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Delving into Pedagogical Levity: An Inquiry into the Interplay of Experience and Humor in Iranian EFL Teachers' Classroom Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

The impact of humor on language acquisition has been documented in scholarly accounts. Hence, this study investigated Iranian pre-service and high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' beliefs and practices of humor in the classroom. In order to collect data, the researchers adopted four distinct instruments including pedagogical humor questionnaire, semi-structured interview, observation checklist, and field notes. A total of 182 Iranian EFL teachers participated completed the questionnaires, while 10 in-service EFL teachers engaged in semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the second researcher observed 36 classes. The results indicated that both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers believed that humor was effective. Notably, high-experienced in-service EFL teachers displayed more pronounced positive beliefs in humor compared to their pre-service and low-experienced counterparts. The results also disclosed that humor was a routine practice for high-experienced teachers. Based on the findings of the present study, it can be suggested that it is essential to train and educate both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers in order to integrate humor into different EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Beliefs, Humor, Practices, Pre-service teachers, In-service teachers

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1. Introduction

Despite the insufficient emphasis on humor in the realm of language and literacy education, humor holds a significant position in the social tapestry of the classroom and fulfills crucial functions (Qin & Beauchemin, 2022). Integral to genuine daily exchanges among native speakers and imperative for effective classroom or conference facilitation, humor serves as a potent tool wielded by speakers or lecturers to cultivate an environment of assurance (Raskin, 1992). Wagner and Urios-Aparisi (2011) have defined humor as an activity executed through linguistic and nonlinguistic modalities by teachers or students within the educational setting. As underscored by Lomax and Moosavi (2002), humor constitutes a pedagogical approach, serving not only to enhance student participation but also to foster students' conceptual advancement.

Within the realm of foreign language education, scholarly investigations highlight the significant impact of instructors' adept utilization of humor on the facilitation of teaching and learning processes. The examination of strategies pertaining to humor aligns within the domain of investigating the pleasure derived from acquiring a new language, a prominent area of study within research on positive emotions in second language acquisition (Tong & Tsung, 2020). Given that humor is conveyed through language and can be seamlessly integrated into the pedagogy of all four language skills, its utility becomes particularly advantageous in the context of foreign language instruction (Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011). In accordance with the assertions made by Wanger and Urios-Aparisi (2011), the augmentation of instructional frameworks with humor emerges as a facilitator for learners to develop heightened intercultural awareness. Furthermore, it is evident that the pedagogical landscape of second and foreign language instruction in the classroom stands to derive positive influences from the judicious incorporation of humor (Ziyaeemehr et al., 2011).

As indicated by a substantial body of scholarly research, the introduction of humor has been identified as a factor that enhances motivation (McCroskey et al., 2006). Consequently, the incorporation of humor into instructional practices has been correlated with an augmentation in student learning outcomes (Baringer & McCroskey, 2000). Additionally, humor is observed to engender a more relaxed and enjoyable milieu within the classroom setting (Kher et al., 1999), thereby contributing to heightened instructional effectiveness (Wanzer, 2002). According to Martin and Ford (2018), humor serves various cognitive, emotional, and social functions, including capturing students' attention to enhance learning experiences. Furthermore, the employment of humor has been associated with an elevation in students' creativity and critical thinking abilities (Chabeli, 2008). Notably, humor plays a

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pivotal role in fostering rapport between teachers and students, fostering a sense of community within the educational environment (McCabe et al., 2017). However, implementing humor in pedagogical practices may present challenges, as the subject matter of lectures is not typically designed to elicit mirth (Bakar & Kumar, 2019).

An examination of existing literature reveals a paucity of research endeavors within the Iranian educational context (e.g., Alemi et al., 2021; Ghanei Motlagh et al., 2014) investigating the alignment between teachers' beliefs regarding humor and the practical instantiation of humor in the classroom. Furthermore, the discernment of distinctions in the actual utilization of humor in classrooms between highly experienced and less experienced English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors warrants exploration. Consequently, this study endeavors to scrutinize the distinctions and convergences among Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers, considering their levels of experience in terms of their beliefs regarding humor and the manifestation of these beliefs in classroom practices. The relevance of the study extends beyond the confines of the Iranian educational landscape. The findings stand to contribute valuable insights to the global discourse on pedagogical approaches and teacher-student dynamics, shedding light on universal patterns or distinctions in teachers' beliefs and practices concerning humor. This broader perspective enhances the generalizability and applicability of the study's outcomes, making them potentially beneficial for educational contexts beyond the Iranian milieu.

