International Journal of Instruction *October 2026 ● Vol.19, No.4*
e-ISSN: 1308-1470 ● www.e-iji.net *p-ISSN: 1694-609X*
pp. 489-506

Article submission code: 20251128075602
Received: 28/11/2025 Revision: 24/04/2026
Accepted: 01/05/2026 OnlineFirst: 01/07/2026

Humour in EFL Classes: Effects on Academic Engagement, Anxiety, and Language Learning

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This research examined the impact of humour on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner's educational engagement, their language skills, and their feelings of anxiety. To do this, the researchers created a quasi-experimental study. Thirty-six students studying in an English institute were asked to participate in this experimental study and completed two questionnaires. For assessing the participation behaviour of students, the engagement questionnaire designed by Golestani and Ghanizadeh (forthc.) was used to evaluate the three elements of engagement. It includes 24 items: The behavioural (9 items, Questions 1-9), emotional (3 items, Questions 10-12), and cognitive engagement (12 items, Questions 13-24) (Appendix A). To measure the anxiety of cross-cultural communication, six components from Dörnyei's L2 motivational self-system (2005), which were translated into Persian and validated in the Iranian context by Papi (2010), were used (Appendix B). Humour instructions were carried out in the experimental group through a number of techniques. The findings estimated via an independent samples t-test indicated that humour can influence anxiety negatively and language achievement positively. The results of Multi Variance Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) demonstrated that Humour can boost emotional engagement by up to 55 percent; it is less effective for cognitive engagement, predicting about 37 percent, and even weaker for behavioural engagement, with just 27 percent. When teachers become aware of the contributions of humour to engagement, language achievement, and anxiety, they pay more attention to learners' emotions and use homer-based instruction in their classes more frequently.

Keywords: anxiety, EFL learners, engagement, humour, language achievement

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of teaching is to change the learner's behaviour and knowledge through some form of communication. There are several ways to communicate that are more effective than the typical way. Proper use of humour, for example, is an effective way to facilitate communication. A communicator succeeds when humour brings about the

Citation: Avan, S., & Ghanizadeh, A. (2026). Humour in EFL classes: Effects on academic engagement, anxiety, and language learning. *International Journal of Instruction*, *19*(4), 489-506. https://doi.org/10.29333/iji.2026.19425a

desired changes in behaviour and the acquisition of knowledge. Furthermore, humour not only motivates students, but also creates a more relaxed and positive classroom atmosphere that triggers cheerfulness and laughter, which helps learning. Arousal theory explains humour as a blend of emotion and how we see things (Martin & Kuiper, 2016). This theory, which comes from Berlyne (1960), maintains that humour and laughter happen when we use our thinking skills along with a good level of body excitement. Humour is a happy feeling that makes people feel cheerful (Martin & Kuiper, 2016).

Explaining how humour functions in the classroom is difficult. Teaching with humour is complicated, and scholars have used various methods to study how people use humour in communication. Garner (2006) showed that students who listened to a lecture using humorous elements held significantly more information from the lecture than students who listened to the same speech without humorous inserts. The study of Hackathorn et al. (2011) showed that "not only is memory and cognition enhanced by humour, but it also provides new evidence that humour enhances the ability of humour to understand information". In addition, Schmidt (1994) found that humorous texts were much better remembered by students than non-humorous texts.

Zhou and Lee (2025), in a review on five-decades research on teaching and learning with instructional humour, recapitulated extant studies on instructional humour and concluded that using instructional humour in class encourages teaching and learning efficiency. In this study, it is presumed that proper humour can motivate students' engagement and improve language performance.

Engagement is the degree to which students show connections and concerns about their involvement in their teaching and learning activities (Sciarra & Seirup et al., 2008). Humour must be engaging and interesting to influence. The role of humour in providing such fascinating interactions has been the focus of much research over the last decade. Humour can be used not only to make language lessons more enjoyable, but also as an educational tool to improve students' language achievement. The study of humour used by educators focuses on the type of humour (Bryant et al., 1980). Instructors often use humour in the classroom for different reasons, as shown in various studies like those by Aylor and Oppliger (2003).

