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The Effect of Using Humor on High School Students' Grammar Performance and Motivation

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***Abstract*—Teaching in high schools needs specific techniques, methods and skills in order to motivate the students (Ss) properly. In this study, the aim was to explore the effect of humor on students' grammar performance and their motivation. The study was designed as true-experimental research-randomized control experimental group, pre-test, post-test design. The participants were second grade high school students (120 students) in four classes. So, the researcher gave them a Nelson test in order to homogenize them. Out of 120 Ss, only 60 Ss who could get 50% percent of score were selected. Then, the Ss randomly were assigned one member of each pair to the experimental group and the other to the control group containing 30 Ss male in each cause-effect relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Then, the data analysis was done by SPSS version 21. The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between the gained scores in the groups, namely experimental group in comparison to the control group. A questionnaire was also given to the participants to gather their opinions about humor and its effect on their motivation. The finding showed that a large number of students agree of using humor, because it is enjoyable and motivator. It can be concluded that there is significance relationship between using humor and the Ss grammar performance, and their motivations. . Then, through giving the treatment and placebo to the experimental and control groups, respectively, the researcher tried to observe the direct**

***Index Terms*—motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic, humor, self esteem**

I. Introduction

"Humor can help the shy and/or timid students to feel that they are a part of the class and to allow them to contribute or participate in class activities and assignment doing without feeling humiliated or vulnerable" (Chiasson, 2002). This can act as a means of enhancing students' motivation in learning as well as stimulating recall to the materials taught to them by the teachers; so, it is important for the teachers to motivate the students to be active and enthusiastic for learning. Also, Askilson (2005) states that we all learn more effectively and enthusiastically when we are enjoying the process. Humor sets a social context within which almost students feel comfortable and appreciate learning. As a teacher, if we use humorous techniques and methods in our instruction, we can attract the students' respect toward ourselves, and in that case it will be easy for the teacher to handle the classroom problems better. The nature of humor is that helps to create 'positive atmosphere which encourages the students to take part in desired participation and activities in class by decreasing anxiety and stress (Chiasson, 2002). Hence, the purpose of this research is to study the effect of using humor on students' grammar performance to see whether it yields positive effects in their scores.

II. Literature Review

So far, no one has directly investigated the effect of humor on students' grammar performance and motivation. According to Tamblyn (2003), you can and should create states of attention, curiosity, confidence, and more, as they are needed. One of the easiest ways to do this is through the appropriate use of humor. Neuliep's (1991) studied different types of humor and coded them. His findings indicated that humor can prepare the students for learning. The findings details include taxonomy and coded typology of humor. . Wandersee (1982) who is a biology professor suggests that since humor has appositive effect on the environment strengthens the relationship between students and teacher should be used as teaching strategy. He reasons that: "making learning more personal and enjoyable, and establishing a more efficient learning climate," and humor's main strength as producing a "classroom climate conducive to learning,"(p.213).Raeshide(1993) suggests that the students can benefit the humor if humor is used because the teachers are more comfortable in this case. He declares that: "Humor makes for a more relaxed atmosphere, which I am comfortable in. So, it helps the teacher, , as well as the students, when humor is incorporated into the lesson. His survey from fifth and six grade teachers shows that humor is an integral part of teaching. It is found in his guidelines that only one minute of humor can make the classroom a happier and comfortable place".

Michelli (1998) links humor to successful problem-solving. They agree that teachers can benefit of using humor from improving problem solving to increasing students' comprehension in the classroom. .. Wanzer and Frymier (1999)

regards about power of humor: "The theoretical explanation for the humor-learning relationship is explained by the attention-gaining and holding power of humor" (p. 49). Wanzer and Frymier(1999) studied about the relationship between instructors and their use of humor on student learning. They concur that the use of humor should "put students at ease, gain attention, and show that the teacher is human" (p.58).They relate in their study humor to the relationship of the student-teacher and the "immediacy as physical and or psychological closeness" (p.50). They note that as the teacher uses humor, he closes the perceived distance between himself and the students. They also (2007) report that immediacy that the teachers use whether verbal or nonverbal is useful to "reduce physical and psychological distance between themselves and their students to create more positive teacher-student relations" (p. 273).The main purpose is to decrease the perceived distance between students and teachers and establish a strong relationship. Additional findings from Frymier, Wanzer, and Wojtaszczyk (2006) supported their original work. Positive humor includes joking and playacting while sarcasm, racial, and sexual humor is labeled as negative and as detracting from the goal of the lesson. This study reports that utilizing of different types of humor will offer expected results.

