

## Teachers' Perception of Humor and Laughter as Pedagogical Tools for Promoting Learning in Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper examined the knowledge of teachers of Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, about the pedagogical relevance of humor and laughter in view of their consequentiality to teaching and learning and how they could be used to encourage classroom attendance for learners' who misunderstand "academic freedom" to be truancy, absenteeism and lateness to classes. Areas of close examinations were the educational relevance of humor and laughter and how they could impact on learning, the various types of humor available to the teacher for use, the forms that humor could take to make it effective and possible hindrances to effective use of humor in achieving desired goals. Five research questions were drawn from the five purposes established for the study. The data for the study were collected from 120 teachers in the college through accidental sampling procedure using 42 item designed questionnaires by the researchers. The questionnaires were of a four-point likert type. The acceptable mean score was 2.50, meaning that any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above is accepted as positive while scores below 2.50, were termed negative and rejected. The data were analyzed using tables, means and standard deviations. The findings of the study included that teachers are aware about the educational benefits of laughter, that humor and laughter could make teaching and learning to be fun, improves relationships between the teacher and students as well as between the students themselves. Recommendations were that teachers should have senses of humor and should not be afraid to use them, should use humor and laughter to contribute to class unity and that humor should not be used to run any student down; it should not be on disability and should not be delivered through insults and sarcasm among others.

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**Keywords:** teachers' perception, Humor, laughter, tools, promoting, learning.

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### INTRODUCTION

Teachers make learning happen in the classroom. This makes them (teachers) indispensable to learning because no matter how beautifully designed the curriculum is and how conducive the classroom environment and learning materials are, without the teacher, all things being equal, effective learning cannot take place. The effectiveness of the teacher is dependent on how knowledgeable he is about the subject matter as well as the methods with which he delivers the lesson. There are so many of such teaching methods as lecture, demonstration, dramatization, discussion as well as play way methods among others that are available to the teacher to use to promote teaching as well as learning. In higher institutions of learning in Nigeria, the predominant method of teaching is lecture. One of the characteristics and criticisms of this method is that it is teacher dominated; the teacher does the talking mostly while the learners are made redundant and passive. When learners lose interest in the teacher and his teaching method, the resultant effect is obvious-poor learning and comprehension. This passivity of learners could be broken if the teacher

can occasionally colorize his teaching with the use of humor.

Humor according to Hornby (2010) is the quality in something that makes it funny or amusing, the ability to laugh at things that are amusing. The outcome of humor most times is laughter. To laugh is to make the sounds of movement of one's face that will show that one is happy or think something is funny (Hornby, 2010). Laughter is always the outward manifestation of the presence of joy and happiness. It is not exclusive to a race, class of people or a particular nation; rather, it is universal as well as contagious. Both humor and laughter are used complementarily and they could be regarded as the two sides of the same coin. Humor and laughter enhance conviviality, radiance and ecstasy of people in a group. It lightens both the emotional and psychological burdens of people and could be used even in very serious sad situations. For instance, the Igala people believe that when a man falls down and the people around do not laugh, what it means is that the fall is dangerous. Humor can be used expertly to diffuse tensions temporarily no matter the sadness of the moment.

