

## The Impact of Using Humor Techniques through Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication on Enhancing EFL Teacher-Student Rapport

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### KEYWORDS

CALL, MALL, Technology, Education, Teacher-student Interaction

### ABSTRACT

Educators constantly seek innovative and engaging methods to engage students and ensure their academic achievement. Using humor in the classroom is one of the strategies which can promote classroom environment and facilitate teacher-student rapport. The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of using humor techniques through synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) in enhancing EFL teacher-student rapport. The population of this quasi-experimental study consisted of 70 Iranian female EFL intermediate learners and eight TEFL instructors. Initially, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was initially administered to the language learners in two English classes. Subsequently, the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) was administered to both teachers and students to gather their feedback. Afterward, the treatment began and lasted for twelve sessions. The control group received speaking skill instruction through traditional face-to-face teaching without humor techniques, while the experimental group received instruction incorporating humor techniques through SCMC using WhatsApp. After the treatment period, both student and teacher groups completed the QTI post-test. Upon data collection, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze potential differences in teacher-student rapport between the two independent groups at both the beginning and end of the study. The results indicated that the experimental group demonstrated a significant improvement in teacher-student rapport from both student and teacher perspectives, whereas the control group showed only minimal improvement. The results emphasize the potential of humor to serve as an effective means for fostering a positive and engaging learning environment, particularly in online or blended learning contexts.

### ARTICLE INFO

**Article type:** Original article

**Article history:**

Received: 01 November 2025

Revised: 29 December 2025

Accepted: 31 December, 2025

Published online: 20 June 2026

### Introduction

Teachers have always tried to implement some techniques in the classroom that can help them engage their students amidst the distractions of the internet, media, and other home entertainment options (Cornett, 2001). Research suggests that even though students are engaged in learning the curriculum, many teachers wish for their students to have a pleasurable experience in their classes (Burgess, 2000). For these educators, success can be reflected in methods that create meaningful connections and foster higher-order thinking skills (Gurtler, 2002).

**How to Cite:** Abdi Bastami, B., Salehi, M., & Teimourtash, M. (2026). The Impact of Using Humor Techniques through Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication on Enhancing EFL Teacher-Student Rapport. *International Journal of Practical and Pedagogical Issues in English Education*, 4(2), 81-99. DOI: 10.22034/ijpie.2025.556846.1159



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As a result, one aspect of human development that has been shown to enhance family relationships and encourages academic success is frequently overlooked by educators. This aspect is humor. Developing real-life scenarios for students can effectively aid them in language acquisition. Research conducted in the area of humor indicates that incorporating “humor” in classrooms fosters a positive classroom atmosphere, strengthens student-teacher relationships, boosts enjoyment, alleviates tension, and even simplifies the learning process, turning it into a real-world experience (Lomax & Moosavi, 1998; Province, 2002). Schmitz (2002) argues that the use of humor in the language classroom assists EFL learners in comprehending and responding to discourse elements in language interactions. Therefore, it is advisable for language instructors to integrate humor into class activities. Schmitz also supported the use of humor in language education, highlighting that humor in EFL classes should be both presented and explored. He claims that incorporating humor in language courses makes EFL classes more engaging and consequently enhances learners’ proficiency.

Researchers have suggested various methods for use in a language classroom. Pham (2014) posits that language teachers can infuse humor into their teaching by incorporating jokes, amusing stories, and humorous remarks. According to Pham, these are among the most effective humorous techniques for language instruction. Ghanei Motlagh et al. (2014) also propose several humorous strategies that can be employed in a language classroom. They mention telling jokes, using amusing gestures, and drawing funny illustrations on the board. Their argument is that these strategies can transform the classroom environment and lead to more humorous ideas and expressions from the students.

Considering the importance of the innovation in learning approaches and techniques that instructors apply in the educational setting, utilizing technology can also be suggested as one of the recent ways in English language teaching. Incorporating technology is an essential aspect of almost every facet of life, and educational environments are no different (Hashemifardnia et al., 2018). Recent technological advancements suggest that technical assistance is no longer limited to computers. Many of the functionalities of computers have now been integrated into mobile devices like smartphones and tablets, enhancing access to technology in numerous classrooms (Hashemifardnia et al., 2018).

