

Preliminary results of a survey of teacher attitudes and experiences regarding the teaching of English humour

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Abstract

A survey of 54 English teachers in Japan, both native and non-native speakers of English, was conducted to investigate their attitudes towards, and experiences of, teaching English humour in EFL classes, including factors such as teacher confidence and materials used. Preliminary analysis of responses - limited in this paper to numerical results from required survey questions only - suggests that although the teaching and learning of English humour is perceived to be difficult and challenging, in terms of cultural knowledge and English proficiency demands on both teachers and learners, it is also seen to be beneficial in those areas. Whereas only around two-thirds of respondents had attempted to teach humour, with those who had not done so mostly citing personal and practical rather than pedagogical reasons for this, the vast majority of teachers surveyed were interested both in the teaching of English humour, and in learning about it themselves. The limitations of the current study are examined, and potential for future research is suggested.

1 Introduction and research objectives

As part of an ongoing project to explore the potential benefits and challenges of teaching English humour as part of EFL classes, a questionnaire was produced to address the following research questions:

- a) What are the attitudes and opinions of English teachers in Japan, both native and non-native speakers of English, towards the teaching and learning of English humour within the context of EFL classes?
 - i. To what extent is the teaching and learning of humour seen as valuable for learners, and what potential benefits do teachers perceive?
 - ii. To what extent is the teaching and learning of humour seen as difficult for both teachers and learners, and what potential difficulties do teachers perceive?
 - iii. To what extent are teachers interested both in teaching English humour, and in learning about it themselves?
 - iv. To what extent are teachers confident in their own ability to teach English humour?

- b) What proportion of teachers has attempted to teach English humour?
- c) For teachers who have attempted to teach humour:
 - i. What materials were used?
 - ii. How do teachers characterise their experience of teaching humour in terms of success and difficulty?
- d) What reasons did those teachers who had not attempted to teach humour give for this?

2 Research questionnaire

2.1 Distribution and response

A questionnaire was produced and distributed in two forms, containing identical questions. The primary collection method was via an online survey site, the link to which was distributed to participants by email. The initial recipients were asked to pass on this link to colleagues and acquaintances. 41 responses were received via this method, of which one was left incomplete from question 4, and one incomplete from question 12. These incomplete responses were discarded, leaving 39 complete responses. A paper version of the questionnaire was also created, and given to a group of 15 junior and senior high school teachers selected by their board of education to take place in a training seminar. All 15 of these questionnaires were fully completed, giving a total of 54 complete responses to the questionnaire as a whole, received between 26 July and 22 August 2009.

2.2 Questions

The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions, of which participants could answer a minimum of 10, and a maximum of 15. Required questions are marked * below, with answer choices shown in parentheses. The first two questions were designed to ensure that all respondents were part of the survey's target population of English teachers working in Japan:

*1 Which country do you currently work in? [Japan / Other (please specify)]

*2 What subject do you teach? [English / Other (please specify)]

The next two questions gathered minimal personal information about the respondent:

*3 What is your main teaching environment? [eight answer choices]

*4 Are you a native or non-native speaker of English? [native speaker / non-native speaker]

In order to maximize participation, no other personal data was collected, and respondent anonymity was guaranteed. Questions 5-8 asked participants for their opinions on the teaching of English humour and about their own role as teachers, with the following definition given:

On this page, "teaching humour" does not mean "being funny in the classroom". It means using a humorous text like a joke, a funny story, or a humorous poem, to teach your students English, or to teach them about how English humour works.¹

Each question consisted of between two and four statements in response to the question:

*5/*7 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about teaching English humour?

*6/*8 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about yourself?

1 Survey materials used the spelling 'humor' throughout.

Questions 9 and 10 asked for participant opinions on the learning of English humour, and about their students, again with a definition given:

This page asks for your opinions about studying English humour. " Studying humour " means when students study a humorous text like a joke, a funny story, or a humorous poem, to learn something about English, or to learn about how English humour works.

and with four and three statements, respectively, in response to the questions:

*9 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about studying English humour?

*10 Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your students?