Millard (1999) in her research suggests that laughing with your students about dumb things you have done is a good way to begin to strengthen the teacher –student relationship. She explains that laughter reminds a student: "teachers are human, too, , and this makes your room a safe place to make mistakes" (p. 9). Then, she explains how humor can create a better "feeling tone" in your class, affecting student comfort, learning, and potential achievement. Some courses particularly statistic courses are found to be "difficult to the point of being incomprehensible"

Gurtler (2002) says that humor is "rooted in a positive state of mind and extends to students appreciation" (p. 11). Lynch (2002) echoes this definition of humor. Humor provides a social function (e.g., communication) and is a reaction to ambiguity providing relief. Lynch adopts a psychological view of humor, intertwining it with motivational aspects. The teachers' message should be encouraging, grade appropriate which could engage the students, and could assist in the goal of effective instruction.

In the current context of using humor in English classes of Iranian high schools (second grade students), we are facing an increasing level of accountability for the teachers to increase their students' performances. Nearly, all the teachers try to utilize effective tricks to control their classrooms' atmosphere, encourage the students to do their tasks well, help them to reduce effective barriers, motivate them to be effective and efficient by keeping a few simple rules of humor in mind which help them to be successful in their teaching and behaving with the students. So, the teachers try to utilize some techniques and methods which can facilitate teaching.

In fact, it is widely accepted that boring classes and anxiety atmosphere reduces the students' performance; and, it is difficult for the teacher to run the classroom in this stressful situation since students cannot focus appropriately or be effective and efficient. So it may decline student's self-esteem and make the class atmosphere to be hateful for them causing lots of problems both for the students and teachers.

Actually, much of the past researches have been conducted on the anxiety associated with oral production; so, as a teacher, it is important for us to know why the students' grammar performance decreases in specific situations. Then we might what we can do to make the situation stress free in order to enhance students' potential of learning and make the classroom atmosphere so enjoyable that everybody without any stress can enjoy the class and also enthusiastically take part in all sessions.

By using a few simple rules of humor such as, saying very short jokes, showing humor by our gestures, verbal activities and action, looking, role play, showing some funny things and pictures, or by telling very short stories, the teacher can help the students to do their tasks with their maximum potential of abilities in an enjoyable atmosphere. It also will hopefully help the teachers to encourage and motivate their students in doing given assignments and learning their lessons with high degree of interest and motivation.

This research tried to focus mainly on grammar performances and students' motivation to know what factors affect students to achieve higher or lower scores in certain situations especially in their midterm or final exams, and how to increase the Iranian second grade high school students' grammar performance and also motivate them by using humor.

The teacher expects that the students' scores in grammar enhance in comparison to the control group's score in midterm or final exam at least two times. The main reason that the researcher tries to measure students' improvement in grammar is that it can help the teachers to teach grammar easier to their students in a friendly situation with their maximum capacity. Second, it can help the syllabus designers in preparing pedagogy materials in order to design and prepare the pedagogy materials easier by using humorous techniques and methods. Third, the benefit may also be for language teaching institutes to teach grammar consuming least energy with getting maximum efficiency. Forth, it is interesting for the teachers to motivate the students by creating friendly situation in order to increase their self-esteem and enhance their efficiency in learning. Finally it is expected that the students can be motivated by feeling relaxed because of the enjoying and relaxing atmosphere in the classroom. Hence, the research questions are:

1. Is there any relationship between using humor and students' grammar performance?
2. Is there any significant relationship between using humor and increasing students' motivation?

