



Exploring The Effectiveness of Humor in Teaching English as A Second Language in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Recent developments in the teaching of English Language, especially at the secondary schools' levels are geared towards methods and techniques of improving the quality of teaching in order to ensure good performances of students. Also, scholars are wilfully interested in pedagogical approaches that could enhance effective teaching of the language. Hence, the employment of humour, which is regarded as what is perceived as humorous by the participants in communication, is an innovative way of assisting students in the learning process. It has been argued by scholars in the field of psychology that humour has a lot of benefits. These benefits could also be achievable when humour is systematically employed in teaching, especially in the teaching of English Language. This research covers three (3) secondary schools selected across the three senatorial districts in Kebbi state, Nigeria. They are Kanta Unity College Argungu, (Kebbi North). Nagari Science College Birnin Kebbi (Kebbi Sentral), and Government Secondary School Yauri (Kebbi South). One Hundred and twenty Students from the schools served as the research subjects as they were taught specific topics with the application of humour and without its application. After two weeks, assessments were conducted. It was observed that students performed better in topics taught through the application of humour in all the schools. The research demonstrated that humour could make the classroom environment lively, facilitate acquisition and retention of vocabulary, and increase the general performances of students.

I. Introduction

In Nigeria, the English language has become a determining factor for most of the social, political and educational activities in the country. Therefore, the various functions that the English language performs in the nation are very important, hence, the continual attraction of scholars to studies that bother on the language. Despite the fact that Ker (2002:117)

opines that Nigeria is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country, the English language has made it possible for diverse ethnic nationalities to employ a common linguistic umbrella.

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines humour as the quality of something that makes it funny or amusing. It is important to state that, for a successful use, humour depends on the parties involved in a discourse. In other words, the onus lies on the parties to know whether something is humorous or not. Therefore, humour is anything perceived by parties as humorous, that is, possessing the ability to make someone laugh, smile, etc. The English language in Nigeria polity has become a necessary and welcomed development that people have to live it. Hence, the teaching of the language, at any level in Nigerian schools, deserves scholarly attention from time to time. In Kebbi State, the state government has initiated a policy that stipulates that student in public secondary schools, whether at junior level or senior level, should be promoted to the next class on the basis of a credit pass in English language and Mathematics. This step is as a result of a clear decline in the performances of students in National Examination Council (NECO) and West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Therefore, teachers have been mandated to improve the quality of teaching in schools, which is monitored by Quality Assurance Education Agency (QAEA) of the state. It is pertinent to state that teachers, in the past and present, have searched for more effective methods of communicating information and assisting the students in the learning process because the issue of poor performances cannot be glossed over. In fact, new pedagogies are being introduced to curriculum from time to time. This indicates that innovations and constant improvements are needed in the teaching process. One of the innovative ways of achieving this is through the employment of humour as a way of assessing the relevance of improvement of students' performances in English language. Therefore, the research examined the effectiveness of humour in



teaching English as a second language in secondary school in Kebbi State.

II. Literature Review

There are lots of benefits that could be derived from the incorporation of humour in the teaching of ESL. Generally speaking, it is a known fact that humour is therapeutic. Moreover, a sense of humour makes the classroom environment lively and it also reduces anxiety by creating a free and easy atmosphere. On humour, Gatt (2000) posits that: It is the 'breathing –out of the soul' when during the pupils only listen to the teacher, who may be teaching in the same tone, then it is as if they only breathe in and have no opportunity to breathe out. They need humour, which the teacher can find in very different places. Therefore, the teacher must bring in humour during his lessons and this show result from vitality and momentum of the lesson. With this submission, it is crystal clear that one of the ways of creating interest on the part of both the students and teachers is through the use of humour in the teaching of English as L2. It is also observable that the effect of humour is two-sided, that is, there are benefits for both the teachers and the students.

Krashen (1987) writes extremely on the negative effect of anxiety on the student's ability to learn ESL. For a course like English language, especially in an ESL environment, humour can help increase motivation, self-confidence and bridge the gap between teachers and students. Through this, the students can maximize ESL lessons through easy understanding and long-term retention (Glenn, 2002). Munoz-Basols (2005:24) argues that 'humour is closely related to memory as it is easier to recall an experience that occurred in a humorous context...', while Tosta (2001: 27) regards being funny as humorous by asserting that 'the funny teacher is not a clown figure, he is a serious conscientious professional who believes in the meaningfulness and effectiveness of having fun while learning'. The major benefit of humour in the teaching of ESL can be summed up in Munoz-Basols (2005) submission thus: There are many benefits to complementing humour in the classroom, it creates a cooperative atmosphere helping students to better relate to one another and it focuses them more effectively .it adds a cultural frame to language by presenting a tone, expression and context to the materials, thus increasing cultural knowledge. Humour facilitates the acquisition of vocabulary and helps distinguish figurative from literal meaning.