2. Literature review

2.1. Humor in L2 classroom

Numerous academics have underscored the imperative of incorporating humor within the educational setting. Powell and Andersen (1985) posit that the employment of humor in classrooms yields various impacts on students' learning, encompassing the retention of students' focus, mitigation of disruptive behaviors, facilitation of comprehension, cultivation of a favorable disposition towards the subject, and alleviation of anxiety. As articulated by Omede and Jimba (2013), the preservation of students' attention emerges as a notable advantage associated with the judicious integration of humor.

According to Askildson (2005), the integration of humor in educational settings holds the potential to enhance student learning by diminishing affective barriers and fostering an environment conducive to learning. Likewise, Gorham and Christophel (2014) assert that the employment of humor serves to facilitate student learning through the reduction of tension and boredom, heightened interest, alleviation of embarrassment, and preservation of dignity. As proposed by Aboudan (2009), the incorporation of humor in instructional contexts engenders

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a sense of security, assurance, confidence, independence, and freedom among students. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests that humor plays a role in rendering intricate concepts more accessible and enhancing students' comprehension (Wagner, 2007). Additionally, Korobkin (1988) contends that the utilization of humor in the classroom stimulates creativity and encourages critical thinking.

As posited by Omede and Jimba (2013), the integration of humor within the educational environment engenders a sense of relaxation and comfort among students in their interactions with teachers, thereby mitigating perceptions of authoritative demeanor. Consequently, this conducive atmosphere promotes heightened engagement in the classroom, particularly among reticent and reserved students. As articulated by Koutrouba (2012), a discernible trait of an efficacious teacher is the possession of a sense of humor.

2.2. Teachers' beliefs and practices

A considerable body of research underscores the significance of beliefs in the realm of language learning and teaching (Ajzen, 1988; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Addressing this, Zheng (2009) posits that the convictions held by teachers exert a profound influence on their pedagogical methodologies, cognitive processes, and pedagogical development. Furthermore, the impact extends to encompass classroom practices, the nature of decisions undertaken by teachers, and the formulation of lesson plans, as articulated by Pourhosein Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017). Within this paradigm, Kuzborska (2011) elucidates that teachers' beliefs have discernible repercussions on their educational objectives, procedural approaches, roles, and perceptions of learners.

Pintrich (1990) emphasizes the importance of adopting a dual perspective when examining teachers' beliefs. Firstly, heightened awareness of these beliefs allows instructors to make informed decisions within the instructional setting. Secondly, this awareness of beliefs has the potential to significantly influence classroom practices, thereby shaping students' learning outcomes. Parr et al. (2021) affirm that increased levels of enthusiasm and stronger adherence to constructivist beliefs correlate positively with improved instructional quality. However, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the prevailing beliefs guiding individuals, particularly in authentic workplace settings, and the subsequent impact of these beliefs on their practical approaches and actions (Zheng et al., 2022). Furthermore, Liu (2024) underscores the limited exploration within scholarly literature concerning how the distinctive educational backgrounds of educators influence their pedagogical ideologies and methodologies in genuine teaching environments.

Based on the objectives of the study, the following questions were formulated:

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1. What are Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor?
2. What are the similarities and differences between Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor? Is there any statistically significant difference between the two groups?
3. What are the similarities and differences between Iranian high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor? Is there any statistically significant difference between the two groups?
4. What are Iranian in-service EFL teachers' actual practices in using humor in the classroom?
5. What are the similarities and differences between Iranian high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' actual practices in using humor in the classroom?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The data for the present study were collected nationwide, from 37 cities of Iran. In this regard, a sample of 72 pre-service teachers majoring in TEFL at different branches of Farhangiyan university who will be employed by the Ministry of Education of Iran and 110 in-service EFL teachers with M.A degrees in TEFL who are working in private language institutes and public schools. In Iran, the students who are studying at Farhangiyan universities are regarded as pre-service teachers. A total of 138 teachers were female, and 44 teachers were male. The age of the subjects ranged from 18 to 30 years. Out of 110 in-service EFL teachers, 12 teachers were selected to be observed three times and 10 teachers were selected to be interviewed. Out of 12 selected teachers, 6 teachers were male, and 6 teachers were female. The EFL teachers were classified into two groups of low-experienced (i.e., less than five years of teaching experience) (n=65) and high-experienced (i.e., more than five years of teaching experience) (n=45).

