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PONTIFICIA UNIVERSIDAD
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Discovering the inner comedian in 12th
graders; Developing Intercultural
competence through stand-up comedy.

Trabajo de Titulación para optar al Grado
de Licenciado en Educación y al Título de
Profesor de Inglés

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In modern ESL/EFL settings, culture and language are perceived as inseparable items, as two sides of a coin. Terms such as *linguaculture* (Kramsch, 1989) or *language-and-culture* (Byram & Morgan, 1993) portray the close relationship between these concepts. Under this premise, the main task of the EFL teacher must be to incorporate culture in their teaching to help their students make the best out of the English lessons.

Why is it important to do so? Because culture provides the context to make meaning of language and, at the same time, language allows us to understand culture by describing it.

Humor can prove to be an effective tool to accomplish what has been stated above by incorporating cultural features into the EFL classroom. The use of humor in the EFL classroom provides the teacher with potential benefits such as lowering students' anxiety (Gorham & Christophel, 1990; Chee, 2006), increasing students' participation, raising their retention levels, and improving the class atmosphere itself (Aboudan, 2009; Bell, 2009).

Apart from the benefits that the incorporation of humor in an EFL setting can provide to the classroom dynamics, it can also prove to be quite effective in language teaching as humor helps students to learn vocabulary, syntax, and semantics, as well as it gives them the opportunity to interact with a different culture, keeping in mind that humor is deeply connected to culture (Bell, 2009). All of the benefits mentioned above can help to lower what Krashen (1982) has defined as "Affective Filter." This concept refers to the notion that language acquisition can be affected by the students' emotions and feelings towards learning a second language, and it can be prompted by the students' anxiety, stress and self-motivation.

Although the use of humor could present some difficulties for language teachers, such as having students feeling uncomfortable with or not being capable of being humorous in a different language, or having discipline problems inside the classroom, humor is still thought to be a useful tool to consider when preparing lessons.

Bringing these ideas to the Chilean reality, humor has been cast aside by many teachers who consider that the classroom environment could be affected by an excess of humor, and they still keep the notion of the classroom as a “serious” place where only formal instruction can take place (Bryant, Comisky & Zillman, 1979).

Additionally, we can see that apart from not considering the use of humor in EFL teaching, the MINEDUC programs for 12th graders place little emphasis on developing intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is seen as “cultural diversity” that has to be acknowledged and fostered in the EFL classroom, but the MINEDUC does not provide teachers with any tools or hints to actually deal with this concept (MINEDUC program: 17-18).

Under this scenario, the elective course for 12th graders herein proposed seeks to develop the notion of critical cultural awareness (Byram, Nichols & Stevens 2001) that is, having students who can “evaluate perspectives, practices and products of both home and target cultures” (Byram, 1997). Apart from the previous point, the purpose of this course is to gain insight into another culture’s humor and how it portrays said culture.

To accomplish that objective, students will be exposed to stand-up comedy, as it analyzes a given culture in order to come up with jokes that are to be understood by the members of that culture. Stand-up comedy is recognized

by the participants of a culture not only because they are funny, but also because the audience can easily relate to the situations being described, thus making it more appealing to the audience.

As described above, stand-up comedians can show both sides of a culture, what is good and not so good about them, and this can help teachers to incorporate a whole new set of ideas and activities into the classroom that might be of the students' interest.

This project will provide students with the necessary tools and strategies to: (a) comprehend SL humor morefully; (b) compare SL culture and their own through the study of humor in stand-up comedy; and (c) to develop oral skills in SL.

Literature Review

In order to understand the purpose of this project, it is necessary to define some key concepts that are going to be used in its development.

Culture

Culture is a term that has been defined by many authors from different fields and, as a result of that, there is not a single definition of this concept. Moran (2001) presents five interactive components that are present in the cultural phenomena. These components are (a) Cultural Products: any artifact produced or adopted by members of a culture used to carry out cultural practices; (b) Cultural Practices: actions and interactions that members of a culture participate in, either individually or in groups; (c) Cultural Perspectives: set of values, beliefs and attitudes that are shared by the members of a culture; (d) Cultural Communities: social contexts and groups in which members of a community carry out their cultural practices; and Cultural Persons: each member of a community that has built up his/her own culture within a broader culture.

