

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the foundation of the study. It begins with the research background, which highlights the context and rationale of the study. This is followed by the identification of problems, research limitations, and the formulation of research questions. Lastly, this chapter discusses the significance of the research, both in theoretical and practical terms.

1.1. Research Background

In recent years, the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety has become increasingly noticeable in Indonesian classrooms, especially at the senior high school level. Most students often confront issues such as a lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and uncertainty about participating in the classroom, which directly affect their engagement in learning. When the students experience language anxiety, they tend to remain silent during the discussion, or they mostly rely on memorization without considering meaningful communication. Furthermore, students are likely to use short responses to avoid revealing different opinions to their partner, which might lead to an awkward interaction (Maher & King, 2020). This situation creates barriers not only in communication but also in the overall classroom environment. In some cases, students with

foreign language anxiety perceive English as a difficult and intimidating subject. This can make students more prone to stress and disengagement. Accordingly, the classroom atmosphere becomes less interactive, and students' willingness to learn English declines.

These challenges highlight the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable participating without fear of making mistakes. A positive and emotionally supportive learning atmosphere is particularly important in EFL classrooms because students' emotional experiences strongly influence their willingness to communicate and engage in learning activities. Therefore, teachers need to employ instructional strategies that not only facilitate language learning but also reduce students' anxiety and encourage active participation.

Furthermore, one instructional strategy that has received considerable attention is the use of humor in classroom teaching. Humor can be defined as the creative and enjoyable use of language that evokes amusement, laughter, and enjoyment. In EFL classrooms, humor may take various forms, such as verbal jokes, playful remarks, funny examples, humorous stories, or spontaneous interactions integrated into the learning process. When the teacher uses humor in instruction, students are not only entertained but also cognitively engaged with the linguistic forms and meanings presented. This process helps students understand vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar while simultaneously reducing stress (Al Arief, 2023). Consequently, humor functions not merely as

entertainment but also as a pedagogical strategy that promotes meaningful interaction and creates a more enjoyable learning experience.

Several studies have demonstrated the benefits of teacher humor. Piniel & Zolyomi (2022) revealed that humor can positively affect students' psychological well-being. This includes a regulating impact on their personal emotions and their perceptions of themselves, the classroom, and the school environment. Similarly, instructional humor has been shown to strengthen teacher-student relationships and increase student engagement (Zhang & Tur, 2024). In addition, when teachers incorporate appropriate jokes or humor into their teaching, it can help reduce students' anxiety, create a more relaxed atmosphere, and strengthen the teacher-student relationship. Numerous studies have examined the positive effects of incorporating humor into the teaching process. al. (2023) found that instructional humor was positively correlated with both Teacher-Student Relationship Quality (TSRQ) and student engagement. The results also revealed that TSRQ plays an important role in strengthening the relationship between teachers and students. When students relate to the jokes, the positive impact on fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment becomes even more significant. Furthermore, the use of humor, especially linguistic jokes, can help students experience enjoyable learning and encourage them to participate actively (Al Arief, 2023). It aligns with a finding that university students in New Zealand reported that using humor in the classroom helped them remember and understand the course content

(Bakar & Kumar, 2022). Furthermore, according to Weisi and Mohammadi (2023), the use of humor also gives a positive perception of the Iranian EFL teachers. They argued that humorous language in the classroom serves as a tool to create a cheerful and friendly atmosphere, reducing tension, increasing students' enjoyment, and improving the quality of learning.

Despite the positive findings, humor is not always beneficial when it is used inappropriately. The effectiveness of humor depends on how it is constructed, delivered, and interpreted by the students. While course-related humor can support learning by reinforcing lesson content and reducing anxiety, inappropriate or poorly delivered humor may distract students, create misunderstandings, or even be perceived as ridicule or bullying. Therefore, teachers need to use humor carefully and purposefully so that it contributes positively to the learning process rather than creating negative classroom experiences.

Although numerous studies report a positive connection among teacher humor, students' enjoyment, and classroom engagement, several research gaps remain. First, a methodological gap exists because most previous studies have investigated teacher humor using quantitative survey methods, whereas relatively few have employed qualitative case studies that provide a deeper understanding of how humor is used during classroom interactions. Second, a contextual gap is evident because most previous studies have been conducted in university settings, while this research, focusing on Indonesian senior high school EFL classrooms,

remains limited. Third, an analytical gap exists because only a few studies have comprehensively examined the types of humor used by the teachers, the strategies employed to implement humor, and the perceptions of both teachers and students within a single study. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating a teacher's use of humor in an EFL classroom at SMA Negeri 9 Denpasar.

