in interest) (10) 5%	(no increase) (21) 10.5%	(slight increase) (54) 27%	(noticeable increase) (70) 35%	(considerable increase) (45) 22.5%
10.In your opinion, how important is humor to language learning in the classroom overall?	(not at all) (18) 8%	(minimally) (30) 15%	(slightly) (36) 18%	(important) (65) 32.5%	(considerably important) (51) 25.5%

It is worth mentioning that 58 % (120) of students’ responses on Item 5 indicated that humor usage tends to create a more comfortable and conducive learning environment overall, as shown by Table 3 below. Furthermore, in Item 10, 58% also of students believe in the importance of humor.

Table 3: item 8 in the Humor Questionnaire

8.Do you feel that humor generally improves your ability to learn a language in the classroom by creating a more comfortable and conducive learning environment overall?	(hampers learning) (13) 6.5%	(no effect) (23) 11.5%	(slight improvement) (44) 22%	(improvement) (78) 39%	(considerable improvement) (42) 21%
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On the other hand, from the respondents of the participants as shown by Item 2 and 3, it is precise that although students perceive the instructors of English and their classes with humor positively, the almost the third of them 44% (88) agreed that using humor should be moderate from (1-3 times only). Besides, almost a quarter of them prefer humor that is relevant to the subject matter (English), as shown Table 4 below,

Table 4: Item 2, 3, 6 in the Humor Questionnaire

2.How often (on average) does your instructor use humor (i.e. jokes, witticisms, humorous facial expressions, funny stories, etc.) during each class session?	(uses no humor) (30) 15%	(1-3 times) (88) 44%	(4-7 times) (42) 21%	(8-11 times) (24) 12%	(12 times or more) (16) 8%
3.How much of the humor used by your language instructor is related or relevant to classroom subject matter?	(none) (18) 6%	(a little) (48) 24%	(about half) (64) 32%	(most) (54) 27%	(all) (16) 8%
6.Do you feel that you learn more about the foreign language by being exposed to humor native to that language and culture?	(not at all) (16) 8%	(a little more) (39) 19.5%	(slightly more) (52) 26%	(noticeably more) (58) 29%	(considerably more) (35) 17.5%

Regarding the Research Question (3) “How do students perceive their instructors of sense of humor?”, 64 % (106) of students suggested that the instructors’ use of humor makes them more approachable and close, as shown in Item 7, as shown in Table 5. As for Item 1, although these two items seem to be irrelevant, they are interconnected. That is when the same participants who agreed on humor tends to make their instructor approachable, (129) of them described their English instructor to be effective.

Table 5: Item 1 and 7 in the Humor Questionnaire

1. How would you rate your instructor in terms of his/ her effectiveness?	(totally ineffective) (14) 7%	(slightly ineffective) (20) 10%	(Modera tely effective) (34) 17%	(effective) (70) 35%	(extremely effective) (57) 28.5%
7.Do you feel that your teacher’s use of humor makes him/her more approachable in class?	(less approachable) (17) 8.5%	(no effect) (23) 11.5%	(slightly more) (54) 27%	(more approachable) (60) 30%	(considerably more) (46) 23%

Besides, the sense of humor and having fun inside English language classes was ranked as the top fourth attributes (out of eight) of teachers of English from students’ perceptions, after the subject matter knowledge, answering questions and grading as shown in the table below:

Table 6: Highly Rated Attributes of Effective English Instructor.

Top 4 attributes of Effective Instructor
1 Subject Matter Knowledge
2 Answering Questions/ Interaction with Students
3 Grading
4 Senses of Humor / A “ Fun Classroom”

4.2 The Interviews:

The interviews were the second data collection instrument that were used in this investigation. The purpose was to answer the following two questions:

1. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from teachers’ perceptions?
2. What are the suggested educational principles for using humor inside classes of English at BZU?

As for the instructors’ perception of humor inside their classes, the five interviewed instructors agreed on having fun inside their classes and using humor would make their students feel more relaxed and comfortable. This was precise when they were asked: “To what degree does humor make your students feel more relaxed and comfortable in the language classroom?”.