Moran (2001) compares culture with an iceberg where some cultural aspects are explicit, located at the tip of the iceberg, whereas other cultural aspects are tacit, thus located below the surface of the iceberg, covered by the sea. The cultural aspects that are located on the surface of the iceberg are Cultural Products, Cultural Practices, Cultural Communities and Cultural Persons because these aspects are the ones that can be experienced and identified by the participants of a given culture. The aspect that lies beneath the

surface of the iceberg is Cultural Perspective because it is related to beliefs, values and attitudes that are invisible to people but have an impact on all the other cultural aspects.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) is a term that was coined by Byram (1997) and refers to:

“A combination of attitudes, knowledge, understanding and skills applied through action which enables one either singly or together with others to:

- Understand and respect people who are perceived to have different cultural affiliations from oneself.
- Respond appropriately, effectively, and respectfully when interacting and communicating with such people.
- Establish positive and constructive relations with such people.
- Understand oneself and one's own multiple cultural affiliations through encounters with cultural 'difference'.”

Humor

It is difficult to come up with a definition that can accurately describe what humor is, as something that a person might find humorous might not be for others. Stroud (2013) simplifies its definition as “something visual or audible which results in laughter (rather than just increased interest for example) because it is amusing.”

Stroud (2013) explores the use and relevance of humor in EFL Japanese classrooms. The author describes the findings of surveys with 104 Japanese high school students, plus a set of interviews with EFL teachers. He concludes that the advantages are: noticeable positive effects perceived as improvements in retention, willingness to participation, enjoyment in learning and classroom atmosphere, as well as a lowering of anxiety. In addition, the study found that the constraints to using humor in the classroom are: teacher disapproval,

student confidence issues and language problems with being humorous in the L2. Finally, the author proposes a ten-step guideline for teachers to effectively use humor in the EFL classroom. However, this guideline will not be considered for the purpose of this workshop as it aims at providing teacher with tools to include humor in their language classrooms, but not to be applied in a humor-based workshop.

In Stroud's (2013) study, this definition made more sense to the students that participated in it, so it will be helpful for the purpose of this project as well.

Humor in the classroom. Stroud (2013) presents the potential benefits that the use of humor can bring to the EFL classroom. These are the following:

- Lowered student anxiety
- Improved retention
- Improved student participation
- Increased enjoyment in learning for students
- A more comfortable classroom atmosphere.

Universal Humor and Cultural Humor

Schmitz (2002) makes a distinction between different types of humor that can be applied to the EFL classroom and refers to two types in particular. Universal humor goes beyond the barriers of culture and it is universally understood and shared by people (Example 1), whereas cultural humor points out to humor that belongs to a specific culture and in order to fully understand it,

people need to have knowledge about the culture to which that specific humor is referring (Example 2).

1. Slipping on a banana peel.
2. "I was born in a mixed raced family during the apartheid, so I was born a crime"

Comedians such as Mr. Bean or the three stooges appeal to universal humor, by evidencing human tendency to be oblivious and favoring self-involvement. In the other hand, Stand-up comedians such as Trevor Noah, Pablo Francisco, or *Dinamita Show* appeal to specific features of the culture in which they are inserted.

Stand-up Comedy

Dictionary.com defines stand-up comedy as "a comic monologue performed by one person standing on a stage; also called stand-up" And the topics covered by stand-up comedians will vary depending on many factors such as their political, religious views on life, their backgrounds, etc.

This genre has been a part of American humor since early 1800's in minstrel shows (a form of comedy popular in the US during the 1800's which consisted of white actors painting their faces black and mocking African Americans), but the term "stand-up comedy" was coined somewhere around 1940's when TV shows such as The Ed Sullivan Show started presenting comedians along with musical shows. Comedians such as George Carlin and his 1972's "Seven Words You Can Never Say on Television" have helped reshape the genre and have provided other comedians with a framework to work with.

Nowadays, stand-up comedy has become the most popular comedy style in America, with programs such as Saturday Night Live that mixes stand-up with sketches and allows new generations of comedians to develop and gain public acclaim. Shows such as “Club de la Comedia” have helped to popularize this genre in Chile.

Needs Analysis

To establish the relevance of this project, 42 students from Colegio Ruben Castro (a semi-private school) were surveyed. The survey consisted of 12 statements on the following Likert scale: (a) Totally disagree, (b) Slightly disagree, (c) I don't know, (d) Slightly agree, (e) Totally agree. Additionally, one open-ended question was meant to ascertain students' interest in this project. (See Appendix 1)

Four questions focused on present situation analysis (PSA) by asking the students about the main characteristics of their English language lessons. In addition, six questions were designed to analyze the language situation (LSA) by asking students about the language skills they feel comfortable with. Finally, two questions sought to determine the materials students prefer to work with when learning a foreign language (TSA) (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998).

Results

In terms of the present situation analysis, students consider that they receive enough input from their teacher, which means that the listening skills were accounted on in the designing this workshop. However, the students' answers also reveal that they are not sure that they learn about another country's culture while learning the language, which leads us to believe that their English class solely focuses on developing grammatical features of the language. This information is useful for the purpose of this project as it shows that the concept of culture is not being properly addressed in their language

class. Thus, students may benefit from a workshop that includes culture as an essential part of their learning process.