3.2. Instruments

3.2.1. Pedagogical humor questionnaire

The Pedagogical Humor Questionnaire by Ketabi and Simin (2009) was employed in this study. The questionnaire contains 12 items that investigate teachers' beliefs of humor. It is a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'totally ineffective' to 'extremely effective'. In the present study, the estimated KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was found to be 0.85 and 0.00 respectively. Furthermore, using Cronbach's Alpha, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be 0.83.

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3.2.2. Semi-structured interview

To ensure comprehensive data collection, semi-structured interviews were employed. A total of 10 teachers, comprising 5 with extensive experience and 5 with limited experience, participated in the interviews, evenly distributed between male and female teachers. The interview questions were developed collaboratively by the researchers and reviewed by three experts in qualitative research (See Appendix). The interviews were conducted informally and in an open-ended manner, utilizing social media platforms such as WhatsApp through recorded voice messages and via telephone calls.

3.2.3. Observation checklist

The items of the checklist were developed by the researchers based on the teachers' beliefs of humor questionnaire. The observation checklist was given to three experts in the field of qualitative research to provide the necessary feedback.

3.2.4. Field notes

Some qualitative notes were recorded during and after observations and interview sessions by the second researcher. Moreover, in order not to miss any instances of humor that were not included in the checklist, some field notes were taken during the observations.

3.3. Data collection procedure

First, the second researcher observed the classes that were selected and used the checklist to collect the data. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the observations were online. Permissions and justifications were issued by the managers of the institutes and public schools to collect the required data. Second, the questionnaires were given to the subjects of the study. Next, interview sessions were held to gather the data from the subjects. The subjects were assured that their information would be kept confidential. As mentioned earlier, 12 teachers were selected and observed three times to explore their actual classroom practices regarding the use of humor in the classroom. Therefore, overall, 36 observations were conducted. Some field notes were taken during interviews and observations by the second researcher.

3.4. Data analysis

In order to investigate the first question, the researchers used descriptive analysis and thematic analysis. The qualitative approach for analyzing interviews was conducted through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With the aim of investigating the second question, an independent sample t-test was run. In an effort to investigate the third question, an independent sample t-test was run and for the interviews thematic analysis were used. For investigating the fourth question, teachers' practices were coded. To do this, the data were classified into two groups of routine practices and non-routine practices. In this case, if an instance of humor

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occurred 50% or more, it was regarded as a routine practice. In order to investigate the fifth research question, the classes were observed and chi-square analysis was conducted by the researchers.

4. Results

The results of each research question are provided below.

4.1. Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor

In order to identify pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor, descriptive statistics was used, the results of which are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics for beliefs of humor among pre-service EFL teachers*

Factor	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Beliefs of Humor	72	1.17	3.92	3.02	.66

As is shown in Table 1, the mean and standard deviation of the pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor were 3.02 and 0.66 respectively. The ultimate score was computed in the possible range of 1 to 5 (Mean=2.5). Thus, the pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor level was moderate to high.

In order to identify in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor, descriptive statistics were used, the results of which are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics for beliefs of humor among in-service EFL teachers*

Factor	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Beliefs of Humor	110	2.08	4.83	3.45	.47

As is shown in Table 2, the mean and standard deviation of the in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor were 3.45 and 0.47 respectively. The ultimate score was computed in the possible range of 1 to 5 (Mean=2.5). Thus, the in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor level was moderate to high.

As mentioned earlier, semi-structured interviews were also conducted with 10 in-service EFL teachers to obtain their practices of humor. The themes are summarized in Table 3.