While there are many reasons teachers might use humour, many believe the main reason is to help students learn better. Some research suggests that when teachers use humour, it can make learning easier (Davies, 2003), but other studies do not support this idea (Ziv, 1988). When thinking about how humour influences learning, it is important to know that humour does not function the same in every situation. Humour can help in many good ways, like bringing people together and helping deal with stress. But it can also have some bad effects, such as making fun of others or causing someone to feel left out. Studies by Booth-Butterfield et al. (2007), Kane et al. (1977), Lefcourt (2001), Lefcourt and Martin (1986), and Mulkay (1988) demonstrated both the positive and negative sides of humour in social settings.

Good feelings from funny moments can help students pay more attention and make learning easier. But bad feelings like worry and stress can make it harder to remember and learn things. According to Krashen (1985), anxiety sets an emotional filter. This is a

mental block that makes an individual generally unresponsive to language input. Therefore, the learner "cannot use the comprehensible input received for language acquisition" and prevents further progress in that particular target language (Krashen (1985, p.3). As Horwitz et al. (1986) pointed out, anxiety and inefficiency in foreign languages can lead to poor test results and grades, leading to teachers' misunderstandings of the students' actual language proficiency.

In this study, it is also hypothesized that the use of humour helps create a more positive and relaxed classroom atmosphere. This reduces student anxiety, resolves emotionally stressful classroom situations, and eliminates significant adverse learning factors.

In short, according to Astin's theory (1993), students who are more active in their learning and in the school environment tend to be more successful. The value of teaching methods and practices becomes clear when they help students become more engaged, because being more engaged helps them learn better. So, this study aims to look at how humour affects English learners' participation, language skills, and feelings of anxiety.

Review of the Related Literature

Humour

Humour in foreign language education plays a different role in making learning fun and effective (Bell & Pomerantz, 2015); Bushnell, 2009; Lems, 2011). Much of the research on humour focuses on how humour makes students enjoy language learning. Lems (2011) argued that humour motivates and alerts students. Similarly, Bell and Pomerantz (2015) reported that adult English learners as second language learners are much better at remembering objects in playful language-related episodes than in language-related episodes. Forman (2011) concluded that teacher humour created a warm and engaging classroom environment and ultimately reduced students' anxiety about learning a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Researchers in the field of education have examined the use of humour as a valuable tool in the classroom. Humour research is interdisciplinary, but it is particularly significant as a method to capture students' attention and enhance the classroom environment. It is considered an effective strategy for teachers. Deneire (1995) found that "humour has a positive effect on the learning environment, attracting, maintaining, strengthening, and promoting retention of learners" (p.53). Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2011) examined the use of humour in global language education and highlighted the numerous benefits of humour in foreign language contexts. They argue that "studies in the field of language education around the world show the importance of using humour in reducing student anxiety and helping learners acquire practical language skills" (p. 401). They generally refer to humour as "an important resource for motivating students" (p. 402). Recent studies have substantiated that integrating instruction with humour has positive effects on students' academic performance (Luo & Zhan, 2021), their engagement in virtual education (Erdoğdu & Çakıroğlu, 2021; Luo et al., 2023), university students' achievement goals and self-efficacy (Daumiller et al., 2019), their positive attitude toward math through solving humorous word problems (CsÃkos et al.,

2022). It is also verified that humour-oriented instruction exerts longitudinal influences on students' emotional states (Bieg et al., 2018).

Anxiety

Horwitz et al (1986) formulated a distinct definition of anxiety related to language acquisition in their publication titled Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety. They characterized language anxiety as "a combination of self-perception, convictions, emotions, and behaviours that occur during the process of learning a language in a classroom setting, due to the distinctive nature of the language learning experience" (p. 128). Anxiety is a personal feeling of stress, worry, and tension that comes from the body's automatic nervous system getting excited (Horwitz et al, 1986).