Synchronous as well as asynchronous types are the two fundamental forms of computer-mediated communication (CMC). Synchronous CMC (SCMC) can be regarded as immediate communication, where participants exchange and receive messages in real time. Asynchronous CMC (ASCMC) refers to electronic interactions that are accessed after they have been sent, occurring with some delay (Fotos & Browne, 2004). Examples of SCMC include text-based and verbal Internet Relay Chat (IRC), video conferences, instant messaging, and Multi-User Field, Object Oriented (MOOs), commonly known as object-centered Multi-User Fields. Instances of ASCMC consist of email, online discussion forums, and mailing lists (Fotos & Browne, 2004).

Numerous research studies have been conducted regarding techniques related to humor (Ghanei Motlagh et al., 2014; Pham, 2014; Rashidi et al., 2014) and student-teacher interaction and their impact on learning (Estep & Roberts, 2013; Jiang-Yuan & Wei, 2012) but not many studies have addressed the effectiveness of using humor techniques through SCMC on enhancing EFL teacher-student rapport. Therefore, to obtain insight into the effectiveness of using humor techniques through synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC) on enhancing EFL teacher-student rapport, an investigation is required. Moreover, most previous studies related to use of SCMC were conducted in countries other than Iran. This gap in the literature in an Iranian context was another motive for the conduction of the present study.

Accordingly, this study focused basically on answering the following questions:

Q1: Does using humor techniques through SCMC have any significant effect on enhancing EFL teacher-student rapport from learners' perceptions?

Q2: Does using humor techniques through SCMC have any significant effect on enhancing EFL teacher-student rapport from teachers' perceptions?

### Literature Review

The establishment of positive interactions between instructors and students has been referred to as professor/student rapport (Wilson et al. 2010). Lowman (1994, 1995) described this connection as interpersonal rapport and highlighted its importance for effective teaching. He proposed that instructors who foster rapport are viewed as supportive, welcoming, promising, positive, independent, and genuinely interested in their students. Meyers (2009) suggested that in college settings, interpersonal interactions play a crucial role in the teaching and learning process.

#### *Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL)*

The rapid progress of information and communication technology (ICT) facilitates the utilization of electronic media like computers for sharing information. In education, the growth of ICT is driving the evolution of e-learning (electronic learning). E-learning refers to a learning approach that employs ICT, particularly through internet-based platforms. The advancement of internet technology allows individuals to connect without the limitations of time and location. The emergence of internet technology has propelled the education sector into a new age characterized by the community's ability to create a new civilization based on technology and various virtual endeavors (Marani et al., 2020). Numerous studies have shown the beneficial impacts of incorporating computer technology in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (e.g., Hosseini Dinani & Chalak, 2023; Talebi, 2025).

### Empirical Background

#### *The Role of Humor in EFL Classes*

Numerous studies have explored humor techniques and their effects on student-teacher interactions and learning; however, none have specifically examined how humor techniques used in SCMC can improve EFL teacher-student rapport. Jiang-Yuan and Wei (2012) studied how nonverbal reflecting influences the rapport between instructors and learners in individual interactions. Analyses of instructor's reflecting manners in communications and learners' self-rating reviews showed substantial growth in learners' understanding of rapport in the reflecting situation. Four nonverbal reflecting manners were substantially connected with rapport factors.

In a similar vein, Estep and Roberts (2013) sought to clarify the relationships between the rapport of instructors and learners, while also examining how learners' motivation serves as an expectation for success and their values/goals. This study was conducted with students enrolled in large classes, consisting of 50 or more individuals. The findings revealed a moderate positive correlation between rapport and learners' achievement expectations, along with a significant positive correlation between interaction and values/goals.

In an Iranian context, Kalhori (2014) examined how the relationship between instructors and learners influenced the willingness of students to cheat in English classes among Iranian high school students aged 17-18. Initially, these students completed two questionnaires: one focused on the rapport and the other on cheating behavior. The collected data were analyzed to determine

whether a significant link existed between the rapport between instructors and learners and the students' inclination to cheat on assessments. The investigator theorized that association between instructor and learner decreases learners cheating, but it seemed that learners cheating connected to some factors like culture, school context, poor instruction, learner's financial conditions, age, gender and so on.

