

# THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING PUNS ON STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN VOCABULARY

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## ABSTRACT

*The current study is entitled "The Effectiveness of Using Puns on Students Achievement in Vocabulary". Humor is an essential part of human life and since puns belong to humor they are very effective in teaching English language vocabularies. In teaching English, humor enhances students' learning capacity. Humor is also a significant element to reduce the stress in the classroom.*

*It is hypothesized that puns can be used as a technique in the process of learning English language and especially learning its vocabulary. The study aims to show that puns can be used to teach students new vocabulary, for example, vocabularies that sound the same but spelled differently, vocabularies that their sound and spell are the same, and so on. Moreover, puns can also be used to check students' comprehension.*

*An experiment is applied on a group of university students in order to test the hypothesis that puns can be used in teaching vocabulary. The students are divided into two groups, group (A) and group (B) and are given a number of fill in the blanks questions which contain vocabularies they have learned either through the classroom language(class A) or vocabularies they have learned by using puns (class B). The results of the test show that students who have learned vocabularies by using puns are better than those who have learned vocabularies through the language of the classroom.*

*The study consists of three sections parts. Section one is an introduction. It includes the problem, aims, the hypothesis, limits, and procedures of the study. Section two provides theoretical background about the study. It includes the definition of puns, classification of puns, and advantages of using puns in teaching vocabulary. It also involves the definition of vocabulary, strategies for learning vocabulary, and the importance of learning vocabulary. Section three involves the practical procedures that can be used in order to incorporate humor and especially puns into teaching process. The last part consists of conclusions, appendix, and references.*

*Key words (puns, vocabularies, strategies)*

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Problem of the Study

**Pun**, also called **paronomasia**, is a form of '[word play](#)' that has multiple meanings of a term, or of 'similar-sounding words'. Pun has an intended [humorous](#) or [rhetorical](#) effect. These

ambiguities can arise from the intentional use of [homophonic](#), [homographic](#), [metonymic](#), or [figurative language](#). A pun involves expressions with multiple meanings or interpretations. Puns may be regarded as '[in-jokes](#)' or '[idiomatic constructions](#)' their usage and meaning are often specific to a particular language or its culture. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pun>

Humor, especially puns, is becoming an important tool that is used widely in the process of teaching students the English language skills. The problem of the study lies in the fact that many non-native learners of English language cannot differentiate between puns that have double meaning. So, the study is an attempt to investigate how learners can pass this problem by working out the meaning of the key words in these puns that make them have different interpretation.

### 1.2 The Aims

The current study aims at:

1. showing that puns can be used to teach students new vocabulary, for example, vocabularies that sound the same but spelled differently, vocabularies that their sound and spell are the same, and so on.
2. exploring whether puns can also be used to check students' comprehension.

### 1.3 The Hypothesis of the Study

It is hypothesized that puns can be used as a technique in the process of learning English language and especially learning its vocabulary.

### 1.4 The Limits of the Study

The study is carried out in 2019 to a group of university students who are studying English as a foreign language at Ibn Rushed College of Education/English Department. The researcher has chosen (50) students, they are both boys and girls and their age range from (18-20).

### 1.5 Definition of Basic Terms

1. **Puns:** the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pun>
2. **Effectiveness:** is the capability of producing a desired result or the ability to produce desired output. When something is deemed effective, it means it has an intended or expected outcome, or produces a deep, vivid impression.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effectiveness>

3. **Achievement:** An achievement is something which someone has [succeeded](#) in doing, [especially](#) after a [lot](#) of [effort](#).

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/achievement>

Procedures: An experiment is applied on a group of university students. The students are divided into two groups, group (A) and group (B) and are given a number of fill in the blanks questions which contain vocabularies they have learned either through the classroom language (class A) or vocabularies they have learned by using puns (class B).

## SECTION TWO

### 2.1 Theoretical Background

A pun is a [clever](#) and [amusing](#) use of a vocabulary or phrase with two meanings, or of vocabularies with the same sound but with different meanings. For instance, if someone [says](#):

"The [peasants](#) are [revolting](#)", this is a pun because it can be [interpreted](#) as meaning either that the peasants are [fighting](#) against [authority](#), or that they are [disgusting](#). ([www.collinsdictionary.com](http://www.collinsdictionary.com))

On the other hand, Vocabulary is one of the essential elements of the language system, vocabulary is the basis of language development. Generally, it is vocabulary, rather than grammar that obstructs learners from reading, listening, speaking, writing as well as exchanging information with each other in a foreign language. "Vocabulary is one of main concerns in second language settings because it plays a dominant role in classroom success" (Nie and Zhou, 2017, p.1).

