

# HUMOR IN THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM: EFFECTS ON STUDENTS AND THEIR ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN THE NEW NORMAL

**Dr. HERMINIA N. FALSARIO**

Faculty, Teacher Education Program, ISAT U Miagao Campus, Miagao Iloilo, Philippines.

## Abstract

The study determined the respondents' perception about humor in the virtual classroom, its level of beneficiality and their academic performance. The study employed descriptive-co relational design with frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Pearson's  $r$  as the statistical tools. The respondents were 124 Teacher Education students. The fully adapted questionnaire on the use of humor and the researcher-made questionnaire on beneficiality of humor were used. On using humor, 100% declared that "It is possible to learn and have fun at the same time and that they "Enjoy the class". They perceived humor as "Extremely Beneficial." The highest bulk of academic performance fell under Outstanding (46.77%) and followed by "Very Good" (39.52 %). A positive correlation between beneficiality of humor and academic performance existed. Therefore, it is imperative to integrate humor in the virtual classroom to hone future teachers to become emotionally intelligent and to be successful classroom leaders.

**Keywords:** Beneficiality of Humor, Virtual Classroom, Academic Performance, Teacher Education Students

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

In the New Normal, students have been experiencing a lot of stress, burdens, problems and challenges. It seems that they are overburdened and they may experience burnout. In the daily grind of their academic activities, they may be scaffolded by some activities that may lighten their heavy load. One of the activities is to let them experience the lighter side of life by sharing jokes in the virtual classroom. They may share their jokes or the teacher will be the one to share jokes or funny quotes. Another activity that can establish humor in the virtual classroom is to have the "Knock, Knock" jokes. In this way, students can experience laughter with a sense. They can also experience catharsis, a purging of pent up emotions which will lead to a happy disposition which, in turn, can result in better academic performance on the part of the students. It is said that "Laughter is the best medicine." So, teachers might as well use this strategy to elicit laughter in the classroom.

There has been an extensive study on the employment of humor in the classroom and some benefits are a)An increase in learning; b)An increase in self-motivation; c)An increase in class attendance; d)An increase in test performance; e)An increase in divergent thinking; f)An increase of interest in learning; g)A reduction of anxiety and stress in dealing with difficult material; h)The creation of a positive social and emotional learning environment; and i)The creation of a common psychological bond between students and faculty(Banas, Dunbar, Rodriguez & Liu, 2011; Garner, 2006; Huss & Estep, 2016; Pollio, 2002).

Mc Keachie and Svinicki (2006) said that to sustain interest and deep learning in students, knowledge may be imparted through informal ways such as humor. Buskist, Sikorski, Buckley & Saville (2002) said that having a sense of humor is an important characteristic of excellent teachers. Forging a good student-teacher rapport can be done through humor. They said that students enjoy the process of learning and they learn much from teachers possessing a sense of humor.

The study is anchored on the Relief Theory of Humor which is attributed to Sigmund Freud and Herbert Spencer. The perception of humor is directly related to the release of built up tension which is actually good for the health. It relieves psychological tension by allowing the person to face his/her fears, to release nervous energy, and to overcome inhibitions. (<https://roxannaelden.com/2018/02/three-theories-humor-relief-superiority-surprise/>)

The type of humor used in the study is verbal humor including jokes, anecdote, puns, and irony.

### Research Questions

1. What is the percentage distribution of the respondents as to their perceptions on the use of humor in the virtual classroom?
2. What is the level of beneficiality of humor in the virtual classroom as perceived by the respondents?
3. What is the percentage distribution of the respondents as to academic performance?
4. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' perception on the level of beneficiality of humor in the virtual classroom and their academic performance?

### Research Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between the respondents' perception on the level of beneficiality of humor in the virtual classroom and their academic performance.