Similarly, it helps develop visual memory and improves the capacity to solve linguistic problems. The devices that we can use to add humour

to a language class range from idiomatic expressions, riddles, or proverbs, to pronunciation games, comics, the use of regalia, jokes or typical grammatical errors. In the teaching of English, humour serves as means to an end. The end is the crux of the matter that could be ascertained through good performances of students in the course of assessment. Once this goal is achieved, such teaching becomes a successful adventure. Statement of the Research Problem Teaching English as L2 has received attention from scholars via sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, literary, philosophical, anthropological. Such studies include the works of Pecknik(2001), Aminu and Adewumi(2014), Munoz-Basols(2005), Schmitz(2002) and Akinkurolere(2013). Despite this, none of the identified works has examined the effectiveness of humour in the teaching of students through a comparative analysis of performances of students taught with humour and those taught without such. Therefore, the research paid attention to this.

Objectives of the Study The study aims at conducting an inquiry into the employment of humour in the improvement of students' performances in selected secondary schools in Kebbi State. Thus, the main thrust of the research was to achieve the following objectives: i) identification of topics in English language that could be taught using humour: tenses and parts of speech; ii) teaching of the students with and without humour iii) comparison of the performances of the students in topics taught with and without humour and iv) recommendation of humour in teaching selected topics in English language.

III. Research Methodology

This research was designed for only three selected secondary schools in Kebbi state. The three schools were selected from each of the three senatorial districts. Forty students were selected from each of the three selected secondary schools. The research subjects were drawn from Senior Secondary One (S.S.S.1) Class. The selected schools are Kanta Unity College Argungu (Kebbi North), Nagari Science College Birnin Kebbi (Kebbi Central), and Government Secondary School Yauri (Kebbi South). Students in the three schools were taught one topic through the use of humour and another topic without the use of humour. Assessments were conducted in the third week while the results of the assessments in the three schools were analysed and compared. This was the basis for the discussion. Also, recommendations were based on the results of the students.

Classroom/ Field Experience A team of researchers comprising four research members and



four assistants embarked on the project in line with the research objectives. There was a provision for incentives for students comprising notebooks and pens with customized logo. The materials were distributed to the students and researchers ensured students were not more than twenty in a class. The students in each of the school were taught 'parts of speech' by two researchers without the use of humour. After which, three researchers taught 'tenses. Parts of Speech in English Language are Noun, Pronoun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Preposition, Conjunction, and Interjection. These were explained with copious examples. Tenses are classified into three categories of twelve types. The categories are Past, Present and Future. Indeed, each of these categories comprises four types. They are simple Present Tense, Present Continuous Tense, Present Perfect Tense, Present Perfect Continuous Tense; Simple Past Tense, Past Continuous Tense, Past Perfect Tense, Past Perfect Continuous Tense; and Simple Future Tense, Future Continuous Tense, Future Perfect Tense, Future Perfect Continuous Tense. A researcher handled each category of the tenses and the appearance, clothes, and materials, employed in the teaching, reflected what was being taught in a humorous manner. The experiences in the three schools were similar. Students were initially curious when researchers got to the classrooms but

became excited when incentives were distributed. The students were highly excited and expectant. As such, the researchers enjoyed utmost cooperation. Most times, the students' eyes were on researchers' clothes where the stickers of the aspects being taught were fixed. Materials include charts, clocks, brooms, brushes, combs, deodorant. All the types of tenses were explained by making the students smile, laugh and excited. Thereby, teaching became a fun and quite interesting for both the teachers and researchers. On the day of assessment, students were given question based on the topics earlier taught. After forty-five minutes, the answer booklets were collected. Results Presentation and Analysis For the purpose of results presentation, the identities of the three schools were not revealed in respect to the results of their students. This is to encourage further partnership and cooperation in future. Therefore, the results were only labelled as Result A, Result B and Result C without reference to a particular school. It is imperative to state that scores in Category A in tables of results represent scores of students without humour and scores of students in Category B reflect their scores in aspect taught with humour. The results of twenty students in a particular class were analysed in each school. The tables of results are presented thus:

Table 1: Table of Result A

Students	Score (A)	Score (B)
1	2	4
2	0	5
3	3	4
4	5	7
5	2	4
6	5	5
7	1	5
8	4	7
9	6	5
10	0	6
11	2	5
12	3	4
13	5	7
14	4	6
15	2	5
16	1	4
17	0	4
18	3	6
19	2	6
20	4	5
Mean Score	7.0	12.1



Table 2: Table of Result B

Students	Scores (A)	Scores (B)
1	4	8
2	5	10
3	3	6
4	6	9
5	5	4
6	2	5
7	3	6
8	3	7
9	2	5
10	5	8
11	1	4
12	5	9
13	5	8
14	7	10
15	3	7
16	4	7
17	5	6
18	4	8
19	2	6
20	2	5
Mean Score	8.1	15.1

Table 3: Table of Result C

Students	Scores (A)	Scores (B)
1	5	8
2	7	10
3	2	6
4	4	7
5	6	8
6	7	7
7	4	6
8	2	6
9	1	5
10	3	7
11	3	4
12	6	8
13	2	6
14	4	5
15	3	9
16	2	7
17	5	8
18	4	8
19	2	6
20	4	2
Mean Score	9.0	14.1

Table 4: Summary Table of the Findings from Three Results

Results	Mean Score (A)	Mean Score (B)	Percentage of Improvement Scores
Results A	7.0	12.0	41.6%
Results B	8.1	15.0	85.1%



Results C	9.0	14.1	56.1%
Cumulative Mean	6.0	13.7	128. %

IV. Discussion of Results

The results' tables reflected considerable improvement in the students' performances with percentages at 41.6 in Result I, a better improvement of 85.1 in Result II and an outstanding improvement of 56.1% in Result 3. The reasons for this are not far-fetched, the researchers were improving in their application of the humour as the results were recorded in the order of visitation to schools. It is also noteworthy that the geometric increase in the students'

performances showed that using humour as pedagogical tools for teaching students of English as a second language. In Table of Result A, it is obvious that only three (3) students had higher scores in Category A while fourteen (14) had lesser scores in the same category. It is also imperative that the students were more familiar with topic under Category A (parts of speech) than topic under Category B (tenses). Therefore, the percentage increase of 41.6%, which was the least among the three results, was a worthwhile research effort and highly commendable. The humorous tools were used by the researchers to assist the students in learning better in a relaxed atmosphere. On Result B, there was a performance increase of 85.1% with a mean score of 8.1 under Category A and 15.1 under Category B. This showed that demonstrations and explanations that are humorous assist in teaching and learning. The advantages are two sided, the teacher becomes better teacher and the students learn better

Result III, the mean score under Category A was 9.0 with 14.1 under Category B. The students did not master the topic, in the first category, as much as the topic in the second category. It is also important to state that the issue of variation in quality of teaching did not arise in the analysis since the topics were handled by same teachers/researchers in the three schools.

Contribution to Knowledge The study has provided more intellectual insights into innovative pedagogies of teaching through the employment of humour in the teaching of English to Second Language (L2) learners. It has also contributed to academic debates that bother on students' performances at every level of education which will also enrich teachers' understanding of the application of humour in the classroom environment in Nigeria. **Conclusion** The scores of the students in topic taught in humorous manner reflected significant improvement in the course of marking the answer scripts in the three schools. This research serves as

reference for subsequent researchers in beaming light on the appropriateness of humour in the teaching of topics in English as L2.

Therefore, the study concludes that humour should be employed in the teaching of all aspects of grammar in secondary schools in order to prepare the students towards the needed and required competence and performance levels in the use of English as a second language in Nigeria.

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Students' Questions

INSTRUCTION: ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS IN SECTION A, B AND C.

SECTION A:

- 1) List the parts of speech in English Language.
- 2) Define parts of speech with examples.

SECTION B:

- 3) What do you understand by the word 'tense' in English Language?
- 4) Discuss the classification of tense in English Language.

SECTION C: WRITE THE TENSE IN EACH SENTENCE

- 5). I saw Aisha yesterday.
- 6) Audu and joy are in the class.
- 7) She had eaten her food before she slept.
- 8) She is sweeping the floor.
- 9) they will travel tomorrow