

# Incorporating Humor to Develop EFL Learner's Speaking Ability and Willingness to Communicate

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**Abstract**—The present research attempted at finding out whether using humor techniques in the classroom is effective in developing EFL learner's speaking ability, and second to investigate the effectiveness of these techniques in developing EFL learner's willingness to communicate. For reaching the aims of this study, Iranian adult intermediate EFL learners were chosen based on intact group sampling. First, all the participants took The Oxford Placement test as a homogeneity test. Then, a speaking ability and willingness to communicate pre-test was administered to measure the participants' initial level of speaking ability and willingness to communicate. After that, when the experimental group learnt the speaking ability using humor techniques, the control group just experienced their routine method of teaching. After conducting 8 sessions of the course treatment, a post-test with the same content as the pre-test was conducted one by one for all the participants in order to measure their achievement in English speaking ability. For data analysis, SPSS software was used to run independent samples t-test to make comparisons between the experimental and the control groups' test scores. The results indicated that there is a significant difference in level of 95% certainty in terms of speaking ability and 99% certainty in terms of willingness to communicate between the learners' scores in experimental group which incorporate techniques of humor in EFL classrooms and the learners of the control group.

**Index Terms**—Humor, humor techniques, speaking ability, willingness to communicate

## I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers are always looking for creative and attractive teaching strategies that can help them to compete with the internet, media and other forms of home entertainment to attract their students' attention (Cornett, 2001). Literature indicates that in spite of having learners learn curriculum, most teachers desire to have learners enjoy time in their classes (Burgess, 2000). Teachers try to find the most influential ways to connect to learners and guarantee their academic success. For such teachers, achievement can be seen in approaches that make relevant associations and support higher-order thinking (Gurtler, 2002). Accordingly, one factor of human development that has been shown to reinforce familial relationships and supports academic excellence is often ignored by teachers. That factor is humor. Creating real life situations for students can efficiently assist them in learning language. Studies which have been done in humor field shows that the utilization of "humor" in classrooms promote classroom environment, facilitates student-teacher rapport, increases enjoyment, makes less tension, and even makes learning easy and turns it into a real-life experience (Loomax and Moosavi, 1998; Provine, 2002). Schmitz (2002) believes that utilizing humor in the language classroom helps EFL learners to understand and react to element of discourse in language interactions. Thus, it is a good idea that language teachers incorporate humor into the class activities. Schmitz also supported the utilization of humor in language classroom by stating that humor in EFL classes should be presented and investigated. He states that using humor in language courses makes the EFL class interesting and thereby improves learners' proficiency.

Researchers have proposed a variety of techniques in order to be used in a language classroom. Pham (2014) believed that for having humor, language teachers can incorporate jokes and funny stories and comments into their teaching. Pham believed that these are one of the best techniques of humor for language teaching. Ghanei Motlagh, Motallebzade, and Fatemi (2014) also suggest some humorous techniques that can be utilized in a language classroom. They name telling a joke, using funny gesture, and funny drawing on the board. As they claimed, these techniques can change the class atmosphere and result in more funny ideas and expressions by the learners.

One area in which EFL students need to be proficient is speaking ability and willingness to communicate. On the one hand, nowadays, knowing more than one language has become a prerequisite for people to be competent in many areas of their professional environment and be able to cope with the demands of modern life. For many people, there is a need to learn a foreign language to receive promotion in their jobs, to further their education, or to immigrate to other countries. At the same time, English language as the predominant language of the era appears to be the means by which

people are able to accomplish some of their goals in life. Due to this reason, many people around the world make efforts to learn a foreign language. This situation is also true for Iran as an EFL context. However, learning a foreign language in general and communicative skills such as speaking in particular is a challenging task for Iranian EFL learners. According to Castro Villada (2009), in learning a foreign language, speaking skill is considered the most crucial one by many EFL learners to be able to communicate in the target language.