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Table 3. *In-service EFL teachers' common themes of answers to the interview questions (practices of humor)*

Themes		**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Theme 1	Humor nurtures understanding and learning	5	50
Theme 2	Humor is used to convey goodwill and alleviate boredom	5	50
Theme 3	Humor fosters students' motivation	5	50
Theme 4	Humor increases students' participation	5	50
Theme 5	Humor reduces tension and generates a comfortable atmosphere	5	50
Theme 6	Humor is not used due to lack of humor competence	4	40
Theme 7	Humor is avoided due to lack of competence in English to make humor	4	40
Theme 8	Humor is not used to maintain professionalism	4	40
Theme 9	Humor is a rich cultural resource of English	3	30
Theme 10	Humor facilitates teachers' self-disclosure	2	20
Theme 11	Humor draws students' consideration	2	20

By conducting semi-structured interviews for answering the first research question, it was revealed that some differences could be seen in the interview questions between teachers who used humor and teachers who did not use humor in the classroom. Moreover, most of the teachers who used humor and teachers who did not use humor shared a similar belief about the advantageous role of humor in the classroom.

4.2. Similarities and differences between Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor

To investigate the second question, an independent sample t-test was run. The descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 4 below.

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Table 4. *Descriptive statistics of Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor*

	Teachers	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Beliefs of Humor	In-service Teachers	110	3.45	.47	.03
	Pre-service Teachers	72	3.02	.66	.13

As can be seen in Table 4, the mean and standard deviation of in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor were 3.45 and 0.47, respectively, while the mean and standard deviation of pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor were 3.02 and 0.66, respectively. The results of an independent sample t-test are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *Independent samples test for Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Beliefs of Humor	Equal variances assumed	2.15	.14	3.92	180	.00	.43	.11	.21	.65
	Equal variances not assumed			3.07	26.70	.00	.43	.14	.14	.72

As can be seen in Table 5, in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor (M=3.45; SD=0.47) was significantly higher than pre-service EFL teachers (M=3.02; SD=0.66).

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4.3. Similarities and differences between Iranian high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor

To investigate the third question, an independent sample t-test was run. The descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 6 below.

Table 6. *Descriptive Statistics of Iranian High-experienced and Low-experienced In-service EFL Teachers' Beliefs of Humor*

	Teaching Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Beliefs of Humor	Low-experienced	65	3.19	.35	.03
	High-experienced	45	3.79	.40	.04

As shown in Table 6, the mean and standard deviation of low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor were 3.19 and 0.35, respectively, while the mean and standard deviation of high-experienced in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor were 3.79 and 0.40, respectively. The results of an independent sample t-test are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *Independent samples test for Iranian high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Beliefs of Humor	Equal variances assumed	1.52	.21	-9.89	156	.00	-.59	.06	-.71	-.47
	Equal variances not assumed			-9.72	135.46	.00	-.59	.06	-.71	-.47

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As is evident in Table 7, high-experienced in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor (M=3.79; SD=0.40) was significantly higher than low-experienced in-service EFL teachers (M=3.19; SD=0.35).

Also, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with 5 high-experienced and 5 low-experienced in-service EFL teachers. Their responses are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8. *High-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' common patterns of answers to the interview questions*

Themes	High-experienced teachers	Low-experienced teachers	
Theme 1	Humor nurtures understanding and learning	**Theme 1**	Humor is not used due to lack of humor competence
Theme 2	Humor is used to convey goodwill and alleviate boredom	**Theme 2**	Humor is avoided due to lack of competence in English to make humor
Theme 3	Humor fosters students' motivation	**Theme 3**	Humor is not used to maintain professionalism
Theme 4	Humor increases students' participation	**Theme 4**	Humor facilitates teachers' self-disclosure
Theme 5	Humor reduces tension and generates a comfortable atmosphere		
Theme 6	Humor is a rich cultural resource of English		
Theme 7	Humor draws students' consideration		

As illustrated in Table 8, high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers differed concerning their practices of humor.

4.4. Iranian in-service EFL teachers' actual practices in using humor in the classroom

To investigate the fifth question, the second researcher observed 36 classes using an observation checklist. The results of the observation checklist are shown in Table 9.