### Literature Reviews

Humor is a comic, absurd, or incongruous quality causing amusement; it is the faculty of perceiving what is amusing or comical; it is an instance of being or attempting to be comical or amusing; something humorous; or it is the faculty of expressing the amusing or comical. (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/humor>)

A number of researchers gave some definitions of humor. Leung (2004) defines humour as 'the ability to understand, enjoy, and express what is amusing. Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk & Smith (2006) indicate that humour is 'anything that the teacher and/or students find funny or amusing'. Faulkner (2011), defines humor as 'any physical action or spoken statement intentionally or otherwise that causes students to react by laughing, giggling, smiling, etc.' (Murat Hismanoğlu & Yüksel Ersan & Yusuf Ziyaettin Turan, 2017)

Humor, the capacity to express or perceive what's funny, is both a source of entertainment and a means of coping with difficult or awkward situations and stressful events. From its most light-

hearted forms to its more absurd ones, humor can play an instrumental role in forming social bonds, releasing tension, or attracting a mate. (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/humor>)

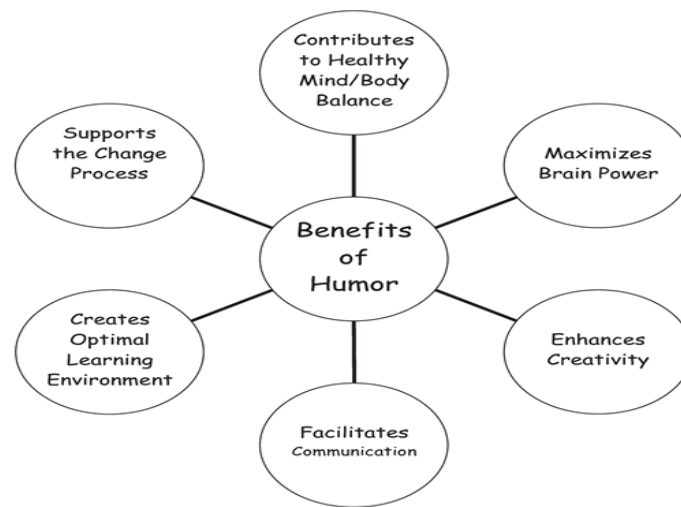
In psychological research, humor and the sense of humor are concepts studied in a variety of fields, such as personality, social, and clinical psychology and education and health psychology. In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, research has been carried out on fundamental and applied issues, and a humor and health movement is burgeoning. The International Society of Humor Studies (ISHS) unites several hundred researchers from many disciplines, and the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH) is an international community of professionals involved in the practice and promotion of healthy humor.

### **Classification of humor types**

Shade (1996) has categorized humor into four main sub-categories as figural humor including comic strips, cartoons and caricatures; verbal humor including jokes, anecdote, parody, limerick, riddles, satire, puns, irony; visual humor such as impersonation impressions, clowning, practical jokes; and auditory humor like impersonations, impressions, noises and sounds. Chee (2003) has sorted humor forms into four main groups as textual forms including stories and jokes; pictorial forms such as cartoons and comics; verbal forms including puns, word games and acronyms; and action/games such as theater, video, role play, contests.

Ziyeemehr & Kumar (2014) have identified humor as verbal humor, nonverbal humor and combined verbal and nonverbal humor. Puns, funny examples/ stories, riddles, comic irony, word plays, hyperbole, content related jokes comprise verbal humor. Examples of non-verbal humor are gestures, making faces and funny facial expressions. Combined verbal and nonverbal humor comprise skit, parody, impersonation, satire and monologue.

Previous research on instructor humor in the classroom has shown that humor is an effective approach to “entertain students, alleviate anxiety related to learning, create a positive academic climate, and produce an enjoyable atmosphere for learning.” But the authors note that beyond the impact humor has on the atmosphere of the classroom, its impact on learning has yet to be demonstrated convincingly. One reason for this may be because there are various ways that teachers can use humor to instruct their students, whether it is via physical comedy, general or personal anecdotes, language or logic, etc. An added dimension is that there are two approaches that instructors can utilize when they convey humor (Hofmann and Ruch, 2017 (<https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199828340/obo-9780199828340-0127.xml>))