And the accompanying hypotheses are:

1. There is high relationship between using humor and students' grammar performance.
2. There is a significant relationship between using humor and increasing motivation.

Null: There is no relationship between using humor and Ss grammar performance.

III. Methodology

The subjects in this study were 120 male students of second grade high school in Abhar's Ayatullah Khamenei School. Only 60 Ss, out of 120 were selected for the study with age range of 16 and 17. The students were aware that they are taking part in the study and were motivated by being informed in advance that they would receive extra awards for their participation.

For the purpose of the study and to investigate the hypotheses, some instruments were used .They were validated through a pilot study before being utilized in the research project. First, grammar test including 30 multiple-choice test items along with and answer sheet was used in order to homogenize the participants. In other words, the students were exposed to Nelson English language tests to be homogeneous. It means that, those students who could get more then 50% of the score were selected for the main purpose of the study. Then the participants were divided into two groups including experimental and control group. Each group consisted of thirty male subjects.

Second, before administering the tests, the researcher checked almost everything which would facilitate administering the tests whether there were adequate materials (pencil, paper ...) on hand, perhaps with a few extras of everything. All necessary devices were ready and checked to see if they had worked better. The next step was to make sure that there was a well-ventilated and quiet place to give the test with enough time in that space.

Third, the tests which were utilized in both groups were Nelson grammar Tests. They were employed three times after each treatment in both groups. They were standardized tests to determine the amount of grammar learning of the groups. In other words, they were utilized as achievement tests. In all, the test contained 20 items.

Forth, a questionnaire including 14 items including 10 multiple-choose and 4 descriptive questions were prepared. That is a kind of eliciting surveys of students' opinions about the effect of humor on their motivation. Its aim was to collect enough information from Ss' motivation toward their course, English class, and teacher. There was no time limit, but generally took approximately 20 minutes for all. The items were prepared (appeared in Appendix B) in Farsi in order to be known for the participants and for ease of them in exams.

Fifth, the objectives, the instructional materials, and the criterion examination were taken from students' books (book 2). The tests were directly based on course objectives. They included the grammar materials equivalent to the second grade student's book.

Finaly, the treatment was administered up to the third lesson of the book which had been taught. But, after the midterm exam humor was used as independent variables in experimental group; in other words, experimental group received treatments and the other group called control group, did not receive any treatment. It was run by traditional method of instruction or it got a kind of treatment called placebo. Both pre-test and post-test were defined considering the number of correct items. A correct item rated 1 and an incorrect answer corrected 0.

The study followed the true experimental design with the help of pre-test and some post tests during twelve weeks in target high school. As the table shows, the independent variable, in this case humor, is utilized in experimental group, but not in control group. It is the variable which is selected, manipulated, and measured by the researcher, so we can observe its effect on dependent variable. The dependent variable, on the other hand, is the variable which is observed and measured to determine the effect of the independent variable.

Table of the Randomized Control Experimental Group, Pretest-Posttest Design

Group	**Pre-test**	**Independent variable**	**Post test**
Experimental	_ T	x T2	x T3
control	_ T	_ T1	_ T2

In this design T(exp) and (T con) are the tests before applying the treatment, and T2,T3, (exp), (con) are tests after each treatment, respectively, where X is the treatment. The difference between the mean of pre-test and post test of first group and the difference between pre-test and posttest of next group were tested for statistical significance. At the outset of the study, two groups were given pre-test containing 20 items about grammar materials, then the scores were calculated for statistical significance (by spss) after being recorded. Next, both groups received instruction through different method for twelve weeks (one session a week including 90 minutes). During this period the experimental group received humor, but control group received traditional method of instruction which will be shown graphically and statistically later.

IV. Data Analysis and Discussion

In order to sort and display the data in meaningful way, the researcher went through three steps: coding the data, doing the numerical computations, and preparing a final display. Once the data were coded, descriptive statistics were used to help organize the data. The final data are displayed in graph form, table form, arithmetic form, or all three.

Out of 120 Ss, only 60 Ss who could get 50% percent of score were selected. Then, the Ss randomly were assigned one member of each pair to the experimental group and the other to the control group.