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Table 9. *The results of the observation checklist*

No.	Items	Frequency	Percentage	Routine/non- routine practice
1	The teacher used humor during each class session.	20	55.55	Routine
2	Humor that was used by the teacher was related and relevant to classroom subject matter.	20	55.55	Routine
3	Humor could make students feel more relaxed (i.e. less anxious) in the language classroom.	20	55.55	Routine
4	Humor in the foreign language could increase the teacher's interest in teaching that language.	20	55.55	Routine
5	Humor could make the teacher more approachable to students in class.	20	55.55	Routine
6	Humor could improve students' ability to learn a language in the classroom by creating a more comfortable and conductive learning environment.	20	55.55	Routine
7	The teacher used actual words and/or other elements of a humorous example in the foreign language to illustrate grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or any other particularity of the language during a typical class.	20	55.55	Routine
8	Illustrative humor could help students to learn the language they are studying.	20	55.55	Routine
9	Ideal amount of humor for a typical class period was used to create the classroom environment most conductive to learning.	17	47.22	Non-routine
10	Humor was important to language learning in the classroom.	17	47.22	Non-routine

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4.5. The similarities and differences between Iranian high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' actual practices in using humor in the classroom

Using the observation checklist, it was found that most of the high-experienced in-service EFL teachers (i.e., 16 out of 18) used humor in their classes and all 10 items of the checklist were considered routine practices for high-experienced in-service EFL teachers, while only few low-experienced in-service EFL teachers (i.e., 4 out of 18) used humor in their classes and humor was not considered routine practice of low-experienced EFL teachers. Table 10 shows the descriptive statistics of the two groups.

Table 10. *High-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' actual practices in using humor*

	Teachers	N	Used humor	Not used humor	Routine/non-routine practice
Actual Practices in Using Humor	Low-experienced	18	4	14	Non- routine
	High-experienced	18	16	2	Routine

In order to inspect the sixth question, a Chi-square analysis was run whose results are summarized in Table 11.

Table 11. *Chi-Square test for high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers' actual practices in using humor*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	25.235	2	.000
Likelihood Ratio	30.244	2	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.233	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	36		

As demonstrated in Table 11, the results revealed that there existed a significant difference between high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers regarding their actual practices in using humor. In other words, high-experienced in-service EFL teachers had higher level concerning their actual practices in using humor than low-experienced in-service EFL teachers.

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An example of a humorous situation was occurred by a high-experienced in-service teacher (T6). She was teaching punctuations in her class. Students were listening to her. She started to write some examples on the board. She wrote:

T: "Let's eat Grandma!

T: Let's eat, Grandma"!

T: Punctuation saves lives.

Ss: laughing

5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to understand the similarities and differences between pre-service and in-service, and experienced and inexperienced EFL teachers' beliefs of humor and their actual practices in the classroom. As the results revealed, both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers' beliefs of humor level was moderate to high. The findings of this study may be attributed to the perceptions held by both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers regarding the advantageous impact of humor. Extant literature supports the notion that positive perceptions and opinions pertaining to pedagogical tools can significantly influence teachers' attitudes and performances (Borg, 2006). The outcomes of this investigation align with the conclusions drawn by Petraki and Nguyen (2016), who conducted a similar examination focusing on the beliefs and practices of Vietnamese EFL teachers regarding the role and types of humor in English language instruction. Their study revealed a unanimous preference for the incorporation of humor in the classroom, with humorous comments, jokes, and amusing anecdotes emerging as the three most favored forms of humor among teachers.

The first perception commonly shared by both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers pertains to the positive impact of humor in enhancing students' language acquisition within the classroom milieu, fostering a more comfortable and conducive learning environment. Plausible rationale for this consensus may be attributed to the multifaceted cognitive, emotional, and social functions inherent in humor, which fundamentally contribute to enhancing language learners' educational experiences by capturing their attention (Martin & Ford, 2018). This observation aligns with analogous findings reported by Martin and Ford in London (2018), McCabe et al. in Arizona (2017), Chabeli in Johannesburg (2008), and Smith and Wortley in Arizona (2017), all of whom substantiated the pedagogical advantages associated with the incorporation of humor in the educational setting.

