



“LAUGHING MATTERS” INTO EFL: INVESTIGATING THE IMPACT OF HUMOR ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND MOTIVATION

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ABSTRACT

Humor, a powerful tool in human interaction, has the potential to significantly impact language learning. This study investigates the impact of humor on the engagement and motivation of Indonesian EFL students. By analyzing the use of humor in popular Indonesian podcasts like @itsindahg and @whatisupindonesia, this research aims to uncover the specific strategies employed by the hosts to engage their audience. The study will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Quantitative data will be collected through surveys and questionnaires to measure students' perceptions of humor and its impact on their motivation. Qualitative data will be gathered through focus group discussions and content analysis of the podcasts to identify the specific humor techniques used and their effects on audience engagement. It is anticipated that the findings of this study will provide valuable insights into the role of humor in language learning and offer practical implications for EFL teachers in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Language learning is a complex cognitive and social process, often requiring learners to engage in active meaning-making, cultural negotiation, and emotional regulation (Ellis, 2019; Najimova & Kartbaeva, 2020; Peng, 2021; Siwa & Basthomi, 2023; Wang et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2019). One promising but often underutilized strategy in EFL pedagogy is the integration of humor as a teaching approach. Humor, as a deeply embedded social phenomenon, has the capacity to break down affective barriers, enhance student participation, and create a positive learning environment conducive to deeper learning and sustained interest (Erdoğan & Çakıroğlu, 2021; Luo et al., 2023; Rudick et al., 2024). While humor has been widely discussed in the context of general education, its potential role in second language acquisition (SLA) remains underexplored, particularly within the Indonesian EFL landscape. This study investigates how humor, specifically as employed in popular Indonesian podcasts such as @itsindahg and @whatisupindonesia, influences the engagement and motivation of Indonesian EFL students and explores how humor-based strategies can be effectively integrated into classroom instruction.

The use of humor in educational settings has been widely recognized for its ability to enhance learning experiences. The Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982) highlights the role of emotions in language learning, arguing that a high affective filter caused by stress, anxiety, or lack of confidence can hinder language acquisition. Humor, by fostering a relaxed and enjoyable classroom environment, has the potential to lower the affective filter, thereby increasing students' willingness to engage in communicative activities (Andarab, 2019; Gonulal, 2018; Nâznean, 2024). Furthermore,



humor encourages active cognitive processing by prompting students to make linguistic and cultural connections, thereby strengthening their language comprehension and retention (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Mahdiloo & Izadpanah, 2017; Zabidin, 2015).

Despite its recognized benefits, humor is rarely systematically incorporated into Indonesian EFL classrooms, where traditional teaching methods such as rote memorization, grammar-translation approaches, and teacher-centered instruction continue to dominate (Petraiki & Pham Nguyen, 2016; Weisi & Mohammadi, 2023). These conventional approaches, while effective for structural knowledge acquisition, often fail to promote communicative competence, critical thinking, and intrinsic motivation—all of which are essential for meaningful language learning (Weisi & Mohammadi, 2023). Introducing humor as a deliberate instructional strategy can provide a cognitive, affective, and social bridge between formal language instruction and real-life communicative use, making language learning more dynamic, student-centered, and culturally relevant (Neff & Dewaele, 2023).

Humor in language learning operates at multiple levels, engaging students cognitively, socially, and affectively (Heidari-Shahreza, 2021; Neff & Dewaele, 2023). At the cognitive level, humor stimulates linguistic awareness, requiring students to decode puns, recognize cultural references, and understand pragmatics (Dynel, 2018; Takovski, 2021; Zheng & Wang, 2023). Many jokes rely on incongruity-resolution mechanisms, in which the punchline defies expectations, prompting learners to engage in deeper levels of comprehension (Zheng & Wang, 2023). In the EFL context, this helps students internalize syntactic, lexical, and phonological structures while developing their inferencing skills (Al Arief, 2023; Gonulal, 2018; Najafi et al., 2021; Rahmi & Adek, 2019).

At the social level, humor fosters a collaborative learning environment where students feel more comfortable participating in class discussions and group activities. Studies show that humor enhances peer interaction, classroom cohesion, and rapport between students and teachers (Forman, 2011; Mustafa & Muhammad, 2023; Nagy, 2020; Nâznean, 2024; Qi & Wang, 2024). In Indonesian EFL classrooms, where students may feel hesitant to speak due to cultural notions of "saving face" (Humaero, 2019), humor can create low-risk opportunities for language use, allowing students to practice speaking without the fear of embarrassment (Al Arief, 2023; Debreli & Bilokçuoğlu, 2018).