Moreover, the preliminary observation was conducted at SMA Negeri 9 Denpasar to obtain an initial understanding of the teacher's use of humor in classroom instruction. As a part of this preliminary observation, a brief informal interview was conducted with students who had previously been taught by the targeted teacher. According to the students, the teacher often tells jokes related to the lesson content, which they categorize as course-related humor. Furthermore, a preliminary review of the teacher's social media content indicated that humor was consistently integrated into English lessons. Most of the humor observed was course-related and directly connected to the learning materials. Students reported that this humorous approach made the classroom atmosphere more relaxed, helped them maintain attention, encouraged active participation, and increased their confidence in asking questions because they felt less anxious during classroom interaction.

According to these theoretical considerations and preliminary findings, this study aims to investigate the types of humor used by the teacher, the strategies employed to use humor in the classroom instruction, and the perceptions of both teacher and students regarding its

use in the EFL classroom. By focusing on an Indonesian senior high school context, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how teacher humor contributes to creating a supportive and engaging learning environment while addressing the existing gap in qualitative research on classroom humor.

1.2. Problem Identification

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students frequently experience foreign language anxiety, low confidence, and limited participation during classroom learning. These challenges often reduce students' engagement and willingness to communicate in English, making the learning process less effective. Therefore, teachers need instructional strategies that can create a more supportive, enjoyable, and interactive classroom environment. One widely recognized strategy is the use of humor, as it can reduce students' anxiety, increase learning enjoyment, and encourage active classroom participation.

However, the effectiveness of humor depends on how it is used. Not all forms of humor contribute positively to learning. While appropriate humor, particularly course-related humor, can support students' learning experiences, inappropriate or poorly delivered humor may distract students, create misunderstandings, or even be perceived negatively. Therefore, it is important to understand not only whether teachers use humor but also how they construct and implement humor during classroom interactions.

Although previous studies have reported the positive effects of teacher humor on students' enjoyment and engagement, most have relied on quantitative survey methods and have been conducted in university settings. Consequently, limited qualitative research has examined how teacher humor is naturally used in Indonesian senior high school EFL classrooms.

1.3. Research Limitation

This study is limited by certain factors that help define its scope and focus. Contextually, this study is limited to SMA N 9 Denpasar, a senior high school in Bali, Indonesia. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other educational institution settings. The participants in the study are limited to an English teacher and grade 11 students involved in EFL instruction. Furthermore, this study analyses humor episodes that naturally occurred during the observed classroom lessons, including the types of humor employed by the teacher. The study focuses on describing the types of humor, the teacher's strategies for using humor, and the perceptions of both the teacher and students regarding its use.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What types of humor are used by the English teacher in the EFL classroom?
2. What strategies does the English teacher use to integrate humor into the teaching and learning process?

3. How does the English teacher perceive the use of humor in the EFL classroom?
4. How do students perceive the use of humor in the EFL classroom?

1.5. Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. To identify the types of humor used by English teacher in the EFL classroom.
2. To describe the strategies used by the English teacher to integrate humor into the teaching and learning process.
3. To explore the English teacher's perceptions of the use of humor in the EFL classroom.
4. To explore students' perceptions of the use of teacher humor in the EFL classroom.

1.6. Research Significance

The present research is expected to have theoretical and practical significance for the integration of humor at SMA N 9 Denpasar.

1.6.1. Theoretical Significance

The study is expected to contribute to research on instructional humor in EFL classroom discourse. By applying Humor Processing Theory (IHPT), this study provides a contextual understanding of how different types of teacher humor are used and perceived in an Indonesian senior high school classroom. The findings may enrich discussions on affective pedagogy, joyful learning, and teacher-

student interaction in English language teaching. Additionally, the study may extend the existing literature by providing qualitative evidence on how teacher humor is naturally constructed and implemented during classroom interaction, particularly within the Indonesian EFL context.

1.6.2. Practical Significance

a. For Teachers

For teachers, this study provides examples of how humor can be used appropriately to support classroom interaction, reduce tension, and make learning more engaging.

b. For Students

For students, the study may contribute to a better understanding of how teacher humor can create a more comfortable learning atmosphere.

c. For Teacher Education

The findings may provide insights for teacher educators and pre-service English teachers regarding the pedagogical use of humor in classroom interaction. The study may serve as

an example of how appropriate humor can be integrated into English language teaching to foster a positive, supportive, and engaging learning environment while maintaining instructional objectives.

d. For Curriculum Developers

The findings may provide insights for curriculum developers in considering the affective and communicative dimensions of English language teaching. Although the findings are limited to one classroom context, they may inform the development of instructional guidelines or teaching resources that encourage appropriate and context-sensitive use of humor to support positive classroom interaction.

e. For Future Researchers

For future researchers, this study may serve as a reference for further qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods research on humor in language classrooms. It may also provide a foundation for studies examining teacher humor in different educational contexts, grade levels, or cultural settings, as well as its relationships with other language learning variables.

