Jurnal Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan Borneo
Volume 7, Nomor 3, 2026
E-ISSN: 2714-6030, P-ISSN: 2987-7725, Halaman 348-364
https://doi.org/10.21093/jtikborneo.v7i3.14267

Lecturer Humor When AI Is at Hand: Students' Perceptions of AI, Explanations, and Engagement

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Article History:
Received: 23 Oktober 2026
Accepted: 10 November 2026
Published: 18 November 2026

Keywords:
artificial intelligence; engagement; English language learning; higher education; lecturer humor

Kata Kunci:
kecerdasan buatan; keterlibatan belajar; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris; pendidikan tinggi; humor dosen

A B S T R A C T

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has become part of how Indonesian university students learn English, yet research has focused mainly on how students use AI and not on which qualities of human teaching they still value when AI is readily available. This qualitative descriptive study explored how seventh-semester students in an Information Technology department at one vocational higher education used AI in an English course, how they compared AI-generated and lecturer explanations, and how they perceived their lecturer's humor in relation to engagement and AI use. Open-ended online questionnaire responses from 40 students in three classes were collected in December 2025 and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis supported by frequency counts. All 40 students used AI for English learning, most often ChatGPT (31) and Gemini (21), mainly for translation, explanations, and grammar, and 13 noted limitations such as unclear or inaccurate answers. Asked whose explanations they understood better, 21 chose the lecturer, 6 chose AI, and 13 gave mixed answers. Thirty-eight students viewed the lecturer's humor positively, associating it with a relaxed atmosphere, less boredom, enjoyment, and easier understanding, one approved of it with reservations, and one considered it a matter of personal preference. Seven contrasted the lecturer's humor with AI, whereas two noted that AI can also joke. Students appear to value AI for flexible individual support and the lecturer's humor for affective and relational support.

A B S T R A K

Kecerdasan buatan (AI) generatif telah menjadi bagian dari cara mahasiswa Indonesia belajar bahasa Inggris, tetapi penelitian sejauh ini lebih banyak membahas cara mahasiswa menggunakan AI daripada kualitas pengajaran manusia yang tetap mereka hargai ketika AI selalu tersedia. Penelitian deskriptif kualitatif ini mengkaji bagaimana mahasiswa semester tujuh jurusan Teknologi Informasi di salah satu perguruan tinggi vokasi di Indonesia menggunakan AI dalam mata kuliah bahasa Inggris, bagaimana mereka membandingkan penjelasan AI dengan penjelasan dosen, dan bagaimana mereka memandang humor dosen dalam kaitannya dengan keterlibatan belajar dan penggunaan AI. Jawaban kuesioner daring terbuka dari 40 mahasiswa di tiga kelas dikumpulkan pada Desember 2025 dan dianalisis dengan analisis tematik reflektif yang dilengkapi hitungan frekuensi. Seluruh 40 mahasiswa menggunakan AI untuk belajar bahasa Inggris, paling sering ChatGPT (31) dan Gemini (21), terutama untuk penerjemahan, penjelasan, dan tata bahasa, dan 13 mahasiswa menyebut keterbatasannya, seperti jawaban yang tidak jelas atau tidak akurat. Ketika ditanya penjelasan siapa yang lebih mudah dipahami, 21 memilih dosen, 6 memilih AI, dan 13 memberikan jawaban campuran. Sebanyak 38 mahasiswa memandang humor dosen secara positif dan mengaitkannya dengan suasana yang lebih santai, berkurangnya kebosanan, rasa senang, dan pemahaman yang lebih mudah; satu mahasiswa menyetujuinya dengan catatan, dan satu menganggapnya tergantung pada pribadi masing-masing. Tujuh mahasiswa membandingkan humor dosen dengan AI, sedangkan dua menyebut bahwa AI juga bisa melucu. Mahasiswa memandang AI sebagai dukungan belajar mandiri yang fleksibel dan humor dosen untuk dukungan afektif dan relasional.

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Citation: Maesaroh, D. T., & Biabdillah, F. (2026). Lecturer Humor When AI Is at Hand: Students' Perceptions of AI, Explanations, and Engagement. *Jurnal Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan Borneo*, *7*(3), 348-364. https://doi.org/10.21093/jtikborneo.v7i3.14267

A. Introduction

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) has quickly become part of everyday study in Indonesian higher education. In a survey of 340 undergraduates at a state university in Surabaya, the most common pattern of use was several times a week (33.53% of respondents), and habit was the strongest predictor of students' intention to keep using ChatGPT (Wahdah et al., 2025). Among Indonesian English education students, attitudes toward generative AI for writing are generally positive, although students also worry about dependency, reduced independent thinking, and the accuracy of AI output (Tunggay et al., 2025). National policy has followed this shift. In October 2024, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology issued a guideline that treats generative AI as a learning aid to be used responsibly rather than banned, while stressing that humans must remain in control and that AI should support rather than replace human work (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Riset dan Teknologi, 2024).