At the affective level, humor plays a critical role in sustaining motivation by transforming language learning from a passive and monotonous process into an engaging and enjoyable experience. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory by Ryan & Deci (2024) which suggested that students are more likely to be motivated when they find learning intrinsically rewarding. The use of humor, particularly through culturally relevant content such as Indonesian podcasts, can make English learning more relatable and personally meaningful to students.

Popular Indonesian podcasts, such as @itsindahg and @whatisupindonesia, have gained widespread popularity due to their engaging, humorous, and culturally resonant content. These podcasts often incorporate wordplay, satire, storytelling, and observational humor, making them an invaluable authentic resource for language learners. Unlike scripted classroom dialogues, podcasts expose students to natural conversational flow, intonation, and pragmatic cues, helping them develop listening comprehension and sociolinguistic awareness (Syifa et al., 2024; Binsasi, 2024; Efendi & Astutik, 2024; Novianty et al., 2023; Widodo & Gunawan, 2019; Saedakhtar et al., 2021).

By analyzing how humor is used in these podcasts, this study aims to uncover specific humor strategies that could be replicated and adapted in EFL classrooms. For example, studies by Shalekhah et al. (2020) and Azhar & Fitrawati (2023) highlighted Indonesian podcasts frequently use:



1. Code-switching humor – Switching between Indonesian and English in a humorous manner, which can be used in classrooms to help students develop bilingual competence.
2. Exaggeration and irony – Common techniques in storytelling that can be integrated into speaking activities, encouraging students to use expressive language.
3. Cultural satire – Critiques of social norms that provide opportunities for students to engage in critical thinking while expanding their vocabulary.
4. Self-deprecating humor – Making fun of one's own mistakes, which can help students feel more comfortable making errors in English.

By incorporating these humor techniques into EFL instruction, educators can create a more engaging and relatable learning experience, ultimately enhancing student motivation and participation.

Although humor has been widely studied in education, its role in Indonesian EFL classrooms remains significantly underexplored. Existing research on humor and language learning has largely focused on Western contexts, where humor styles and cultural norms differ considerably from those in Indonesia (Al-Duleimi & Aziz, 2016). Furthermore, most studies do not examine authentic media sources, such as podcasts, as vehicles for humor-based learning, leaving a critical gap in understanding how contemporary digital content can enhance EFL instruction.

Moreover, while previous research has documented humor's potential to reduce anxiety and increase classroom engagement, fewer studies have systematically investigated how humor can be strategically integrated into language curricula to promote long-term learning outcomes. This study seeks to fill this gap by:

1. Examining the specific humor techniques used in Indonesian podcasts and their effects on EFL students' engagement and motivation.
2. Investigating how humor can be systematically incorporated into EFL pedagogy to enhance both communicative competence and deeper learning.
3. Providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of humor-driven teaching strategies tailored to Indonesian learners.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on humor and language learning by focusing on authentic digital media as a culturally relevant tool for Indonesian EFL classrooms. By bridging theoretical humor frameworks with real-world applications, it offers pedagogical insights into how humor can be harnessed to create more engaging, enjoyable, and effective English learning experiences. Ultimately, it aims to provide practical recommendations for EFL teachers in Indonesia, demonstrating how humor can be used not merely as an occasional classroom tool, but as a deliberate teaching approach that fosters linguistic, social, and cognitive development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Humor in Language Learning: Theoretical Perspectives

The role of humor in education, particularly in second language acquisition (SLA), has been widely discussed in scholarly literature, with researchers emphasizing its cognitive, affective, and social benefits. Early works such as Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) established the foundational argument that positive emotional states facilitate language learning, while anxiety and stress hinder acquisition. Following this, researchers such as Neff & Dewaele (2023) and Al Arief (2023) investigated humor's ability to reduce affective barriers, making language learning more engaging and enjoyable.

However, while these theories suggest a strong correlation between humor and language acquisition, they largely remain theoretical frameworks rather than empirical



studies. One limitation is their lack of specific guidelines on how humor can be deliberately integrated into language curricula, particularly in non-Western contexts such as Indonesia. This study builds on these theoretical foundations by examining how humor is employed in Indonesian digital media (e.g., podcasts) and its practical applications in EFL instruction.

