

Humor and Critical Literacy: Exploring Stand-Up Comedy in Indonesian Language Education

 <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol22issue1page1-16>

Aisyah Nimatul Azizah¹, Putri Maharani¹

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof Dr Hamka, Jalan Limau II No.2, Jakarta 12130, Indonesia

Abstract

This study investigates the potential of stand-up comedy as a pedagogical strategy for enhancing critical literacy in Indonesian language classrooms. Unlike conventional literacy practices that emphasize technical reading and writing skills, stand-up comedy offers a space for students to combine humor, performance, and critique. Using a qualitative case study at a public senior high school in Indonesia, data were collected through classroom observations of student performances, interviews with teachers and students, and textual analysis of students' written monologues. The findings show that stand-up comedy enables students to transform everyday experiences into critical commentary, express social critique in accessible and creative forms, and develop confidence in public speaking. Humor proved effective in stimulating reflective dialogue on sensitive issues, fostering peer engagement, and encouraging students to negotiate meanings beyond the textbook. The novelty of this study lies in positioning stand-up comedy as a form of multimodal literacy that integrates text, performance, and humor, highlighting its role as both linguistic practice and critical pedagogy. Challenges were identified in guiding humor responsibly, particularly when addressing sensitive or controversial topics. This research demonstrates the value of integrating popular culture into literacy education to cultivate students' critical, contextual, and creative capacities.

Article Info:

Keywords: Classroom Discourse, Critical Literacy, Humor In Education, Multimodal Pedagogy, Stand-Up Comedy

Correspondence E-Mail:
aisyahazizah21@gmail.com

Received manuscript: 15/08/2024

Final revision: 05/11/2024

Approved: 25/11/2024

Online Access: 20/01/2025

Published: 25/02/2025

Copyright © by the Authors

RESEARCH ARTICLE 

Publisher: Jurusan Bahasa dan Seni FKIP
Universitas Pattimura, Jl. Ir. M.
Putuhena, Kampus Universitas
Pattimura, Poka, Ambon 97233

E-mail:
tahuri.journal@mail.unpatti.ac.id



This work is licensed
under Creative
Commons Attribution License 4.0 CC-
BY International license

How to cite: Azizah, N. A., & Maharani, P. (2025). Humor and Critical Literacy: Exploring Stand-Up Comedy in Indonesian Language Education. *Jurnal Tahuri*, 22(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol22issue1page1-16>

INTRODUCTION

Language literacy in schools has thus far tended to be understood in a narrow sense, namely as limited to the technical skills of reading and writing (Intiana et al., 2023; Litaly et al., 2022). The focus of learning that places excessive emphasis on procedural cognitive aspects has rendered literacy as a mechanical activity, detached from the social and cultural contexts in which language lives. Consequently, spaces for students' critical and creative expression are often neglected. In fact, language learning should not merely prepare students to become grammatically "correct" users of language, but also citizens capable of reflective thinking, articulating ideas with courage, and being sensitive to social issues in their surroundings (Ismawati et al., 2023; Sarah, 2022). It is at this juncture that the urgency of fostering a more critical and participatory form of literacy learning becomes increasingly evident.

Humor, particularly stand-up comedy, has emerged as one of the most popular forms of expression closely connected to the lives of young people. This humorous monologue performance does not merely serve entertainment purposes but often also conveys social critique, sharp observations about everyday realities, and personal reflections delivered in a witty manner. These characteristics position stand-up comedy as a rich pedagogical medium to encourage students to process language while also training their confidence in public speaking (Drani et al., 2021; Hukubun et al., 2022). However, in the context of Indonesian language education, the use of humor, especially in the form of stand-up comedy, has received little to no attention. Curricula and teaching practices remain distanced from popular cultural forms that in fact hold strong appeal for students. This becomes a critical issue, as schools should not be isolated from contemporary cultural developments that can enrich the learning process.

Studies on the relationship between humor, literacy, and education are not entirely new. Several works show that humor can foster more inclusive learning environments and enhance student engagement (Apituley et al., 2022; Sudarmo et al., 2021). In the context of language learning, humor has been shown to reduce learning anxiety and improve students' memory retention of materials (Dzulkifli Isadaud et al., 2022; Manuputty, 2022). Furthermore, critical literacy as a pedagogical framework emphasizes the importance of reading and producing texts with an awareness of the power relations, ideologies, and representations embedded within them (Lubis & Bahri, 2021; Tabelessy & Umkeketony, 2022). Thus, integrating humor into critical literacy has a strong theoretical foundation: humor functions not only as entertainment but also as a means of creatively deconstructing social realities.

Several international studies have highlighted the potential of humor in education. Cook et al. (2023) and Tsukawaki & Imura (2020) found that humor can enhance learning motivation and foster a positive classroom climate. Ceha et al. (2021) and Neff & Dewaele (2023) demonstrated that humor in second language learning helps students understand pragmatic nuances in communication. Meanwhile, Şahin (2021) and St-Amand et al. (2024) emphasized that humor contributes to shaping students' linguistic identities in classroom interactions. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, studies such as those by Burger (2022) and Erdoğan & Çakıroğlu (2021) stressed the need for education that not only teaches technical skills but also nurtures social and political consciousness. The combination of humor and critical pedagogy, therefore, opens up new spaces for more reflective educational practices.