Considering the role of online teacher-student interaction, Alamir (2014) examined how Saudi EFL students express their social presence and utilize their language during online discussions with their teacher compared to those without teacher interaction. The findings demonstrated that Saudi EFL students had significantly higher levels of lexical density and social presence but lower levels of linguistic accuracy in peer-to-peer online conversations. Conversely, when engaging in online discussions with their instructors, students demonstrated better rates of linguistic correctness but lower levels of lexical richness and social presence. The students' grammatical complexity and fluency did not significantly alter between the two stages of the online discussions. It was also discovered that Saudi students considered their teachers' online contacts as beneficial to their L2 growth and had good opinions of instructor-student online discussions.

Concerning the role of humor in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, Pham (2014) examined the perspectives of university instructors and students regarding humor's role in EFL education, teachers' experiences with using humor, the reasons for either employing or refraining from humor, the types of humor preferred by teachers, and how students respond to the use of humor by instructors. The study focused on the application of humor in English teaching and learning within the context of Vietnam. The findings revealed that most university EFL educators and students involved in this study hold positive views and share similar opinions about the importance of humor in EFL instruction. They affirmed that humor brings significant cognitive and emotional benefits for students, enhances their learning experience, and improves the relationship between teachers and students. Every teacher either employed humor in their teaching or indicated that they did.

The role of humor in EFL classrooms was investigated in an Iranian context too. Rashidi et al. (2014) sought to examine the various ways in which humor is utilized by EFL learners. The researchers gathered data through the Pedagogical Humor Questionnaire. Data analysis revealed that both language instructors and students felt that humor could serve as an effective educational resource in language classes and help to alleviate emotional barriers.

With regard to the use of humor in online classes, Moalla and Amor (2021) investigated how a teacher and her pupils collaborate to create and identify humor exchanges over the internet. It focuses on the contribution humor studies provide to the comprehension of CMC-related problems. The data consists of synchronous Skype chat conversations between 11 English language learners from Tunisia and their teacher. The research offers an explanation for the internal dynamics of exchanges by employing the concept of script oppositions (SOs) from the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH). The findings revealed that understanding jokes online may be more challenging than interpreting humor among friends, and that comedy arises from engaging with binary SOs between instructors and learners.

Uyen and Duyen (2024) investigated the appreciation of different humor strategies adopted in Vietnamese English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms from both teachers' and learners' perspectives. A quantitative approach was used, which involved surveying 30 instructors and 207 undergraduates with an open-ended question. After applying descriptive statistics to analyze the data, the results provided insightful information on the most popular comedy techniques used in

the classroom and highlighted certain gaps that still existed between the expectations of the students and the perspectives of the teachers.

More recently, Peng (2025) examined the effect of humor discourse strategies on cognitive load and affective filtering within EFL learning context. The study was conducted on 120 Chinese EFL learners. The results indicated the experimental group, which received humor discourse strategies, outperformed the controlled group, which received traditional teaching without humor, in learning English. The results also showed that humor discourse strategies effectively reduced students' cognitive load and affective filtering.

### ***The Role of Technology in EFL Classes***

In a comprehensive study, Yeung et al. (2023) sought to highlight the possible advantages and drawbacks of integrating communication technology (CT) into higher education classrooms, based on the candid reflections of four English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors during the pandemic. The authors observed that a strengthened teacher-student relationship, engendered by teachers, led to increased self-disclosure, along with the informal nature of communication technology and the novelty of online learning platforms, which may have contributed to a rise in learners' text-based output in the target language. Despite the potential benefits of CT in ESL, there are still significant disadvantages.

Zhi and Wang (2024) focused more specifically on artificial intelligence. They investigated the complex relationship among EFL students' perceptions of artificial intelligence (AI), Teachers' Immediacy (TI), Teacher-Student Rapport (TSR), and their willingness to communicate (WTC). The findings highlight the potential of AI technology to enhance language learning results and the importance of developing strong teacher-student relationships to promote students' readiness to communicate effectively in the digital age, which holds practical implications for educators and policymakers.

Considering the role of SCMC in language classes, Zhang et al. (2024) conducted an exploratory analysis on the functions of text-chat interaction in a SCMC setting. The results showed that such interaction led to cognitively meaningful learning. Another finding was that the quantity of text-chat interactions diminished over time. Moreover, the nature of the student-student chats was different from that of teacher-student chat.