After collecting the data, the researcher's first task was to organize and present the collected scores from 60 high school students in an understandable form.

TABLE OF STATISTICS

		exptest1	exptest2	exptest3	contest1	contest2	contest3
N	Valid	30	30	30	30	30	30
	Missing	1	1	1	1	1	1
Mean		14.2667	15.4333	16.1333	14.4000	13.3333	12.2333
Median		14.5000	15.5000	16.0000	15.0000	13.5000	12.0000
Mode		15.00	16.00	18.00	15.00	13.00	12.00
Std. Deviation		2.37346	1.94197	2.28539	2.30591	2.69525	3.13691
Variance		5.633	3.771	5.223	5.317	7.264	9.840
Skewness		-.450	.032	-.788	-.487	-.652	-.001
Std. Error of Skewness		.427	.427	.427	.427	.427	.427
Kurtosis		-.327	-.213	1.918	-.253	.584	-.729
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.833	.833	.833	.833	.833	.833
Range		9.00	7.00	11.00	9.00	12.00	12.00

As it is indicated in the following histogram chart, the scores are spread normally. It also represents that the scores are homogeneous, but after using humor it gradually becomes negatively skewed. This means that when the tail is pointing in the direction of the lower scores (-), the distribution is said to be negatively skewed. It shows that the scores become better gradually.

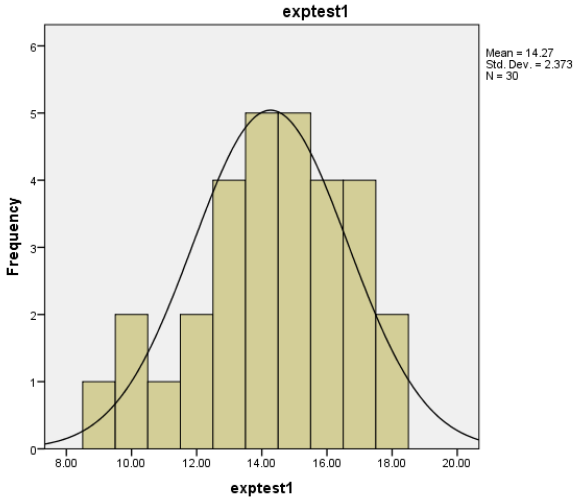

Figure4. 1 Approximate percentages under the normal distribution

In experimental group (test 2), it can be observed that the normal distribution becomes a little negatively skewed. By increasing the scores the mean becomes better than the previous test. Such improvement makes it possible that the scores spread to the right side of the central part of distribution. In fact, this chart shows that the treatment is effective and motivator too.

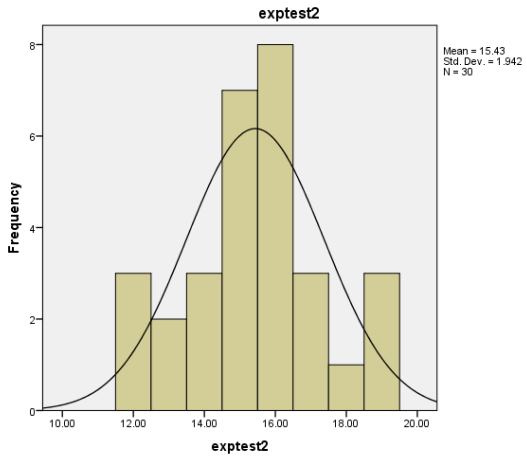

Figure4. 2 Positively-skewed distribution in experimental group

As it can be inferred from test 3 in experimental group the scores are scrunched up toward the higher end of the scale. It indicates that the treatment was effective and can be useful.