Details of these questions, which each required a response using a 5-point Likert scale, will be given in 4.1, below.

The second half of the survey asked respondents about their experience of teaching English humour:

*11 Have you ever tried to teach English humour in your classes? [Yes / No]

' Yes ' answers directed participants to three required and two optional questions about their experiences:

*12 Which of the following materials have you used to teach humour? (Please check all that apply) [eight answer choices]

*13 Please describe your experience of teaching humour. If you have taught humour several times, please describe your usual or typical experience.

How successful was it? [5-point Likert scale]

14 Please add a comment if you have one.

*15 Please describe your experience of teaching humour. If you have taught humour several times, please describe your usual or typical experience.

How easy was it? [5-point Likert scale]

16 Please add a comment if you have one.

' No ' answers directed participants to one required question:

*17 Please check up to three reasons why you have not tried to teach humour in your classes. [seven answer choices]

The final, optional question asked for further comments or questions from all participants. This paper will report principally on numerical data derived from responses to the required questions.

3 Profile and grouping of respondents

Of the 54 respondents to the survey, 33 identified themselves as non-native speakers of English (61.1%), and 21 as native speakers (38.9%). 32 respondents worked in universities or colleges (59.3%), 13 in high schools (24.1%), five in junior high schools (9.3%), and two each in language schools and in other teaching situations. No teachers working in elementary schools or cram schools, or as private, self-employed teachers, responded to the survey.

The largest single group of respondents, which formed exactly one-third of the sample, was university non-native speakers (18 respondents; 33.3%, to be referred to hereafter as group ' A '), followed by university native speakers (14 respondents; 25.9%, group ' B '), and high

school non-native speakers (11 respondents; 20.4%, group 'C'). Six further groups were identified for the purposes of analysis: university teachers, including both native and non-native speakers (32 respondents; 59.3%, 'uni'); junior and senior high school teachers, both native and non-native speakers (18 respondents; 33.3%, 'jhs & shs'); all native speakers, regardless of teaching situation (21 respondents; 38.9%, 'ns'); all non-native speakers, regardless of teaching situation (33 respondents; 61.1%, 'nns'); all respondents who had taught humour (35 respondents; 64.8%, 'hth'); and all respondents who had not taught humour (19 respondents; 35.2%, 'hnth'). Membership of groups A-C is mutually exclusive, whereas all individual respondents are included in at least two, or (in all except four cases) three of the six further groups.

4 Findings

4.1 Opinions on the teaching and learning of English humour

Questions 5-10 asked respondents for their opinions on the teaching and learning of English humour, and comprised statements to be rated using a 5-point Likert scale, with answers ranging from 'Strongly disagree' (rated 1 point) to 'Strongly agree' (rated 5 points). Overall rating averages were obtained for each statement: averages close to 1.00 and 5.00 would therefore indicate strong disagreement, and strong agreement with the statement, respectively; an average close to 3.00 would indicate a neutral position. Question 5, answered by native-speaker respondents, comprised four statements (a-d) on the teaching of English humour as a general proposition, duplicated in question 7 for non-native speakers. Question 6, for native speakers, consisted of two statements (6a and 6b) on the teaching of humour from the perspective of the individual respondent. These were duplicated for non-native speakers in question 8, with two additional statements, 8a and 8c.

Question 9 comprised four statements (a-d) on the learning of English humour, from a general perspective, and question 10 consisted of three statements on the learning of humour from the perspective of the individual respondent and their students. In an attempt to minimise the potential for acquiescence bias, the statements included both positive and negative views about the teaching and learning of humour: statements 5c/7c, 6a/8b, 6b/8d, 8a, 8c, 9c, 9d, 10a, 10b and 10c can be characterised as 'humour-positive' (teaching and learning humour as easy, beneficial, interesting etc) and 5a/7a, 5b/7b, 9a and 9b as 'humour-negative' (teaching and learning humour as demanding, requiring skill and knowledge etc) with 5d/7d as neutral. Each statement in questions 5-10 can therefore be described as either 'humour-positive', 'humour-negative' or 'neutral', and as either 'general' or 'individual'.