Empirical Studies on Humor in EFL Classrooms

Several empirical studies have explored humor's impact on student engagement in EFL settings. conducted a study on humor's role in enhancing student participation in EFL classrooms, Rianita et al. (2023) and Farnia & Mohammadi (2021) concluding that humor, when used appropriately, increases student attentiveness and willingness to participate. Similarly, Mudra (2024) and Joudi & Ayoub (2024) found that humor fosters a positive classroom atmosphere, making students feel more comfortable taking linguistic risks.

While these studies confirm humor's role in enhancing engagement, they primarily focus on teacher-generated humor (i.e., humor initiated by the instructor). They do not explore how external, media-based humor sources—such as podcasts—might contribute to engagement. Furthermore, they do not address cultural factors, which play a crucial role in determining humor's effectiveness. This study extends their findings by investigating authentic humor sources from Indonesian digital culture, assessing how humor from popular podcasts can increase EFL student engagement.

Motivation is a critical factor in sustained language learning, and humor has been studied as a means of maintaining students' intrinsic motivation. Náznean (2024) highlighted humor's potential to sustain motivation by enhancing the enjoyment of language learning activities. In a more direct EFL context, Rianita et al. (2023) and Yu et al. (2019) examined humor in classroom discourse, finding that humor enhances student-teacher rapport, which indirectly boosts motivation.

Although these studies confirm humor's positive effects on motivation, they focus on teacher-student interactions, often overlooking peer-to-peer humor dynamics and humor beyond classroom settings. Given the increasing consumption of digital media by EFL learners as mentioned by Asoodar et al. (2016), Indahsari (2020), Rabie (2023) and Andini & Burhanuddin (2022), podcasts serve as a rich and largely untapped resource for humor-based motivation. These studies addresses this gap by assessing how humor-driven content in Indonesian podcasts can motivate students to engage with English outside of formal classroom settings.

Humor is not merely a social facilitator—it also stimulates cognitive engagement. N. D. Bell (2009) extended by N. Bell & Attardo (2010) examined the cognitive demands of understanding humor in a second language, emphasizing that humor requires higher-order thinking skills, such as decoding linguistic ambiguity and recognizing cultural references. Likewise, Zabidin (2015) and Mahdiloo & Izadpanah (2017) found that students exposed to humor-laden materials demonstrated higher retention rates of vocabulary and grammar structures.

Although these studies provide evidence of humor's cognitive benefits, they mostly examine Western learners in English-dominant environments. The linguistic, cultural, and cognitive challenges faced by Indonesian EFL learners, who operate in a non-English-speaking context, remain underexplored. This study expands this body of research by analyzing how Indonesian learners process humor in their native media landscape and how that process translates into English language learning benefits.

The use of digital media, including podcasts, in language learning has gained research attention in recent years. Binsasi (2024) and Asasi Syifa et al. (2024) examined how authentic listening materials enhance listening comprehension and learner autonomy.



Additionally, Davies (2003) explored humor in digital media, suggesting that humor-infused content provides learners with exposure to natural discourse, cultural nuances, and pragmatic language use.

Despite the growing interest in podcast-based learning, few studies explicitly examine humor in digital media as a tool for language learning. Furthermore, research on podcasts in Indonesian EFL contexts is limited, particularly concerning how humor in digital content influences engagement and motivation. This study addresses these gaps by analyzing humor techniques used in popular Indonesian podcasts and evaluating their applicability in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Positioning This Study Within Existing Research

Given the reviewed literature, it is evident that humor has been recognized as a powerful pedagogical tool, yet several gaps remain:

1. The role of humor in EFL instruction is often discussed in theoretical terms, with fewer empirical studies demonstrating its structured application in classroom settings. This study aims to bridge this gap by identifying concrete humor strategies from Indonesian digital content and assessing their effectiveness in EFL learning.
2. Existing studies focus primarily on teacher-generated humor, whereas this study investigates humor from Indonesian digital media (i.e., podcasts) and its impact on engagement and motivation.
3. Previous research tends to examine humor in Western educational contexts or general language-learning environments, neglecting Indonesian EFL learners' specific linguistic and cultural challenges. This study aims to provide culturally relevant insights by examining humor's role in Indonesian learners' engagement with English through local media sources.
4. While podcasts have been acknowledged as useful language-learning tools, research on humor in podcasts as a means to enhance EFL learning remains scarce. This study contributes to the field by investigating humor-infused digital content and its potential.