The LSA showed that, even though the students feel comfortable working individually, they prefer to work in pairs or groups. This fact helped design activities that foster collaborative work. Additionally, students feel comfortable with their current level of English, which means that they are able to communicate effectively in the target language without necessarily being proficient at it. And in terms of the language skills, most students like activities that involve both productive and receptive skills. This allowed for a wide range of activities to design this project.

Finally, TSA revealed that students are familiar with both American and Chilean comedy, which allows the teacher to work with different comedians when designing the workshop. The students also feel that it is important to understand a culture in order to learn the language, which is essential for the acquisition of the target language as has been stated above.

Syllabus Design

As was mentioned in the introduction to this project, in order to help students to develop the necessary skills to grasp some cultural features of the target culture through humor, a syllabus that allows them to develop their linguistic skills is herein proposed.

In order to do so, a mixture of a situational syllabus and a task-based syllabus has been designed. A situational syllabus provides students with the social context in which language is being used, so they will be presented with specific humorous situations to use language. A task-based syllabus allows students to use the target language to carry out specific tasks. This will help the teacher to work on the other language skills and not focusing on a specific one. This allows the syllabus design to focus on comprehensive activities that develop the four language skills.

Course description

- Name of the workshop: Discovering the Inner Comedian in 12th graders:
Developing Intercultural Competence through stand-up comedy.
- Type of workshop: Elective.
- Area: English.
- Subarea: Culture.
- Audience: 15-20 students from year 12th in a semi-private school.
- English level: Intermediate
- Lessons: 90 minutes each, once a week´

Assessment

The assessment of the different activities in this workshop will be divided into three types:

Self-assessment: By the end of each lesson students will have to comment on what they have learned and evaluate their participation. This assessment will be 15% of the final grade of the workshop.

Oral Presentations: By the end of module 2, students will be asked to give an oral presentation based on one of the topics discussed. This presentation will be 30% of the final grade. In module 3, each student will have to prepare a 5-minute monologue on one of the aspects of the American culture that they found the most interesting. This monologue will be 35% of the final grade.

Reaction Paper: By the end of module 1, students will be asked to write a reaction paper between 200-300 words based on one of the videos studied in the module. This assessment will be 20% of their final grade.

Course Requirements

- **Materials:** They will be provided by the teacher.
- **Attendance:** Students must attend at least 75% of the lessons.
- **Punctuality:** Students must arrive on time, but they will have the chance to enter the class within the first 15 minutes of it.

Scope and Sequence

The course will be divided into three modules and each module is composed of four lessons. Details of each module can be seen in table 1.

Table 1.		
Name of the module	General objective	Lessons
Unit 1: What is comedy?	Students will be able to identify the main characteristics of comedy and American humor.	Lesson 1: What is comedy? Specific objective: Students will be able to identify the basic components of comedy.
		Lesson 2: Introduction to stand-up comedy. Specific objective: Students will be able to identify the basic features of stand-up comedy.
		Lesson 3: What is politically correct in stand-up? Specific objective: Students will differentiate between what is politically correct in everyday life and in stand-up.
		Lesson 4: Evaluation Students will have to write a reaction paper between 200-300 words to one of the videos discussed in class. Specific objective: To produce a coherent written text about the topics in the unit.
Unit 2: American politics and religion through stand-up.	Students will be able to understand the concepts underlying American stand-up comedy.	Lesson 1: An overview of American politics and religion. Specific objective: Students will distinguish the most relevant ideals behind American culture.
		Lesson 2: Politics in stand-up Specific objective: Students will recognize examples of political stand-up comedy. Students will compare US politics to their own country's politics.
		Lesson 3: Religion in stand-up Specific objective: Students will recognize examples of religion-based stand-up.
		Lesson 4: Evaluation Students will have to prepare an oral presentation on one of the topics discussed in class. Specific objective: To produce a coherent oral text using topic-related vocabulary.
Unit 3: Racial and migratory issues in the US.	Students will be able to understand the relevance of racial and migratory issues to the "melting pot" American imagery.	Lesson 1: African-Americans Specific objective: Students will identify the characteristics of the African-American culture. Students will understand the relevance of this type of stand-up.
		Lesson 2: Latinos through the eyes of Latino-Americans. Specific objective: Students will recognize the characteristics of the Latin culture in the US. Students will compare their perception of the

		<p>Latin culture with the perception of Latin Americans in the US.</p> <p>Lesson 3: Course Evaluation. Self-Assessment and peer assessment. Specific objective: Students will be able to identify their main strengths and weaknesses.</p> <p>Lesson 4: Final Evaluation Students will have to prepare a 5-minute monologue on one aspect of the American culture that they found the most interesting. Specific objective: Students will be able to produce a coherent oral text using topic-related vocabulary. Students will be able to show their understanding of the topics covered.</p>
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Sample Activities



Lesson 1 - Module One

What is comedy?