One of the Instructors explained, “ *when students laugh in my class I feel all the negativity and stress faded and replaced with warmth and caring*”. Another instructor indicated that “ *laughing and fun is so important since that breaks the ice resulted in by fear of failure and mistakes*” . In addition, the instructors enhanced the idea of enjoying the classes with humor and how that reflects the humanistic approach in teaching. Additionally, almost most of the instructors participants enhanced how humor may increase the students’ ability for learning a foreign language and how students usually demonstrate high motivation in classes and feel that time “ *passes too fast..*” . Moreover, three instructors responded that having fun and humor may give an indicator that the teachers are approachable, “ *when laughter is burst in our classes, this definitely means that we reached our students out and they are engaged*”.

Related to the Research Question (4) “What are the suggested educational principles for using humor inside classes of English at BZU?”, different themes and ideas were inducted from the interviews with the instructors at BZU.

One of the most significant issues that was inducted that humor in English classes should be authentic and spontaneous, most of the instructors believe that humor should be natural, “ *humor actually depends on the personality of the instructor..*”. One of the instructors emphasized that humor cannot be applied as a separate theme or objective inside English classes, but they can be generated from the context and the given material. One of the responses indicated that: “ *as instructors we can add something fun and interesting related to the given topic as ice- breakers*”.

Besides, from the responses of the interviewees, all of the instructors emphasized that humor should be related to the subject matter or the lesson, “ *sometimes, students may find laughter and fun is a time –waste, you know, so it is necessary to address humor which is relevant to the lesson and the skills*”. This comes when they were asked how can we integrate or embed humor in lesson plans as educational practices.

Furthermore, the instructors of English emphasized the issue of using humor with caution, since the diverse number of students may cause misunderstanding to some types of humor, “ *we should be careful about using humor in classes , especially in the sensitive topics, such as gender, races and religion..*”. Another point that was raised is the idea of dignity and charisma, that instructors should keep the formal interaction inside the classrooms and not be turned into clowns, since this may cause students to be disrespectful and do something harmful to the instructors’ presence, “ *in our culture, not all students are mature enough to respond positively to using humor within classes of English, so I personally vary in my styles based on the characteristics of students*”. That is why the instructors presented humor with caution as it can be culturally unacceptable.

5. Discussion, the Suggested Educational Principles and recommendations.

5.1 Discussion

The current study investigated some educational principles in using humor in teaching English as a foreign language based on the Relief Theory. Five questions guided this research, which are:

1. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from students' perceptions?
2. How do students perceive their instructors of sense of humor?
3. Does humor create positive foreign language classroom for BZU students?
4. Does humor decrease the tension and anxiety inside English classes from teachers' perceptions?
5. What are the suggested educational principles for using humor inside classes of English at BZU?

In order to answer these inquires, the researcher surveyed a sample from BZU beginner students, who are enrolled in remedial English courses. Besides, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 instructors of English at BZU.

The major findings can be summarized as follows. Most of the participants from students and teachers agreed on the importance of humor inside classrooms in terms of creating warm and caring environment, which participates accordingly in decreasing the stress and the tension resulted in by the anxiety of learning a foreign language. This result comes in line with what is suggested in the Relief Theory, cited by Morreall (1983; 2012), that by humor and laughter the nervous energy that is repressed by different psychological pressures would decrease and can be released. In a sense, in psychology, laughter or humor is considered to be a release of repressed emotions, such as fear and tension.

Moreover, the current study concludes that by using humor a caring environment can be created, and that might be an effective element in increasing students' interest and engagement in learning English as a foreign language. This result is similar with Gregar's study (2016) that he came up with the positive effects of using humor on the students' interests and engagement in learning English. Humor is also perceived by instructors as an element that goes with the humanistic approach, which prioritize students at the top in student-centered classrooms which agrees with Backman (2010), when he concluded that using humor creates student-centered learning environment and keeps the subject fresh and fun.

As for the students' perception to their instructors, who tend to use humor in their classes, the findings demonstrated that those instructors are described to be effective and approachable. That is by embedding humor in classes, instructors would break the psychological barriers between students and learning a foreign language (English), which may cause highly motivated positive learners, especially because that may make them feel secure. This result agreed with a study conducted by Truett (2011), who confirmed that humor gives the teacher an advantage, when the class is veered away from the seriousness. Besides, when students' interest of the subject increases, they often learn more (Truett, 2011). In a similar study, it is also stated that students under anxiety practice the feeling of worry with problems of concentration and being forgetful. Humor, therefore, can improve the students' motivation and retention (Conway, 2007).