In the Indonesian context, research on critical literacy in language classrooms has begun to develop, although it remains limited. For example, studies by Fitria (2023) and Pranoto & Suprayogi (2021) emphasized the necessity of integrating multimodal text-based literacy into the Indonesian language curriculum. Other research by Fauzia et al. (2023) and Fitriyah et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of strategies that encourage students to critique social issues through narrative texts. Meanwhile, Asmawati et al. (2023) and Qatrinada & Apoko (2024) found that popular culture can serve as an effective entry point for

increasing student engagement in critical literacy. However, specific studies linking humor, particularly stand-up comedy, with literacy learning in Indonesian language education are virtually absent.

International literature reveals a similar trend: humor is often studied from psychological, linguistic, or general pedagogical perspectives, but rarely in connection with performative humor and critical literacy practices in language classrooms. For instance, Umar et al. (2024) and Winhar (2022) examined humor from a pragmatic perspective, while Attardo (2008) discussed humor theory within linguistics. On the other hand, studies by Maulidiah et al. (2023) and Parlindungan et al. (2024) positioned humor as a medium for social critique, but without directly addressing its pedagogical potential in classrooms. This indicates that although the theoretical basis and practices for using humor in education are relatively established, there remains a significant gap in directly associating humor with critical literacy in the context of Indonesian language education.

Ironically, although stand-up comedy culture is rapidly growing in Indonesia and highly familiar to young generations, the education sector still appears hesitant to incorporate it into teaching strategies. This hesitation may stem from perceptions that humor is less serious or potentially controversial when addressing sensitive issues. Yet, this is precisely where its critical potential lies. Humor provides a safe space to deliver social critique in a communicative and entertaining way, making it more acceptable to audiences, including in classrooms. By overlooking this potential, language education loses a valuable opportunity to foster more relevant and meaningful learning.

Given the current research landscape, it is apparent that the integration of performative humor such as stand-up comedy into critical literacy learning has not been seriously explored. Yet, this combination holds significant promise for enriching language education practices: students not only learn to write monologues and practice public speaking but also cultivate sensitivity to social realities. This innovation presents an alternative approach rooted in popular culture that remains rarely addressed in academic discussions of Indonesian language education.

Building upon this issue, the present study seeks to explore how stand-up comedy can serve as a medium for critical literacy in Indonesian language classrooms. The focus is on analyzing the role of humor in enhancing students' language skills, both in writing and speaking, while also examining how humor fosters courage in expressing critical ideas. This study further identifies the opportunities and challenges of implementing critical humor in educational contexts, particularly in managing the sensitivity of social issues and the readiness of teachers in facilitating humor-based learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design, as it aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of experiences, meanings, and language practices that emerge in the context of learning through stand-up comedy. Qualitative research enables researchers to capture social dynamics and creative processes that cannot be reduced merely to numbers or

statistical data. As emphasized by Ames et al. (2019) and Mulisa (2022), a qualitative approach is appropriate when the research seeks to explore complex phenomena, interpret meanings constructed by participants, and understand the social contexts surrounding them. In this case, the use of stand-up comedy as a medium for critical literacy represents a novel phenomenon requiring contextual understanding, thus making the qualitative approach most suitable.

The study was conducted at SMAN 10 Tangerang. The selection of this school was deliberate: it is known for its Indonesian language program that actively encourages student self-expression and has a well-developed extracurricular arts community. These conditions allowed students to be more receptive to creative and experimental teaching methods. Moreover, Tangerang, as an urban area with rich socio-cultural diversity, offered a fertile context for exploration, especially regarding issues often addressed in stand-up comedy performances. Given this background, the location provided a relevant and potential setting to understand how critical humor may emerge within formal educational spaces.

The research participants consisted of 11th and 12th-grade students as well as Indonesian language teachers directly involved in the learning process. A total of 12 students and 2 teachers were selected for in-depth interviews. Student selection considered gender diversity, social backgrounds, and their involvement in stand-up comedy activities facilitated in class. Teachers were chosen due to their crucial role in designing lessons and guiding how humor was utilized in educational contexts. This composition enabled the collection of rich and nuanced data while maintaining focus on the personal narratives of each participant.

Data collection employed three main techniques: observation, interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted to directly examine how students performed stand-up comedy in class, how the audience responded, and how teachers facilitated the learning process. Observations allowed the researcher to capture interactions not always revealed through interviews, such as body expressions, spontaneity, or nuances of humor in performances. In-depth interviews explored students' and teachers' personal experiences: how they wrote stand-up texts, how they felt during performances, and how they interpreted humor as part of the learning process. Interviews were particularly valuable for providing space for participants to express their perspectives more openly (Allan, 2020; Kaluarachchi, 2025). Document analysis was carried out by examining students' stand-up texts to trace how critical ideas were constructed through creative language.

