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Being Humorous: A Privilege for the English Language Teachers

G. Vijay, M.A., M.Phil.

Abstract

Humorous sense is much adored, appreciated and demanded by everyone. Teachers who have this potential will definitely be liked by all the students and the possibility of fulfilling the objectives of the syllabus or curriculum becomes more feasible. Being humorous is a charismatic attitude that every student welcomes with a happy face and handsome applause. Always being strict with focused instruction never installs hope among the learners and instead it may end-up with dejection and deprivation towards learning. Learning is an outcome of teaching. When teaching fails to serve its purpose, learning will never take place. When humour is blended with teaching, a delicious recipe can be made out of the syllabus or else the subjects will appear boring.

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English teachers are much privileged as they could do variety of activities in the classroom by telling jokes, stories, and conducting games unlike the science teachers who are supposed to confine themselves to the stipulated content and the methodology.

This paper establishes the fact that teachers of the English language are bestowed with a special right of using joy and humour in the classroom to teach the target lessons. The paper also elucidates how congenial atmosphere can be created in the classroom using fun and humour.

Introduction

Humour can contribute much to the second language classroom as it enables the teacher not only to create a comfortable environment, but also being a source of entertainment. Language is an expression of life; it has the flavour of all emotions. Ironically, in the classrooms, teachers fail to use humour fearing the loss of control over the students. They strictly follow the ‘principle of being strict’ in the course of their lectures. But that will not serve the purpose since learning will take place only when the encoding and the decoding minds are parallel to each other. Humorous situations allow the students to express themselves without fear of criticism. Anxiety and stress is reduced and so the students will be encouraged to involve in the lessons.

Everyone wants to laugh but none cracks jokes. The fear of becoming a comedian regulates people, especially teachers, from unleashing their sense of humour. Paul-Emile Chiasson (2002) delineates that laughter helps us forget about ourselves, our problems, our fears and allows us to lose ourselves momentarily. This momentary loss may be interpreted by some teachers as a loss of control, poor classroom management and therefore something to be avoided. However, humour, as with all activities in the communicative language classroom, must be well prepared and have a specific objective

Importance of Using Humour in the Classroom

Researches state that the attention span of students is short and so the teachers have to find creative ways to draw the attention of the students for the entire session (Rosalia H Bonjour, 2011). Dry lessons without the aroma of interest will seldom fetch the results. Irony

of time will exist in the classroom if only the teacher is interested in teaching than the students in learning. If time evades in full pace for the teacher and in snail's pace for the students, it will not create healthy learning environment and outcome from the students will not be parallel to the efforts of the teacher. "It is the breathing-out of the soul, when during the lesson the pupils only listen to the teacher, who may be teaching in the same tone, and then it is as if they only breathe in and have no opportunity to breathe out" (Gatt, Joseph, 2000). Therefore the teachers must bring humor in the course of their lessons and this humor should rejuvenate the students and increase the vitality and momentum of the lesson. "The job of the teacher is to get students laughing, and when their mouths are open, to give them something on which to chew" (Paul-Emile Chiasson , 2002).

Special Privilege for English Teachers

Using fun and humour is possible in the language classrooms since it shall be related to the lessons taught but it is impossible in science classrooms since fun and humour stand isolated from the technical lessons. Whatever the English teacher does in the classroom, can be defended in the name of developing communications skills of the students. When debate and group discussions are conducted in the language classrooms, it may lead to emotional arguments among the students and as a result the classroom becomes rapturous which may offend the neighbouring class teachers. However, this is not offensive as it is one of the methods of second language training. The jokes that are told in the class may not have logical connection with regular lessons. If they are told in good English, even the irrelevant content gets the reverence. This is the reason why English teachers are more privileged than the technical teachers.

How to Use Humour?

Using humour does not mean only telling jokes, stories and other laughable agents. It may be even the mannerisms of the teacher like articulation, body language that causes laughter. Provine (2000) states, "Your reaction to their non-reaction may be the most amusing part." Humorous situations can be created in the class by making the students themselves the protagonists of those situations. While teaching grammar, the names of the students present in the class shall be used in the sample sentences so that they will be in active spirit. The names of the present super-heroes that bring keen interest among the

students shall be used for receiving a better attention from the students' side. "Total absence of humour renders life impossible; as teachers we are aware that, teaching grammar at times can become quite monotonous; in this context. Humor can be used as an effective teaching aid." (Nandana N.G, 2013).

The following examples are tried in the classes where the students are found be alert and in the happy state of mind.

- (i). Vijay dances well. (Simple present tense)
- (ii). Rajini Kanth has stopped acting in films (Present Perfect)
- (iii). Anna Hazare has been fighting against corruption, (Present Perfect Continuous Tense)
- (iv). CSE-A section is better than CSE-B section. (Comparative Adjectives)

However, teachers should note that

- Humour should arise naturally that fits one's personality. If it is forced, it never works.
- The classroom is made up of different individuals with different taste and so utmost care should be taken while delivering the content so that everyone is satisfied.
- Humour that creates sadistic pleasure, by affecting the sentiment of the individuals, by making sarcastic remarks on a particular group, nationality, faith and beliefs, should be avoided.
- Humour should be an integral part of the lecture and not as the main part. If it is over-used it will lose its effect.