Foreign language anxiety holds significant importance as it can lead to emotional and physical discomfort for some students. When students experience high levels of anxiety in the classroom, they may struggle to focus fully or may refrain from participating altogether. Research indicates that foreign language anxiety can negatively impact academic performance, resulting in lower college grades (Saito & Samimi, 1996), influence cognitive functioning, such as hindering language production (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), and alter students' interactions with peers, leading to reduced verbal engagement (Morshedian et al., 2023).

Effective teachers have great competence to utilize innovative and alternative approaches in their instruction to diminish L2 anxiety or help students cope with it efficiently. For instance, Arzhangi and Ghanizadeh (2025) demonstrated that incorporating game-based elements into language classes can create a stress-free context that not only develops buoyant students but also encourages their persistent motivation. Moulavinafchi et al. (2026) reported similar results in favour of AI-integrated flipped experience in EFL context.

In this study, it is presumed that humour can help bridge the gap between teachers and students by making them feel more relaxed (Baid & Lambert, 2010). This positive effect might come from the fact that humour can be fun and enjoyable. Learners might experience reduced anxiety within the classroom environment, thereby contributing to the establishment of a more conducive learning atmosphere. It also can boost their interest in learning and make it easier for them to learn (Banas, et al., 2011). Garner (2006) also examined the psychological effects of laughter in the classroom and hypothesized that humour could support learning through improved breathing and circulation.

Engagement

Engagement is the extent to which students show connections and concerns about their education and engage in learning activities (Davis et al., 2012; Sciarra & Seirup, 2008,). Student engagement has become a great concern in recent years. FranklinGuy and Schnorr (2016) maintained that it is a key part of the learning process. Appleton et al. (2006) explained that *student engagement* refers to how much students are involved in learning, how interested they seem, how they act in class, how they connect with the school, and how they get along with their classmates. Christman (2018) noted that *student engagement* has become a common term used to describe various academic

endeavours (Kahu, 2013). Some people even think the idea is so common that it is almost like part of academic thinking (Zepke et al., 2014).

In real classrooms, student engagement is made up of several segments and can be affected by how friendly and supportive the classroom environment is (Fredricks et al., 2004). A two-part model has been developed by certain researchers, encompassing both behaviour and emotions. (Skinner et al., 2008). Others have developed a three-part model that covers behavioural, thinking, and emotional aspects (Reschly & Christenson, 2006; Jimerson et al., 2003;).

The initial component of academic achievement is emotional engagement, which refers to the feelings students have regarding their academic tasks. These feelings can include being happy, interested, angry, or scared about their learning (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). In simpler words, emotional involvement is when students feel connected to their studies and care about their education (Sciarra & Seirup, 2008; Davis et al., 2012).

Behavioural involvement means how much a student takes part in school activities. It includes paying attention, behaving well, and showing up to class (Finn, 1989). Cognitive involvement is about how students think about their learning. It includes using strategies to manage their learning and thinking about how they learn (Raisi & Javedan, 2015). Cognitive involvement is a key part of academic involvement and often helps connect different parts of learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). It positively influences students' academic performance and demonstrates that they are engaging thoughtfully and employing effective strategies to grasp challenging subjects.

Recent research on EFL learning demonstrated that learners' engagement can be nurtured through various strategies, techniques, and methods teachers utilizes in their instruction and in their interaction with learners, including narratives (Ghanizadeh et al., 2024), reflective journals (Ghanizadeh et al., 2025), and teacher motivated behaviour (Pourtousi et al., 2024)

Given that humour is a teaching tool that can make learning more enjoyable and easier to remember (Shatz & Coil, 2008), it can be used as a teaching strategy to engage students in the process of learning and interaction. It is how teachers use laughter or funny moments in their teaching (Chiasson, 2002). The National Education Association supports using humour because it helps students stay interested and learn better (McNeely, 2015).