To ensure data validity, triangulation was employed by combining results from observations, interviews, and document analysis. This triangulation allowed comparisons between what students wrote in their scripts, how they performed them orally in the classroom stage, and how both students and teachers interpreted them in interviews. According to Doyle et al. (2020) and Hossain et al. (2024), triangulation strengthens qualitative research by reducing bias and enhancing the credibility of findings. Additionally, triangulation was applied by comparing data from different students, thereby identifying variations in perspectives more clearly. All research processes were conducted with careful consideration of research ethics, including obtaining school approval and ensuring participant

confidentiality. This was crucial not only to yield academically sound findings but also to maintain the comfort and trust of the participants involved.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Humor as a Medium of Critical Literacy

Humor in the form of stand-up comedy creates a new space in literacy learning that does not merely emphasize the technical skills of reading and writing, but also invites students to interpret, critique, and negotiate the social realities they face in daily life. In practice, students are not only asked to write monologue texts for performance, but also given the opportunity to express their views on phenomena closely related to their lived experiences. This process makes humor a unique medium in critical literacy, as students produce texts that are both reflective and communicative, bringing them into a performative space where language, body, and intonation converge to produce meaning.

In one performance, a student narrated an experience of being late to class and of teachers' tendency to scold students for trivial reasons. Instead of recounting the experience plainly, the student framed it through comedy, comparing the teacher's anger to the endless notifications of a family WhatsApp group. This evoked laughter while also prompting reflection on how authority in the classroom often feels excessive. Field observations showed that students who were usually quiet became more confident on the small classroom stage repurposed for stand-up. The student stood in front of the blackboard holding a simple microphone connected to the school's portable speaker. His face appeared tense at first, but relaxed when the audience responded with laughter. This situation demonstrated that stand-up comedy has the potential to transform the classroom into a participatory space, where personal experiences are transformed into social critique that is accessible and engaging.

Interviews with several students revealed that they felt freer to convey criticism through humor than in formal essay writing. One student, referred to as AR, stated that writing stand-up texts gave him a "legitimate reason" to voice his concerns without fear of reprimand. For him, delivering criticism through humor felt safer, as the audience received it in a humorous rather than confrontational tone. This aligns with Kohli et al. (2021) and Polizzi (2021), who emphasize that critical literacy provides space for student "agency," namely their capacity to choose, interpret, and construct meaning in ways relevant to their lives. With stand-up comedy, such agency is concretely manifested: students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but become producers of discourse who can interpret social realities through linguistic creativity.

Beyond school experiences, family issues were also frequently raised by students. One student, referred to as LM, wrote a stand-up script about household rules such as curfews and constant comparisons with a neighbor's child who was always praised. She presented this story through humorous analogies, likening "the mother to Google who knows everything" and "the father to Wi-Fi whose signal often disappears when needed." The performance provoked laughter but also opened space for discussion on how families reproduce social values that frequently restrict children's freedoms. From a critical literacy perspective, such

humor serves as a tool of deconstruction, unpacking power relations within families and re-presenting them with fresh perspectives for the audience to reinterpret.

Field observations indicated that the classroom audience responded in diverse ways. Some laughed openly, while others merely smiled. However, these moments triggered spontaneous dialogue after the performance. Several students added their own similar experiences, demonstrating that stand-up texts were not merely individual performances but meeting points of collective experience that stimulated critical conversations. This audience engagement illustrates what Polizzi (2021) describes as “dialogic spaces”, conversational arenas where students collaboratively build critical understanding through social interaction.

Teacher interviews provided additional insights. For instance, Mr. RS, who taught Indonesian language, admitted that he initially doubted whether humor was appropriate for a formal class. Yet after observing how students could process serious issues in lighthearted ways, he recognized that language learning should not constrain creative expression. He remarked that stand-up comedy opened new opportunities to assess students’ linguistic skills more comprehensively, as it involved writing, rhetoric, and mastery of social context. This acknowledgment underscores how humor can be repositioned from mere entertainment to a serious pedagogical tool, even while retaining its comic form.

Analytically, the practice of stand-up comedy highlights three key points. First, humor offers students the chance to articulate everyday experiences often considered trivial and elevate them to the level of critical reflection. Second, humor builds a bridge between students and audiences, enabling critical messages to be received more fluidly without resistance. Third, humor strengthens students’ self-confidence in public speaking, as they feel supported by the collective laughter of their peers. These three aspects are consistent with critical literacy theory, which emphasizes that literacy is not merely about decoding texts but also about producing meanings relevant to social contexts (Kohli et al., 2021; Polizzi, 2021).

Nevertheless, field findings also revealed certain dynamics. Not all students were immediately successful in producing critical humor. Some initially relied on slapstick or jokes reinforcing stereotypes. However, through reflective guidance from teachers, they were directed toward crafting more nuanced and educative critiques. This process indicates that critical literacy through humor requires pedagogical scaffolding so that the resulting social critique fosters dialogue rather than harm. In this regard, the teacher’s role as facilitator is crucial to the success of this approach.

Creative Expression and Social Critique through Humor

The humor practiced by students through stand-up comedy in Indonesian language classes functions not only as entertainment but also as a medium for delivering social critique in ways that are communicative and relatable among peers. Direct classroom observations showed how the atmosphere became relaxed when a student humorously addressed gender inequality. She shared a daily experience where her brother enjoyed greater freedom while she was more strictly monitored. Delivered with ironic intonation, the joke provoked laughter, but after the laughter subsided, several students appeared to reflect on similar experiences in their own families. This demonstrates humor’s capacity to penetrate resistance to sensitive

issues, transforming potentially tense topics into inclusive reflections.