By the end of this class you will be able to:

- Identify the basic components of comedy.

Let's get to know each other!

- Get in pairs with a classmate you don't know and answer the following questions:
 - a) What is your name?
 - b) How old are you?
 - c) Where and with whom do you live?
 - d) What are your hobbies?
 - e) What was your motivation to take this workshop?
- Now, sit in a semicircle.
 - When the teacher calls your name, you and your partner will have to stand in front of the class and you will have to introduce your partner to the rest of the class based on the information provided in the previous section.

Example: He is Luis Bustos, he is 25 years old and lives in Valparaíso with his parents and sisters. He likes to listen to music, hang out with his friends and play football. His motivation to take this class is to learn about a new culture in an interesting way.

Pay close attention to your classmates because you might be asked some questions about them!

Pre-Task Activity

Form groups of 4 and discuss the following questions and write down your answers in the designated space for each question:

Before watching the video	After watching the video
How would you define comedy?	
What is funny for you and why?	

Now, share your answers to the rest of the class.

You will watch the video: "What's the definition of comedy? Banana" by Addison Anderson.



While watching, answer the following questions:

1. What is a definition?
 - a) The true nature or essence of the defined thing.
 - b) Language-mapping that provides meaning to people.
 - c) The weirdest word to look up in the dictionary.
 - d) A true statement of affairs, the opposite of which cannot also be true.
2. Are all truths funny?
 - a) No, never.
 - b) Yes, always.
 - c) Sometimes.
 - d) Yes, but only if you wait a while to make fun of them.
3. Why do we need language?
 - a) To build reality and avoid chaos.
 - b) To send text messages.
 - c) To notice funny things.
 - d) To value laughter.
4. Why did Henri Bergson refuse to define comedy?
 - a) Because he didn't know how to define it.
 - b) Because it challenges automatic behavior.
 - c) Because it is infinite.
 - d) Because it wouldn't be funny.
5. What is the basis for comedy?
 - a) Banana peels.
 - b) Having an innate capacity for being funny and knowing many jokes.
 - c) Contradiction between what is expected to happen and what actually happens.
 - d) Being hit in the groin with a football.

Watch the video one more time in order to answer all questions.

Post-Activity

Plenary

Now that you have seen the video twice, go back to the chart in the pre-task activity.

Re-read their answers and to compare those ideas to what you understood from the video.

- Were they correct?
- Has your opinion on comedy changed?



Lesson 1 - Module Three

African-Americans and stand-up

By the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- Identify basic characteristics of the African-American culture.
- Understand the relevance of this type of stand-up.

Getting started!

What do you know about African-Americans?

Write down 3 sentences referring to what you have heard about African-Americans or their culture.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Activity

You will watch a video on African-Americans called “Funny South African Comedian Trevor Noah On Black Americans” by stand-up comedian Trevor Noah.



While watching, notice how the comedian refers to Black Americans. Write down the characteristics you find most interesting.

After watching the video:

Form groups of 3 and discuss the following question:

- Do you agree or disagree with how Noah portrays Black Americans? Back up your opinions with examples from the video and compare them with the sentences you wrote at the beginning of the lesson.

Plenary

Once everyone has finished discussing, share your opinions with the rest of the class in order try to come up with a single perspective on Black Americans.



Lesson 2 - Module Two

Politics in stand-up

By the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- Recognize examples of political stand-up comedy.
- Compare US politics to your own country’s politics.

Before we begin:

What can you tell me about Chilean politicians?

- Form groups of 3 and discuss the previous question.
- Complete the following chart by naming some of the characteristics of Chilean politicians.

Chilean politicians are:	

Keep this information at hand as you will use it later on.

Video

You will watch a video called: “Robin Williams breaks down the last ten years of U.S politics” in which comedian Robin Williams talks about the last 3 U.S Presidents.



While watching the video, pay close attention to what Robin Williams says about each President.

Complete the chart with information from the video. To do so, you will watch the video twice.

U.S President	Characteristics
Clinton	
Bush	
Obama	

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Compare what you wrote on the chart with you partner.

Plenary

- Compare the information you wrote on the first chart about Chilean politicians with the information in the second chart about U.S presidents.
- Are there any similarities between Chilean and American politicians?
- Are there any differences between them?

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Needs analysis' questionnaire

Questionnaire

The following questionnaire aims at gathering information from 12th year students regarding their perception on American humor and the possibility of including it in an elective workshop.

Read the instructions carefully and then answer the following questionnaire.