The effect of SCMC on language learning was also analyzed by Peng and Lei (2025). They compared the effects of video-chat versus text-chat on learning pragmalinguistics. The participants were 42 Chinese EFL learners. The results demonstrated that the use of video-chat provided more opportunities for learners to discuss pragmatic features of language and was more effective than text-chat on the learning pragmalinguistics.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This research utilized a quasi-experimental approach incorporating both pre-tests and post-tests. Instead of random sampling, intact group sampling was used. In addition, this study used quantitative method for presenting the results. With respect to the variables of the study, the

independent variable was using humor techniques through SCMC and the dependent variable was teacher-student rapport.

**Participants**

The study included 70 intermediate female students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and eight instructors specializing in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) from an English language institute. The ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 45 years. Due to the fact that Iranian language institutes typically enroll students of only one gender, it was not feasible to include both genders in this research. As a result, only female students were involved in the current study. Since the participants were already enrolled in their respective classes and it was impractical to randomly assign them to different groups, it can be stated that intact groups were utilized in this study. Thus, two classes were designated as the study groups (one experimental group consisting of 35 students and one control group also consisting of 35 students).

The participants were informed that they were participating in a research study. In addition, data privacy considerations were also taken into account in this study, and the participants were assured that their data, including their names and their chats on WhatsApp would be kept confidential. All the participants agreed to participate in this study under the mentioned conditions.

Moreover, eight TEFL instructors with more than ten years of teaching experiences participated in the study. To assess the level of English language proficiency among students for the sake of achieving homogeneity, all participants participated in The Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Only those who demonstrated the same level of overall language learning proficiency were selected for the study. The results of the test showed that the learners’ proficiency level was intermediate. These students were then divided into one experimental group and one control group. Specifications of the participants are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Specifications of the Participants*

Group	Number	Age	Gender	Teaching/Learning Experience	Academic Degree	L1
Experimental learners	35	20-45	Female	4-6 years	Miscellaneous	Persian
Control learners	35	20-45	Female	4-6 years	Miscellaneous	Persian
Experimental teachers	4	30-50	Female	10-15 years	B.A. and M.A. in TEFL	Persian
Control teachers	4	30-50	Female	10-15 years	B.A. and M.A. in TEFL	Persian

**Instruments**

*The Oxford Placement Test*

The Oxford placement exam was utilized to assess the uniformity of participants. The Oxford Placement Test comprises 60 multiple-choice questions focused on vocabulary, grammar, and cloze assessment. For each item, students were supposed to check the correct answer from among four given choices. They were supposed to get through with this test in 50 minutes. The validity of Oxford Placement Test is taken for granted since it is a standard test of proficiency, and the test's reliability was confirmed using the Cronbach's Alpha method, which produced a reliability index of 0.83.

### ***Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI)***

The second tool utilized was the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI). The QTI is a self-reporting tool aimed at evaluating both teacher and student behaviors in the classroom, teachers' interactions with students, and the diverse perceptions or reactions to these interactions. The Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behavior, created by Wubbels and Levy in 1993, served as the foundation for the development of the QTI. For this study, the version employed was the 48-item format that utilizes a five-point Likert scale.

The QTI encompasses four domains: Dominance, Submission, Opposition, and Cooperation. These domains are broken down into eight scales, which include Leadership, Helping/Friendly, Understanding, Student Responsibility or Freedom, Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, and Strict (Lourusamy et al., 2001). According to Zohrabi (2013), researchers should make sure of the validity and reliability of a questionnaire before using it in their study. The QTI demonstrated satisfactory validity (Wubbels & Levey, 1993). Also, across all nationalities, the QTI scale scores were associated with high levels of internal consistency reliabilities (Wubbels et al., 2006). The test-retest reliability of the whole QTI was reported to be above 0.65, and the reliability of each of its subscales calculated by Cronbach's alpha formula ranged from 0.76 to 0.84 for students' questionnaire and from 0.77 to 0.81 for teachers' questionnaire (Wubbels et al., 2006).

### **Procedure**

A number of 70 Iranian female EFL intermediate learners and eight TEFL instructors were selected as the population of the present study. In order to answer the research questions in this study, first of all, the OPT was administered among language learners in two English classes. Then, QTI-Teacher Questionnaire was given to the teachers and students to obtain their feedback. The QTI is a self-assessment tool created to evaluate the behaviors of teachers and students within the classroom, as well as the interactions between teachers and their students and the different perceptions or reactions to those interactions. The students were assured that the outcome of the study would not impact their grades; in addition, the participants were made aware of the study's purpose, its significance, and its applicability for both educators and students.