**Figure 1: Benefits of Humor in Classroom (Morrison, 2008)**

([https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Benefits-of-Humor-in-Classroom-Morrison-2008-p-10\\_fig1\\_326062780](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Benefits-of-Humor-in-Classroom-Morrison-2008-p-10_fig1_326062780))

### Meaning of Humor in an Online Classroom

Humor in the online classroom is a way to make the environment a little more lighthearted. Humor can help to create a comfortable learning environment for students and can also create mutual respect and openness between the instructor and the students and among students. There is a shared belief amongst both teachers and students that learning should be fun (Shatz & Lo Schiavo, 2006). Humor also has the ability to help with the actual lesson delivery. By promoting objectives and increasing student interest and attention, humor can effectively promote learning (Shatz & Lo Schiavo, 2006).

### The Importance of Humor

According to McCabe (2017), humor is important because it has many physiological and psychological benefits. While humor can help students understand concepts and lesson content, it can also capture and maintain attention and motivation, which helps students to mentally engage with the course material (Shatz & Coil, 2008). Humor is an “educational lubricant making learning more engaging, enjoyable, and memorable” (Shatz & Coil, 2008, p. 106). The use of humor in the online classroom can appeal to the more technology-savvy population. The National Education Association ran an article by McNeely (n.d.) finding that humor can stimulate brain activity and increase creativity. The use of humor has been shown to reduce stress and anxiety and lower the affective filter (Ivy, 2013). Building relationships with students should be a goal of every instructor. According to James (2004), “Humor is a characteristic of the best and most effective teachers”. The use of humor helps to change student perceptions of the instructor and makes the instructor more approachable (Eskey, 2010). Micari and Pazos (2012) determined that the difference between students’ perceptions of their class being

“unreasonably hard” and being “a great learning experience” was their relationship with the instructor. Not only does humor aid in building relationships between the students and the instructor, it also builds relationships among the students. Anderson (2011) found that humor helped to increase group cohesion and student connectedness.

### **The Pros of Using Humor in a College Classroom**

(<https://www.edsys.in/using-humor-in-the-college-classroom-the-pros-and-the-cons/>)

A teacher with a great sense of humor can turn a class into a comfortable experience of each and every student. Some advantages of using humor are 1) Enhances learning ability; 2. Improves emotional and social positivity; 3) Increases Class Attendance; 4) Improves Test Performance; and 5) Reduces the fear of a subject

According to Eskey (2010), humor, whether in the form of jokes, riddles, puns, funny stories, humorous comments or other humorous items, builds a bond between the instructor and students; bridging the student-teacher gap by allowing students to view the instructor as more approachable. A number of researchers have found that humor is instrumental in creating an inviting classroom environment, reducing stress, improving attention, enhancing learning, creating a positive emotional and social environment, reducing anxiety, enhancing self-esteem, and increasing self-motivation.

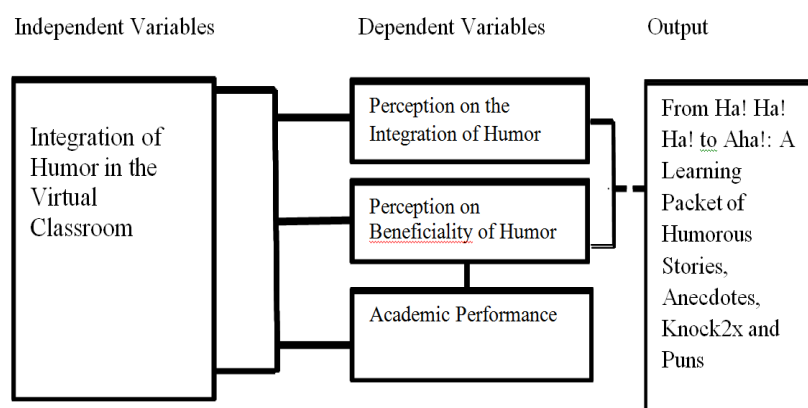
Some reasons to use humor in the classroom are 1) Humor reduces stress in the classroom; 2) Humor increases creativity; 3) Humor reduces negative talk. It is hard to complain after smiling; 4) Humor creates more memorable lessons; 5) Humor leads to more work being completed.; 6) Humor leads to fewer discipline problems.; 7) Humor creates more student “buy in.”; 8) Humor improves your relationship with families.; 9) Humor is team- and family-building. (<https://freespiritpublishingblog.com/2015/08/17/top-10-reasons-to-use-humor-in-the-classroom/>)