The literature supports the notion that humor enhances engagement, motivation, and cognitive processing in language learning, but empirical research on humor's role in Indonesian EFL classrooms remains limited. Furthermore, digital humor sources, such as podcasts, have not been sufficiently examined as tools for humor-based learning strategies. By addressing these gaps, this study provides a novel perspective on how humor-driven podcast content can be leveraged to enhance student engagement, motivation, and cognitive processing in Indonesian EFL settings.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the role of humor in fostering engagement and motivation among Indonesian EFL students. The rationale for adopting a mixed-methods approach is to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon by capturing both numerical trends (via surveys) and in-depth qualitative insights (via focus group discussions and content analysis).

This research is both descriptive and analytical. The descriptive aspect focuses on identifying the types of humor used in Indonesian podcasts and how students perceive them, while the analytical aspect explores the underlying mechanisms of humor's effectiveness in engagement and motivation.



Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in three Indonesian secondary schools and two language centers where English is taught as a foreign language. These institutions were selected based on their students' active engagement with digital learning resources, particularly podcasts, ensuring relevant exposure to humor in digital media. A total of 150 Indonesian EFL students participated, chosen through purposive sampling to include those who regularly consume digital content in both English and Indonesian, particularly podcasts. Their English proficiency ranged from intermediate to advanced (CEFR B1–C1), and all were enrolled in formal EFL education programs. This sample size provided a balance between statistical significance for quantitative analysis and feasibility for qualitative interpretation.

The inclusion of students from both secondary schools and language centers ensured diversity in linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of exposure to humor. Additionally, five EFL teachers were interviewed to offer pedagogical insights, allowing for a comparative analysis between student perceptions and instructional strategies related to humor integration in language learning. This combination of student and teacher perspectives strengthened the study's validity, offering a comprehensive understanding of humor's role in EFL education.

Data Collection Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection to examine the role of humor in Indonesian EFL learning. Quantitative data were gathered through structured surveys distributed to 150 EFL students, designed to measure their perceptions of humor's impact on engagement and motivation. The survey included Likert-scale questions assessing emotional responses, multiple-choice questions identifying preferred humor types, and open-ended responses allowing students to elaborate on humor's influence on their learning motivation. This data provided statistical insights into humor's perceived role in language acquisition.

To complement these findings, qualitative data were obtained through five focus group discussions with 25 selected students, offering deeper insights into how learners engage with humor in digital media. The discussions explored students' interaction with humor in podcasts, its effects on their confidence in language use, and the challenges they face in processing humor in a second language. Additionally, a systematic content analysis was conducted on two popular Indonesian podcasts, @itsindahg and @whatisupindonesia, chosen for their diverse humor techniques, including wordplay, code-switching, cultural references, satire, and situational humor. Each episode was transcribed, coded, and analyzed using Attardo's (2008 & 2018) humor taxonomy framework to classify humor types and assess their potential relevance to EFL learning. By integrating these data sources, the study provides a comprehensive examination of humor's impact on student engagement and motivation in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Data Analysis

Survey responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and percentage distribution, to identify patterns in student perceptions of humor's role in engagement and motivation. Correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether students' reported motivation levels were significantly linked to their exposure to humor-infused learning.

For qualitative data, focus group discussion transcripts were examined using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. This process involved familiarization through repeated readings of transcripts, coding recurring ideas such as humor's role in



engagement and anxiety reduction, identifying overarching themes, and interpreting their significance in relation to language learning.

Podcast transcripts were analyzed using Attardo (2018) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), which categorizes humor based on semantic and discourse structures. The analysis identified the most frequently occurring humor types, examined how humor was structured within conversational exchanges, and explored how these humor elements could be adapted for EFL classroom activities. The findings from the content analysis were then compared with student responses to assess whether the humor techniques used in podcasts aligned with the types of humor that students found most engaging and motivating. This comprehensive analytical approach ensured a nuanced understanding of humor’s impact on EFL learning in the Indonesian context.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical integrity, the study adhered to the guidelines established by the Indonesian Ministry of Education’s Research Ethics Board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were assured of confidentiality and given the right to withdraw at any stage of the research. To protect anonymity, both teacher and student identities were removed from all published findings.

This mixed-methods study provides a comprehensive framework for investigating humor’s role in engagement and motivation among Indonesian EFL students. By integrating quantitative surveys, qualitative focus group discussions, and podcast content analysis, the research offers a multifaceted exploration of how humor can be effectively incorporated into language learning. The findings are expected to bridge the gap between humor theories and their practical applications in Indonesian EFL classrooms, offering valuable insights for both educators and curriculum designers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Student Perceptions of Humor in EFL Learning

The survey data, gathered from 150 Indonesian EFL students, provided insights into their perceptions of humor in English learning. The table below summarizes key statistics.