The study's findings find resonance in the work of Kher et al. (1999), conducted in Alabama, which posits that humor serves to establish a closer rapport between teachers and

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learners by mitigating potential barriers. Additionally, the outcomes indicate that a majority of both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers endorse the view that humor proves advantageous in rendering teachers more approachable within the classroom. A plausible rationale for these findings lies in the socio-psychological benefits associated with the utilization of humor (Aboudan, 2009). Similarly, it is contended that the introduction of humor in the educational setting fosters a stress-free and comfortable dynamic within the student-instructor relationships, as articulated by Omed and Jimba (2013).

Furthermore, the outcomes derived from the interviews are consistent with the questionnaire results. In-service EFL instructors expressed a belief that the incorporation of humor fosters comprehension and facilitates learning, heightens motivation and engagement among language learners, and concurrently diminishes tension while cultivating a comfortable classroom environment. Additionally, a noteworthy proportion of in-service EFL teachers contended that they employ humor with the dual purpose of conveying goodwill and alleviating boredom. The interview findings align with those of Askildson (2005) in the United States, Petraki and Nguyen (2016) in Vietnam, Gorham and Christophel (2014) in Virginia, Powell and Andersen (1985) in New South Wales, and Omede and Jimba (2013) in Nigeria, collectively attesting to the educational and socio-psychological benefits associated with the utilization of humor.

The second research question aimed to discern any noteworthy disparities in the beliefs regarding humor between Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL teachers. The outcomes of an independent samples t-test unveiled that in-service EFL teachers exhibited more pronounced positive beliefs concerning humor compared to their pre-service counterparts. A plausible rationale for this observation lies in the fact that in-service EFL teachers, actively engaging in the utilization of humor within their instructional contexts and cognizant of its tangible impact and value, manifested a heightened positive disposition towards its incorporation in the classroom. In contrast, pre-service EFL teachers, primarily engaged in theoretical discourse on the utilization of humor, lacked the personal and practical experience associated with deploying diverse forms of humor in instructional settings. This finding is in consonance with the broader literature underscoring the influence of positive perceptions and attitudes toward pedagogical tools, such as humor, on teachers' beliefs and practices (Borg, 2006).

The third question aimed to examine whether a statistically significant disparity existed between the beliefs regarding humor among high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers in Iran. The outcomes of an independent samples t-test indicated that high-experienced in-service EFL teachers exhibited more pronounced positive beliefs pertaining to

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humor compared to their low-experienced counterparts. A conceivable rationale for these findings lies in the notion that accumulated teaching experience enables teachers to refine their perspectives on diverse facets of language learning and teaching, including their outlook on the incorporation of humor within the classroom (Woolfolk & Hoy, 1993). Consequently, the present study posits that teaching experience emerges as a consequential factor influencing the divergence in beliefs regarding humor among in-service EFL teachers in Iran. These findings find corroboration in the works of Stergiopoulou (2012) in Greece and Heidari-Shahreza (2018) in Iran, both contending that teaching experience exerts a notable influence on various dimensions of teachers' beliefs and professional performances.

The outcomes derived from the interviews provided supplementary support for the outcomes of the questionnaire. A majority of low-experienced in-service EFL teachers expressed a reluctance to incorporate humor in their classes, primarily attributing this reservation to perceived 'lack of humor competence,' 'insufficient proficiency in English to employ humor,' and a desire to 'sustain professionalism.' These findings align with those of Ziyaeemehr et al. (2011), conducted in Malaysia. Additionally, the interview results unveiled that a predominant proportion of high-experienced in-service EFL teachers actively employed humor in their instructional contexts, driven by objectives such as conveying goodwill, alleviating boredom, fostering understanding and learning, nurturing student motivation, enhancing student participation, reducing tension, and cultivating a comfortable learning atmosphere. Furthermore, high-experienced in-service teachers asserted that humor constitutes a valuable cultural asset within the realm of English language education. These observations are congruent with the findings reported by Gorham and Christophel (2014) in the United Kingdom and Omede and Jimba (2013) in Nigeria.