Bolkan and Goodboy (2015) argued that instructor humor is a positive method of enhancing students’ learning experiences. This is because humor has the ability to entertain students, alleviate anxiety related to the learning environment, create a positive academic climate, and increase student motivation. Specifically, early theorists said that humor may influence learning because it increases the attention students pay to a lecture and motivates them to think deeply about the lesson. They argued that humorous teachers create a positive climate that fosters students’ beliefs in themselves and positive relationships with their instructors; that instructors may help students enjoy their classes more and perceive them to reflect experiences in which they choose to participate as opposed to experiences in which they are forced to engage; and that students may be more intrinsically motivated to learn and may be more likely to engage in behaviors that relate to learning such as coming to class. They concluded that humor’s impact on learning largely stems from the positive climate it builds and, subsequently, the needs it fulfills for students and instructors can promote genuine enthusiasm for learning, which leads to a variety of academic behaviors that increase students’ chances for being successful in their courses.

Yusuf, et al. (2021) had a study “Using Humor in Virtual Classroom: Lecturer’s Perspective”. The findings indicated that lecturers believe humor is vital in the classroom and can be used as a teaching method. Additionally, they feel that incorporating humor into the teaching-learning process can increase student participation, enthusiasm, comfort, and motivation, as well as garner respect and a favourable attitude toward lecturers.

Erdoğan & Çakıroğlu (2021) conducted a study titled “The Educational Power of Humor on Student Engagement in Online Learning Environments.” The mixed-method study was conducted over 14 weeks with the participation of 74 university students in an online university course. Elements of humor can be employed for attention grabbing, recalling, feedback, and humor breaks. A diversity of humorous elements created a significant difference and improved behavioral engagement for course materials, discussions, and assignments. It was observed that the use of humor created a significant difference and improved emotional engagement. A positive influence of the usage of humorous elements in course materials, discussions and assignments was observed.

### Conceptual Framework of the Study



**Figure 2: Paradigm of the Study**

The paradigm presents the relationship of the variables in the study. The researcher believes that the respondents’ perception on the beneficiality of humor has a relationship with their academic performance.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

One hundred twenty-four students who sent back the questionnaires out of one hundred eighty-three total populations were considered respondents of the study. The sample size was determined using the Slovin’s formula. Convenient sampling was used because only those who submitted the questionnaires were considered until such time that the desired sample size was

reached. All activities were conducted online: the researcher uploaded the questionnaires in the Group Chat and the respondents submitted them online as well.