Following that, the treatment commenced and continued for a total of twelve sessions. The control group developed speaking skills using conventional face-to-face instruction without the use of humor techniques, while the experimental group engaged in humor techniques through real-time SCMC teaching utilizing the WhatsApp application. To meet the requirements of the study, the instructor made a group voice call on the WhatsApp software at the beginning of each session and added the learners to this group call one by one. Then she selected some topics from the Four Corners book to help students communicate with each other and discuss the topics orally. The

topics of the speaking assignments included Health, My Interests, Shopping, Descriptions, What's on TV, Rain or Shine, Fun in the City, Life at Home, At a Restaurant, People, Time for a Change, and Entertainment. The participants were expected to discuss these topics, which encompassed the target tasks in their class as part of their curriculum for the semester.

They learned these tasks using humor techniques to check whether the teacher-student rapport through SCMC would be improved after utilizing treatment for the experimental group. Humor techniques included beginning the class with a thought for the day, using stories and experiences, relating things to students, planning lectures in segments with humor injected, asking students for humorous material, and telling jokes.

In the first session, the topic of "Time for a change" started with the use and impact of technology and websites. The teacher commenced the session with a funny story about her experience of using technology for cheating in an exam. Then, asked the learners to tell similar stories about their experiences. Some learners talked about their funny experiences of using technology in situations where it was not allowed.

In the second session with the topic of "Health", the teacher talked about the impact of laughing on people's health and using fun in stressful environments to reduce tension. Then, the teacher asked students to talk about the positive impacts of using fun in different situations. One student suggested a clown language teacher for their course. The teacher used this funny idea for discussing the rest of the topic.

Because the focus of the third session was "What's on TV," the teacher requested the students, at the conclusion of the second session, to find humorous anecdotes related to artists and present them in the classroom as lectures. The next nine sessions continued in this way and the teacher used humor techniques to teach the new topics.

Conversely, in the control group, the conventional instruction of the teacher-student rapport and the speaking skill was fulfilled. This group did not receive any special treatment and followed the language instructional procedure common for English language students in the Iranian institution context. The instructor used the target language in the classroom. This kind of instruction included teacher-fronted instruction. Students had to learn speaking skills in the classroom without using humor techniques in a synchronous CMC speaking course. It means that the teacher explained the topic and discussed it from different aspects. After that, the students had to speak about that topic.

Following the treatment, both the students and teachers from each group completed the QTI post-test. This was considered the post-test to assess any changes in the perceptions of the learners and teachers resulting from the SCMC humor teaching.

### **Data Analysis**

After the required data was collected, two types of statistical analysis were carried out using SPSS software. First, descriptive statistics was run to report mean scores and standard deviations of the groups. Moreover, as an inferential statistic, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test was used to test for the possible differences between the two independent groups on their teacher-student rapport both at the beginning and at the end of the study.

## Results

### The Results of the Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

In order to guarantee participant homogeneity and confirm the validity of the study, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was given. Those students who scored within one standard deviation of the average were classified as intermediate participants, who were then divided into experimental and control groups. Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for the OPT for a sample size of 70 students.

**Table 2**

*Statistics for the OPT Test*

N	Valid	70
	Missing	0
Mean		32.00
Median		32.00
Mode		32.00
Std. Deviation		2.00
Variance		5.00
Range		8.00

Table 2 presented the results of group statistics for the OPT test scores, which were used to identify subjects with similar levels of general foreign language proficiency. Central tendency measures such as mean, mode, and median, along with measures of dispersion like variance, range, and standard deviation, as well as distribution measures (i.e., Skewness and Kurtosis), were calculated for the OPT test. Consequently, a cut-off point was established, and 70 EFL learners whose proficiency scores fell within one standard deviation of the mean were chosen as the primary participants for this study and were randomly assigned to two groups (one control group and one experimental group).

### Answering the First Research Question

At the first stage of the study, the effectiveness of using humor techniques through SCMC on enhancing EFL teacher-student rapport from learners' perceptions was examined. The QTI-Student Questionnaire was administered to the students to gather their initial feedback and to assess the differences in teacher-student rapport between the two groups prior to implementing humor techniques through SCMC for the experimental group.