As for humor among other instructor's attribute, the results showed that students placed humor as a fourth important trait of the instructor out of eight attributes. It is important to mention, however, this rating of humor would indicate that students' attitude towards humor is still not based on a scientific or educational base. The results showed they preferred the content of the subject matter and the interaction with grading than humor, which can tell that students in English courses are still grade-oriented more than learning-oriented.

5.2 Suggested Educational principles for using humor inside classes of English at BZU.

1. The Philosophy/ Paradigm of the Suggested Principles:

The suggested practices of using humor in English classrooms are being raised so that they can be more practical and educational. It is worth mentioning that in our society, Palestine, as in all the countries, humor in education is still affected with a negative attitude. Many educators, though, have viewed humor in classrooms as an unprofessional and

uncontrolled act (Halula,2013). Thus, the educational principles are being suggested in this paper in order to melt the philosophy behind integrating humor in teaching a foreign language into practical practices can be used easily to enhance students' learning and interest in the subject. The root of these suggested principles was designed based on the Relief Theory presented by Morreall (2012), as well as on reviewing some related studies that have discussed the benefits of using humor in teaching a foreign language.

2.The Importance of the Suggested Principles:

The educational principles of integrating humor inside English as a foreign language classes, which are suggested by the researcher may be considered the first research effort in this field, based on the researcher's experience. By reviewing the literature that was written in this regard, obviously we can state that the main concern of the previous studies was to enhance the importance of using humor, besides they were to prove the positive impacts that humor can leave on students' learning and motivation. Other research papers were mainly devoted to present the negative perception of humor in the past, and how this has affected the students' and teachers' attitude. It is also essential to highlight that most research in humor was devoted to study humor in education, whereas this paper is mainly discussing humor in teaching English as a foreign language, that very few studies were conducted to investigate this issue.

3. The Aspects of the Educational Principles of Integrating Humor:

Based on the findings of the study, that were inducted from the survey and the interviews, and under the light of the theoretical framework and the literature review that enhanced the importance of using humor in education in general and in teaching a foreign language in particular, there are some educational principles can be suggested. These practices form some guidelines and tips for teachers and instructors of English to be adopted in their teaching, in order to use humor effectively and invest its psychological power inside their classes. These practices are as follows:

1. Humor is a psychological element that is proved to decrease the tension and the anxiety inside classes of English, by which a caring and humanistic atmosphere can be created. Thus, humor should be adopted inside English classrooms so as to improve the students' motivation in learning a foreign language, which may make them high achievers in their learned subject.

2. Humor is advisable be both planned and spontaneous as well. By being planned, teachers can design ice-breaking activity at the beginning of their classes that makes classrooms more fun. As for being spontaneous, that instructors can invest the moments that generate laughter during explaining the different language aspects and skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), which is based on the intuition in most cases.

3. Humor inside classrooms is suggested to be designed or applied related to the subject matter. This makes students feel that they are learning as well as having fun. Besides, this relevancy may be convincing to them, that they are learning and having fun, not wasting their time.

4. Although humor is proved to increase the students' motivation inside classrooms, it is suggested to be used with caution, particularly with issues related to the gender, religions, races...etc. Since that may be considered offending more than motivating. Thus, instructors must avoid inappropriate humor.

5. Despite using humor may make the instructors more approachable, it is recommended not to be overused, that too much humor may result in negative attitude among students. Therefore, as it is revealed in the survey, students suggested that (1-3) times to be more than enough.

6. Different variables interact to create humor in a communicative English class. The characteristics of students and the personality of the instructor should be taken into consideration. Sometimes, using humor by the same instructor may work with a certain group of students, and may not work with others. Therefore, instructors are advisable not struggle to use humor with students who resist that, and they should keep in mind that their job is not to be comedians at the end.

7. At university level and with teaching adults, humor is rather recommended than in schools, since school students may take advantage of the humor moments and misbehave accordingly. However, college instructors should

use humor without affecting their dignity or presence in front of students.