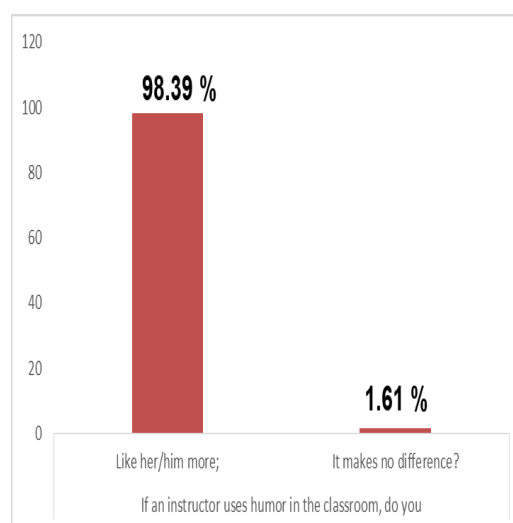
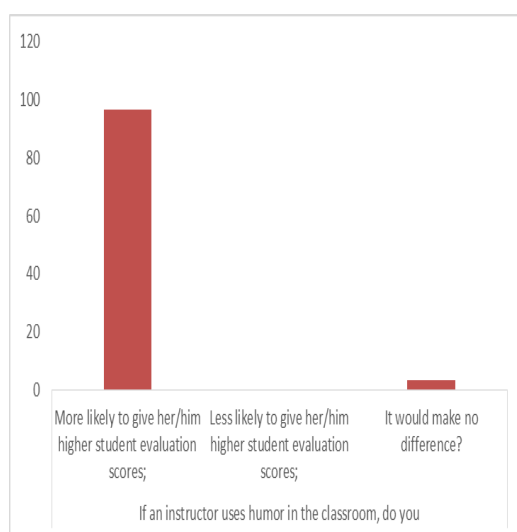
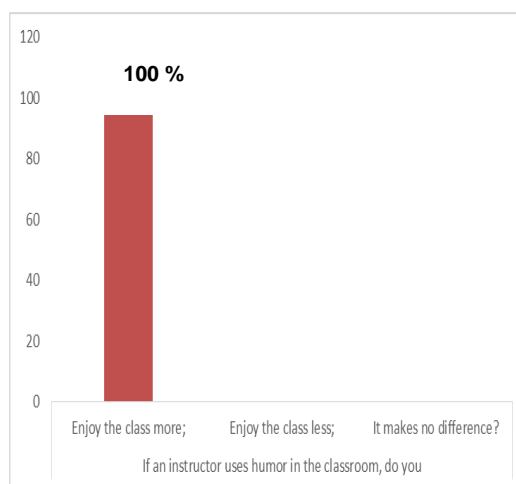
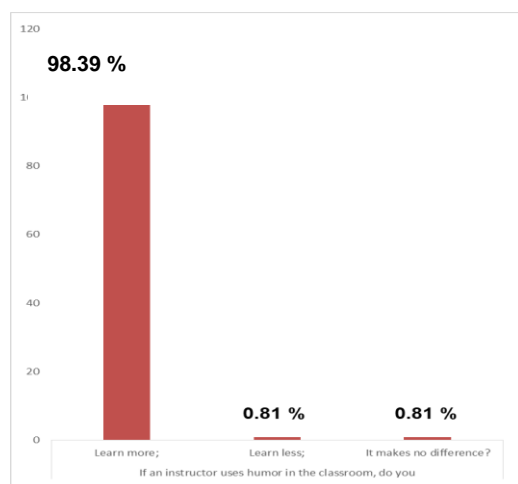
### Research Design and Instrument

A descriptive-co relational research design was used in this study. Students were made to answer one fully adapted questionnaire on their perception of humor integration in the classroom and another researcher-made questionnaire on the beneficiality of humor.