But as important as humor and laughter are to general well being, and particularly to teaching and learning, teachers seem not to have sufficient knowledge of their potential magical and promotional learning effects and so use them sparingly in the classrooms. This has great consequence on learning especially in higher institutions where students misunderstand the concept of “academic freedom.” This study is therefore, carried out to find out the knowledge of teachers in KSCOE, Ankpa, about the benefits of humor and laughter as teaching and learning tools.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The possible pedagogical relevance of humor and laughter cannot be ignored or dispensed with impunity. Korobkin (1988) noted that humor could be used to reduce stress and facilitate creativity. It is capable of fostering greater understanding and rapport between the teacher and the students (Proctor, 1994) cited by Kher, Molstad and Donahue (1999), improves students’ retentions when instructors use humorous examples (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1997) as well as facilitating students’ creativity and critical thinking (Shatz, 2006). In fact, Downs, Javidi & Nussbaum (1988) noted that teachers who effectively used humor were able to convey course contents more effectively. For Wagner (2007:15) “Almost without exception I have found that, regardless of the setting or the size of the audience, whenever I use humor effectively my students learn more than if I had been dead serious and never given them reason or opportunity to laugh.” And in the views of Kher, Molstad & Donahue (1999) humor is a valuable teaching tool for establishing a classroom climate conducive to learning. Humor could help an audience or a classroom of students to relax with the speaker/teacher as well as with each other, even when they have never met (Walter, 2007). According to Walter, people laughing at your humor are a sure sign that you have their attention and that laughter is valuable instant feedback from your audience to you. Humor and laughter make students like the teacher, love learning and always would want to be available whenever that teacher enters the class. Students of a humorous teacher miss him/her each time he/she may not be available in class due to some inhibitory incidentals or circumstances. Humor can come in so many ways namely, jokes, quotes, funny stories, cartoons, photos, illustrations, reactions, riddles, humorous examples, comic verse and top ten lists (Shatz, 2006, Loomax & Mosavi, 1998 & Bryant, Comisky & Zillmann, 1979).

The essence of humor/laughter however, is not just to create an atmosphere of conviviality, but to be sure that the expected learning outcome is achieved. Therefore, to a classroom teacher, humor is not an end but a means to an end. Impliedly, it is not all humor that promotes learning in the classrooms. Humors that promote learning in the classrooms must

be topic-related (Wagner, 2007), appropriate to the situation (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992), a student should not be made the target of the riddle and it should not be on disability as well as delivered through insult or sarcasm. When humors are topic-related, made an integral part of the class and not used to run any student down, they could be potential tools for promoting learning and making the social classroom atmosphere to be high. But according to Chiasson (2002) teachers at times overlook humor and laughter as important elements in teaching, in teacher training and how they can contribute to positive environment for learning. To Chiasson, humor and laughter are areas that have not been closely studied. Little literature speaks of its pedagogical values noted Loomax & Mosavi, (2002).

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was intended to find out the perception of teachers about the benefits of humor and laughter in promoting learning among students of Kogi State College of Education (KSCOE), Ankpa. In more specific terms, the study was intended to find out the perception of teachers about the:

1. Socio-psychological and educational benefits of humor and laughter to the students of KSCOE, Ankpa
2. Health benefits of humor and laughter in promoting learning for students’ of KSCOE, Ankpa.
3. Various types of humor that could be used in the classrooms to promote students’ learning in KSCOE, Ankpa.
4. Forms that humor could take to be effective in promoting learning in KSCOE, Ankpa.
5. Hindrances to the use of humor to promote learning among students in KSCOE, Ankpa.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was guided by five (5) research questions thus:

1. What is the perception of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the socio-psychological and educational benefits of humor and laughter in promoting students’ learning in the college?
2. What is the perception of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the health benefits of humor and laughter on students’ learning in the college?
3. What is the knowledge of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the various types of humor that could be used to promote learning in this college?
4. What is the knowledge of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the forms that humor could take to promote learning in the college?

5. What constitutes barriers to the effective use of humor and laughter in promoting learning as perceived by teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa?

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The results of this study will benefit teachers, students, parents as well as the entire nation as it will help to promote learning by making the classroom atmospheres to be conducive, interactive, tension and anxieties free. The students will love learning, the teachers will love teaching, parents will witness improvement in their children’s interest for learning and the nation will witness technological growth and advancement in other sectors of the economy.

**METHODS**

The design for this study was descriptive survey. The population was made up two hundred and forty (240) academic staff (lecturers) of Kogi State College of Education (KSCOE), Ankpa. Out of this population, 120 representing 50% was sampled for the study through accidental sampling technique. This means that, those lecturers who were found in their offices when the instrument was distributed and those who the researchers came across in the course of the distributions were used for the study.