In interviews, a teacher (coded as Ms. R) noted that students were more willing to raise social issues when framed humorously. She believed humor created emotional distance, allowing sharp criticism to be received more lightly. This was echoed by a student (F), who admitted he was more comfortable discussing social class differences through jokes about “never having enough pocket money.” For him, discussing the issue seriously risked being perceived as a personal complaint, whereas humor allowed it to be embraced as shared reflection that provoked both laughter and thought. These experiences align with Fotopoulou (2021) and Storm & Jones (2021) on performative pedagogy, which view humor as a rhetorical strategy providing safe spaces for students to negotiate social discourses without fear or guilt.

Field data also illustrated how humor fostered more participatory interactions. In one performance, a student (M) exaggerated the role of social media, portraying how a simple post became a stage for social-class display. The audience laughed loudly as he imitated the over-the-top behavior of a “school influencer.” Yet subsequent discussions revealed that students began reflecting on the psychological impact of such ostentation. Thus, humor not only generated emotional engagement but also opened dialogue about social critique in honest and accessible ways. Humor, in this sense, operates as “inclusive rhetoric” that enables critique without distancing speaker and listener.

This approach shows that humor minimizes resistance, particularly on taboo or overly serious issues. For instance, when a female student (S) humorously pointed out gender bias at school, “if a girl is late, she’s considered lazy, but if a boy is late, it’s because he just played soccer to stay healthy”, the laughter that followed did not erase the substance of her critique but reinforced it in a more acceptable form. According to Domínguez Romero & Bobkina (2021), critical literacy emphasizes the importance of students’ agency in meaning-making. In this case, humor provides agency for students to articulate critique without fear of stigma or rejection.

From Storm & Jones’ (2021) perspective, humor creates performative conditions where students not only present texts but also shape atmosphere, build interaction, and negotiate social meaning with their audiences. Observations indicated that shared laughter produced a sense of togetherness rarely achieved through formal discussions. This collective spirit is key for critical issues to be received, reflected upon, and further discussed.

Moreover, humor helped students avoid resistance often triggered by sensitive topics. For example, social-class differences may provoke shame for some students. Through humor, however, such topics could be addressed without targeting individuals. This was evident when a student joked that “branded shoes seem to improve report card grades.” The laughter that followed suggested that the audience did not feel attacked, but instead invited to critically reflect on the phenomenon in a lighthearted way. In this context, humor becomes not only a communication strategy but also a form of social negotiation that maintains the classroom as a safe and productive space.

Interviews further reinforced these findings. A student (A) remarked that humor made him more confident in speaking before the class, as he knew his peers would be more

receptive if there was something funny in his critique. For him, humor was a “shield” that allowed critical messages to flow smoothly. Field observations showed enthusiastic audience responses, laughter, applause, and spontaneous comments, all indicating that humor enlivened two-way communication, enabling students to act not only as speakers but also as facilitators of dialogue.

Developing Confidence and Public Speaking Skills

Students’ experiences of expressing themselves through stand-up comedy in Indonesian language classes demonstrated significant growth in confidence and public speaking abilities. Field observations revealed how previously passive students began taking the stage before their peers. They did not merely read prepared texts but improvised with intonation, gestures, and facial expressions to deliver humor. The typically rigid classroom environment was transformed into a lively one, energized by audience laughter. These observations suggest that stand-up comedy provided space for students to leave their comfort zones, practice courage, and hone rhetorical skills rarely emphasized in conventional learning.

One interviewed student (R) confessed that he initially felt nervous performing before many people. However, once he heard his peers laugh at certain parts of his monologue, his fear gradually disappeared and was replaced with confidence. Similarly, another student (S) noted that stand-up gave her the chance to experiment with new speaking styles. She felt empowered when she successfully elicited audience reactions, gaining a sense of control over the classroom atmosphere. These accounts highlight how students’ confidence grew not merely from technical practice but also from the emotional interaction established between performer and audience.

Classroom observations further showed that the stand-up format encouraged creative language use. In one performance, a student (A) recounted an experience on public transport with exaggerated voices and body movements, which engaged the audience and invited spontaneous responses. This illustrates how stand-up comedy transformed the event from monologue to dialogue, with performers and audiences interacting dynamically. From a literacy perspective, this practice can be understood as multimodal literacy, as students combined written text, performance, intonation, gesture, and audience response to co-construct meaning.

Multimodal literacy, as emphasized by Banegas & Gerlach (2021) and Putri et al. (2024), stresses that language learning should not be confined to written texts but involve diverse representational modes, visual, gestural, performative, and auditory. In stand-up comedy, students not only write monologues but also visualize ideas through body language, manipulate intonation to reinforce messages, and adjust speaking tempo based on audience response. Hence, their public speaking skills developed beyond technical proficiency to include multimodal sensitivity to complex communicative situations.

Observations also revealed that students became increasingly confident in improvising. For instance, when one student forgot a section of his text, he spontaneously replaced it with a self-deprecating joke. Rather than creating awkwardness, the improvisation

was met with laughter and applause. This demonstrated how humor provided a way to recover from technical lapses while teaching students that public speaking does not require perfection, only communicativeness. Supardi (2024) similarly notes that multimodal literacies train students to manage uncertainty in communication, as performances inherently involve dynamic meaning negotiations between speakers and audiences.