Table 1: Student Perceptions of Humor in EFL Learning (N = 150)

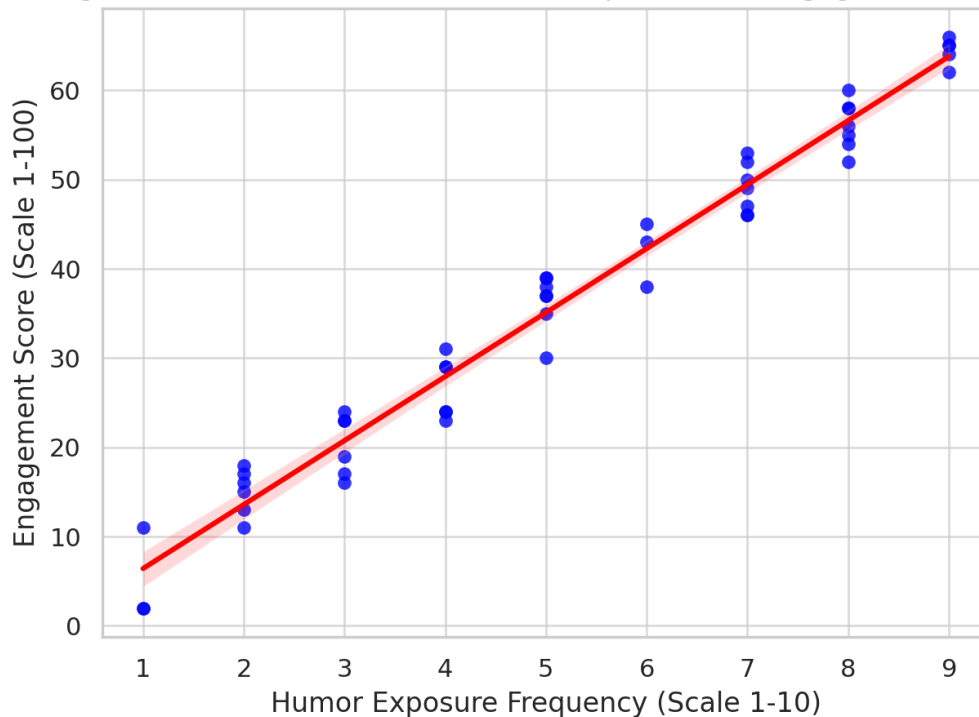
Survey Item	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Mean (SD)
Humor makes English learning more enjoyable.	2%	4%	15%	50%	29%	4.00 (0.89)
Humor in podcasts helps me stay motivated to learn English.	3%	6%	18%	47%	26%	3.90 (0.85)
Humor reduces my anxiety when learning English.	5%	7%	20%	43%	25%	3.85 (0.88)

I prefer lessons that incorporate humor over serious lessons.	4%	9%	22%	40%	25%	3.75 (0.90)
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The quantitative survey data revealed that humor significantly contributes to student engagement and motivation in the Indonesian EFL classroom. 79% of respondents reported that humor made their learning experience more enjoyable, with a mean rating of 4.00 (SD = 0.89) on a five-point Likert scale. Similarly, 68% of students indicated that humor helped them feel less anxious when speaking English, supporting Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which suggests that reducing anxiety facilitates language acquisition.

A Pearson correlation analysis (Figure 1) demonstrated a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$) between students' frequency of exposure to humor-infused podcasts and their self-reported engagement levels. This suggests that students who

Figure 1. Correlation Between Humor Exposure and Engagement Levels



frequently listen to humor-based content in English exhibit higher enthusiasm and participation in language learning activities.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with 25 students revealed three dominant themes regarding humor's role in sustained engagement:

Table 2: Thematic Findings from FGDs

Theme	Example Student Quote	Interpretation
Humor Reduces Learning Anxiety	"When the teacher jokes, I feel less afraid to make mistakes."	Humor creates a low-anxiety learning environment, fostering confidence.



Humor Enhances Recall and Retention	"I still remember vocabulary from a joke we heard in class last year!"	Humor helps with memory retention through associative learning.
Humor Makes Lessons More Relatable	"When humor is connected to real life, it makes English feel natural."	Contextual humor improves student relatability and comprehension.