The overall rating average of the responses of groups A-C, university teachers, junior and senior high school teachers, native and non-native speakers, and respondents who have and have not taught humour, are shown in Tables 1-4 below, along with those of the whole group of 54 respondents.

		A (18)	B (14)	C (11)	uni (32)	jhs & shs (18)	ns (21)	nns (33)	hth (35)	hnth (19)	all resp (54)
5a 7a	Teaching humour requires a lot of cultural knowledge.	4.33	4.21	4.18	4.28	4.28	4.29	4.30	4.29	4.32	4.30
5b 7b	Teaching humour requires a high level of English proficiency.	3.83	3.93	4.00	3.88	3.72	3.67	3.88	3.77	3.84	3.80
5c 7c	It is easy to find humorous materials for classroom use.	2.94	3.43	3.00	3.16	2.72	3.10	2.91	3.14	2.68	2.98
5d 7d	Native speakers are the best people to teach English humour.	3.00	3.07	3.82	3.03	3.78	3.14	3.48	3.26	3.53	3.35

Table 1: Opinions on the teaching of English humour (general perspectives)

		A (18)	B (14)	C (11)	uni (32)	jhs & shs (18)	ns (21)	nns (33)	hth (35)	hnth (19)	all resp (54)
6a 8b	I am interested in teaching English humour.	4.06	4.07	3.82	4.06	3.67	3.95	3.91	4.11	3.58	3.93
6b 8d	I am confident that I can teach English humour.	2.72	3.64	2.55	3.13	2.5	3.43	2.48	3.06	2.47	2.85
8a	It is easy for me to understand English humour.	2.61	n/a	2.64	2.61	2.5 (14)	n/a	2.55	2.65 (23)	2.30 (10)	2.55
8c	I am interested in learning about English humour.	4.67	n/a	4.09	4.67	4.07 (14)	n/a	4.39	4.48 (23)	4.20 (10)	4.39

Table 2: Opinions on the teaching of English humour (individual perspectives)

		A (18)	B (14)	C (11)	uni (32)	jhs & shs (18)	ns (21)	nns (33)	hth (35)	hnth (19)	all resp (54)
9a	Students need a high level of cultural knowledge to understand English humour.	3.94	3.64	3.55	3.81	3.78	3.81	3.85	3.77	3.95	3.83
9b	Students need a high level of English proficiency to understand English humour.	3.56	3.50	3.36	3.53	3.33	3.38	3.52	3.43	3.53	3.46
9c	Studying English humour helps students to improve their English.	4.11	4.00	3.82	4.06	3.94	3.90	4.00	4.09	3.74	3.96
9d	Studying English humour helps students to learn more about other cultures.	4.67	4.14	4.27	4.44	4.28	4.00	4.52	4.40	4.16	4.31

Table 3: Opinions on learning and studying English humour (general perspectives)

		A (18)	B (14)	C (11)	uni (32)	jhs & shs (18)	ns (21)	nns (33)	hth (35)	hnth (19)	all resp (54)
10a	It is easy for my students to understand English humour.	2.17	1.93	2.09	2.06	2.17	2.00	2.12	2.14	1.95	2.07
10b	Learning about English humour is important for my students.	3.78	3.21	2.91	3.53	3.28	3.29	3.52	3.60	3.11	3.43
10c	My students are interested in learning about English humour.	3.56	3.29	3.09	3.44	3.28	3.29	3.39	3.49	3.11	3.35

Table 4: Opinions on learning and studying English humour (individual perspectives)

4.2 Respondent experiences of teaching humour

4.2.1 Profile of respondents

Questions 11-17 asked respondents about their experiences of teaching humour. 35 respondents (64.8%) had tried to teach English humour in their classes, and 19 (35.2%) had not. Of those who had taught humour, 24 were university teachers, representing 75% of all university teachers who responded to the survey, eight were high school teachers (62% of all high school respondents) and two were junior high school teachers (40% of all junior high respondents), with one other (an ex-junior and senior high school teacher). 23 non-native speakers had taught humour (70% of all non-native speakers) whereas only 12 native speakers had done so (57.1% of all native speakers). Of the three largest groups of respondents identified above, 14 out of 18 university non-native speakers had tried to teach humour (group A, 77.8%), compared to 10 out of 14 university native speakers (group B, 71.4%) and seven out of 11 high school non-native speakers (group C, 63.6%).