8. Although this study came up with all the benefits of humor in learning English as a foreign language, humor alone can not be effective in teaching if it is not accompanied by other important elements, such as the subject matter knowledge, discipline and classroom management, grading ...etc.

4. Challenges affect these Educational Principles:

There are different obstacles that can be dilemmas in adopting these principles:

1. The negative attitude towards humor in education, in general, and in teaching English in particular, may cause a resistance for these principles.

2. The characteristics of teachers or instructors are uncontrolled variable, in a sense that not all teachers have a sense of humor or are able to use humor naturally.

3. The maturity and the readiness of students are another two elements, that may make these principles impractical in some cases, that mature students may respond positively to humor in English classes, whereas other may misuse it.

5. Overcoming the Challenges:

The previous challenges may be overcome by:

1. As for the negative attitude towards humor, spreading the educational awareness for such humanistic practices (humor) among educators will definitely assist.

2. Although some educators do not have the natural sense of humor, they can at least understand the importance of finding a fun atmosphere, and be tolerant with some acts done by students that may burst students' laughter.

6. The Validity of the Suggested Principles:

These suggested principles were given to 8 English language instructors to be evaluated. The 8 experts were given a table to fill as a kind of validating the generated principles. Surprisingly, most experts (90%) validated these principles and complemented this innovation in terms of both the content and the face validity. Their evaluation was based on certain criteria and items (see Appendix B)

Conclusion and recommendations

This study investigated some educational principles for integrating humor inside classes of English at Birzeit University. These suggested principles were created based on the literature review and the obtained data from the survey and the interviews. The first chapter was devoted to rationale the importance of the study and to suggest the research main questions. In chapter two, the theoretical framework and different studies were reviewed. The theoretical framework was the Relief Theory by Morreall (2012), in which he presented that humor in psychology is considered to be a relief of tension and anxiety. The methodology was confirmed in five phases in chapter three. Besides, the findings and the discussion were displayed in the following chapters, where the educational principles for integrating humor in teaching English as a foreign language were presented and their validity was confirmed. Based on the conducted study, some recommendations are suggested as follows:

1. It is recommended to adopt the suggested principles of humor, that are resulted in by this study, in teaching English as foreign language, where tension can be decreased and the affective barriers can be also overcome.

2. It is also recommended to study the gender differences in responding to humor (male and female students).

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أسس تربوية مقترحة لدمج المرح والدعابة داخل صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة بيرزيت بناءً على نظرية الفكاهاة

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ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد (1) كيف ينظر الطلاب والمعلمون إلى الفكاهاة في داخل الفصول الدراسية للغة الإنجليزية من حيث تقليل التوتر والقلق، و(2) كيف ينظر الطلاب إلى مدرسهم الذين يتمتعون بروح الدعابة، و(3) كيف تؤثر الفكاهاة على الجو داخل الفصول الدراسية، و(4) تسعى إلى اقتراح بعض المبادئ التعليمية التربوية لاستخدام الفكاهاة داخل فصول اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة بيرزيت، وانتهجت الدراسة منهج البحث نوعي ذو تصميم وصفي تطويري، واشتمل المشاركون في الدراسة على 200 طالب/ة، تم تصنيفهم إلى مساقات الUnlock الاستدراكية للغة الإنجليزية، واشتمل المشاركون في الدراسة على خمسة مدرسين في قسم اللغات والترجمة، وجمعت البيانات عن طريق استبانة تشتمل على المسح النوعي ومقابلات، وبناءً على نتائج تحليل البيانات، أشار الطلاب والمدرسون إلى أن الفكاهاة تقلل من التوتر داخل فصول اللغة الإنجليزية وتخلق جوًا من الاهتمام، وينظر الطلاب إلى المدرسين ذوي روح الدعابة على أنهم إنسانيون وقريبون من طلابهم، علاوة على ذلك، تم تطوير بعض المبادئ التعليمية التربوية لاستخدام الفكاهاة داخل فصول اللغة الإنجليزية بناءً على البيانات التي تم الحصول عليها بعد تأكيدها ومراجعتها من قبل 10 مختصين. وفق النتائج تم اقتراح بعض التوصيات.

الكلمات الدالة: دمج المرح، جامعة بيرزيت.

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