On the other hand, researchers have indicated that student features such as aptitude, attitudes, motivation, and language anxiety associated with a lots of elements of language success (Gardner & Cle ment, 1990). In a situation that modern language pedagogy seriously mentions authentic communication as a necessary section of language learning result will be in the way that learner's differences in communication tendencies will have a meaningful part in language-learning results, both linguistic and nonlinguistic. Considering a social psychological view point to these points, the complex impact of these and other variables has lately been defined in a theoretical model (MacIntyre, Cle ment, Do rnyei, & Noels, 1998) that suggests willingness to communicate (WTC) as an element combining their impacts on authentic communication in the L2. Since humor is utilized as a language teaching tool, it can impact the learning environment positively and make it funny and interesting. Consequently, it can improve class attendance and learning (Deiter, 2000). Humor can be a tool for language instruction and enhance the teaching effectiveness. According to the importance of humor techniques and its impact on learning, the aim of this study is first to investigate whether incorporating humor techniques in the classroom is effective in developing EFL learner's speaking ability, and second to investigate the effectiveness of these techniques in developing EFL learner's willingness to communicate.

There have been many studies in the field of humor techniques and its impact on learning but no study has addressed incorporating humor techniques in the classroom to develop EFL learner's speaking ability, and their willingness to communicate. Pham, (2014) investigated the role of humor in the EFL classroom. Particularly, it investigated university teachers' and students' opinions of the roles of humor in EFL teaching, teachers' experiences of humor utilization, the reasons behind their application (or not application) of humor, teachers' preferences in respect to the humor types, and students' reaction to teachers' utilization of humor. It examined humor in English teaching/learning in the setting of Vietnam. The outcomes showed that the most of the university EFL teachers and students in this research have positive perceptions of and are in agreement about the roles of humor in EFL teaching.

They confirmed that humor has efficient and cognitive profits for students, their learning, and the teacher-student relationship. All teachers utilized humor in their teaching, or mentioned that they do so. The three most common implied types of humor were humorous comments, jokes, and funny stories. Humor was utilized most frequently at the start and towards the end of a class meeting. Most of the students support teachers' utilization of humor – particularly humor in English, comment that humor assists to raise their interest and motivation in learning English, and preferred a humorous teacher to a no humorous one.

Rashidi, Eslami, Rakhshandehroo and Izadpanah (2014) attempted to compare the different uses of humor among EFL learners. In this study, data was collected using Pedagogical Humor Questionnaire. The analyses of data indicated that language teachers and learners believed humor could be an effective teaching tool in language classroom and overcome affective barriers.

Khan and Ali (2010) did a descriptive study on the improvement of speaking English. The study was done on 40 students from 4 government colleges in district Charsadda (NWFD, Pakistan). A questionnaire consists of 15 questions was developed by studying the literature review and through conversation (discussion) with the experts. The results indicated that there is no adequate time for the improvement of speaking ability in the classroom. In fact, due to the limited time for students speaking ability, English is taught as a subject not a language and the routine of rote memory is advanced. The participants also complained about reprimanding, and discouraging by their teachers because of their incorrect speaking. It is concluded that although both teachers and students are accountable for the poor speaking ability, teachers are more responsible due to their professional knowledge and skills.

Khodarahmi and Nia (2014) examined the relationship between EFL learners' perception of their teachers' classroom discipline strategies and their willingness to communicate (WTC) in English inside the classroom. Participants were 87 learners who filled the classroom discipline strategies questionnaire and the scale for WTC inside the classroom. The outcomes discovered that learners' WTC inside the classroom was substantially connected to their perception of the discipline strategies applied by their teachers. In addition, teachers' discipline strategies were recognized to consider 38% of the variance in learners' second language (L2) WTC inside the classroom.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The participants of the study were 60 Iranian adult intermediate EFL learners with the age range of 18-24 who were studying English in language institute in Tehran. Totally, 60 participants were chosen in two groups for the purpose of this study. And each group included 30 participants. Three instruments were used in this study: One of them was the Oxford Placement Test to check the homogeneity of the groups. The test included two parts, namely grammar and listening. TOEFL based speaking test and willingness to communicate pre-test was administered to both control and experimental groups to measure the participants' initial level of speaking ability and willingness to communicate. After that, when the experimental group learnt the speaking ability using humor techniques, the control group just experienced their routine method of teaching. In experimental group, students learnt the speaking ability using humor