4.2.2 Respondents who had taught humour

The 35 respondents who had indicated that they had attempted to teach humour in their classes were asked to indicate what kinds of materials they had used, shown in Table 5 in descending order of popularity. Of the five 'other' responses, four mentioned audio-visual texts, including TV news shows and movies, together with movie scripts and quotations.

		Response percent	Response count
12c	Funny stories	74.3%	26
12a	Jokes	60%	21
12d	Cartoons	48.6%	17
12b	Riddles	31.4%	11
12e	Humorous poems	14.3%	5
12f	Humorous songs	14.3%	5
12h	Other	14.3%	5
12g	Textbook on humour	5.7%	2

Table 5: Materials used in teaching humour

Questions 13 and 15 asked respondents to describe their experience (or typical experience) of teaching humour in terms of success and difficulty, using a 5-point Likert scale.

	Not at all successful	Not very successful	Satisfactory	Quite successful	Very successful	Rating average	Response count
A	all 0% (0)	28.6% (4)	42.9% (6)	28.6% (4)	all 0% (0)	3.00	14
B		30.0% (3)	40.0% (4)	30.0% (3)		3.00	10
C		28.6% (2)	57.1% (4)	14.3% (1)		2.86	7
uni		29.2% (7)	41.7% (10)	29.2% (7)		3.00	24
jhs & shs		20.0% (2)	70.0% (7)	10.0% (1)		2.90	10
ns		25.0% (3)	50.0% (6)	25.0% (3)		3.00	12
nns		26.1% (6)	52.2% (12)	21.7% (5)		2.96	23
all respondents (= hth)		25.7% (9)	51.4% (18)	22.9% (8)		2.97	35

Table 6: Degree of success in teaching humour

	Very difficult	Difficult	Neither easy nor difficult	Easy	Very easy	Rating average	Response count
A	0.0% (0)	42.9% (6)	50.0% (7)	7.1% (1)	all 0% (0)	2.64	14
B	0.0% (0)	50.0% (5)	40.0% (4)	10.0% (1)		2.60	10
C	0.0% (0)	57.1% (4)	14.3% (1)	28.6% (2)		2.71	7
uni	0.0% (0)	45.8% (11)	45.8% (11)	8.3% (2)		2.63	24
jhs & shs	0.0% (0)	60.0% (6)	10.0% (1)	30.0% (3)		2.70	10
ns	0.0% (0)	50.0% (6)	33.3% (4)	16.7% (2)		2.67	12
nns	4.3% (1)	47.8% (11)	34.8% (8)	13.0% (3)		2.57	23
all respondents (= hth)	2.9% (1)	48.6% (17)	34.3% (12)	14.3% (5)		2.60	35

Table 7: Degree of difficulty in teaching humour

4.2.3 Respondents who had not taught humour

The 19 respondents who had indicated that they had not attempted to teach English humour in their classes were asked to give between one and three reasons for this; the mean response rate was 2.4 reasons per respondent. Six answer choices were supplied, and two respondents submitted their own reasons. Table 8 shows the reasons chosen in descending order of popularity.

		Response percent	Response count
17e	I have never thought of teaching humour.	63.2%	12
17f	I am not confident that I can teach humour.	57.9%	11
17c	I cannot find appropriate materials.	42.1%	8
17b	I do not have enough time.	31.6%	6
17a	It is not important or appropriate for my students.	26.3%	5
17g	Other	10.5%	2
17d	I am not interested in teaching humour.	5.3%	1

Table 8: Reasons for not teaching humour (all respondents)

The most popular responses, 17e and 17f, can be characterised as ‘personal’ as they deal with teacher attitudes and experience. Reasons 17c and 17b can be described as ‘practical’, involving constraints on time and materials, and 17a as ‘pedagogical’, although there is some overlap between these categories. Both of the ‘other’ responses are ‘practical’ - ‘I have to follow a set curriculum’ (university native speaker) and ‘Company requests English related to their work only’ (employee at a private company) - with specific reference to the external imposition of constraints, and there is one more ‘personal’ response, 17d. Table 9 shows answers given by members of the three largest respondent groups, native and non-native speakers, university teachers, and teachers in junior and senior high schools, with ‘personal’ factors being the most widely-cited reasons in all respondent groups.