Derived from the above literature review, the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of using humour in EFL classes on students' engagement, language achievement, and students' anxiety. EFL learners' engagement, anxiety, and language achievement were the factors investigated in this study, and were presumed to be enhanced through some humour-derived instructions like games, funny idioms, and panel discussions in language teaching. These strategies as the treatment implemented in the experimental group acted as the independent variable, while engagement, anxiety, and language achievement are considered as the dependent variables. Accordingly, this research addresses the following questions:

1. Does the use of humour in EFL classes influence learners' language achievement?

2. Does the use of humour in EFL classes influence learners' academic engagement?

2.1. Does the use of humour in EFL classes influence learners' cognitive engagement?

2.2. Does the use of humour in EFL classes influence learners' emotional engagement?

2.3. Does the use of humour in EFL classes influence learners' behavioral engagement?

3. Does the use of humour in EFL classes influence learners' L2 anxiety?

METHOD

Design

The present research is a quantitative investigation employing a quasi-experimental methodology. As noted earlier, this research was conducted in two classes. The initial phase involved selecting two classes where the students were predominantly at a comparable level. To ensure their similarity regarding language proficiency and the psychological characteristics under consideration, proficiency tests, along with engagement and anxiety questionnaires, were administered as pre-tests to the participants in both groups. The same factors were checked again in the post-test to see how well the teaching method influenced students. The group that received the new method used humour-based activities such as panel discussions, teaching funny idioms, guessing games, and pantomimes, all carefully planned. The other group continued with traditional teacher-cantered lessons. Data were collected from March 2022 and continued for three months. The experimental part included 10 sessions, each lasting about 90 minutes.

Participants

This study took place in two classes with 36 English Foreign Language (EFL) students who learn English at Helmi English Institute in Mashhad, a city located in the northeastern region of Iran. The institute was chosen because it met the criteria for reliability and practicality. All the students were girls who had the same level of English ability, were in the same semester of their studies, and were between the ages of 15 and 17.

Instruments

Academic Engagement Questionnaire

For assessing the participation behaviour of students, the engagement questionnaire designed by Golestani and Ghanizadeh (forthc.) was used to evaluate the three elements of engagement: The behavioural (9 items, Questions 1-9), emotional (3 items, Questions 10-12), and cognitive engagement (12 items, Questions 13-24) (Appendix A).

The initial researchers validated the scale, indicating satisfactory fit indices: a chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio of 2.81, an RMSEA of 0.06, and fit indices such as NFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.91, and GFI = 0.94, all falling within acceptable limits. Reliability was established with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.89 for behavioural engagement, 0.90 for cognitive engagement, and 0.84 for emotional engagement. (Golestani & Ghanizadeh, forthc.). The questionnaire was created using the Google Docs platform,

with the link provided to students and also made accessible through the website used during the treatment.

L2 Anxiety in English Scale

A total of six items derived from Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System (2009) were employed to evaluate L2 anxiety (Appendix B). In an Iranian context, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for these items was determined to be 0.74. Examples of the questions included in this scale are: 1- To what extent are you concerned that other English speakers may perceive your English as unusual? 2- How anxious would you feel if a foreigner requested directions from you in English?

The Babel English Language Placement Tests

To evaluate the language proficiency of the learners, the chosen version of the Babel English Language Placement Test was employed. This assessment is fundamentally derived from the Nelson Quick Check Placement Tests, which have been demonstrated to possess both validity and reliability (Al-Andaluz, 2006). Regarding validity, the Babel tests are indeed accurate; however, they do not provide the same degree of precision as the individual assessments found within the broader NELT or other CAT batteries. Nevertheless, for our objectives, they are adequate to offer a reliable indication of the overall language proficiency of the test participants. The test is divided into four sections of equal difficulty, designated as Test A, Test B, Test C, and Test D. Each section comprises four subsections containing 25 items that pertain to reading, grammar, and vocabulary. The version utilized in this study consists of 25 items and requires approximately twenty minutes for completion.