Descriptive statistics, including mean ranks and standard deviations, were conducted to evaluate teacher-student rapport in EFL classes. This was analyzed by calculating the overall mean

rank for all participants. The maximum attainable mean rank was five. The results of the analysis of the participants' ratings are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics for QTI-Student Questionnaire*

Group			First administration	Second administration
Experimental	N	Valid	35	35
		Missing	0	0
	Mean	3.05	3.18	
	Mean rank	35.12	38.45	
	Std. Deviation	0.14	0.12	
Control	N	Valid	35	35
		Missing	0	0
	Mean	3.03	3.10	
	Mean rank	34.88	35.55	
	Std. Deviation	0.15	0.13	

As shown in Table 3, at the beginning of the study, there was not a mean difference between the two groups. Nonetheless, during the second round of the survey, this disparity increased to .08. Furthermore, the ratings made at the beginning of the study were slightly more heterogeneous than those made at the end of the study.

In addition, the mean rank of the participants in the experimental group before applying humor techniques through SCMC was less than that of after employing the treatment indicating that the students' perceptions of teacher-student rapport were improved after utilizing the humor techniques through SCMC for the experimental group.

On the other hand, the participants in the control group made a slight improvement in terms of their perceptions of teacher-student rapport at the end of the study.

The scales chosen by the participants for the items in the QTI-Student Questionnaire (ranging from 1 to 5) were treated as ranks for both groups. Subsequently, the ranks for each group were analyzed to determine whether there were significant differences. Since the data were ranked, the normal distribution of scores was not relevant. To assess potential differences in perceptions

of teacher-student rapport between the two independent groups at both the start and the conclusion of the study, the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test was employed.

**Table 4**

*Mann-Whitney U Test for the Control and the Experimental Groups*

<b>Test Statistics<sup>a</sup></b>		
	First administration	Second administration
Mann-Whitney U	605.000	525.000
Z	-0.245	-1.987
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.806	0.047

a. Grouping Variable: Group

In Table 4, the Z value for the pre-test was -0.245 with a significance level of  $p = 0.806$ . Since the probability value ( $p$ ) was greater than 0.05, the result was not statistically significant. This indicates that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of teacher-student rapport at the beginning of the study.

However, for the post-test, the Z value was -1.987 with a significance level of  $p = 0.047$ . Since the probability value ( $p$ ) was less than 0.05, the result was statistically significant (effect size  $r = 0.30$ ). This means that there was a statistically significant difference in teacher-student rapport between the experimental and control groups at the end of the study.

These results suggest that the use of humor techniques through SCMC effectively enhanced teacher-student rapport from students' perceptions in the experimental group, while the control group, which did not receive the humor treatment, showed only minimal improvement.

### **Answering the Second Research Question**

In the second part of the research, the focus shifted to assessing the impact of humor strategies employed through SCMC on improving the rapport between EFL teachers and students, as perceived by the teachers. The QTI-Teacher Questionnaire was administered to gather initial feedback from the teachers and to identify differences in teacher-student rapport between the two groups prior to the implementation of humor techniques through SCMC for the experimental group. Descriptive statistics, including mean ranks and standard deviations, were conducted to evaluate teacher-student rapport in EFL classrooms. The analysis involved calculating the overall

mean rank of all participants. The highest achievable mean rank was five. The findings from the analysis of the participants' ratings are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Descriptive Statistics for QTI-Teacher Questionnaire*

Group			First administration	Second administration
Experimental	N	Valid	4	4
		Missing	0	0
	Mean	3.13	3.45	
	Mean rank	15.50	22.75	
	Std. Deviation	0.15	0.10	
Control	N	Valid	4	4
		Missing	0	0
	Mean	3.10	3.15	
	Mean rank	14.25	14.50	
	Std. Deviation	0.14	0.12	

As shown in Table 5, at the beginning of the study, there was not a mean difference between the two groups. Nonetheless, during the second administration of the survey, this discrepancy increased to .30. Furthermore, the ratings made at the beginning of the study were slightly more heterogeneous than those made at the end of the study.

In addition, the mean rank of the participants in the experimental group before applying humor techniques through SCMC was less than that of after employing the treatment indicating that the teachers' perceptions of teacher-student rapport were improved after utilizing the humor techniques through SCMC for the experimental group. On the other hand, the participants in the control group made a slight improvement in terms of their perceptions of teacher-student rapport at the end of the study.