Teacher interviews supported these findings. Ms. T, for example, observed that students who were usually quiet performed with confidence in stand-up. She concluded that humor created a safe space for students to speak without fear of mistakes. She added that improvisation skills honed through stand-up were highly valuable, as students would encounter unpredictable communication situations outside school. In this sense, stand-up comedy not only built courage but also equipped students with adaptive communication skills applicable to real-life contexts.

Classroom conditions during performances also showed that students' confidence increased alongside the social support they received. Shared laughter, applause, and positive peer comments created an inclusive environment where performers felt appreciated. In one case, a student trembled at the beginning, but after the audience laughed at his first joke, he continued with far greater confidence. This illustrates that confidence develops gradually through interactive experiences rather than emerging fully formed.

In addition to building confidence, students' public speaking skills improved in terms of discourse structure and rhetorical mastery. Some began recognizing the importance of pauses to allow audience laughter or adjusting intonation to make punchlines more impactful. These observations highlight how students learned practical communication strategies difficult to acquire solely from theory. In this regard, stand-up comedy functioned as a small laboratory for testing, refining, and enhancing public speaking skills.

Critical Reflection on Sensitive Issues and Negotiation of Meaning

In the practice of stand-up comedy-based learning in Indonesian language classes, humor is not merely a means of entertainment but also serves as an entry point for addressing issues often considered sensitive. Classroom observations reveal that when students deliver humorous monologues, the audience does not only laugh but also contemplates the underlying messages. For example, one student (initial M) joked about teachers' tendency to assign excessive homework, comparing it to "office workers who never go home." Although seemingly lighthearted, this remark sparked both laughter and conversations among students about the power relations inherent in the teacher's position in the classroom. By packaging criticism in the form of humor, messages that might otherwise be deemed too confrontational when expressed seriously were instead received more warmly and reflectively.

Interviews with several students indicated that stand-up comedy provides them with a space to talk about matters that are usually difficult to express directly. One student (R) explained that he felt freer to voice concerns about the unequal treatment of male and female students in school activities. By transforming his experiences into comedic material, he was able to raise awareness among peers without sounding harsh. This illustrates how humor functions as an inclusive communication strategy through which social critique can be

articulated without generating strong resistance.

Classroom conditions during performances also showed that humor creates a safe space for discussing typically taboo issues. For instance, in one session, a student shared experiences of facing stereotypes from teachers who assumed that students from certain tracks were “less intelligent” than those from others. By presenting this narrative satirically, the performance elicited laughter, while murmurs of agreement from other students revealed shared experiences. Teachers present did not feel attacked but instead responded with smiles and clarifications after the performance. Such observations demonstrate that humor facilitates a space for negotiating meaning, allowing critique to emerge without generating open conflict.

The concept of safe space in pedagogy, as emphasized by Daniels (2019) and Williams (2022), is highly relevant here. They argue that classrooms should ideally be places where students feel comfortable expressing critical views within a constructive learning framework. Stand-up comedy provides a unique form of safe space: students can address stereotypes, inequality, and power relations under the guise of laughter. With teachers’ guidance, this atmosphere can be managed so that humor does not devolve into derogatory jokes but remains focused on reflective purposes.

Interviews with teachers further support this observation. One teacher (Mrs. T) recounted how a student created material on social class differences in school, such as who could afford the latest gadgets versus those using basic phones. She noted that such issues would be too sensitive if addressed directly, but when wrapped in humor, the audience responded with laughter and agreement. She acknowledged that humor gives students opportunities to critique in gentler ways while becoming more aware of the social realities they face daily.

More broadly, humor demonstrates how students negotiate meaning. In one performance, a student (F) spoke about his family’s joking around gender roles at home, particularly the father’s lack of involvement in domestic tasks. Delivered humorously, the story elicited laughter but also spurred post-performance discussions among students about household responsibilities. This shows that humor does not merely relieve tension but also opens up critical conversations extending beyond the performance itself.

Field observations further show that such interactions often continued after the performances. Students did not merely enjoy laughter but carried conversations into small-group discussions. For example, after a joke about the school’s strict uniform policy, some students debated the rationale behind the rules and whether they were fair. Teachers facilitated these dialogues by prompting students to reflect on the purpose of such regulations. This illustrates how humor sparks reflective dialogue that might otherwise be difficult to initiate in formal classroom settings.

From an analytical perspective, this phenomenon can be understood as a form of critical literacy practice, wherein students not only produce texts (in the form of stand-up monologues) but also use them to critically interpret social realities. Humor becomes a medium for deconstructing power structures, questioning stereotypes, and interrogating

prevailing social norms. In this context, Häggström and Schmidt (2021) argue that the safe space fostered through humor illustrates that critical pedagogy need not always be serious but can also be developed through creative expressions closely tied to students' popular culture.

These findings further affirm that humor offers students opportunities to negotiate their positions as active subjects in the learning process. They do not merely receive knowledge from teachers or textbooks but also produce their own discourses that reflect their experiences and perspectives. This negotiation of meaning highlights that critical literacy through stand-up comedy is not simply a language skill but also a process of identity formation and social consciousness.