Procedure

Humour instructions were carried out in the experimental group through the following procedures. Funny idioms and proverbs were selected and stated in the classroom. It was so interesting for students and helped them to engage more in the classroom activities. They said they did not have such as this experience before.

There were different kinds of games that can motivate students and would decrease anxiety in the students. One of these games is *guessing game* that one of the students should find a vocabulary from the book and count the letters of that word and draw some lines on the board, equal to the number of the letters of that word and the others would guess the letters one by one to reach the exact word. All of the students came and played this game.

Another game involved pantomime, where the students were split into two groups. In each group, one student became volunteer. The other participants of group said a word to that student in a slow voice and she acted it while the other group guessed the exact word.

During some sessions, there were panel discussions through which, one student chose a funny and interesting topic, and the others talked about that topic, and they discussed about that. It was expected to enhance their engagement and their language achievement. In the early sessions, some students did not engage in panel discussion, but then they started to talk and discuss with their classmate.

FINDINGS

The Results of Pretest on Language Proficiency

In order to determine whether there is a significant difference in language skill levels between the control group and the experimental group, an independent samples t-test was performed. The descriptive statistics for proficiency in both groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Analytical overview of proficiency metrics in control and experimental groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Proficiency_pre	experimental	18	7.66	2.27	.53
	control	18	9.16	2.33	.54

As illustrated in the table, there are notable differences in the average language proficiency scores between the participants in the control group and those in the experimental group.: control group (mean = 9.16, standard deviation = 2.33), experimental group (mean = 7.66, standard deviation = 2.27).

To determine whether this difference holds statistical significance, an independent similar statistical analysis was performed. The results indicated that there is no statistically significant difference in language proficiency levels between the two groups ($t = -1.95$, $p = .06$). This suggests that the two groups exhibited comparable language proficiency prior to the commencement of the study.

To make sure the two groups of participants had similar levels of engagement in terms of their behaviour, feelings, and thinking, a statistical test called MANOVA was used. Table 2 presents the mean scores for each category of engagement across both groups.

Table 2
Descriptive analysis of engagement in control and experimental groups

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Behavioural_ pre	experimental group	39.83	2.87	18
	control group	36.66	4.74	18
	Total	38.25	4.18	36
Cognitive_pre	experimental group	47.66	7.91	18
	control group	42.33	7.76	18
	Total	45.00	8.18	36
Emotional_pre	experimental group	12.83	1.38	18
	control group	12.00	1.57	18
	Total	12.41	1.51	36

As observed, there are minor distinctions in the engagement levels of the two groups. To accurately assess these differences, a MANOVA was conducted. The analysis focused on three categories of outcomes: emotional, behavioural, and cognitive. The groups under comparison were the control group and the experimental group. Prior to executing the analysis, preliminary checks were performed to ensure that the data satisfied the required conditions. The findings from the MANOVA, presented in Table

3, indicated that there was no significant difference between the two groups across all combined outcomes. (F=1.10, p= .36, Wilks' Lambda=.89).

Table 3
MANOVA table illustrating the outcomes of engagement between control and experimental groups

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Level	Wilks' Lambda	.82	2.35	3.00	32.00	.90

To determine whether there is a significant difference in the levels of L2 anxiety between the control group and the experimental group, an independent similar statistical analysis was performed. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for anxiety levels in both groups. As illustrated in the table, the mean scores of L2 anxiety for participants in the control and experimental groups exhibit some variation: control group (average = 15.81, standard deviation = 4.73), experimental group (average = 17.80, standard deviation = 6.68).

Table 4
Descriptive statistics of l2 anxiety across control and experimental groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety_pre	experimental group	18	22.83	8.08	1.90
	control group	18	24.33	6.30	1.48

In order to determine whether the observed difference is statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was performed. The results indicated that there is no statistically significant difference in the levels of L2 anxiety between the two groups (t = -0.62, p = -.53). This suggests that the two groups exhibited comparable levels of L2 anxiety prior to the commencement of the study.

