

UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

Faculty of Education

**USING HUMOUR TO REDUCE ANXIETY AND
IMPROVE PERFORMANCE IN A COLLEGE ESP
CLASSROOM CENTRE**

SYAHRIN BAHAROM SHAH

**A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education TESL**

May 2007

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank UITM's Faculty of Education, for giving me the opportunity to pursue my Master's Degree in TESL; the opportunity for me to finally do what I should have done years ago. This has rekindled me my love of knowledge and teaching. I have found strength and new challenges here, as well as the reaffirmation that I had been seeking,

My sincerest gratitude to my pillar of strength, my bro, Sham a.k.a Yany, whose "one of a kind" method of motivation both inspires and pushes me to work harder each time my will seem to falter. To my parents, who have stood by my side all this while and for praying hard for my success and happiness, and my brothers and sister, I love you all for understanding my dreams. To my loveliest friend Azelin and the rest of my colleagues, may God bless all of you for your unwavering belief in my dreams and me. To Dr. Holmes, a million thanks for courageously going through my hopeless work, again and again. Last, but definitely not the least, all my professors for their generosity, hard work, enthusiasm and belief in all of us in Cohort 5, entrusting us with your valuable knowledge.

List of Contents

List of figures	vii
List of tables	viii
List of appendices	x
Abstract	xi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction to the study.	1
1.2 Theoretical framework.	2
1.2.1 Studies of anxiety in the foreign language classroom.	2
1.2.2 The role of humour in reducing stress and anxiety.	4
1.2.3 Humour and students performance.	5
1.3 Statement of problem.	5
1.4 Objectives of the study.	6
1.5 Limitations of the study.	7
1.6 Definition of terms.	7
1.7 Conclusion.	9
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
2.1 Introduction.	10
2.2 Language play activity in the classroom.	10
2.3 The development of humour.	13
2.4 Types of humour used in an English classroom.	14
2.5 Puns.	17
2.6 Theories of humour.	20
2.7 Using humour to teach language.	23
2.8 Students' perception of the use of humour.	25
2.9 Anxiety in foreign language classrooms.	26
2.10 Anxiety and humour.	28

2.11	Previous study on puns.	29
2.12	Conclusion	31

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN **32**

3.1	Introduction.	32
3.2	Participants.	32
3.3	The instruments.	34
3.4	The task.	34
3.5	Pilot study.	38
3.6	Data collection.	38
3.7	Conclusion.	40

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION **41**

4.1	Introduction.	41
4.2	Reliability.	41
4.3	The validity and reliability of the data collection.	43
4.4	Data analysis.	44
4.5	Students' responses to the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale.	47
	4.5.1 Communication anxiety.	48
	4.5.2 Fear of negative evaluation.	50
	4.5.3 Foreign language classroom anxiety.	51
4.6	Students' responses to the class activity survey questionnaire.	53
4.7.1	Students' responses to the STAI before the activity.	54
4.7.2	Students' responses to the STAI after the activity.	55
4.8.1	Students' responses to the VKS Adapted Test before the activity.	57
4.8.2	Students' responses to the VKS Adapted Test after the activity.	59
4.9	Conclusion.	63

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION **64**

5.1	Introduction	64
-----	--------------	----

ABSTRACT

Recent studies in second language acquisition highlight the importance of language play (LP) in the development of competence in the target language. Humour based language-plays were sometimes used by teachers in the classroom to promote student to talk and participate in the classroom activities, due to the beliefs that humour can make learning fun and reduce students' interaction and communication anxiety. In this study, seventeen college students took the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and the State Trait Anxiety Inventory (A-State) to measure the cause of their classroom anxiety and their response to the humour-focused language activity. Both pretest and post-test were used to measure the possible effect of reduced anxiety on the students' performance. Analysis of the results of the study suggested the possibility that the students' anxiety level was reduced after the language play activity. The students' performance however, does not seem to be strongly affected by the reduced level of anxiety.