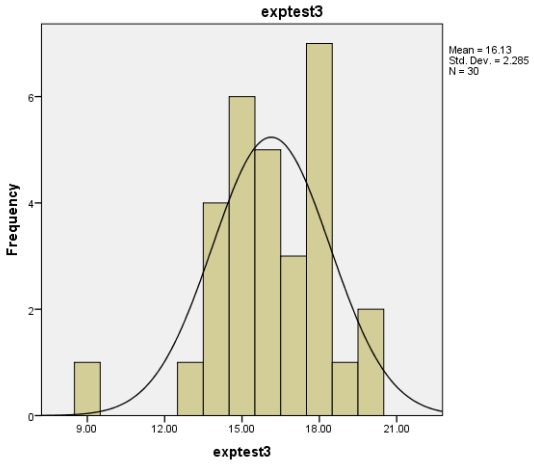

Figure4. 3 . More positively- skewed in experimental group

It can also be observed that the control groups' scores are distributed normally too. It means that the scores are distributed equally above and below the mean and symmetrically. Since the distribution of scores above central score is a mirror image of the distribution below the central score. We can see that scores range from a low of 9 to the high of 18.

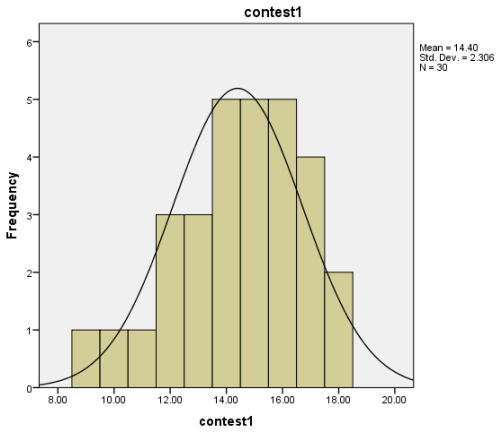

Figure4. 4 Approximate percentage under the normal distribution

In this case, the distribution shows that it becomes gradually positively skewed. It indicates that when the tail points toward the higher scores (+) the distribution is positively skewed. In other words the scores become worse by omitting the humor in this group.

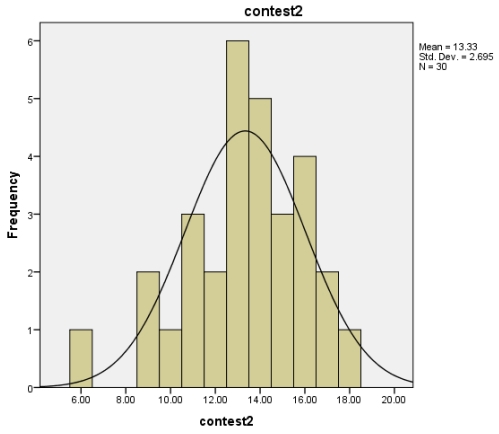

Figure4. 5 Negatively-skewed distribution in control group

In the following figure, it can obviously be observed that the distribution becomes positively skewed. It shows that by omitting humor some other factors may make it possible for them to become more tired of taking part in such classes and their motivation may be effected negatively without any flexibility, enjoyment, and humor.

It also clearly shows that the standard deviation increases in this case in comparison to test 3 in experimental group. This means that the average differences of scores from the mean in control group is more than experimental group. It still shows that the mean decreases in this group compared to experimental group (test 3).

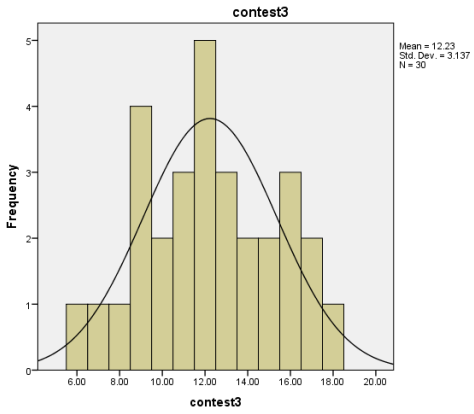

Figure4. 6 More negatively-skewed of scores in control group

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between using humor and increasing student's grammar performance.