The scales chosen by the participants for the items in the QTI-Teacher Questionnaire (ranging from 1 to 5) were treated as ranks for both groups. The ranks from the two groups were then analyzed to determine if any significant differences existed. Since the data were ranked, the normal distribution of the scores was not a factor. The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U Test was

employed to assess potential differences between the two independent groups regarding their perceptions of teacher-student rapport at both the start and the conclusion of the study.

**Table 6**

*Mann-Whitney U Test for the Control and the Experimental Groups*

<b>Test Statistics<sup>a</sup></b>		
	First administration	Second administration
Mann-Whitney U	105.50	45.00
Z	-0.447	-2.521
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.655	0.012

a. Grouping Variable: Group

In Table 6, the Mann-Whitney U value for the pre-test was 105.50 with a Z value of -0.447 and a significance level of  $p = 0.655$ , which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that there was no significant difference between the experimental and control groups at the pre-test stage.

In the post-test, the Mann-Whitney U value was recorded at 45.00, accompanied by a Z value of -2.521 and a significance level of  $p = 0.012$ , which is below 0.05 (effect size  $r = 0.80$ ; power analysis = 0.35). This implies that there was a significant statistical difference between the experimental and control groups during the post-test phase. Notably, the experimental group that utilized humor techniques through SCMC exhibited a considerably greater enhancement in teacher-student rapport compared to the control group that did not undergo the humor treatment. These findings indicate that employing humor techniques through SCMC significantly improved teachers' perceptions of teacher-student rapport in the experimental group, whereas the control group showed no change. This is consistent with the results from the QTI-Student Questionnaire, which also indicated a significant improvement in the experimental group.

### Discussion

The findings of this research revealed that the experimental group demonstrated a significant enhancement in the relationship between teachers and students from both perspectives, whereas the control group experienced only slight improvement. While prior studies have thoroughly examined the influence of humor and rapport on educational results, there is still a lack of research concentrating on how humor techniques used in Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (SCMC) can improve teacher-student rapport.

The studies by Uyen and Duyen (2024), Pham (2014), and Rashidi et al. (2014) collectively emphasize the positive perceptions of humor among both teachers and students in EFL classrooms. These studies reveal that humor, when effectively utilized, can enhance student motivation, reduce anxiety, and foster a positive learning environment. Pham (2014) particularly highlights the cognitive and affective benefits of humor, noting that students prefer teachers who incorporate humor into their teaching. However, Uyen and Duyen (2024) also point out a disconnect between

teachers' and students' expectations regarding the use of humor, suggesting that while humor is widely appreciated, its application needs to be more aligned with students' preferences.

Despite these positive findings, the literature barely contains a focused exploration of how humor techniques can be adapted to SCMC environments. Yeung et al. (2023) and Moalla and Amor (2021) provide some insights into the use of communication technology in EFL settings, but their focus is broader and does not specifically address humor. Moalla and Amor (2021) discussed the challenges of interpreting humor in online interactions, suggesting that humor in SCMC may require different strategies compared to face-to-face settings. This suggests a necessity for additional investigation into how humor can be successfully incorporated into SCMC to improve the relationship between teachers and students.

The significance of teacher-student rapport in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education is extensively covered in existing literature. Both Zhi and Wang (2024) and Estep and Roberts (2013) emphasize how important rapport is in encouraging students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and their motivation. Zhi and Wang (2024) further explore the interplay between teacher immediacy, rapport, and students' perceptions of AI, suggesting that rapport is a critical factor in the digital age. However, these studies do not specifically address how rapport can be built or maintained through SCMC.

Yeung et al. (2023) and Alamir (2014) provide some insights into the use of communication technology in building rapport. Yeung et al. (2023) noted that SCMC can enhance teacher-student relationships by reducing formality and encouraging self-disclosure, but they also caution against the potential distortion of professional boundaries. Alamir (2014) highlighted the role of teacher presence in online interactions, suggesting that scaffolding and reflective conversations can enhance students' language skills. However, neither study directly addresses the role of humor in these interactions.