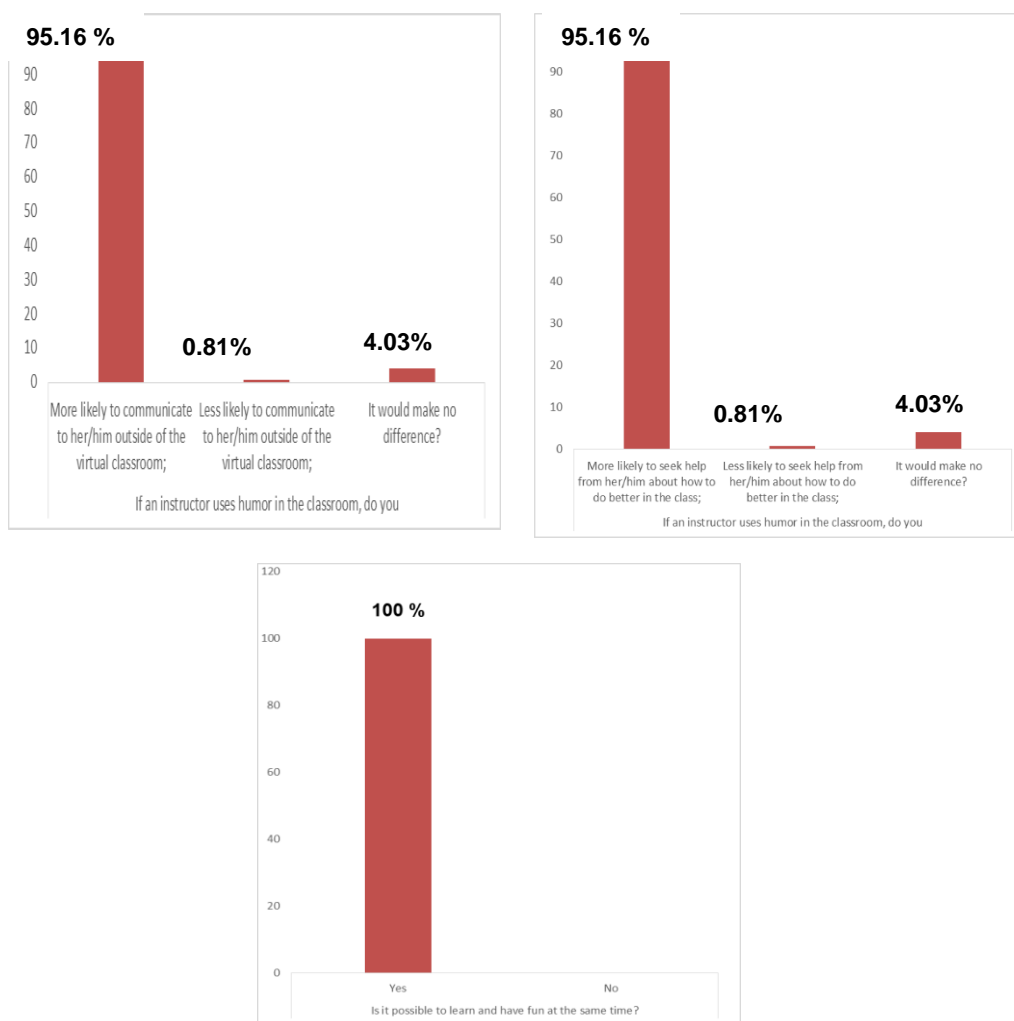
### Statistical Tools

The gathered data were subjected to statistical treatment. Frequency, percentage, means, standard deviation and Pearson's  $r$  were the statistical tools.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION







**Figure 3: Percentage Distribution of the Respondents as to their Perception on Humor in the Virtual Classroom**

Figure 3 presents the percentage distribution of the respondents as to their perception on humor in the virtual classroom. As to the integration of humor in the virtual classroom, 98.39% declared they “learn more”; 100% “enjoy the class”; 98.39% “like the class”; 96.77% “more likely to give their instructor higher evaluation rating”; 95.16% “more likely to communicate to the instructor outside of the virtual classroom”; 95.16 % “more likely to seek help from the instructor how to do better in class”; and 100% declared “It is possible to learn and have fun at the same time.” So, the respondents had the very high positive perception on the integration of humor in the virtual classroom.

The results of the study of Yusuf,et al. (2021) titled “Using Humor in Virtual Classroom: Lecturer’s Perspective” supports the results of the current study. They found out that lecturers believe humor is vital in the classroom and can be used as a teaching method. Additionally,



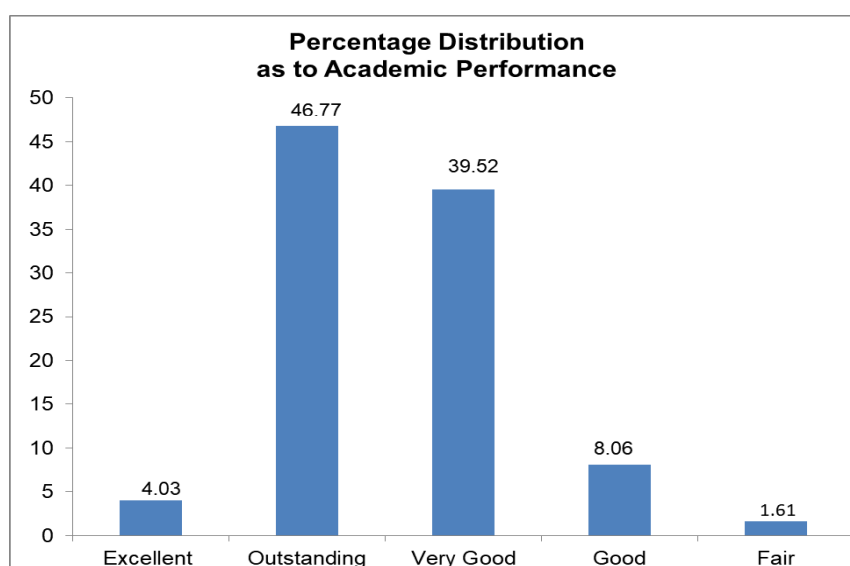
they feel that incorporating humor into the teaching-learning process can increase student participation, enthusiasm, comfort, and motivation, as well as garner respect and a favorable attitude toward lecturers.