The instrument that was used to collect the data for the study was a 42 item questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was divided into five sections A-E. Section A fielded 16 items on the possible educational, socio-psychological and emotional benefits of humor and laughter. Section B contained 5 questions on the health benefits of laughter and how they could impact on students’ learning. Section C, D and E fielded 8 items on types of humor, 8 items on the forms that humor could take to be effective and 5 items on hindrances to the use of humor in the college, respectively. The questionnaire items required that these teachers respond by choosing the option that best indicated their level of agreement or disagreement. Values were assigned to each of the items thus: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4; Agree (A) = 3; Disagree (D) = 2; Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. For each respondent, the mean score of responses to each statement was computed. A mean score of 2.5 and above showed agreement/acceptance for the item that is, the teachers know that the item is capable of promoting learning while a mean score of below 2.5 showed disagreement meaning the item is not capable of promoting learning. The instrument was face validated by two lecturers in the department of psychology, Kogi State College of Education (KSCOE), Ankpa. The data collected through this instrument were analyzed using tables, means and standard deviation.

**RESULTS**

The analyses of data collected for this study were done according to the research questions raised.

**Research Question 1**

What is the perception of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the socio-psychological and educational benefits of humor and laughter in promoting students’ learning in the college?

The answer to this question is shown on table 1.

Table 1: Teachers’ perception about the socio-psychological and educational benefits of laughter

S/N	Items	-X	SD
1	Humor and laughter can create a closer relationship between the teacher and students	3.05	1.03
2	Humor and laughter can get and hold students’ attention during lectures	2.84	1.01
3	Could increase students’ interest in the subject or topic	2.91	0.96
4	Could facilitate students’ creativity and critical thinking	2.71	0.90
5	Facilitate the understanding of students about difficult concepts	2.72	0.95
6	Could provide students a mental break to make sense of learning	3.18	0.99
7	Could increase retention of what is learned	2.70	0.94
8	Could give the student another reason to attend class	2.90	0.98
9	Provides valuable feedback from students to the teacher	2.65	0.93
10	Could promote positive classroom atmosphere	2.91	0.98
11	Could allow shy or timid student to participate actively in learning	2.86	0.99
12	Could make students to take pleasure in the company of each other	2.86	0.97
13	Could contribute to class unity and learning	2.83	0.93
14	Could reduce the authoritarian position of the teacher	2.80	1.03
15	Could reduce students anxieties of dread subjects	2.96	1.01
16	Could lift the spirit of students and help them to see the topic/subject/teacher in a more positive light	2.94	0.97

The analysis on the above table shows that teachers of Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, have sufficient knowledge about the socio-psychological, educational and emotional benefits of humor and laughter and how they could impact on teaching and learning of students. This is as a result of the mean scores of each of the identified items that are above 2.50 that is the acceptable mean score.

**Research Question 2**

What is the perception of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the health benefits of humor and laughter on students’ learning in the college?

The answer to this question is shown on table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' perception about the health benefit of laughter and how it could impact on learning

S/N	Items	-X	SD
17	Could relieve stress, tension and boredom for students	3.18	1.04
18	Could relax the students and they could become good listeners	2.96	0.99
19	Could energize and exercise the body for healthy living	2.80	0.98
20	Could contract the muscles and increases blood flow	2.67	1.01
21	Could give pleasant glow on the faces	2.88	0.97

The analysis on table 2 reveals that the teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, are well informed about the health benefits of laughter and how they could influence teaching and learning. This is evident by the mean scores of each of the items that are more than the acceptable mean score of 2.50.

**Research Question 3**

What is the knowledge of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the various types of humor that could be used to promote learning in this college?

The answer to this question is shown on table 3.

Table 3: The knowledge of teachers about types of humor that could promote learning

S/N	Items	-X	SD
22	Jokes	2.90	1.07
23	Stories	2.95	1.06
24	Quotes	2.70	1.05
25	Cartoons	2.60	1.08
26	Photos	2.56	1.07
27	Riddles	2.70	1.07
28	Puns	2.43	1.06
29	Illustrations & humorous examples	2.75	1.09

The mean score for each of the items on table 3 apart from item 28 are above the acceptable mean of 2.50, meaning that is only pun teachers in KSCOE, Ankpa, said is not a type of humor that is used.