		A (4)	B (4)	C (4)	ns / nns (9 / 10)	uni / jhs & shs (8 / 8)
17e	never thought	75%	75%	25%	77.8 / 50%	75 / 50%
17f	not confident	25%	25%	100%	44.4 / 70%	25 / 87.5%
17c	materials	50%	-	50%	22.2 / 60%	25 / 62.5%
17b	time	-	50%	75%	22.2 / 40%	25 / 50%
17a	not important for students	25%	50%	25%	33.3 / 20%	37.5 / 12.5%
17g	other	-	25%	-	22.2 / -	12.5 / -
17d	not interested	25%	-	-	- / 10%	12.5 / -

Table 9: Reasons for not teaching humour (separated by group)

5 Discussion

5.1 General trends: high, low and mid-rated statements

The statement, ‘I am interested in learning about English humour’ (8c, humour-positive/individual, overall rating average: 4.39, 97% agreeing or strongly agreeing) was the highest-rated statement in the survey, although this statement was not available to native-speaker respondents. The highest-rated statement amongst all 54 respondents was, ‘Studying English humour helps students to learn more about other cultures’ (9d, humour-positive/general, overall rating average: 4.31, 93% agreeing or strongly disagreeing). Interest and cultural factors will be dealt with in more detail below. The lowest-rated statement

was, ' It is easy for my students to understand English humour ' (10a, humour-positive/individual, overall rating average 2.07), with only 2 respondents (3.7%) agreeing with the statement and 43 respondents (79.6%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

The humour-neutral/general statement, ' Native speakers are the best people to teach English humour ' (5d/7d, overall rating average: 3.35) attracted a broad range of responses, with 25.9% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, 46.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing, and 27.8% indicating either that they had no opinion, or that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement (mid-rated). Table 10 shows how native and non-native speakers rated this statement:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	No opinion / Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Rating average	Response count
Native speakers	4.8% (1)	28.6% (6)	33.3% (7)	14.3% (3)	19.0% (4)	3.14	21
Non-native speakers	3.0% (1)	18.2% (6)	24.2% (8)	36.4% (12)	18.2% (6)	3.48	33

Table 10: Native and non-native speaker responses to statement 5d/7d (' Native speakers are the best people to teach English humour ')

Other statements on which more than 25% of respondents offered no opinion were 6b/8d (31.5%; overall rating average: 2.85), 8a (27.3%; 2.55), 9b (25.9%; 3.46) and 10c (31.5%; 3.35). Only three respondents (5.6%) gave a mid-rating to statement 9d (overall rating average: 4.31), and no respondents mid-rated statement 8c (4.39).

5.2 Interest in teaching and learning English humour

The statement, ' I am interested in teaching English humour ' (6a/8b, humour-positive/individual) attracted relatively strong agreement from all groups (overall rating average: 3.93, with 80% agreeing or strongly agreeing). As might be expected, those who had attempted to teach humour showed a stronger degree of agreement (4.11) than those who had not (3.58). As noted above, all groups showed an even stronger agreement with the statement, ' I am interested in learning about English humour' (8c, humour-positive/individual, non-native only, overall rating average: 4.39), with 97% agreeing or strongly agreeing - and with only one respondent (a non-native high school teacher) disagreeing - and all groups showed a relatively weaker degree of agreement about their students' interest in learning about English humour (10c, humour-positive/individual, overall rating average: 3.35).