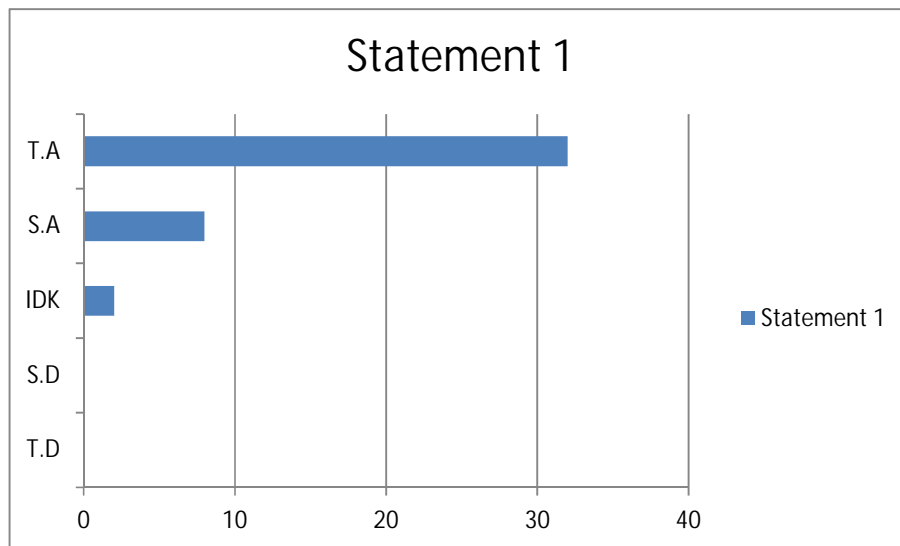
- Read each question/statement. If you have any doubts, ask the teacher.
- Choose the alternative that represents what you think and mark it with an "X". You can only choose ONE alternative.
- Hand in the questionnaire to the teacher once you finish.

I think that...	Totally disagree	Slightly disagree	I don't know	Slightly agree	Totally agree
My teacher uses English in the classroom.					
I learn about another country's culture in class.					
I learn about my own culture in class.					
My teacher's English lessons are interesting/entertaining.					
I feel more comfortable working individually.					
I feel more comfortable working in pairs/groups.					
I like watching sitcoms (The Big Bang Theory), stand-up comedy (Club de la Comedia, Saturday Night Live) or comedy in general.					
I have a good level of English.					
I like listening and reading activities.					
I like speaking and writing activities.					
I feel comfortable when presenting in front of an audience.					
It is helpful to understand a country's culture to learn their language.					

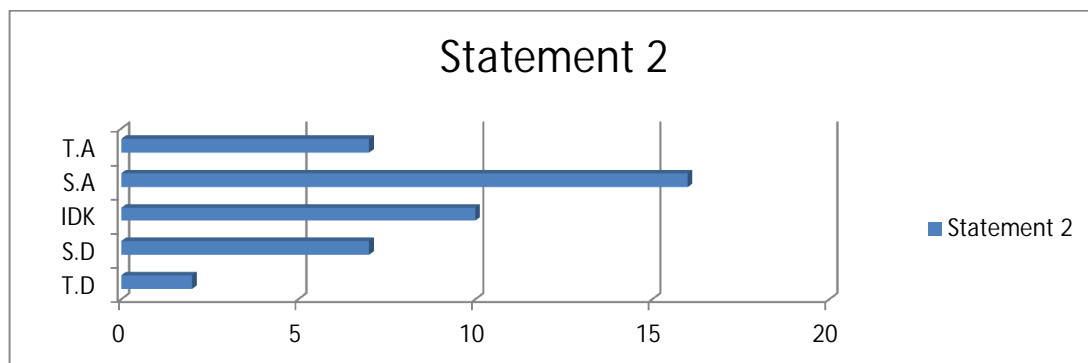
Would you participate in an elective workshop that incorporates American humor and culture? Why?

Appendix B: Needs Analysis' results

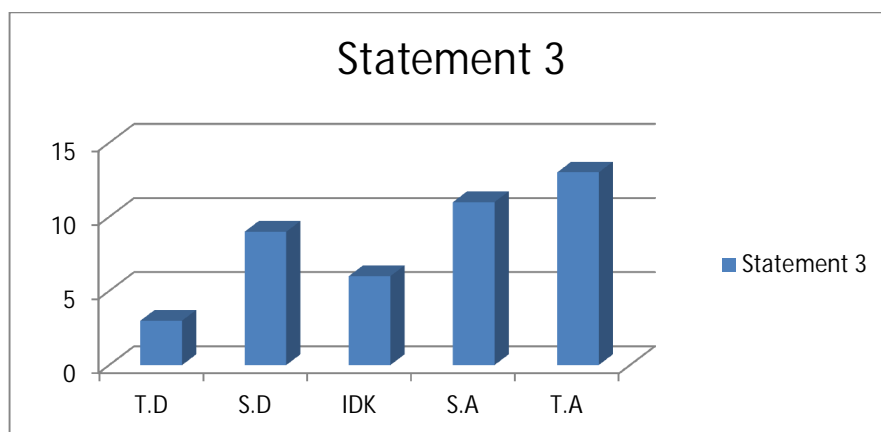
Statement 1: My teacher uses English in the classroom