The Results of the Posttest on Language Proficiency

To determine whether a significant difference exists between the control and experimental groups regarding their language skills in the posttest, an independent samples t-test was performed. The descriptive results of English achievement for both groups are presented in Table 5 below. The table indicates that the average scores for language learning vary between the two groups: control group (average = 9.33, standard deviation = 2.19) and experimental group (average = 13.00, standard deviation = 2.14).

Table 5
Descriptive statistics of language achievement across control and experimental groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Proficiency_ post	control	18	9.33	2.19	.51
	experimental	18	13.00	2.14	.50

As illustrated in the table, the average scores for language achievement, as assessed by the Babel test, are greater in the experimental group than in the control group. To determine whether this difference is statistically significant, an independent similar statistical analysis was performed. The findings reveal a significant difference between the two groups regarding language achievement (t = -5.07, p = .00). This suggests that the incorporation of humour in the experimental group positively influenced the language achievement of EFL students.

To explore the impact of humour on students' engagement—encompassing behavioural, cognitive, and emotional aspects—the differences between the two groups on the engagement scale were analysed in the post-test. The means of both groups in the post-test were found to differ. As demonstrated in Table 6, the means of the experimental group across all three engagement dimensions surpass those of the control group.

Table 6
Descriptive statistics illustrating the outcomes of the post-test on engagement

	Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Behavioural_ post	experimental	42.00	2.37	18
	control	37.83	4.38	18
	Total	39.91	4.06	36
Emotional_post	experimental	14.00	1.18	18
	control	11.50	1.15	18
	Total	12.75	1.71	36
Cognitive_post	experimental	52.16	6.54	18
	control	42.50	6.47	18
	Total	47.33	8.07	36

To determine whether the observed differences were statistically significant, a one-way between-groups multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed. Prior to executing the analysis, several preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that the data satisfied the requirements of the test. The results of the MANOVA indicated a significant difference between the two groups concerning the three combined dependent variables (engagements): F = 13.96, p = .00, Wilks' Lambda = .44. The effect size, computed using partial eta squared, was .57, which is regarded as a moderate effect according to Cohen's F. This suggests that approximately 57% of the variation in engagements can be attributed to the humour-related techniques employed in the experimental group.

The subsequent analysis is detailed in Table 7. It was carried out to ascertain whether the difference persists across the three engagements and, if so, to identify which engagement is most influenced by humour.

Table 7
MANOVA table illustrating the outcomes of three varieties of engagements between control and experimental groups

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Group	Behavioural_post	156.25	1	156.25	12.57	.00	.27
	Emotional_post	56.25	1	56.25	41.12	.00	.55
	Cognitive_post	841.00	1	841.00	19.84	.00	.37

As demonstrated in Table 7, this difference is consistent across all three types of engagement: Behavioural (F=12.54, p= .001, partial eta squared =.27), Emotional (F=41.12, p= .00, partial eta squared =.55), and Cognitive (F=19.84, p= .00, partial eta squared =.37). Notably, the most significant difference is found in Emotional engagement. It can be inferred that humour accounts for a 55 percent increase in emotional engagement, while the predictive capacity for cognitive engagement is 37 percent, and for behavioural engagement, it stands at .27.

In order to determine whether there is a significant difference in L2 anxiety levels between the control and experimental groups in the post-test, a similar statistical analysis was performed. Table 8 presents the average anxiety scores for both groups. The data indicates that the average anxiety levels of participants in the control group and the experimental group differ. The control group recorded an average score of 19.50 with a standard deviation of 7.48, whereas the experimental group had an average score of 9.66 with a standard deviation of 1.41.

Table 8
An analysis of descriptive statistics pertaining to l2 anxiety in control and experimental groups

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety post	control	18	19.50	7.48	1.76
	experimental	18	9.66	1.41	.33

To determine whether this difference is statistically significant, an independent samples t-test was performed. The findings indicated a significant difference between the two groups regarding L2 anxiety ($t = 5.47$, $p = .00$). This suggests that the intervention used in the experimental group, which involved humour, effectively reduced L2 anxiety among EFL students.

DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study looks at whether using humour, like teaching funny idioms, playing games, and having panel discussions, help EFL learners improve their language skills. The findings indicate a notable distinction between the group that incorporated humour and the group that does not. The humour-utilizing group exhibits superior performance in language acquisition. In essence, the implementation of humorous idioms, games, and panel discussions as pedagogical strategies facilitates greater success in students' foreign language education.

Concerning the impact of humour on language acquisition, it was observed that the experimental group outperformed the control group. Humour is often seen as a way to capture students' attention in educational settings and can create a positive reaction and help them remember information (Wortley & Dotson, 2016). Hackathorn et al. (2011) discovered that when teachers use humour while teaching, students tend to understand and remember the material better than when humour is not used. Nasiri and Mafakheri (2015) note that until the 19th century, humour was not considered a part of teaching, and education was seen as a serious and formal process. Today, however, humour is recognized as an effective learning strategy. Glenn (2002) suggests that humour can help students get more involved in learning by making the environment more positive and friendly. However, humour can also influence the learning mood (Hellman, 2007), so it needs to be used carefully. If students focus too much on humour, they might miss the important learning content, leading to enjoyment without real learning.

Looking at the second purpose of the study, which probed if humour has an impact on engagement—cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement— the findings indicated that across the three forms of engagement, a notable distinction existed

between the experimental group and the control group in all three types of engagement, with emotional engagement experiencing the most substantial effect.

This suggests that using humour in the experimental group helped improve emotional engagement substantially. It also had a positive effect on the other two types of engagement: behavioural and cognitive.

Emotional engagement refers to the feelings students have about their learning, such as well-being, interest, anger, or fear connected to their school work (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). In simpler terms, emotional engagement means students feel connected to their education and care about their learning (Sciarra & Seirup, 2008; Davis et al., 2012). It is believed that strong emotional engagement can increase students' motivation to learn and make them feel more attached to school (Connell & Wellborn, 1991).

Behavioural engagement means how students take part in school activities, show good behaviour, and stay focused in class. It includes things like paying attention, following rules, and being present for lessons. Some researchers say it's about not acting out and behaving in a positive way that fits the classroom (Finn, 1989). Other studies define it as showing good behaviour, like not being disruptive and following classroom rules (Finn et al., 1995; Finn & Rock, 1997).

Cognitive engagement is about how students think about their learning and use strategies to help them learn better. It is part of overall academic engagement and is seen as something that helps explain how students perform at school (Raisi & Javedan, 2015). Research shows that cognitive engagement has a positive effect on student performance because it involves thinking carefully and making smart efforts to understand difficult topics (Fredricks et al., 2004).

As stated earlier, humour influences both the body and mind. It can help students understand lessons better and also keep them interested and motivated. This makes students more willing to think about the material (Shatz & Coil, 2008). As a way to teach, humour is described as something that makes learning easier, more enjoyable, and easier to remember (Shatz & Coil, 2008, p.106). When a topic is difficult or serious, humour can help take the edge off and keep students interested. When teachers share funny moments, it helps students connect better and build friendships (Luo & Zhan, 2021).

Wanzer and Frymier (1999) found that when teachers are seen as humorous, students feel more connected to them and are more involved in learning. Humour is considered a key quality of good teachers (Horng et al., 2005). Martin and Kuiper (2016) considered humour as a great teaching tool because it can help students learn better, remember more, and enjoy the process. Humour can also make the classroom a better place to be, and it can make students excited about learning. This helps them take part in discussions more and can make lectures more effective by keeping students interested (Nasiri & Mafakheri, 2015).

The above finding, demonstrating the contribution of humour in enhancing students' engagement, is in harmony with recent previous studies in online teaching and virtual education (e.g., Erdoğdu & Çakıroğlu, 2021; Luo & Zhan, 2021; Luo et al., 2023).