One native speaker and four non-native speakers (9% of the total sample) disagreed with statement 6a/8b, of which only one respondent (a non-native junior high school teacher) had attempted to teach humour, and of which one other (a university non-native speaker) was also the only respondent to select ' I am not interested in teaching humour ' as a reason for not having done so in question 17. This group of five respondents showed a higher than overall level of agreement with the four ' humour-negative ' state-

ments, 5a/7a (4.40>4.30), 5b/7b (4.20>3.80), 9a (4.40>3.83) and 9b (3.80>3.46), and a lower than overall level of agreement with the 'humour-positive' statements 5c/7c (1.60<2.98), 6b/8d (1.60<2.85), 8a (1.75<2.55), 8c (3.75<4.39), 9c (3.60<3.96), 9d (4.20<4.31), 10a (2.00<2.07), 10b (3.00<3.43), and 10c (2.80<3.35).

5.3 Humour and culture

Three questions in the survey dealt with the relationship between humour and culture. Statement 9d, 'Studying English humour helps students to learn more about other cultures' (humour-positive/general), attracted a higher degree of agreement than any other statement (overall rating average: 4.31) dealing with general principles of the teaching and learning of humour. 93% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 85% of respondents who agreed that 'Studying English humour helps students to improve their English' (9c, humour-positive/general, overall rating average: 3.96), and the rating average for 9d was between 0.1 and 0.56 points higher than that for 9c among all nine groups analysed. Statement 5a/7a, 'Teaching humour requires a lot of cultural knowledge' (humour-negative/general), received almost as high a level of agreement (overall rating average: 4.30, 85% agreed or strongly agreed), but there was less strength of agreement on the need for students, rather than teachers, to have a high level of cultural knowledge in order to understand English humour (9a, humour-negative/general, overall rating average: 3.83, 77% agreed or strongly agreed).

5.4 Humour and English proficiency

As noted above, there was less strong agreement on the language benefits for students of the study of English humour than on its cultural knowledge benefits (9c, 3.96), although all groups analysed gave this statement a rating average higher than 3.00. The need for teachers to have a high level of English proficiency to teach humour (5b/7b, humour-negative/general, overall rating average: 3.80) was rated less strongly than the need for teacher cultural knowledge (4.30); a pattern repeated in the equivalent statements regarding student English proficiency (9b, humour-negative/general: 3.46) and cultural knowledge (3.83). These patterns were seen in all groups.

5.5 Materials for teaching humour

Difficulty in finding appropriate materials was the third most-cited reason for not teaching humour, mentioned by 42.1% of respondents. In the survey as a whole, respondents who had taught humour showed a stronger degree of agreement with the statement, 'It is easy to find humorous materials for classroom use' (5c ns: 3.42, 7c nns: 3.00; overall rating average 3.14), than those who had not taught humour (5c ns: 2.67, 7c nns: 2.70, overall rating average 2.68). Of all groups analysed, university native speakers (group B) agreed most strongly with this statement (5c, rating average 3.43), and none of the members of that group who had not taught humour cited materials as a reason. Of other groups, however, group A (university non-native speakers), junior and senior high school teachers, non-native speakers, and teachers who had not taught humour, all showed lower-than-average agreement with the statement.

Those respondents who had taught humour indicated that funny stories, jokes and cartoons were the three most popular materials used, whereas only two respondents had used dedicated textbooks on humour, suggesting that the collection and selection of materials may be a task that is generally undertaken by individ-

ual teachers. Wider availability of textbooks that contain appropriate materials - in particular, funny stories, jokes and cartoons - may be helpful in relieving teachers of the burden of materials collection, which may itself also play a part in the fourth-ranked reason for not teaching humour (lack of time).

5 . 6 Success and difficulty in teaching humour

The overall rating average of question 13, which asked respondents to rate their success in attempting to teach English humour, was 2.97, with no groups rating higher than 3.00 or lower than 2.90. The mid-rating (' Satisfactory ') was the modal response amongst all groups, and no respondents rated their experiences as either ' Not at all successful ' or ' Very successful '. There may be methodological explanations for this phenomenon: the choice of a five-point Likert scale may have led to central tendency bias; and the use of the wording ' Satisfactory ' may have implied a value-judgement rather than a neutral position. Alternatively, it may be the case that the majority of respondents were unable or unwilling to commit themselves to firm judgements about the success of their teaching, or simply that the majority felt that their experience was neither particularly successful, nor conspicuously unsuccessful.