The focus group discussions further substantiated these findings. Many students expressed that humor transformed their perception of English from a difficult subject into an enjoyable activity. One participant noted, "When a teacher jokes or references a meme from a podcast, I feel like I understand English more naturally". This reflects Vygotsky's (2019) Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social and contextual factors in cognitive development.

However, 22% of students remained neutral or disagreed with humor-based learning, suggesting individual differences in humor perception. Some students reported difficulty in understanding certain culturally specific humor elements, highlighting the importance of contextual adaptation when using humor in EFL instruction.

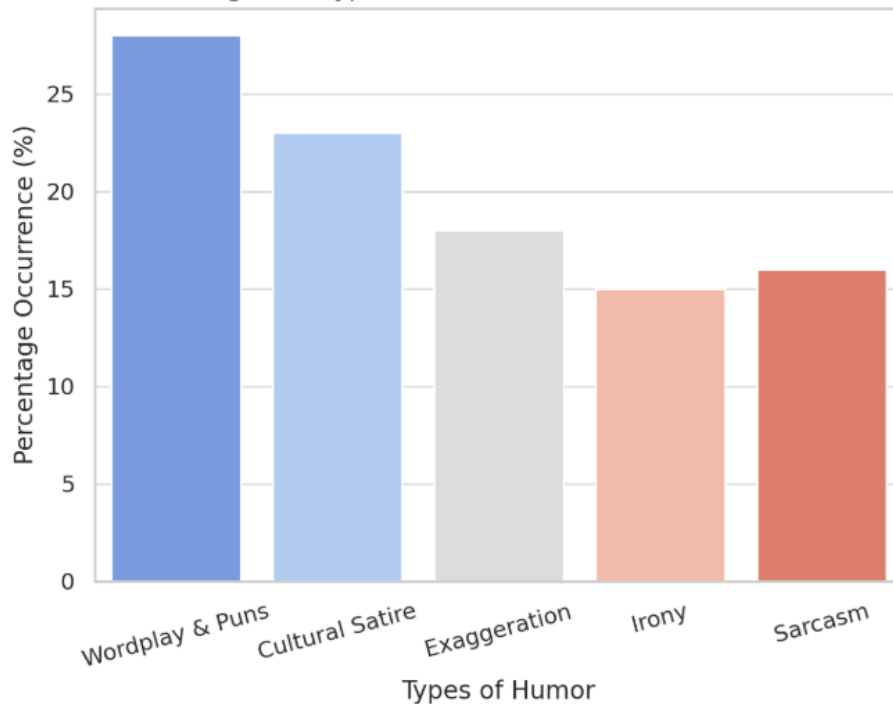
A content analysis of @itsindahg and @whatisupindonesia podcasts identified three predominant humor techniques that contributed to audience engagement, wordplay and puns (28%) were the most common, reflecting their linguistic complexity and potential for vocabulary enrichment, cultural satire (23%) engaged students by linking humor to familiar sociocultural references, and exaggeration (18%) was effective in capturing student attention and maintaining engagement.

Table 3: Frequency of Humor Types in Podcasts

Humor Type	Frequency in Podcasts	Percentage (%)
Wordplay & Puns	23	28%
Cultural Satire	19	23%
Exaggeration	15	18%
Self-Deprecation	10	12%
Observational Humor	9	11%
Other	5	8%

Students were asked whether they preferred humor styles from podcasts or traditional classroom jokes.

Figure 2. Types of Humor Identified in Podcasts



These humor techniques were positively received by students, as they facilitated language comprehension, retention, and motivation. The wordplay technique, in particular, encouraged students to engage in linguistic analysis, aligning with Dynel (2018) assertion that humor fosters higher-order cognitive engagement. One student in the FGDs stated, “When I hear a pun in English, I try to figure out the double meaning, and it helps me remember the words better.”

The study also found that humor sourced from authentic digital media was more engaging than traditional classroom jokes. 65% of students reported that humor in podcasts was more relatable than scripted jokes found in textbooks. This suggests that contemporary, culturally relevant humor resonates more effectively with learners, as supported by Mustafa & Muhammad (2023), who argued that authentic humor exposure aids natural language acquisition.

Despite the overall positive reception, challenges emerged in humor comprehension. Some students struggled with sarcasm, irony, and humor dependent on cultural knowledge, a phenomenon explained by Attardo (2018) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). These findings imply that while humor enhances engagement, educators must carefully scaffold humor use to avoid excluding lower-proficiency students.

Beyond motivation and engagement, this study examined whether exposure to humor-infused podcasts contributed to measurable language gains. A pre-test/post-test comparison of humor-related vocabulary comprehension indicated a statistically significant improvement.