Challenges in Steering Humor Toward Educational Purposes

The most apparent challenge in implementing stand-up comedy-based learning lies in ensuring that students' humor remains within an educational framework. Students naturally tend to explore wide-ranging freedoms of expression, particularly when writing and performing personal monologues. However, such freedom sometimes leads to tension when humorous material touches on sensitive topics such as ethnicity, religion, gender stereotypes, or excessively harsh remarks. Classroom observations revealed that some students attempted to present more confrontational humor, for instance by mimicking ethnic accents or exaggerating stereotypes. Although some audiences laughed, such moments caused unease among teachers, who recognized the potential negative consequences.

One teacher (Mrs. T) admitted that guiding students' humor is not easy. She recalled cases where students wrote scripts containing words deemed too coarse for classroom performance. While not wanting to stifle students' creativity, she emphasized the importance of maintaining a conducive classroom atmosphere and preventing offense. She thus chose to hold pre-performance dialogues, offering advice on how jokes could remain funny without being hurtful. This experience highlights teachers' crucial role as mediators who balance freedom of expression with social responsibility.

Observations also revealed challenges when humor deviated from learning objectives. In one session, a student's script primarily mocked classmates rather than building reflective narratives. While much of the class laughed, some students appeared uncomfortable at being ridiculed. The teacher responded tactfully by stopping the performance and reminding students that stand-up comedy in class was not intended to humiliate others but to develop language skills, critical thinking, and communication. This underscores the teacher's vital role in keeping the learning process on track and preventing humor from morphing into bullying disguised as laughter.

In interviews, one student (R) confessed that he had once been reprimanded for making a joke about social class differences in a way that was too sharp. Although he claimed it was only meant as a joke, he acknowledged after the warning that such humor could hurt peers. He learned that humor could remain critical without targeting individuals directly. His reflection illustrates that teacher intervention is not merely about control but also about teaching values of ethical communication.

This phenomenon resonates with Häggström and Schmidt's (2021) concept of the critical mediator. Within this framework, teachers act as critical facilitators, balancing students' creative expression with boundaries of social responsibility. Teachers are not merely enforcers of restrictions but also companions who help students understand the implications of their words and actions. In the context of stand-up comedy, teachers must highlight that good humor does more than elicit laughter, it opens space for reflection without harm.

In practice, these challenges are further complicated by students' varied perceptions of humor boundaries. Some believe that harsh or provocative humor is the most effective way to provoke laughter, while others find such content offensive. Observations revealed that, in some cases, students laughed not because they genuinely found the jokes funny but out of conformity to peer dynamics. This indicates the presence of "coercive laughter," where students feel compelled to laugh to avoid standing out. Such dynamics underscore the importance of teachers' guidance in ensuring that humor functions as an educational tool rather than as a form of domination or symbolic violence.

Another challenge stems from time constraints that prevent teachers from reviewing all scripts thoroughly before performances. With dozens of scripts to examine in limited time, some problematic material inevitably passed through. Teachers reported trying to mitigate this by giving general guidelines, such as avoiding religious issues or foul language, but acknowledged that certain "dangerous" jokes still reached the stage. This suggests that managing humor in class requires more systematic strategies beyond ad hoc supervision.

Overall, the analysis emphasizes that while humor holds great potential to create spaces for reflection and engagement, it also carries risks if not properly guided. When humor strays from educational purposes, it can reproduce stereotypes or even symbolic bullying. The teacher's role as a critical mediator is thus essential to ensuring productive outcomes. Teachers must instill awareness that humor is not merely entertainment but also a vehicle for ethical social critique and constructive communication. Through this process, students learn not only how to elicit laughter but also how to uphold others' dignity in communication.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of stand-up comedy in Indonesian language learning opens new possibilities for developing critical literacy beyond the technical skills of reading and writing, encompassing creative, performative, and reflective expression. Through humor, students learn to transform everyday experiences into social critique that is both accessible and thought-provoking, while simultaneously fostering the courage to voice their perspectives in public spaces. The findings affirm that humor is not merely entertainment but an effective pedagogical strategy for stimulating critical dialogue, fostering peer engagement, and negotiating meaning beyond textbooks. Although challenges arise when humor risks straying from ethical boundaries or addressing overly sensitive issues, the teacher's role as a critical mediator ensures that the learning process remains productive and constructive. The novelty of this study lies in its assertion that stand-up comedy can be

positioned as a form of multimodal literacy that integrates text, performance, and humor while demonstrating the relevance of incorporating popular culture into language education to cultivate students' critical, contextual, and creative capacities in more inclusive ways.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