### 2.2 The Notion of Puns

Puns are a special form of humor based on double meanings. Puns are sometimes nicknamed 'the lowest form of humor' and often greeted with groans, but in fact, the language knowledge needed to understand a pun is very sophisticated (Pollack, 2011). Puns can be found not only in children's joke books and on TV, but also in environmental print found in daily life- in menus, newspapers headlines, billboards, websites, signs

advertising and especially the names of small businesses (Lems, 2013).

Puns demand considerable language ability because unlike humor based on sight gags, funny facial expressions, or amusing visual arrangements, the humor of puns is based on language play. Every language has its own puns and word play, including language that do not use alphabetic writing systems. For example, Mandarin has puns based on the sounds and appearance of Chinese logograms (ibid).

### 2.2.1 Classification of Puns

According to Delabastita (1996: 128) pun is divided into four categories:

- 1-Homonomy (identical sounds and spelling)
- 2- Homophony (identical sounds but different spelling).
- 3- Homography (different sounds but identical spelling).
- 4- Paronymy (there are slight differences in both spelling and sound).

Gottlieb (2005) considers wordplay and pun as synonymous linguistic units. His classification of a pun is similar to Delabastita's one. He only adds three subdivisions of homonymy:

- 1-Lexical homonymy (the central feature is single-word ambiguity).
- 2- Collocational homonymy (the word-in-context ambiguity is the central feature).
- 3- Phrasal homonymy (the clause ambiguity is the central feature).

### 2.2.2 Advantages of Using Puns in Teaching Vocabulary

The teaching style of most traditional language schools are very left brain (logical and analytical). However, there's nothing wrong with teaching and learning from the left brain (the imaginative and creative). The best way to learn anything is by enjoying the process. It doesn't matter how effective something is if it's so boring that student will not be enthusiastic to learn it.

So nowadays, teachers focus their attention on new techniques and ways in teaching students, for example, some *fun English* —learning vocabulary with puns. **Puns** are jokes that use words that have different possible meanings or words that sound alike but have different meanings (called [homophones](#)). In order to understand the joke, students need to be aware of both of the meanings that the word(s) can have. Teachers must pay students attention to the fact that puns often use phrasal verbs, expressions, and collocations. As such, it can be a fun way to improve these aspects of their English.

<http://reallifeglobal.com/fun-english-vocabulary-puns/>

### 2.3 The Notion of Vocabulary

Generally, vocabulary is very essential part of language acquisition. Harmer (1997: 153) points out that "*if language structures make up the skeleton of language, then it is vocabulary that provides the vital organ and flesh*". Vocabulary is considered as one of the components of language skills. Vocabulary forms the basis of language development. "*Vocabulary is a way of building blocks of language and no language acquisition can take place without the acquisition of vocabulary*" (Nie and Zhou, 2017, p.101). As a result, vocabulary, as one of the knowledge areas in language plays a great role for learners in acquiring a language. (Cameron, 2001).

#### 2.3.1 Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In 2010, Schmitt has developed twoways in which vocabulary can be learned that is from (1) Meaning-focused Input and (2) Meaning-focused Output:

(1) Meaning-focused Input: Learning vocabulary from meaning-focused input means learning through listening and reading. In order to apply this strategy with the learners there are a number of important things to keep in mind such as:

**First**, the unknown vocabulary should make up a small amount of the tokens. **Second**, it should be a large amount of input.

**Third**, learning will be increased if a lot of attention is paid to the unknown vocabulary.

Reading and listening are the sources of meaning-focused input and the quantity of input affects repetition, it means that if there is a lot repetition the learners will learn more vocabulary items. However, this process can be further motivated by the teacher when he defines the unknown vocabulary items for the students, noting them on the board, and permits the students to give their points of view concerning the meanings of the unknown vocabulary. This kind of learning is known as learning through receptive knowledge. (Schmitt, 2010, p. 38-39).