The fourth question aimed to investigate the practical implementation of humor in the classrooms by in-service EFL teachers in Iran. The outcomes disclosed that a majority of these teachers routinely incorporated humor into their instructional practices. Observational findings indicated that over half of the participants utilized humor in each session, predominantly focusing on content-related and pertinent subject matter within the classroom. The study's results underscored that funny comments constituted the primary modality of humor employed by in-service EFL teachers, aligning with the conclusions drawn by Heidari-Shahreza (2018) in Iran. Additionally, the observed classes revealed that the strategic utilization of humor by in-service EFL teachers engendered a more relaxed atmosphere for students, concurrently fostering heightened interest among teachers in the language instruction. The results suggest that the incorporation of humor rendered instructors more approachable to students, thereby

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enhancing learners' language acquisition within a comfortable and conducive learning environment. However, the observed classes indicated a suboptimal utilization of humor for creating an environment most conducive to learning in a typical class period. These findings find support in the research conducted by Petraki and Nguyen (2016) in Vietnam, emphasizing the widespread preference and utilization of humor by teachers in the classroom.

The fifth research question sought to examine potential similarities and distinctions in the actual implementation of humor in the classroom between high-experienced and low-experienced in-service EFL teachers in Iran. Utilizing an observation checklist and employing chi-square analysis, it was determined that high-experienced in-service EFL teachers predominantly incorporated humor as a routine practice in their classes, whereas only a minority of their low-experienced counterparts engaged in the use of humor, and it was not deemed a routine practice for them. A plausible rationale for these observations may be attributed to the demonstrated impact of teaching experience on teachers' practical knowledge and actions (Borg, 2006). It is imperative to note that, given the absence of a specific study investigating the potential influence of teaching experience on in-service EFL teacher practices of humor, comparisons with the findings of the present study are precluded.

5. Conclusion and implications

Based on the findings of the present study, it was found that low-experienced EFL teachers exhibit infrequent utilization of humor in their classes, primarily attributable to a perceived deficiency in humor competence. To uphold the tenets of professionalism, it is imperative for pedagogical facilitators to extend support to low-experienced EFL instructors who manifest hesitancy in deploying diverse forms of humor. This support may be effectively rendered through the implementation of tailored awareness-raising workshops, specifically designed to enhance the adept integration of various humor types within the classroom milieu. Furthermore, the cultivation of judicious attitudes regarding the humor process among low-experienced EFL teachers holds pivotal significance, necessitating strategic efforts to instill favorable perspectives regarding the incorporation of humor within their instructional practices.

In the broader context, foreign language education stakeholders, including policymakers, supervisors, institute administrators, and teacher trainers, are advised to accord substantial attention to the nuanced needs of both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers. Concomitantly, the provision of diverse activities aimed at fostering continuous professional development becomes imperative, aiming to augment their pedagogical knowledge and skills, thereby contributing to enhanced language learning outcomes for students. Critical to this

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endeavor is the comprehensive training and education of both pre-service and in-service EFL instructors, specifically targeting the effective integration of humor across diverse EFL learning environments.

Furthermore, EFL policymakers are urged to incorporate explicit directives for the judicious use of humor within the curricula of both pre-service and in-service EFL teacher education programs. This proactive measure is essential for the cultivation of proficient teachers. The study's significance lies in its advocacy for heightened awareness regarding the pivotal role of humor in the EFL classroom. By fostering an enjoyable and engaging learning atmosphere, EFL learners are more likely to be motivated and inspired to evolve into "conscious polyglot citizens of the global village" (Wagner & Urios-Aparisi, 2011, p. 427). The implications of this research extend to curriculum developers and teacher teachers, offering insights into the beliefs and practices surrounding humor among Iranian pre-service and in-service EFL instructors, elucidating the nexus with their teaching experience and gender. These outcomes, while locally derived, bear international relevance, resonating with the global discourse on effective language instruction.

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Appendix

Interview questions:

Please answer the following questions based on your opinion:

1. Do you use humor in your classes? Why?
2. What message are you trying to convey by using humor?
3. What do you think your students' reactions are to your humor?
4. What are you trying to achieve by using that humor?
5. Do you think that humor is helpful in your teaching?
6. Are you happy with the humor that you use? Would you like to make any changes?
7. Do you think that the students learn better with the presence of humor?
8. Do you think that you teach better when you use humor?

Thank you for your participation.

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