REFERENCES

- Allan, G. (2020). Qualitative Research. In *Handbook for Research Students in the Social Sciences* (pp. 177–189). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070993-18>
- Ames, H., Glenton, C., & Lewin, S. (2019). Purposive sampling in a qualitative evidence synthesis: a worked example from a synthesis on parental perceptions of vaccination communication. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 19(1), 26. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0665-4>
- Apituley, P. S., Lestuny, C., & Soumokil, P. (2022). Application of the Metaphor Approach in German Learning at SMA Negeri 7 Ambon. *JURNAL TAHURI*, 19(1), 29–35. <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol19issue1page29-35>
- Asmawati, A., Ulya, R. H., & Jasril, J. (2023). A Sociological and Mimesis Studies on the Forms of Social Issues and Critique in Indonesian Novels. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 15(3), 2674–2689. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i3.3159>
- Banegas, D. L., & Gerlach, D. (2021). Critical language teacher education: A duoethnography of teacher educators' identities and agency. *System*, 98(12), 102474. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2021.102474>
- Burger, C. (2022). Humor Styles, Bullying Victimization and Psychological School Adjustment: Mediation, Moderation and Person-Oriented Analyses. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(18), 11415. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph191811415>
- Ceha, J., Lee, K. J., Nilsen, E., Goh, J., & Law, E. (2021). Can a Humorous Conversational Agent Enhance Learning Experience and Outcomes? *Proceedings of the 2021 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3411764.3445068>
- Cook, J., Ecker, U. K. H., Trecek-King, M., Schade, G., Jeffers-Tracy, K., Fessmann, J., Kim, S. C., Kinkead, D., Orr, M., Vraga, E., Roberts, K., & McDowell, J. (2023). The cranky uncle game, combining humor and gamification to build student resilience against climate misinformation. *Environmental Education Research*, 29(4), 607–623.

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2022.2085671>
- Daniels, Karen. (2019). Notions of agency in early literacy classrooms: Assemblages and productive intersections. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 21(4), 568–589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468798419866489>
- Domínguez Romero, E., & Bobkina, J. (2021). Exploring critical and visual literacy needs in digital learning environments: The use of memes in the EFL/ESL university classroom. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 40(12), 100783. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100783>
- Doyle, L., McCabe, C., Keogh, B., Brady, A., & McCann, M. (2020). An overview of the qualitative descriptive design within nursing research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 25(5), 443–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987119880234>
- Drani, A., Adisaputera, A., & Wuriyani, E. P. (2021). Effectiveness of Using Folklore Text-Based Learning Media Literacy in Class X Students of MAN Tg. Pura. *Budapest International Research and Critics in Linguistics and Education (BirLE) Journal*, 4(1), 377–391. <https://doi.org/10.33258/birle.v4i1.1625>
- Dzulikfli Isadaud, M., Dzikrul Fikri, & Muhammad Imam Bukhari. (2022). The Urgency Of English In The Curriculum In Indonesia To Prepare Human Resources For Global Competitiveness. *DIAJAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 1(1), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.54259/diajar.v1i1.177>
- Erdoğan, F., & Çakıroğlu, Ü. (2021). The educational power of humor on student engagement in online learning environments. *Research and Practice in Technology Enhanced Learning*, 16(1), 9–20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41039-021-00158-8>
- Fauzia, N., Kuswardani, R., Rosyid, A., Abida, F. I. N., & Darma, D. B. (2023). Employing Traditional Stories to Enhance Critical Thinking Skills of Junior High School Students. *Humanitatis: Journal of Language and Literature*, 10(1), 147–158. <https://doi.org/10.30812/humanitatis.v10i1.3184>
- Fitria, T. N. (2023). Breaking the Ice in the Classroom: Using Ice Breaking in the Teaching and Learning Process. *Borneo Journal of English Language Education*, 5(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.35334/bjele.v5i1.4210>
- Fitriyah, A., Ayatin, R., Sugiarti, R., Rozak, A., & Pujiatna, T. (2024). Instructional Design of Problem-Based Learning Models: A Strategy for Improving Students' Critical Thinking Abilities in Learning News Texts. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 12(4), 2088. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v12i4.11675>
- Fotopoulou, A. (2021). Conceptualising critical data literacies for civil society organisations: agency, care, and social responsibility. *Information, Communication & Society*, 24(11), 1640–1657. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1716041>
- Häggström, M., & Schmidt, C. (2021). Futures literacy – To belong, participate and act!: An Educational perspective. *Futures*, 132(2), 102813. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2021.102813>
- Hossain, M. S., Alam, M. K., & Ali, M. S. (2024). Phenomenological Approach in the Qualitative Study: Data Collection and Saturation. *ICRRD Quality Index Research Journal*, 5(2), 148–172. <https://doi.org/10.53272/icrrd.v5i2.4>
- Hukubun, Y., Rumalean, I., & Solissa, E. M. (2022). Learning to Write Instructions: Implementation of 21st Century Life Skills Innovation. *JURNAL TAHURI*, 19(1), 20–28. <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol19issue1page20-28>
- Intiana, S. R. H., Prihartini, A. A., Handayani, F., Mar'i, M., & Faridi, K. (2023). Independent Curriculum and the Indonesian Language Education throughout the Era of Society 5.0: A