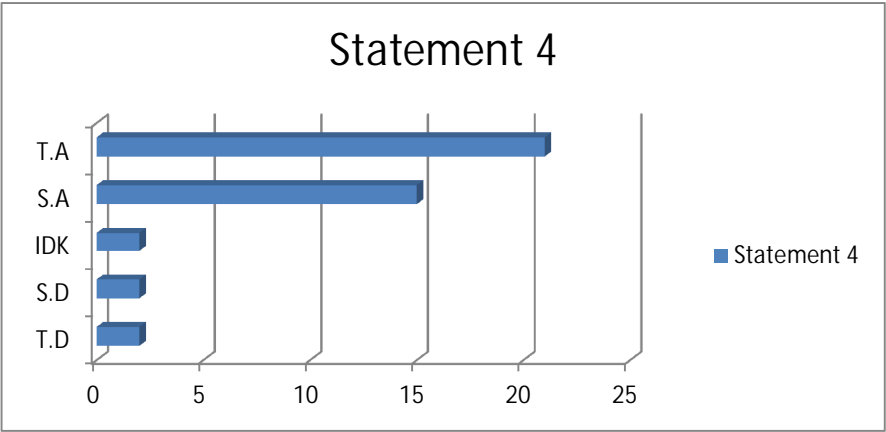
Statement 2: I learn about another country's culture in class.



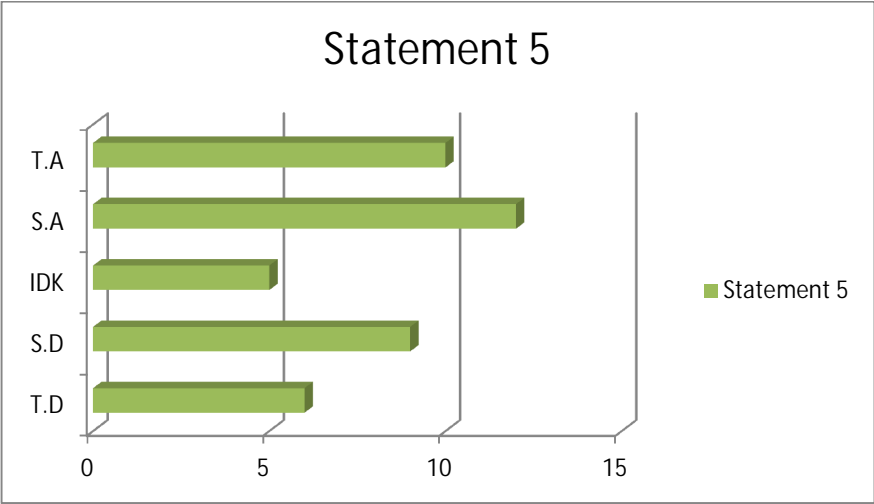
Statement 3: I learn about my own culture in class.



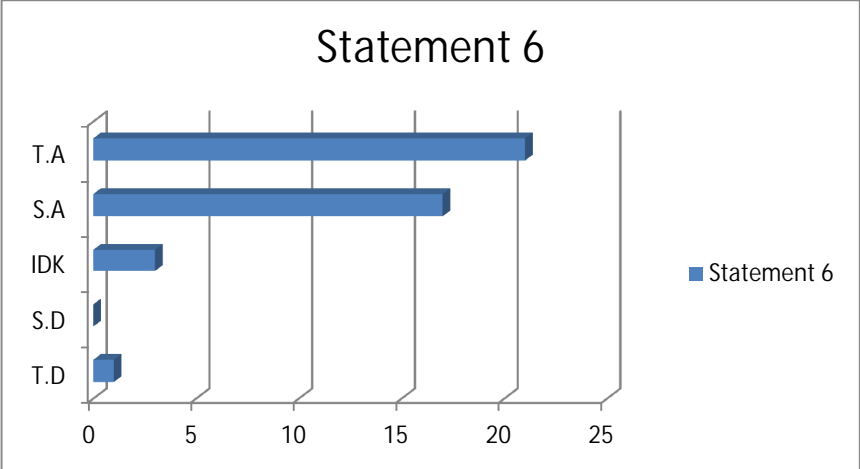
Statement 4: My teacher’s English lessons are interesting/entertaining.