**Research Question 4**

What is the knowledge of teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, about the forms that humor could take to promote learning in the college?

The answer to this question is on table 4.

Table 4: Forms of humor that could make it effective to learning

S/N	Items	-X	SD
30	A student Should not be the target of the riddle	2.99	1.07
31	Should be appropriate and timely	2.98	1.03
32	Should not be to run any student down	3.05	1.01
33	Should not be on disability	3.00	1.06
34	Should not be delivered through insult or sarcasm	3.05	1.08
35	Should be thoughtful and made an integral part of the class	2.93	0.98
36	Should make students to be comfortable and safe	2.95	0.97
37	Use jokes about yourself always rather than your students	2.61	1.03

The responses on table 4 show that items 30-37 have mean responses that are above 2.50 the acceptable mean score. This implies that there are certain forms that humor would need to take before they could become effective in teaching and learning.

**Research Question 5**

What constitutes barriers to the effective use of humor and laughter in promoting learning as perceived by teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa?

The answer to this question is shown on table 5

Table 5: Possible barriers to the use of humor and laughter in learning

S/N	Items	-X	SD
38	Wastes time that should have been used for the lesson	2.5	0.99
39	When the teacher has no sufficient knowledge about the subject/topic	2.5	0.98
40	When the teacher is anxious and stage- freighted	2.6	1.01
41	Believe that humorous teachers are not always taking seriously by their students	2.3	0.97
42	Believe that the teacher is not a comedian	2.6	0.92

From table 5, the mean score for items 38, 39, 40 and 42 are above 2.50 that is the acceptable mean score. What this implies is that teachers in KSCOE, Ankpa, are aware that using humor and laughter is inhibited by those factors. They only refused to accept that teachers who are not using humor are doing so not because they think that their students will not take them seriously.

**DISCUSSION**

The results of this study reveal that teachers of Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, perceive humor and laughter to have educational, socio-psychological and emotional benefits to learning. According to the results of analyses on table one, the teachers perceived that humor and laughter could create a closer relationship between the teacher and the students, can be used to get and hold students' attentions, could increase students' interest in the subjects as well as giving the students another reason to attend class and could also provide valuable feedback from students to the teacher. These findings are in agreement with the findings of Walter (2007) that people laughing at your humor are a sure sign that you have their attention and that laughter is valuable instant feedback from your audience to you. Similarly, the findings agreed with the earlier studies of Prochor (1994) cited by Kher, Molstad and Donahue (1999) that humor is capable of fostering greater understanding and rapport between the teacher and the students. The role of humor and laughter is indeed indispensable to teaching and learning. It has the magical advantage of bridging the gap between the teacher and his students. Today, emphasis is radically shifting from seeing teachers as

teachers but facilitators of learning. Therefore, for the teacher to be effective as a facilitator, he needs to create a tension free environment for discoveries and creativity to take place. Humor and laughter could be viable tools for doing this.

The result of the analyses on table two, revealed that KSCOE, Ankpa, teachers know that humor and laughter in the classroom could relieve stress, boredom and tension for students, could relax the students to become good listeners and could give pleasant glow on the faces of students. This finding is in agreement with the results of the study of Korobkin (1988) that humor could be used to reduce stress and facilitate creativity. A merry heart is like a medicine so goes the biblical saying. The general believe of people is that health is wealth. A student who is not healthy would find learning obviously difficult. Since students pass through stressful situations, relieving tension preparatory to learning is very important. The study equally discovered that teachers of KSCOE, Ankpa, have high awareness that stories, jokes, cartoons as well as riddles and humorous examples and illustrations are forms of humor available that teachers could use to promote teaching and learning in the college. This finding agrees with that of Shatz, (2006), (Loomax & Mosavi, (2002) & Bryant, Comisky & Zillmann, (1979) that humor can come in so many ways namely, jokes, quotes, funny stories, cartoons, photos, illustrations, reactions, riddles, humorous examples, comic verse and top ten lists. The pun that scored below the acceptable mean score of 2.50 probably may be because not many of the respondents know what the actual meaning is. The word is not as commonly used or known as jokes, riddles and stories.