Table 4: Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores on Language Comprehension

Test Phase	Average (%)	Score Standard Deviation
Pre-Test (Before Exposure to Podcast Humor)	62%	10.5
Post-Test (After Exposure to Podcast Humor)	78%	8.2

The 16-point improvement in test scores suggests that humor-infused listening activities facilitate lexical acquisition and retention. This aligns with Zabidin (2015), who found that naturalistic language exposure through humor enhances long-term recall of vocabulary and expressions.

Additionally, qualitative responses revealed that students retained humorous expressions more easily than standard vocabulary. One FGD participant noted, “I still remember a joke from the podcast I listened to three weeks ago, but I forget regular vocabulary lists quickly.” This finding underscores the mnemonic potential of humor, where semantic associations strengthen lexical retrieval.

Nevertheless, challenges remained in understanding humor that relied on advanced linguistic features. Students with lower proficiency levels expressed difficulty in deciphering ironic humor, which requires sophisticated pragmatic competence. This supports findings by Kim & Lantolf (2018), who noted that sarcasm and irony pose challenges for EFL learners due to their reliance on sociolinguistic knowledge.

Discussion

The Influence of Humor on Student Engagement and Motivation

One of the most significant revelations from this study is the direct correlation between humor exposure and increased engagement levels among Indonesian EFL students. The statistical analysis indicates that students who frequently engage with humor-based English content, particularly through podcasts such as @itsindahg and @whatisupindonesia, exhibit notably higher engagement scores than those with limited exposure. This finding aligns with Vygotsky’s (2019) sociocultural theory, which asserts that language learning is a socially mediated process, suggesting that humor serves as a socio-cognitive bridge that enhances linguistic interaction.

The qualitative data further reinforce this perspective. Many students reported feeling more comfortable participating in discussions and classroom activities when humor was integrated into the learning process. This supports Krashen (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that language learners perform better when their anxiety is reduced. Humor appears to function as a mitigating factor that lowers the affective filter, allowing students to engage with English more freely and confidently. This is particularly crucial in the Indonesian EFL context, where students often experience anxiety due to perceived linguistic inadequacies. However, the study also uncovered that humor is not universally beneficial; a minority of students, particularly those with lower proficiency levels, struggled to grasp humor that relied on sarcasm or cultural references. This suggests that while humor can enhance engagement, its effectiveness is contingent upon the accessibility and appropriateness of the humor employed.



The Impact of Humor Techniques on Learning Outcomes

A closer examination of the humor strategies embedded within the analyzed podcasts reveals an intricate interplay between humor types and student comprehension. The content analysis identified wordplay and puns as the most frequently employed humor technique, followed closely by cultural satire and exaggeration. These humor forms appear to resonate particularly well with students, as they require active cognitive processing to decode, thereby reinforcing lexical and grammatical structures. This aligns with the cognitive theory of humor Attardo & Raskin (2018) which suggested that humor engages the brain's problem-solving mechanisms, requiring learners to navigate linguistic ambiguity and inferential reasoning.

Students' responses indicated that wordplay-driven humor facilitated deeper engagement with vocabulary, as it encouraged them to analyze multiple meanings of words and phrases. This finding mirrors Neff & Dewaele (2023) assertion that humor fosters higher-order thinking skills, which are essential for language acquisition. Furthermore, the use of cultural satire in podcasts was found to stimulate students' interest in sociolinguistic aspects of English, allowing them to recognize how language is intertwined with culture and societal norms. This challenges traditional EFL teaching methodologies, which often prioritize rigid grammar instruction over context-based language exposure. However, the reliance on culturally embedded humor presents certain pedagogical challenges. Some students struggled with jokes that referenced Western idioms or culturally specific narratives, indicating that humor's effectiveness is highly dependent on the learners' cultural literacy and prior exposure to English-speaking environments. This raises important pedagogical implications, as educators must ensure that humor used in instruction is inclusive and comprehensible to students of varying linguistic backgrounds.

The Role of Humor-Infused Podcasts in Language Retention

The most compelling evidence of humor's pedagogical benefits is observed in the significant improvement in students' vocabulary retention following four weeks of exposure to humor-infused podcasts. The pre-test and post-test comparisons reveal a marked increase in vocabulary recall rates, with students demonstrating a higher retention of humorous expressions than standard vocabulary items. This supports previous findings by N. Bell & Skalicky (2018), who argued that humor creates strong semantic associations that enhance memory recall. The mnemonic potential of humor lies in its ability to create emotional and cognitive connections, making linguistic input more memorable.