The findings of the study conducted Erdoğan & Çakıroğlu (2021) titled “The Educational Power of Humor on Student Engagement in Online Learning Environments” have some similarities to the findings of the present study because they found out that elements of humor can be integrated into materials for attention grabbing, recalling, feedback, and humor breaks. A diversity of humorous elements created a significant difference and improved behavioral engagement for course materials, discussions, and assignments. It was additionally observed that the use of humor created a significant difference and improved emotional engagement. As for cognitive engagement, a positive influence of the usage of humorous elements in course materials, discussions and assignments was observed.

**Table 1: Level of Beneficiality of Humor in the Classroom as Perceived by the Respondents**

Level of Beneficiality of Humor	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Description
	124	4.33	0.5	Extremely Beneficial

Table 1 presents the level of beneficiality of humor as perceived by the respondents. As a whole and according to sex, humor was perceived as “Extremely Beneficial”. The result of the study is supported by the result of the study of Hismanoğlu, et al. (2018). The findings in their study indicated that the use of humor had positive effects (e.g. creating a more comfortable and conducive learning environment, making students feel more relaxed) in the classroom.



**Figure 4: Percentage Distribution as to Academic Performance**

Figure 2 presents the percentage distribution of the respondents as to their academic performance. It is good to note that the bulk of the percentage falls under “Outstanding” with 46.77% and “Very Good” with 39.52%. This goes to show that the pandemic has no adverse effects on the academic performance of the respondents. This is, probably, because they have enough time to do the learning activities and worksheets at home or the virtual class every week also has helped them understand the lesson concepts and they have been guided by the teacher on how to answer their worksheets.

**Table 2: Test of Significant Relationship between the Respondents’ Perception of the Level of Beneficiality of Humor in the Classroom and their Academic Performance**

Variables	n	r	r <sup>2</sup>	p-value	Remarks
Level of Beneficiality of Humor in the Classroom and Academic Performance	124	0.152	0.023	.091	Not Significant

Table 2 presents the result of the test of relationship between level of beneficiality of humor and academic performance. There was a positive correlation between level of beneficiality of humor and academic performance. The level of beneficiality has 2.3% attribution to the variance in the academic performance. There existed no significant relationship between level of beneficiality of humor and academic performance; so, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between level of beneficiality of humor and academic performance is not rejected.

Results of the study of Machlev& Karlin (2016) affirm the findings of the present study. A factor analysis identified two distinct types of humor (relevant/appropriate and non-relevant) used in the classroom with relevant/appropriate humor predicting perceived learning. No relationship was found between the different types of humor and actual learning.

## CONCLUSIONS

Integration of humor in the virtual classroom has a positive impact on the respondents. The respondents find humor to be relevant and useful especially during this time of COVID-19 pandemic when multifarious burdens are shouldered by them. It is a source of relief for them. The pandemic has not adversely affected the academic performance of the students since most of them have “Very good” to “Outstanding” Final Term grades because, probably, they have enough time to answer their worksheets and to participate actively in the virtual class since they are home-based. They are no longer bothered by travelling or other issues or concerns of the face-to-face classes. There is no significant relationship between level of beneficiality of humor and level of academic performance; therefore, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between level of beneficiality of humor and level of academic performance is not rejected.