Exp= mean=16.13 Sx=2.28 N=30

Con= mean= 12.23 Sx=3.13 N=30

$$\text{T- observed} = \frac{x_e - x_c}{s_{(x_e - x_c)}}$$

Here is the formula of standard error of differences between means.

$$S_{(x_e - x_c)} = \sqrt{(\frac{s_e}{\sqrt{n1}})^2 + (\frac{s_c}{\sqrt{n2}})^2}$$

$$= \sqrt{(\frac{2.28}{\sqrt{30}})^2} + \sqrt{(\frac{3.13}{\sqrt{30}})^2} = 0.7$$

As it is indicated in the following histogram chart, the scores are spread normally, it represents that the scores are homogeneous in this case, but after using humor it gradually becomes negatively skewed. It means that when the tail is pointing in the direction of the lower scores (-), the distribution is said to be negatively skewed. It shows that the Ss scores become better gradually.

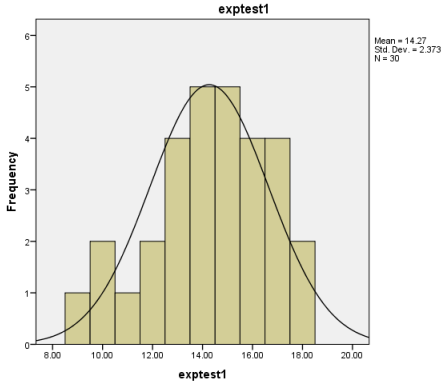

Figure4. 7 Approximate percentages under the normal distribution

In experimental group (test 2), it can be observed that the normal distribution becomes a little negatively skewed. By increasing the scores the mean becomes better than the previous test. Such improvement makes it possible that the scores spread to the right hand side of the central part of distribution. In fact, this chart shows that the treatment and motivator are effective.

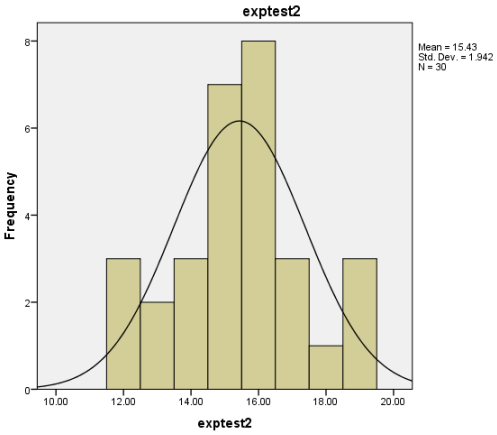

Figure4. 8 Positively-skewed distribution in experimental group

As it can be inferred from test 3 in experimental group, the scores are scrunched up toward the higher end of the scale as shown in the following histogram. This indicates that the treatment was effective and can be useful.

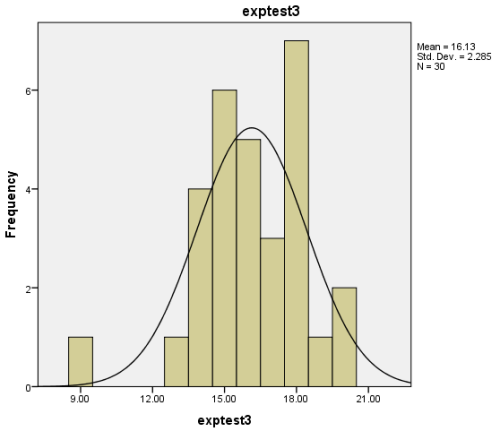

Figure4. 9 . More positively- skewed in experimental group

Looking at the graphic display in Figure 2.1 below, it can be observed that the control groups' score are distributed normally. It means that the scores are distributed equally above and below the mean and symmetrically. Since the distribution of scores above central score is a mirror image of the distribution below the central score. We can see that scores range from a low of 9 to the high of 18.