Hence, based on the findings of the present study, it can be tentatively suggested that the positive impact of humour on learner engagement may extend to other formats of class participation and to different contexts, although further empirical investigation is needed to confirm this possibility.

Looking at the third research objective, delving into whether using humour—like teaching funny idioms, playing games, or having panel discussions—helps reduce EFL learners' anxiety, the findings indicated a statistically significant distinction between the experimental group and the control group.

Students in the experimental group, which incorporated humour, exhibited reduced levels of anxiety. This suggests that the integration of humour into lessons positively influenced the alleviation of anxiety. It is evident that there was a notable difference between the two groups regarding their anxiety levels associated with learning the second language.

Research from around the world on teaching foreign languages shows that using humour helps reduce student stress and build useful language skills (Neuliep & Grohskopf, 2000, as cited in Schmitz, 2002). They also noted that humour is a "big help in keeping students motivated" (Schmitz, 2002, p. 98).

The present findings can be meaningfully explained through the lens of Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Input Hypothesis, in conjunction with engagement theory (Fredricks et al., 2004). As already discussed in literature review, according to Krashen (1985), a high affective filter blocks comprehensible input from reaching the language acquisition device. In the present study, humour appeared to lower this affective filter specifically along the dimension of anxiety. When instructors use humour, students feel less judged and more willing to make errors, which suggests that humour reduces the emotional barrier to input. This aligns with the emotional dimension of engagement model (Fredricks et al., 2004), which refers to students' affective reactions to teachers, peers, and learning tasks.

In a similar vein, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) posits that acquisition occurs when learners understand messages slightly above their current level. However, a high affective filter prevents learners from processing this input even if it is comprehensible. Humour facilitates cognitive engagement by temporarily lowering the filter, thereby freeing up working memory resources that would otherwise be consumed by self-monitoring and anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to look at how using humour affected Iranian English language students' involvement, stress, and success in learning English. The findings indicated that distinct differences existed among the groups, suggesting that the incorporation of humour facilitated greater student engagement, enhanced their language abilities, and alleviated their anxiety during the process of learning a foreign language.

The treatment used in this study can help teachers on various grounds. Also students can benefit from the techniques used in this study. They will be responsible for their

own learning and can achieve their personal needs in learning. By focusing on the interactive dimension of teaching, teachers themselves can find good strategies on how to help the students to cope with their anxiety. In this manner, teachers will find a framework to establish their goals for effective and enjoyable teaching. These instructions can be influential in learners' achievements and as a result increase the school attainments.

It is supposed that teachers can improve students' language achievement if they focus on the importance of learning, for example, by employing humour activities like games and by making learners accountable for personal improvement and by concentrating on the sub-factors of engagement especially on emotional engagement.

Future research could replicate this study with a broader demographic inventory. Specifically, while the present sample comprised predominantly female students, inclusion of male students, across diverse age ranges (e.g., adolescent vs. adult learners) and institutional types (e.g., vocational colleges vs. research universities) would help determine whether engagement-enhancing effects of humour are robust across gender and developmental stages. Additionally, extending the study duration beyond one academic term (e.g., a full academic year or across multiple course levels) would allow researchers to examine whether the positive impact of humour-integrated instruction on anxiety and enjoyment is sustained over time, or whether it habituates or backfires with repeated exposure.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the application of multimedia web simulation in teaching Pilgrimage topic has given positive impact on student achievements. The reason is the virtual simulation resembles the real world, which can attract students and help them to understand abstract images. The used of multimedia web virtual simulation in a lesson also support a learner-centred approach that related to Constructivist Learning Theory. Thus, in developing multimedia software, simulations should be considered as a suitable alternative for teachers in designing teaching materials. Therefore, teachers need to be more creative and innovative in order to attract students in constructing their knowledge by using different approaches that related to the topics in classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author (s) received research funding support from the "Kementerian Riset dan Teknologi Pendidikan Tinggi (KEMENRISTEKDIKTI), Indonesia".

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