## Recommendations

The teachers may integrate humor as a technique in their virtual classroom since students find it “Extremely Beneficial” to give students a respite on the burdens they are shouldering related their studies. The academic performance of the students may still be enhanced by employing activities pushing them beyond their limits. A Learning Packet may be developed containing humorous stories, puns, knock, knock jokes, anecdotes and may be mass produced to be used by the faculty members in their virtual or face-to-face classes and copies may be deposited in the library for students’ use. Also, it may be in the form of courseware and uploaded in the teachers’ Group Chat or YouTube channel of the English Division for ready reference.

## References

- Appleby, C. (2018). Using humor in the college classroom: The pros and the cons. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/ptn/2018/02/humor- college-classroom>
- Arafat, A. et al. (2016). Measuring students' attitudes towards teachers' use of humour during lessons: A questionnaire study journal of education and practice. Vol.7, No.35, 2016 Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1126486.pdf>
- Asaad, A. (2008). Statistics made simple for researchers. Manila. Rex Book Store.
- Bolkan, S. and Griffin, D.J. (2018). “Is Using Humor in the Classroom Beneficial Or Detrimental to Student Learning?” Retrieved from <https://www.natcom.org/communication-currents/using-humor-classroom-beneficial-or-detrimental-student-learning>
- Bolkan, S. and Goodboy, A. (2015). “Communicating Humor in the Classroom Helps Fulfill Students’ Basic Needs” Retrieved from <https://www.natcom.org/communication-currents/communicating-humor- classroom-helps-fulfill-students%E2%80%99-basic-needs>
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887 Available from: <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>
- David, Fely. (2005). Understanding and doing research: A handbook for beginners. Iloilo City: Panorama Printing, Inc.
- Eskey, M. (2010). Humor in online classrooms: New ways to learn and laugh. Retrieved from <https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/online-course-delivery-and-instruction/humor-in-online-classrooms-new-ways-to-learn-and-laugh/>
- Fatih Erdoğan & Ünal Çakıroğlu. (2021). the educational power of humor on student engagement in online learning environments. Retrieved from <https://telrp.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41039-021-00158-8>
- Fraenkel, J. and Norman E. Wallen (2006). How to design and evaluate research in education. U.S.A.: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc.
- Hişmanoğlu, M. et al. (2018). Turkish EFL learners’ perceptions on teachers’ using humor in the EFL classroom. *International Journal of Languages’ Education and Teaching*. Volume 6, Issue 2, June 2018, p. 284-294 Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED585099>
- McCabe, C. (2017). Laughter to learning: how humor can build relationships and increase learning in the online classroom. *Journal of Instructional Research*, Volume 6 (2017). Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1153377.pdf>
- Moshe Machlev, M. & Karlin, N.J. (2016). Understanding the Relationship between Different Types of Instructional Humor and Student Learning <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2158244016670200>, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016670200>

Smith, V. D. (2017). "Everyone's a comedian." no really, they are: Using humor in the online and traditional classroom." Journal of Instructional Research, Volume 6 (2017) Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1153377.pdf>

Kelly, P. (2015). "Top 10 Reasons to Use Humor in the Classroom". Retrieved from <https://freespiritpublishingblog.com/2015/08/17/top-10-reasons-to-use-humor-in-the-classroom/>

Wyse, S. (2011). "What is the difference between qualitative research and quantitative research? Retrieved from <http://www.snapsurveys.com/blog/what-is-the-difference-between-qualitative-research-and-quantitative-research/>

[https://guides.library.duq.edu/c.php?g=836228&p=5972144#:~:text=A%20phenomenological%20study%20explores%20what,before%20embarking%20on%20your%20research.\(n.d.\).](https://guides.library.duq.edu/c.php?g=836228&p=5972144#:~:text=A%20phenomenological%20study%20explores%20what,before%20embarking%20on%20your%20research.(n.d.).) Phenomenological research design. Retrieved from <https://delvetool.com/blog/phenomenology>