(2) Meaning-focused Output: Learning vocabulary through meaning-focused output means leaning through speaking and reading. This kind of leaning is called learning through productive knowledge. In order to increase vocabulary knowledge through this strategy, there are three important ways:

**First**, designing activities, for instance, the use of annotated pictures and definitions.

**Second**, speaking activities involve group work in which learners can share the meaning of unknown vocabularies with each other.

**Third**, using partly known word in speaking or writing can strengthen and increase knowledge of the word. (ibid, p.39).

### 2.3.2 The Importance of Vocabulary Learning

According to Nation (2001) the connection between vocabulary knowledge and language use are complementary and not contradictory: knowledge of vocabulary enables language use and, vice versa, language use leads to an increase in vocabulary knowledge. The significance of vocabulary is always emphasized daily in the school. In classroom, the achievement of the students is often connected with the number of vocabulary he has in his repertoire. Many researchers especially Maximo (2000), Read (2000), and Nation (2011) and others have shown that the acquisition of vocabulary is very important for successful second language use and has a crucial role in the formation of complete spoken and written texts.

In English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) learning vocabulary items have an essential role in all language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) (Nation, 2011).

Moreover, Rivers and Nunan (1991) assert that the acquisition of a good number of vocabulary is very important for successful second language use because without an extensive vocabulary, the students will not be able to use the structures and functions of the language in a comprehensible communication.

The importance of vocabulary is attached to the students' production, since when the students have a meaning or concept that they wish to express, they need to have a repertoire of vocabulary from which they can choose to express this meaning or concept. "*When students travel, they don't carry grammar books, they carry dictionaries*" (Krashen, as cited in Lewis, 1993, p.25).

Wilkins (1972, p.97) further adds that: "*There is not much value in being able to produce grammatical sentences if one has not got the vocabulary that is needed to convey what one wishes to say ... While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed*". Furthermore, many learners see second language acquisition (SLA) as a matter of learning vocabulary and, for this reason, they spend a lot of time on memorizing lists of L2 words and depend on their bilingual dictionary as a basic communicative resource.

## SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Participants

The study is applied on group of university students (about 45 student) who are studying English as a foreign language in Ibn Rushd College of Education, Department of English. All the students are from second stage. The students are both girls and boys and their age range from (19-22) years old.

### 3.2 Data

The material given to the students is a number of English puns which have double meanings. These puns are found in the appendix.

### 3.3 procedures

This study is divided into two main procedures:

#### 3.3.1 Familiarization Phase

The researcher teaches students different types of puns; puns that sound very similar, puns that sound the same,

and puns that look the same. Moreover, she provides background knowledge necessary to understand these puns. The researcher asks students to identify pun types. If necessary, she highlights keywords in the puns and asks the students to predict the meaning of these words.

### 3.3.2 Test Phase

After the students have been familiarized with the puns and the keywords that make them sound like puns, the students must be able to comprehend them and explain what causes humor in these puns. Moreover, they should be able to identify the different types of puns.

The researcher divides the class into two groups, the control group (A) and the experiment group (B). She gives the students of group (A) and (B) test papers that contain fill in the blanks questions. She gives the students of group (A) a number of sentences that contain vocabularies that they have learned through classroom language and gives the students of group (B) a number of sentences that contain vocabularies that they have been familiarized with by using puns to check if they can remember the vocabularies they already have learned through puns.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The results of the study are analyzed by compiling the results of the familiarization phase and test phase. The researcher checks the students' test papers to see their answers. She neglects the students' wrong answers.

## SECTION FOUR: RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

### 4.1 Results and Discussion

The results of the study show that the students of group (B) who learned vocabulary through puns answer the questions more effectively than the students of group (A) who learned the unknown vocabularies simply through the language of the classroom. The results also show that students have learned new vocabulary which increase their storage of words and make them sound more like native speakers. Moreover, the students' ability of comprehension have increased.

### 4.2 Conclusions

The researcher has concluded that it is beneficial to incorporate puns in teaching English language vocabulary in the classroom to attract students' attention and to make the lesson more amusing and less stressful. Moreover, it seems clear that using puns in the language of classroom will make the students eager to know the meaning of these puns, as a result, they will check the meaning of these puns and the unknown vocabulary that have been used in these puns and this will increase their repertoire of vocabulary, in addition, this verifies the researcher's hypothesis that puns can be used as a technique in teaching English language vocabulary. Students prefer a learning process that is based on humor because they feel more comfortable.