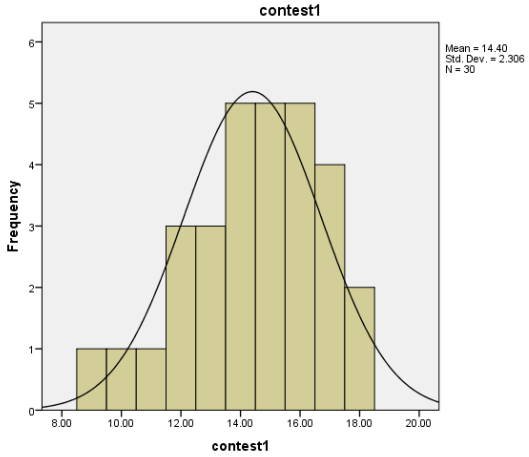

Figure4. 10 Approximate percentage under the normal distribution

In this case, the distribution shows that it becomes gradually positively skewed. The graph indicates that when the tail points toward the higher scores (+) the distribution is positively skewed. In other words, the scores become worse by omitting the humor in this group.

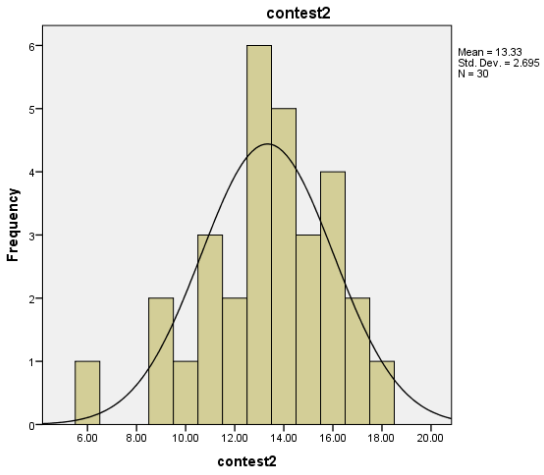

Figure4. 11 Negatively-skewed distribution in control group

In the following figure, it can obviously be observed that the distribution becomes positively skewed. It shows that by omitting humor some other factors may make it possible for the students to become more tired of taking part in such classes and their motivation may be effected negatively without any flexibility, enjoyment, and humor.

It also clearly shows that the standard deviation increases in this case compared to test 3 in experimental group. This means that the average differences of scores from the mean in control group is more than experimental group. It still shows that the mean decreases in this group compared to experimental group (test 3).

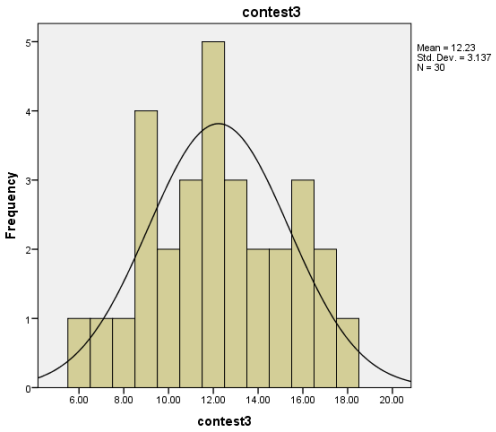

Figure4. 12 More negatively-skewed of scores in control group

Null hypothesis: There is no relationship between using humor and increasing student's grammar performance.

Exp= mean=16.13 Sx=2.28 N=30

Con= mean= 12.23 Sx=3.13 N=30

$$\text{T- observed} = \frac{x_e - x_c}{s_{(x_e - x_c)}}$$

Here is the formula of standard error of differences between means.

$$S_{(x_e - x_c)} = \sqrt{(\frac{s_e}{\sqrt{n1}})^2 + (\frac{s_c}{\sqrt{n2}})^2}$$

$$= \sqrt{(\frac{2.28}{\sqrt{30}})^2} + \sqrt{(\frac{3.13}{\sqrt{30}})^2} = 0.7$$

Now that we have the standard error of differences between the means, we can find the t value.

$$\text{T- Observed} = \frac{16.13 - 12.23}{0.7} = 5.57$$

At this point, all we need is the critical value for t when there are two groups having 30 students in each. So each group has 29 d.f. Since there are two groups, the total d.f ($n_{1-1+}n_{2-1}$) is 58. Now we can turn to the t-distribution table

to find out whether we are justified in rejecting the null hypothesis. It's understood that our number of d.f 58 falls between 40 and 60. Hence, we can choose 60 as being the more conservative estimate, and check across to the .05 column. The t value needed for our selected significance level of .05 is 2.000. Fortunately, our t value is enough above t critical that we are quite sure in rejecting the null hypothesis. Our experimental group scored more differently on final test of using humor. It shows that the experimental group who benefited from treatment, in this case humor, performed better than the control group. This indicates that our treatment was effective. So, we safely can reject the null hypothesis.