techniques including beginning the class with a thought for the day, using stories and experiences, relating things to students, planning lectures in segments with humor injected, asking students for humorous material, and telling jokes. At the end of the research, a post-test with the same content as the pre-test was conducted one by one for all the participants in order to measure their achievement in English speaking ability and willingness to communicate. After the required data were collected, in order to analyze data including homogeneity test scores and speaking ability and willingness to communicate pre-test and post-test scores, SPSS software was used. Descriptive statistics of data provided information such as group's means, standard deviations, and frequency. Inferential statistics helped us to test the research hypotheses. For doing this, independent samples t-test was run to make comparisons between the experimental and the control groups' test scores.

### III. RESULTS

In this section researcher use various analytical methods to respond to the formulated question.

#### A. The Estimation of the Mean and Standard Deviation Based on Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Speaking Ability in Control Group

TABLE 3.1:  
REPRESENTS OF THE MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION BASED ON PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST SCORES OF SPEAKING ABILITY IN CONTROL GROUP

Control Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Speaking Ability	20.80	.96	21.40	1.10

Statistics in the above table indicates the mean score of pre-test in Speaking Ability in control group is  $20.80 \pm 0.96$  and the mean score of post-test is  $21.40 \pm 1.10$ .

#### B. The Estimation of the Mean and Standard Deviation Based on Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Speaking Ability in Experimental Group

TABLE 3.2:  
THE ESTIMATION OF THE MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION BASED ON PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST SCORES OF SPEAKING ABILITY IN EXPERIMENTAL GROUP

Experimental Group	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Speaking Ability	20.60	1.00	22.13	1.45

Statistics in the above table indicates the mean score of pre-test in Speaking Ability in experimental group is  $20.60 \pm 1.00$  and the mean score of post-test is  $22.13 \pm 1.45$ .

#### C. The Estimation of the Mean and Standard Deviation Based on Willingness to Communicate in Both Control and Experimental Groups

TABLE 3.3:  
THE ESTIMATION OF THE MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION BASED ON WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN BOTH CONTROL AND EXPERIMENTAL GROUPS

	Control		Experimental	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Willingness to Communicate	2.98	.57	3.44	.70

Statistics in the above table indicates the mean score of willingness to communicate in control group is  $2.98 \pm 0.57$  and in the experimental group is  $3.44 \pm 0.70$ . And the range of scores is between 1-5.

#### D. Inferential Statistics

##### 1. Investigating the Distribution of Data

H0: There is no significant difference between the distributions of variables with normal distribution. (Distribution of variables is normal).

H1: There is a significant difference between the distributions of variables with normal distribution. (Distribution of variables is not normal).

Kolmogorov – Smirnov test was used to check the normal distribution of data. In single-sample mode, this test compares the observed cumulative distribution function with the expected cumulative distribution function (normal distribution) in a variable in order measurement level. In other words, in this test, distribution of a trait in a sample is compared with the normal distribution.

In the interpretation of test results, if significant level is more than probability of error ( $\alpha=0.05$ ), then the considered distribution is a normal distribution (the null hypothesis is not rejected). But if a significant level is smaller than probability of error level ( $\alpha=0.05$ ), then the distribution will not be normal (the null hypothesis is rejected).

## Test of Examining the Normal Distribution of Variables

TABLE 3.4:  
TEST OF EXAMINING THE NORMAL DISTRIBUTION OF VARIABLES

	Kolmogorov Value	Sig	Probability of Error	Result
Post-test of Speaking Ability in Control Group	1.141	.148	0/05	Normal
Post-test of Speaking Ability in Experimental Group	.863	.446	0/05	Normal
Score of Willingness to Communicate in Control Group	.643	.803	0/05	Normal
Score of Willingness to Communicate in Experimental Group	.767	.598	0/05	Normal

Given the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistics in the above table and also the significant level, it can be inferred that expected distribution (normal distribution) has no significant differences with observed distribution for all variables and so the distribution of these variables is normal. So parametric statistics should be used to test hypotheses.

### 2. Hypothesis Test

The first Hypothesis: "Incorporating techniques of humor in EFL classrooms makes significant difference on developing learners' speaking ability".