### 4.3 Recommendations

On the basis of the current study, a number of recommendations for further research can be outlined:

1. It is recommended that students of linguistics should be encouraged to investigate different types of puns.
2. Investigation has revealed that mastering a large amount of vocabulary is an important prerequisite for mastering linguistic skills. The advice is that the colleges of education should develop language development programs together with primary and secondary schools with the goal of continuously expanding the language skills of their students.

### 4.4 Suggestions for Further Research

A study of Puns in Context and without Context can be applied to students to check their comprehension.

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### Internet Resources

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/pun>

<https://reallifeglobal.com/fun-english-vocabulary-puns/>

<http://www.leadthecompetition.in/english/vocabulary/fill-in-the-blanks-with-suitable-words-7.html>

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pun>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Effectiveness>

<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/achievement>

## APPENDIX

1. I wondered why the tennis ball was getting bigger, then **it hit me**.

- *It hit me* can also mean “I suddenly remembered/realized.”

2. Did you hear about the guy whose whole left side was cut off? **He’s all right** now.

- *He’s all right* can mean “he has no left side,” or it can mean “he’s fine.”

3. I’m reading a book about anti-gravity. **It’s impossible to put down**.

- *It’s impossible to put down* can mean “I’m unable to place it on a surface (because of anti-gravity),” or it can mean “the book is so good you I can’t stop reading it.”

4. I couldn’t quite remember how to throw a boomerang, but eventually it **came back to me**.

- *Come back* can mean “to return” or “to remember.”

5. I used to have a fear of hurdles, but I **got over it**.

- To [get over something](#) can mean “to jump over” or “to stop worrying.”
- A *hurdle* is an obstacle, or a frame that runners must jump over (see [photo](#)).

6. Atheism is a **non-prophet** organization.

- A *prophet* is a spiritual teacher, a *nonprofit* is a type of business known as a charity.

7. When William joined the army he disliked the phrase ‘**fire at will**’.

- *Fire at will* is a phrase used in the army meaning “shoot whenever you want to.” *Fire at Will* (with a capital W) means to shoot *at* William (Will is short for William).

8. A hole has been found in the nudist camp wall. The police are **looking into it**.

- To *look into* can mean “to look through a small hole, crack, etc.” or it can mean “to investigate.”

9. A bicycle can’t stand on its own because it is **two-tired**.

- *Two-tired* can mean it has two tires or that it is too tired (exhausted)

10. Time flies like an arrow. **Fruit flies** like a banana.

- With *fruit flies*, “flies” can either be a verb or a noun. As a verb *flies* means “to travel through the air” as a noun, *fruit flies* “are a type of insect/bug that eats fruit.”

11. Sleeping comes so naturally to me, **I could do it with my eyes closed**.

- If you *can do something with your eyes closed*, it can also mean “it’s super easy.”

12. I used to be addicted to soap, but I’m **clean** now.

- *Clean* can mean “there’s no dirt,” or it can mean someone “no longer uses drugs.”

<https://reallifeglobal.com/fun-english-vocabulary-puns/>

Test sample of Class (A)

Q/ Fill in the blanks using words from the box:

(site, assured, conventional, decrepit, healthy)

1. The union Budget is likely to be presented on Friday, two days ahead of the ----- date.

2. He ----- her that she would pass the exam.

3. The ----- chosen for the construction of the building is in the heart of the city.

4. It is not ----- for a man to be confined to the pursuit of wealth.

5. It is a story of two men and a batch of ----- armored cars.

<http://www.leadthecompetition.in/english/vocabulary/fill-in-the-blanks-with-suitable-words-7.html>

Test sample of Class (B)

Q/ Fill in the blanks using words from the box:

(fire at will, get over it, too tired, addicted, prophet)

1. If you success in this exam, it means that you will -----.
2. The ----- always lights our way and provides the guidance for us.
3. When people have water gun, they like to -----.
4. William can't stand by himself, he is -----.
5. My brother is so ----- to social media.