- Literature Review. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 15(1), 911–921. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i1.3140>
- Ismawati, E., Hersulastuti, H., Amertawengrum, I. P., & Anindita, K. A. (2023). Portrait of Education in Indonesia: Learning from PISA Results 2015 to Present. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 22(1), 321–340. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.1.18>
- Kaluarachchi, K. A. D. P. (2025). Philosophical Approaches to Qualitative Research (Positivism, Phenomenological Approach & Critical Social Sciences). *Sri Lanka Journal of Social Work*, 8(2), 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.4038/sljsw.v8i2.11>
- Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., Garcia, L.-G., Kelly, L., Espinoza, M., & Cordova, J. (2021). Critical professional development and the racial justice leadership possibilities of teachers of colour in K-12 schools. *Professional Development in Education*, 47(1), 89–101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1814387>
- Litually, S. J., Wenno, E. C., & Serpara, H. (2022). Systematic Literature Review of Scientific Journal: Translation Technique of Literary Text of Poetry. *JURNAL TAHURI*, 19(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol19issue1page1-9>
- Lubis, F. K., & Bahri, S. (2021). Enhancing Students' Literacy Competence Through Writing Bilingual Folklore Book by IT: Process Approach. *Randwick International of Education and Linguistics Science Journal*, 2(1), 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v2i1.205>
- Manuputty, R. (2022). Enhancing Students' Critical Reading Skills in Teaching Argumentative Essay. *JURNAL TAHURI*, 19(1), 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol19issue1page36-46>
- Maulidiah, R. H., Nisa, K., Rahayu, S., Irma, C. N., & Fitrianti, E. (2023). Multicultural Education Values in the Indonesian Textbooks: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(3), 624–635. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1303.11>
- Mulisa, F. (2022). When Does a Researcher Choose a Quantitative, Qualitative, or Mixed Research Approach? *Interchange*, 53(1), 113–131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-021-09447-z>
- Neff, P., & Dewaele, J.-M. (2023). Humor strategies in the foreign language class. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 17(3), 567–579. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2022.2088761>
- Parlindungan, F., Rifai, I., Nuthihar, R., & Dewayani, S. (2024). Evaluating Indonesian Hero Stories Featured in Children's Literature. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*, 27(2), 931–947. <https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v27i2.8787>
- Polizzi, Gianfranco. (2021). Internet users' utopian/dystopian imaginaries of society in the digital age: Theorizing critical digital literacy and civic engagement. *New Media & Society*, 25(6), 1205–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211018609>
- Pranoto, B. E., & Suprayogi. (2021). Insights from Students' Perspective of 9GAG Humorous Memes Used in EFL Classroom. *Proceedings of the Thirteenth Conference on Applied Linguistics (CONAPLIN 2020)*, 72–76. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210427.011>
- Putri, I. L., Andayani, A., & Wardani, N. E. (2024). Social Criticism and Morality in "Subversif!" Drama by Faiza Mardzoeki as Literature Teaching Materials. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*, 12(1), 487. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v12i1.8828>
- Qatrinada, C., & Apoko, T. W. (2024). Exploring The Use of Narrative Texts in Teaching Writing for EFL Classroom. *Edulitics (Education, Literature, and Linguistics) Journal*, 9(1), 62–74. <https://doi.org/10.52166/edulitics.v9i1.6536>
- Şahin, Ahmet. (2021). Humor Use in School Settings: The Perceptions of Teachers. SAGE

- Open*, 11(2), 21582440211022692. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211022691>
- Sarah, Y. (2022). Study on EFL Classroom Management in Classroom at SMP Negeri 13 Ambon. *JURNAL TAHURI*, 19(1), 10–19. <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol19issue1page10-19>
- St-Amand, J., Smith, J., & Goulet, M. (2024). Is teacher humor an asset in classroom management? Examining its association with students' well-being, sense of school belonging, and engagement. *Current Psychology*, 43(3), 2499–2514. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04481-9>
- Storm, S., & Jones, K. (2021). Queering critical literacies: disidentifications and queer futurity in an afterschool storytelling and roleplaying game. *English Teaching: Practice & Critique*, 20(4), 534–548. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ETPC-10-2020-0131>
- Sudarmo, S., Arifin, A., Jacob Pattiasina, P., Wirawan, V., & Aslan, A. (2021). The Future of Instruction Media in Indonesian Education: Systematic Review. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 13(2), 1302–1311. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v13i2.542>
- Supardi, S. (2024). Power Relations and Media Narratives in Implementation of the Smart Indonesia Program: A Case Study of Policy Perspective in Indonesia. *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences (PJLSS)*, 22(2), 22985. <https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.2.001634>
- Tabelessy, N., & Umkeketony, S. (2022). Causes of Code Mixing in Interaction Learning Indonesian for Class VIII SMP Negeri 1 Ambon. *JURNAL TAHURI*, 19(1), 55–59. <https://doi.org/10.30598/tahurivol19issue1page55-59>
- Tsukawaki, Ryota, & Imura, Tomoya. (2020). Students' Perception of Teachers' Humor Predicts Their Mental Health. *Psychological Reports*, 125(1), 98–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294120972631>
- Umar, Muhammad Aulia Taufiqi, & M Bambang Purwanto. (2024). Promoting Religious Moderation through English Language Teaching: Strategies and Challenges in Islamic Educational Settings. *ETERNAL (English Teaching Journal)*, 15(2), 192–202. <https://doi.org/10.26877/eternal.v15i2.443>
- Williams, Olivia A. (2022). Critical Literacy in Practice: How Educators Leverage Supports and Overcome Challenges to Enact Critical Literacy Pedagogy in Their Classrooms. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, 71(1), 323–340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23813377221115190>
- Winhar, A. A. P. (2022). Cultivating Gender Sensitivity & Critical Reading Skills Using Fiction. *SALASIKA Indonesian Journal of Gender Women Child and Social Inclusion s Studies*, 4(2), 107–133. <https://doi.org/10.36625/sj.v4i2.91>