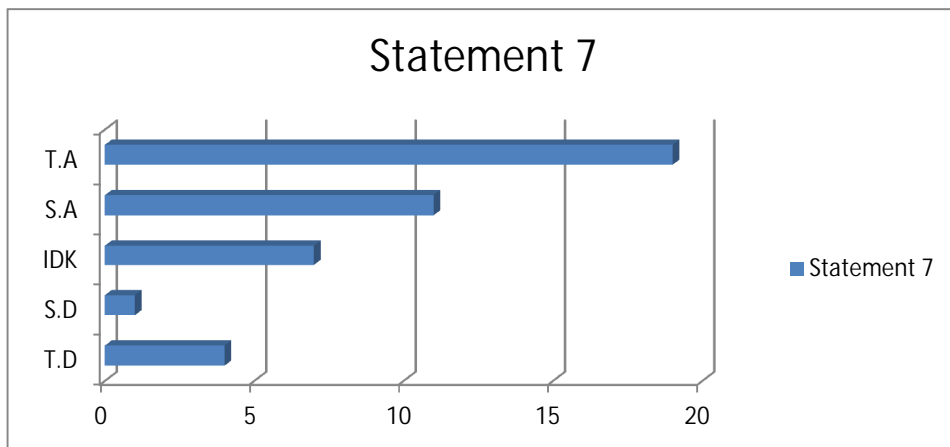
Statement 5: I feel more comfortable working individually.



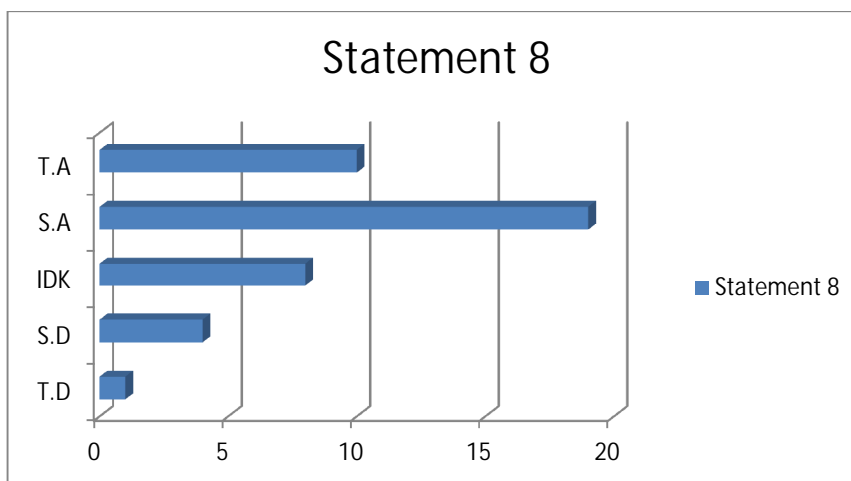
Statement 6: I feel more comfortable working in pairs/groups.



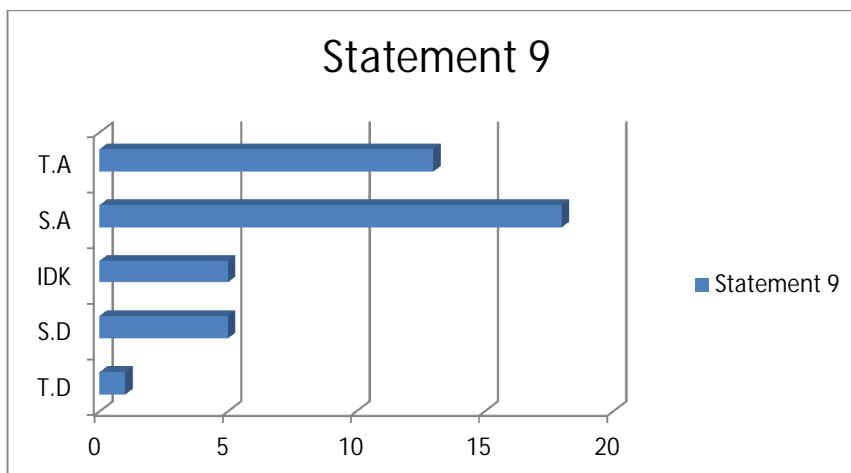
Statement 7: I like watching sitcoms (The Big Bang Theory), stand-up comedy (Club de la Comedia, Saturday Night Live) or comedy in general.