Benefits of Using Humour

Before starting the class, the mood of the students should be analyzed and the lessons should be started only after extending general conversations with students, narrating an anecdote, telling a puzzle so that a convenient platform is laid to start the lessons. While teaching communication skills, presentation skills, conversation skills, relevant incidents, facts, and stories that provoke laughter may carefully be chosen and presented rather than simply reading out theories. There is a common saying that students perform well if they are

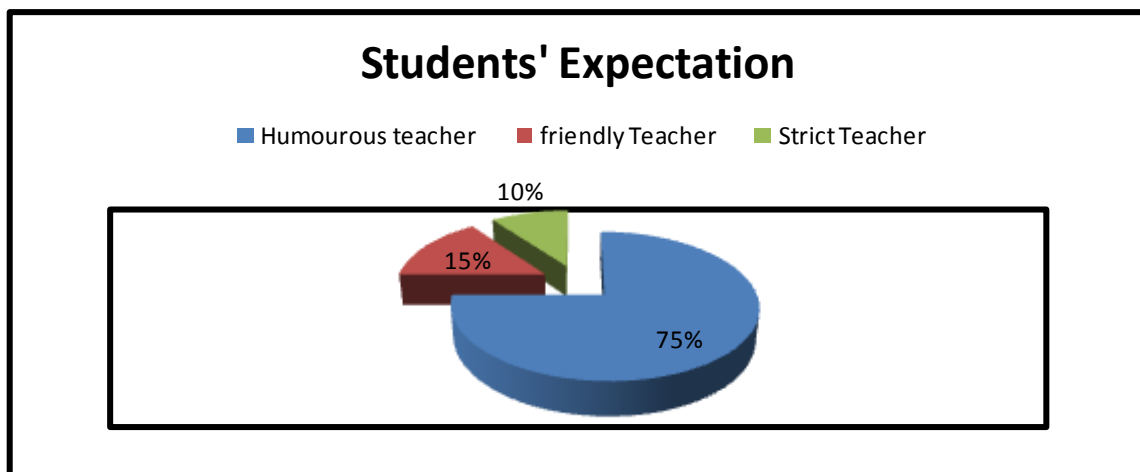
attentive in the class and if they love the subject. However, their attentiveness and their attachment towards the subject are determined only by the teachers' attitude and their efficiency in delivering the contents. If the students start liking their teachers, they will start liking the subjects taught by them and that will definitely increase the outcome. A strict teacher can be successful but a humorous teacher can be more successful.

Expectation of Students

Students of language learning expect something different and additional from the language teachers. "Unconditional acceptance, not a demonstration of perfection, is what students seem to expect from teachers" (Srinath,T.T, 2013). Srinath, T.T, an organizational and behavioural consultant, raised the questions of students' expectations from teachers in a workshop to which the teacher participants listed out the qualities like "a role-model, motivating them, not punishing, being fair, and being competent." At the end of the workshop, after many deliberations, he was able to arrive at a conclusive point from the teacher participants that students want the teacher to "be a happy person" and spread that happiness.

Findings

A class of sixty students was chosen at random for this study. The class had 38 boys and 22 girls who were doing I year B.E/B.Tech in PSNA College of Engineering and Technology, Dindigul. A questionnaire that consists of twenty five questions regarding the research topic was given to them and an analysis was made.



The diagram given above shows the percentage of expectation of the students from their teachers based on three qualities: humourous, friendly, strict. According to the details collected from the questionnaire, a humourous teacher is a person who teaches the lessons with appropriate doses of jokes and stories and makes the students laugh. A friendly teacher is a person who never punishes students for their mistakes. A strict teacher is one who is very serious in his teaching; never steps out of the syllabus; punishes students even for smaller mistakes. 75% of the sixty students in the selected classroom for this study wanted their teacher to be humourous. 15% of the students wanted their teacher to be friendly and 10% of the teachers wanted their teacher to be strict. Srinath.T.T (2013) clarifies this by stating “Home life for many children is a mixed fare, with love and distress in equal measure. When they come to school, where they meet their teacher, they want to experience a neutralizing effect, a removal of toxicity that they sometimes have to cope with outside in the world, and a sense of healing and celebration.” Hence, the teachers are expected to be an entertainer in the class along with the common duty of handling academic stuff. In this context, language teachers are much privileged as they can tell jokes, stories which may or may not related to the curriculum. However, if those items are narrated in good English, they can justify their role in the class in terms of ‘Teaching English through jokes’.

Role of Teacher

In the engineering colleges of Tamil Nadu, Technical English-I and Technical English-II are offered with various objectives. However, only grammar constituents are dealt in the classrooms. Along with mundane lessons of other technical subjects, the students are overloaded with grammar lessons which the students don’t relish. Ample time is available for the English teacher to complete the syllabus and so he/she can make use of the sufficient time for developing personal and professional skills. If personal and professional skills are taught with theory in the text books, it will not achieve its purpose. It needs delivery skills and a tone of conviction so that the principles of the proposed contents of teaching can be instilled in the learners. Teaching those skills becomes easy if the teacher is a happy and a humourous person and also if he/she is also able to radiate the same among the students.

Conclusion

It is commonly said that “Laughter is the best medicine”. It is found true in the world of medicine “Laughter Therapy” is patronized with an aim of relieving stress and improving both mental and physical health. Why couldn't the same be used in the field of teaching? The teacher who provokes laughter in the classroom can easily find a special space reserved in the heart and soul of the students. It could cultivate positive learning environment in the classroom and may render the expected outcome in the examinations and in the personal life. However, the teachers should realize the common adage “too much of anything is good for nothing” and should use fun and humor only as catalyst to induce learning and improve performance.

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