Question 15, which asked respondents to describe how difficult they had found their experience of teaching humour, also used a 5-point Likert scale, and returned an overall rating average of 2.60, with non-native speakers giving the lowest group average (2.57) and group C, high-school non-native speakers, the highest (2.71). The modal response for all groups except group A (modal response: mid-rating) and university teachers (modal response: ' Difficult ' and mid-rating, joint) was that the teaching of humour was ' Difficult ', with no respondents rating it as ' Very easy ', and only one out of 35 respondents rating it as ' Very difficult '. Methodological questions notwithstanding, the data seems to suggest that the difficulty of teaching humour as experienced by those who have attempted it (overall/hth rating average: 2.60) may not be an insuperable obstacle, in that the same respondents showed relatively higher degrees of agreement with humour-positive/individual statements about their interest (6a/8b, hth rating average: 4.11) and confidence (6b/8d, hth rating average: 3.06) in teaching humour than those without such experience (6a/8b, hnth rating average: 3.58; 6b/8d, hnth rating average: 2.47). However, as the current study is a synchronic survey of opinions and attitudes, rather than a diachronic account of their development, it is not possible to determine whether the experience of success or difficulty in teaching humour has any effect - either positive or negative - on teachers' views on their own confidence and interest in introducing the subject of English humour in their own EFL classrooms.

6 Limitations and future research

The current survey has a number of limitations, which could be addressed in future research. Most importantly, although the survey received 54 responses, these were distributed amongst a number of different groups; combined with issues relating to initial survey distribution, this may mean that the respondent sample does not accurately represent the target population of the survey. A larger sample, and/or a better targeted survey distribution, should be a goal of future research. In addition, the synchronic nature of the survey means that it is not possible to draw conclusions about the effects of the experience of teaching humour on teacher opinions and atti-

tudes towards it, and it may be difficult, therefore, to suggest concrete ways in which negative attitudes could be overcome, or to measure their effectiveness. As the most popular reason for not attempting to teach humour was ' I have never thought of teaching humour ', it is possible that the survey itself may have performed an awareness-raising role, although its anonymous nature means that follow-up cannot be conducted to determine whether this might be the case. However, the high degree of interest shown by respondents in the teaching and learning of English humour suggests that larger-scale surveys, or surveys that lend themselves to follow-up, are both desirable and possible. Finally, examination of participant answers to the three open, optional questions (question 14: 19 responses; question 16: 17 responses; question 18: 14 responses) may shed additional light on conclusions drawn from the preliminary results derived from numerical data presented in this paper.

7 Conclusion: summary of results

A significant majority of respondents to this survey were interested in teaching English humour (80%), although only 64.8% had actually done so. Amongst those who had, 51.4% found the experience difficult, with only 14.3% finding it easy; and amongst respondents who had not taught humour, personal and practical factors took precedence over pedagogical concerns as reasons for not having done so. Respondents' confidence in their ability to teach humour was lower amongst those who had not made the attempt, and amongst non-native speakers, than amongst those with experience, and amongst native speakers. The opinion that English humour is best taught by native speakers received slightly more support from non-native speakers, but in general did not attract a striking level of agreement. In terms of general principles, the need for students to have both high English proficiency and - to a greater extent - cultural knowledge to understand English humour was noted, although responses suggested that these factors are perceived to be even more strongly required of teachers themselves. However, the specific potential benefits for students of studying English humour, in terms both of improved English proficiency and - again, to a greater extent - cultural knowledge, were even more strongly supported. Finally, the survey showed that, from an individual rather than a general perspective, respondents believed on the whole that learning about humour was both of interest to (50% agreed, 18.5% disagreed) and important for their students (61.1% agreed, 16.7% disagreed); and the vast majority of non-native speaker teachers who responded to the survey (97%) agreed that they themselves were interested in learning about English humour.