Teachers in this college as evident by the finding on table four know that humors that are targeted at running down a student and those on disability or those delivered through insults, sarcasm as well as those that are not topic-related would not promote learning as desired. This agrees with the findings of Wagner (2007) that humors that promote learning in the classrooms must be topic-related and that of Edwards & Gibboney (1992) that it must be appropriate to the situation. When humor is on disability of even another person outside the classroom, those with disabilities in the classroom either related or not related to the type mentioned will no longer be comfortable with the lesson, topic or subject as well as with the teacher. And under this atmosphere of suspicion, tension and worry, there will be love lost and effective learning will be hindered. This I suppose is why Walter (2007) reiterated that the humor should always be about the teacher himself rather than his students. But the finding of this study was not in agreement with this view of Walter probably because they think it could

be damaging to the personality or image of the teacher. But there are ways a teacher could speak or act humorously about himself that will not be demeaning or insulting to his personality and authority.

But as important as humor and laughter are to learning and teaching, findings on table five show that not many teachers use them because they think it wastes their times and they see it as a digression. In addition, insufficient knowledge about the subject matter and stage-freights are suggested possible reasons why some teachers shy away from using humor in the classrooms. Obviously, when a teacher is not sufficiently knowledgeable about what he teaches or that such a teacher is ill-prepared, there is no magic about it that he will be so relaxed to be humorous and generate laughter. If anything, it is the confusion and tension that raps him up that would make students to laugh at him and such laughter will not promote learning but rather, it will further discomfit the teacher.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Humor and laughter are indispensable tools for effective teaching and learning in schools. Their Educational, Psycho-social, emotional and healthful benefits undoubtedly, have promotional impact on learning if used wisely. That is, humors such as riddles, funny stories, jokes and humorous examples available for the use of the teacher should be used deliberately to promote learning for the students. Humor in the classroom is capable of creating closer relationship between the teacher and the students, can be used to get students' attention during lectures, and could increase students' interest in the subject or topic as well as serving as feedback to the teacher that his students are following his teaching. But as good as humor is to learning, it was discovered that not many teachers use them in the classrooms because they think it wastes their time. Some other teachers who do not use humor do so because they are ill-prepared, and for some it is because of stage-freight and tension and the believe that teachers are not comedians.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are put forward in view of the relevance of humor and laughter to learning.

1. Teachers should have senses of humor and should not be afraid to use them. This is because the educational, psycho-social, emotional and health benefits of laughter to the students far outweigh the seeming damages it may have on learning. If used wisely, intermittently and regulated or controlled properly, it will not waste time but rather speeds up comprehension and retention of what is taught. In addition, it is

not how much a teacher is able to discharge but how well his students are able to comprehend what he teaches.

2. Teachers should use humor and laughter to contribute to class unity. This has the advantages of decreasing anxieties, tensions, and also encouraging shy students in the class to participate freely with the group and then feel a part of the class.
3. Humor should not be used to run any student down; it should not be on disability and should not be delivered through insults and sarcasm or any other variables that could make some students apprehensive and uncomfortable with the lesson as well as with the subject teacher.
4. Humor should come as naturally as it is possible. It should be appropriate to the situation. The teacher is not to force it and it should not be overused.
5. The type of humor to use should be determined by the content of what the teacher teaches. It should be related to the subject matter, it should be topic related so that students can so quickly make connections for effective retention of what is taught.
6. Humor should be well prepared with some specific objectives in mind. The teacher should use it as a rule rather than the exception in view of how it can make students to learn, love learning and give students another reason to attend class.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited in scope. The study examined the knowledge of teachers of Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, about humor and laughter and their promotional impacts on the learning of students in the college. The study should have been extended to other higher institutions within the state. In addition, the study did not put demand on the teachers in this college to know whether they use humor and laughter in teaching topics in their subject disciplines and how frequently they use them in a lecture. This however, can be another angle that is opened to further research. These limitations notwithstanding, the findings and recommendations of this study are not weak.

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