H0: Incorporating techniques of humor in EFL classrooms makes no significant difference on developing learners' speaking ability.

H1: Incorporating techniques of humor in EFL classrooms makes significant difference on developing learners' speaking ability.

To test this hypothesis, first a comparison was made between mean score of pre-test of each group with mean score of post-tests by paired t-test. And then, a comparison was made between mean score of post-test in experimental group with mean score of post-test in control group by independent t-test. Obviously, if there is a significant difference between post-test of experimental group and control group, then researcher's null hypothesis would be rejected.

#### E. Formula of Paired T-test

$$t = \frac{\sum D}{\sqrt{\frac{n \sum D^2 - (\sum D)^2}{n-1}}}$$

In the above formula, D is the differences in the mean of post-test with pre-test.

#### F. Table of Paired T-test

TABLE 3.5:  
TABLE OF PAIRED T-TEST

Comparing Pre-test with Post-test of Learners' Speaking Ability in Groups					
		Mean	Standard Deviation	t	sig
Control group	Pre-test	20.80	.96	-4.871	.000
	Post-test	21.40	1.10		
Experimental group	Pre-test	20.60	1.00	-7.594	.000
	Post-test	22.13	1.45		

As it can be observed, pre-test and post-test scores in the speaking ability were separately compared in control and experimental groups. The paired t test in the (Sig <0.01) level is significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that difference between these two tests was significant in experimental and control group.

To determine the difference between the mentioned groups, the achieved scores of speaking ability by experimental group should be compared to the scores of control group using independent group's t-test.

#### G. Formula of Independent Groups T-test

$$t = \frac{|x_1 - x_2|}{\sqrt{\frac{ss_1 + ss_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2} \times \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2}\right)}}$$

In the above formula,  $ss = (n-1)$ .

#### H. Table of the Independent Groups T-test

TABLE 3.6:  
TABLE OF THE INDEPENDENT GROUPS T-TEST

Comparing Post-test Scores of Speaking Ability in Control and Experimental Groups					
		Mean	Standard Deviation	t	sig
Post-test Scores	Control	21.40	1.10	-2.200	.032
	Experimental	22.13	1.45		

As it can be observed, the t test in the (Sig <0.05) level is significant. In other words, there is a significant difference between the achieved scores of two groups, but according to the mean scores of experimental group which obtained more score in speaking ability, it can be said that there is a significant difference in level of 95% certainty between the learners scores in experimental group which incorporates techniques of humor in EFL classrooms and the learners of the control group in terms of speaking ability. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and researcher hypothesis is confirmed.

The second Hypothesis: “Incorporating techniques of humor in EFL classrooms makes significant difference on developing learners' willingness to communicate”.

H0: Incorporating techniques of humor in EFL classrooms makes no significant difference on developing learners' willingness to communicate.

H1: Incorporating techniques of humor in EFL classrooms makes significant difference on developing learners' willingness to communicate.

To determine the difference between the mentioned groups, the achieved scores of willingness to communicate by experimental group should be compared to the scores of control group using independent group's t-test. Obviously, if there is a significant difference between post-test of experimental group than control group, then researcher hypothesis would be confirmed.

I. Formula of Independent Groups T-test

$$t = \frac{|x1 - x2|}{\sqrt{\frac{ss1 + ss2}{n1 + n2 - 2} \times (\frac{1}{n1} + \frac{1}{n2})}}$$

In the above formula,  $ss = (n-1)$ .

J. Table of the Independent Groups T-test

TABLE 3.7:  
TABLE OF THE INDEPENDENT GROUPS T-TEST

Comparing Post-test Scores of Willingness to Communicate in Control and Experimental Groups					
		Mean	Standard Deviation	t	sig
Post-test Scores	Control	2.98	.57	-2.733	.008
	Experimental	3.44	.70		

As it can be observed, the t test in the (Sig <0.01) level is significant. In other words, there is a significant difference between the achieved scores of two groups, but according to the mean scores of experimental group which obtained more score in willingness to communicate, it can be said that there is a significant difference in level of 99% certainty between the learners scores in experimental group which incorporate techniques of humor in EFL classrooms than the learners of the control group in terms of willingness to communicate. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and researcher hypothesis is confirmed.