Although the studies examined offer important insights, there are still some challenges and unexplored gaps. To begin with, there is insufficient research aimed specifically at the role of humor in SCMC contexts. The works of Moalla and Amor (2021) and Yeung et al. (2023) address related themes, but a more focused study is necessary to comprehend how humor can be effectively employed to foster rapport in online environments. Second, the potential challenges of using humor in SCMC, such as misinterpretation and the distortion of professional boundaries, need to be addressed. Yeung et al. (2023) and Moalla and Amor (2021) both highlight these issues, suggesting that while humor can enhance rapport, it also requires careful management to avoid negative consequences. Finally, the cultural context of humor in EFL classrooms is another area that permits further exploration. Uyen and Duyen (2024) along with Pham (2014) highlight the significance of cultural elements in humor usage, indicating that a strategy that is successful in one cultural setting may not resonate in another. Subsequent studies should explore how variations in culture influence the effectiveness of humor methods in SCMC contexts.

To summarize, the current body of research establishes a basis for comprehending how humor and teacher-student relationships impact EFL learning. Nonetheless, there is a lack of studies that explore the application of humor via SCMC to improve rapport. The reviewed studies highlight the potential benefits of humor and rapport in traditional and online settings, but also point to the challenges and complexities of using humor in SCMC. Future research should address these gaps by exploring how humor can be effectively integrated into SCMC, considering both the potential benefits and challenges. Additionally, cultural factors should be taken into account to ensure that humor techniques are appropriate and effective across different contexts.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the use of humor techniques through SCMC can significantly enhance EFL teacher-student rapport from both teachers' and students' perspectives. By integrating humor into their teaching strategies, EFL teachers can foster stronger relationships with their students, reduce anxiety, and increase motivation, ultimately leading to better learning outcomes. The results of this study carry significant educational implications for EFL instructors and educators. Teachers can effectively use humor techniques through SCMC platforms like WhatsApp to enhance teacher-student rapport. This is particularly useful in contexts where traditional face-to-face interaction is limited, such as in online or blended learning environments. Humor can help reduce student anxiety and create a more relaxed learning environment, which is crucial for language acquisition. Teachers should consider incorporating humor into their online teaching strategies to foster a positive classroom atmosphere. Incorporating humor in SCMC can enhance student involvement and enthusiasm, as it renders the learning experience more enjoyable and engaging. This may result in improved educational results and a more favorable perspective on language acquisition. Teacher training courses ought to feature sections on effectively integrating humor in both in-person and online teaching settings. This can assist educators in acquiring the abilities necessary to foster strong connections with their students, even in digital spaces.

Like any other study, this study suffered from a number of limitations. In this study, only female participants were available to the researcher and were included in the study. Further research can examine the difference between the effects of using humor techniques through SCMC on teacher-student rapport in male and female participants. Another limitation was that the whole study was conducted in one language institute, and it introduces single-institute bias to the study. Future research can be conducted in different language institutes to increase the generalizability of the results.

Another limitation of this study was that there was just one experimental and one control group in this study. If there were another experimental group in this study, namely the SCMC non-humor group, better results would have been obtained. However, more participants with the same level of proficiency were not available to the researchers. Of course, the rationale behind not including a SCMC non-humor group in this study was that previous studies had investigated the effect of humor on teacher-student relationship (e.g., Pham, 2014). Moreover, previous studies had examined the effect of technology on teacher-student rapport (e.g., Zhi and Wang, 2024). Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of the combination of technology and humor on teacher-student rapport, and examining the effect of each of them alone was not the purpose of this study. However, it would have been much better if there were a SCMC non-humor group in this study to obtain more reliable results. Future studies can be conducted with three groups as mentioned above.

Future studies should keep investigating the diverse methods of utilizing humor to improve teacher-student relationships in various scenarios and via different technologies. Additionally, future research could examine the enduring impacts of humor strategies on teacher-student rapport over a prolonged timeframe. This would offer a deeper insight into how humor affects rapport as time progresses. This study focused on Iranian female EFL learners. Future studies could investigate the effectiveness of humor techniques in different cultural contexts and with different demographic groups to determine if the findings are generalizable. While this study

used WhatsApp as the SCMC platform, future research could explore the use of humor on other platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or Google Meet to determine if the effects are consistent across different technologies. Moreover, a qualitative method may offer a more profound understanding of students' and teachers' views on humor in SCMC. Conducting interviews or focus groups could uncover more detailed opinions about the impact of humor on relationship building.

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