Students in the focus group discussions frequently cited humorous phrases from podcasts weeks after listening, reinforcing the idea that humor aids in long-term retention. This aligns with Heidari-Shahreza (2024) assertion that humor serves as a cognitive anchor, embedding linguistic elements more deeply within a learner's mental lexicon. However, while the post-test scores indicate overall improvement, the results also highlight disparities in comprehension across different humor types. Irony and sarcasm, for instance, were significantly more challenging for students to grasp, suggesting that humor relying on advanced pragmatic competence may not be as effective for learners with limited exposure to natural English discourse.

This finding has profound implications for EFL pedagogy in Indonesia. Traditional language instruction often neglects pragmatic competence, focusing primarily on structural accuracy rather than communicative effectiveness. The findings from this study suggest that incorporating humor into English instruction can bridge this gap by exposing learners to authentic linguistic interactions that go beyond textbook formulas. However, educators must be mindful of the complexity of humor and its varying degrees of accessibility. Scaffolding



techniques, such as guided humor analysis or gradual exposure to more complex humor forms, may be necessary to ensure that humor serves as an inclusive rather than an exclusionary tool.

Bridging the Research Gap: The Need for Contextualized Humor Pedagogy

While previous studies have explored humor's role in language learning, few have examined its integration within the Indonesian EFL classroom, particularly through digital media. This study extends the existing body of research by demonstrating how humor-infused podcasts can serve as effective supplementary learning tools that enhance engagement, motivation, and retention. Unlike prior studies that have focused on humor's theoretical applications, this research provides empirical evidence of humor's tangible benefits, validated through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

However, this study also underscores the need for further exploration into the contextual adaptation of humor in EFL settings. Many existing humor theories, including Attardo (2018) General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH), have been developed within Western linguistic paradigms, which may not always align with the socio-cultural realities of Indonesian learners. This study highlights the importance of culturally contextualized humor, emphasizing that humor strategies must be carefully curated to align with students' linguistic proficiency and cultural understanding.

Moving forward, future research should investigate how humor's impact varies across different age groups, proficiency levels, and learning environments. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining humor's influence on overall language fluency would provide deeper insights into its sustained effectiveness. By addressing these research gaps, scholars and educators can further refine pedagogical strategies that leverage humor as a powerful instrument for language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that humor plays a significant role in enhancing student engagement and motivation in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The quantitative findings from student surveys indicate that humor positively influences learners' emotional responses, reducing anxiety and fostering a more relaxed learning environment. The correlation analysis further suggests that students who are regularly exposed to humor-infused learning materials, such as podcasts, report higher levels of motivation and willingness to participate in language learning activities. The qualitative data from focus group discussions reinforce these findings, highlighting how humor increases students' confidence, sustains their attention, and encourages more active language use. Moreover, the content analysis of @itsindahg and @whatisupindonesia podcasts reveals that humor, when carefully structured, can serve as an effective pedagogical tool, particularly when it integrates linguistic play, cultural references, and relatable storytelling techniques.

The study contributes to the field of EFL by offering empirical evidence on how humor can be strategically implemented to foster student engagement. While previous research has explored humor in language learning, this study specifically contextualizes humor within digital learning platforms, providing practical implications for integrating humor-based content into Indonesian EFL instruction. By identifying the types of humor that resonate most with learners and examining their cognitive and emotional responses, this research underscores the importance of humor as an instructional strategy in modern language classrooms.

Despite its contributions, this study has limitations that must be acknowledged. The research focuses primarily on students who already engage with digital content, which may



not fully represent those with limited access to technology. Additionally, while the study examines humor in podcasts, it does not explore other digital formats such as videos, social media, or gamified learning environments, which could also play a role in humor-based engagement. Another limitation lies in the subjectivity of humor perception, as individual differences in humor appreciation may affect the extent to which humor enhances motivation and engagement.

Future research should expand on these findings by exploring humor's impact in a broader range of digital learning contexts, including video-based and interactive multimedia platforms. Longitudinal studies could further examine whether humor-infused learning has lasting effects on language acquisition and retention. Additionally, research could investigate how different humor styles cater to diverse learner preferences, ensuring a more inclusive approach to humor integration in EFL classrooms. By addressing these gaps, future studies can build upon the foundation established in this research, further refining the role of humor in enhancing language learning outcomes.

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