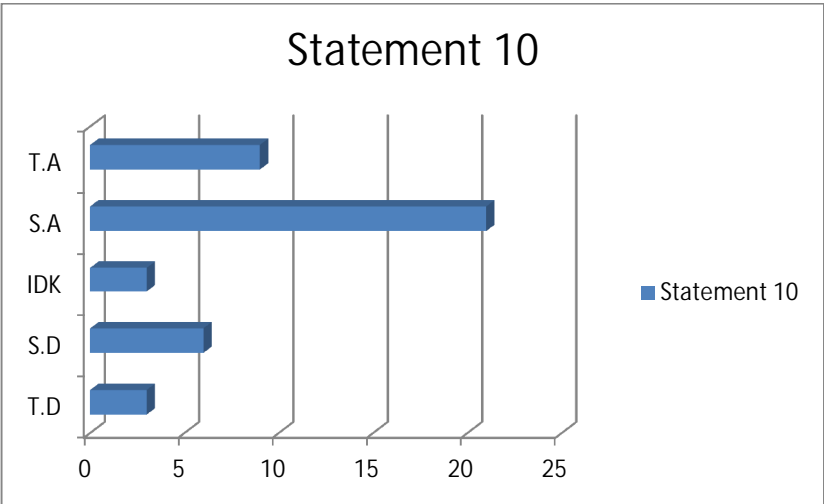
Statement 8: I have a good level of English.



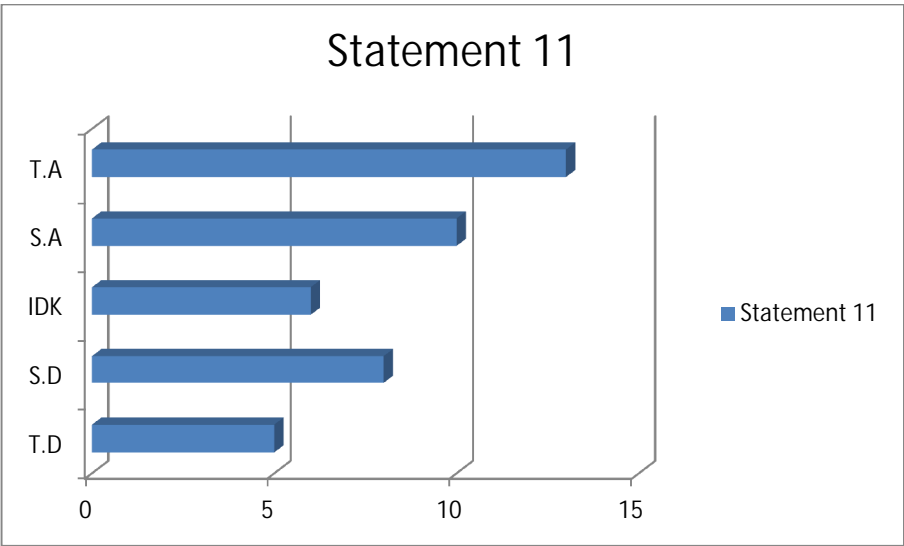
Statement 9: I like listening and reading activities.



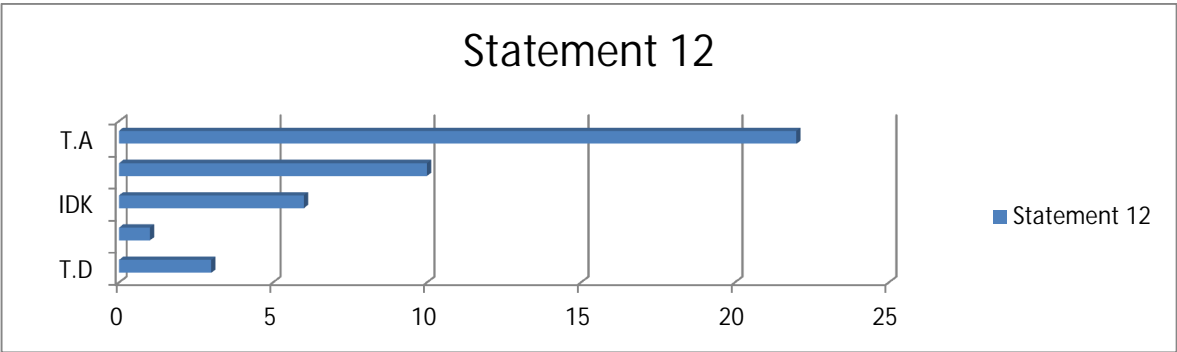
Statement 10: I like speaking and writing activities.



Statement 11: I feel comfortable when presenting in front of an audience.



Statement 12: It is helpful to understand a country's culture to learn their language.



Appendix C**Self-Assessment Rubric**

Instructions:

- Check what you achieved every class.
- Explain each activity.
- You do not have to check all the cells to get a 7.

In every class I:

Lesson	Participated in	Understood	Learned to	Created
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				