.t-observed=5.57, t-critical=2.00 so t-observed>t-critical.

The results of t-test analysis, indicate that the researcher has to reject the null hypothesis. The experimental group surpassed the control group. This means that the subjects in the experimental group surpassed the control group. It also means that the subjects in the experimental group benefited significantly from the instruction in using humor and hence this mode of training was significantly more beneficial than the traditional way of teaching without using humor.

Table-3 Independent samples t-test analysis of gain score differences in the grammar performance test.

TABLE4. 1
T-TEST

	Group	subject	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**	**variance**	**T**-observed	**T- critical**	**Degree of freedom**
Grammar performance-difference on post test	**Experimental**	30	16.13	2.28	5.22	5.57	2.00	58
	Control	30	12.23	3.13	9.84			

The t-distribution table allows us to compare our observed value of t with the appropriate family in the t-distribution table. The rows down the side of the table relate to the separate t-distribution, each with unique number of freedom.

1. Select the column with the probability that you want.
2. Select the row for degree of freedom.

   For two values, number of degrees of freedom is $(n_{1+n_2}) - 2$

3. Compare the t-value in the cell with your t-value.
4. The results are significant if the t-value is greater that the value in the cell.(see table)

The following histogram chart below is representative of the differences between the mean scores in grammar performance in post-test.

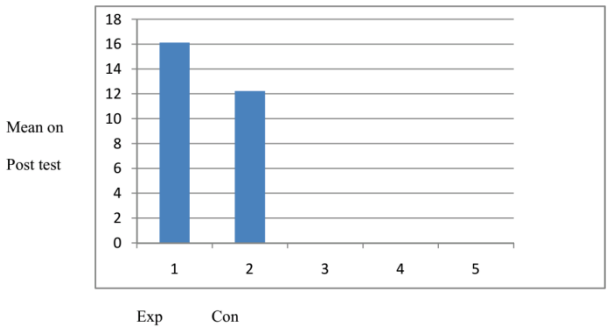

Figure4. 13 Comparison of mean scores in both groups on the final test

Where
Experimental=1
Control=2

TABLE4.2
STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO MOTIVATION QUESTIONNAIRE

items	**Strongly disagree**	**disagree**	**No idea**	**agree**	**Strongly agree**
1	3	7	10	5	2
2	1	4	6	13	4
3	1	2	10	6	8
4	-	1	4	10	11
5	1	-	1	17	8
6	1	-	4	10	12
7	1	1	4	9	12
8	2	1	4	9	11
9	3	2	5	13	5
10	-	1	1	6	19

V. Results and Conclusion

In this study, findings showed that teaching in even space without using humor is boring for the students to attend in the class. But, most of the students take part only out of fear of their parents or school authorities. The reason that teachers believe they should use humor in the classroom is that they think one of the best methods for keeping students focused on the class is using humor.

After administering humor oriented class, some interesting findings have been shown as follow:

1. Students showed enthusiasm to attend in the classroom and became more activated
2. Motivation improved in both over achievers and underachievers.
3. The rate of absentee decreased.
4. Performance showed high rate in experimental group.
5. Most of the students showed more respect toward their teacher.
6. Some parents demanded the teacher to teach their children privately.

The findings in this research support the idea that humor is a "worthwhile strategy" method in the context of vocabulary instruction. It also supports Rareshide's (1994) research that the use of humor makes learning more enjoyable, which, in turn, leads to a more relaxed atmosphere, as well as positive attitudes about school.

There were also some negative results:

1. Few culturally poor students tried to make fun the teacher.
2. The students laughing with loud voices caused problem for other classes.
3. If humor is misused, the teacher may lose control of the class.
4. The teacher may be labeled as a buffoon.

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