IV. DISCUSSION

The results of this study are comparable with the results of the previous studies in this area. This comparison can be useful for deeper understanding and achieving wider knowledge of incorporating humor teaching techniques and its effect in developing learner's speaking ability and willingness to communicate. However, before making comparison, it should be added that previous studies did not address incorporating humor to develop EFL learner's speaking ability and willingness to communicate that were the focus of attention in our study. They either examined the effect of humor on learning a second/foreign language or they investigated the effect of different factors that help EFL learners to develop speaking ability and willingness to communicate. However, the results of all these related studies are still comparable to these study findings.

To make comparison between the present study and few studies in this area, a search conducted by Pham, (2014) can be mentioned. He aimed to investigate the role of humor in the EFL classroom. The outcomes showed that most of the university EFL teachers and students in this research have positive perceptions of and are in agreement about the roles of humor in EFL teaching. They confirmed that humor has efficient and cognitive profits for students, their learning, and the teacher-student relationship. Most of the students support teachers' utilization of humor – particularly humor in English, and comment that humor assists to raise their interest and motivation in learning English, and preferred a humorous teacher to a non-humorous one.

Although Pham's (2014), study focused on the role of humor in the EFL classroom in general, and the current study focused specifically on speaking ability and willingness to communicate. Still it can be said that his study shared humor variable with the current study. Therefore, the results of this study are in accordance with Pham's, (2014) findings which confirmed that the use of humor has efficient and cognitive profits for students, their learning, and the teacher-student relationship.

Rashidi, et al, (2014) study is also comparable to the current research since they attempted to compare the different uses of humor among EFL learners. The analyses of data indicated that language teachers and learners believed humor could be an effective teaching tool in language classroom and overcome affective barriers.

Regarding the results of Rashidi's, et al, (2014)'s study, it can be said that although their study was congruent with this study findings, the two studies bear some similarities and differences. For instance, while in Rashidi, et al's, (2014) study, they focused on the different uses of humor among EFL learners. Nevertheless, in the current study, while humor techniques were also taken into account, L2 students' speaking ability and willingness to communicate were the focus of attention. Therefore, it can be said that these two studies can fulfill the complementary role.

Khan and Ali (2010) did a descriptive study on the improvement of speaking English. The results indicated that there is no adequate time for the improvement of speaking ability in the classroom. In fact, due to the limited time for students speaking ability, English is taught as a subject not a language and the routine of rote memory is advanced. The participants also complained about reprimanding, and discouraging by their teachers because of their incorrect speaking. It is concluded that although both teachers and students are accountable for the poor speaking ability, teachers are more responsible due to their professional knowledge and skills. Again one common variable of their study with the current study is speaking ability which makes the total findings of two studies comparable.

Khodarahmi and Nia (2014) examined the relationship between EFL learners' perception of their teachers' classroom discipline strategies and their willingness to communicate (WTC) in English inside the classroom. The outcomes discovered that learners' WTC inside the classroom was substantially connected to their perception of the discipline strategies applied by their teachers. In addition, teachers' discipline strategies were recognized to consider 38% of the variance in learners' second language (L2) WTC inside the classroom. Willingness to communicate as a common variable of their study with current study can make the total findings of two studies comparable.

#### V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In accordance with the inferential statistics of the study that tested the hypotheses, it was found that there is a significant difference in level of 95% certainty between the learners' scores in experimental group which incorporate techniques of humor in EFL classrooms and the learners of the control group in terms of speaking ability. Furthermore, there is a significant difference in level of 99% certainty between the learners' scores in experimental group which incorporate techniques of humor in EFL classrooms and the learners of the control group in terms of willingness to communicate. The results of this study can have some implications for policy makers, language teachers, and EFL learners.

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#### Articles

1. Do Different Textual Enhancement Formats Have Differential Effects on the Intake of English Subjunctive mood? (2012). Academy publisher Finland.
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#### Books

1. Essential Roots: Prefixes and Suffixes (2012) jungle publishing house Tehran, Iran.



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