AI-based platforms can personalize learning by adjusting explanations, content, and learning pace to students' needs, thereby supporting motivation, participation, and individualized learning experiences (Bernal Párraga et al., 2025). Research with college students likewise indicates that AI can improve the English learning experience by providing personalized support and addressing individual differences among learners (Huang et al., 2025). Students use AI tools to obtain explanations, receive immediate feedback, check grammar, expand vocabulary, translate unfamiliar expressions, generate examples, and practice productive skills ((Akbarani, 2024; Du, 2023; Febriani, 2024; Xie, 2025). In this sense, AI offers important advantages in terms of accessibility, flexibility, personalization, and speed. In this study, AI is considered to be *at hand* when students have ready access to generative AI tools and use them for course-related English learning alongside lecturer-led instruction. How often the participants actually used AI is reported in the Method section.

Nevertheless, the increasing use of AI does not eliminate the need for human interaction in language learning. Recent research identifies limitations in AI-assisted English learning, particularly its difficulty in providing sufficiently contextualized feedback, sustaining authentic social interaction, and supporting productive skills in ways that fully reflect learners' communicative situations (Pido et al., 2025). Students may also become overly dependent on AI, while concerns about accuracy and the quality of AI-generated recommendations remain (Kasneci et al., 2023). In a survey of 399 university students, Chan and Hu (2023) found that students valued generative AI for personalized and immediate support but were also concerned about its accuracy and ethical use. These findings suggest that the value of AI should not be considered independently from the human and social dimensions of classroom learning.

This issue becomes particularly important when the lecturer's role is considered. AI can respond rapidly and repeatedly, but students' learning experiences are also shaped by how explanations are delivered, how classroom

relationships are developed, and how affective conditions for participation are created. Learner–instructor interaction, including communication, support, and a sense of presence, is closely tied to student satisfaction and learning, and students and instructors have expressed concern that AI may cross social boundaries even as it personalizes support (Seo et al., 2021). Among the social and affective resources that lecturers bring to this interaction, such as empathy, clarity, and personalized feedback, this study focuses on humor for two reasons. First, humor is one of the most visible ways in which lecturers shape the emotional climate and the teacher–student relationship. In an Indonesian university EFL class, students reported that their lecturers' lesson-related humor, teasing, and humorous comments made learning more enjoyable, reduced anxiety, relieved tension and boredom, and increased their willingness to participate (Purwanti et al., 2025). Second, humor can no longer be assumed to be an exclusively human resource: jokes produced by ChatGPT were rated as funny as, or funnier than, most human-written jokes in a recent comparison (Gorenz & Schwarz, 2024). Whether students still regard a lecturer's humor as something that AI does not offer is therefore an open empirical question rather than an assumption, which makes humor a useful lens for examining what students value in human teaching when AI is readily available. Clarity and personalized explanation, by contrast, are qualities that AI tools explicitly claim to provide; they are examined here through students' comparison of AI and lecturer explanations.

The affective dimension of humor is especially relevant to language learning, where anxiety, confidence, willingness to communicate, and the quality of teacher–student relationships can influence participation. A review of humor in ESL/EFL classrooms indicates that humor is related to motivation and self-esteem, suggesting that appropriately used humor can contribute to a more supportive learning environment (Lee & Amini, 2024). The evidence is not uniformly positive, however. Course-related teacher humor has been associated with more enjoyment and less boredom, whereas aggressive humor has been associated with less enjoyment and more boredom and anxiety (Bieg et al., 2017). In two experiments, humorous examples integrated into lesson content even lowered students' test performance, apparently by distracting them from the material (Bolkan et al., 2018). In this study, engagement is understood as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions (Hiver et al., 2024). Because engagement was not measured, these dimensions serve as a lens for interpreting students' accounts of how humor shaped their participation, rather than as variables.

These ideas can be framed by three strands of theory. The affective filter hypothesis holds that anxiety and low motivation can hinder language acquisition (Krashen, 1982), and research on foreign language classroom anxiety shows that anxiety is a distinct and common obstacle in language classes (Horwitz et al., 1986). Instructional humor processing theory proposes that humor supports learning when it is appropriate, relevant to the content, and perceived as funny by students (Wanzer et al., 2010). Reviews of research on humor in education, however, indicate that its effects depend on how it is used (Banas et al., 2011). Together, these perspectives suggest that humor may matter for language learners less as entertainment than as a way of shaping the emotional and relational conditions of learning.

Previous studies have examined students' uses of and attitudes toward AI in English learning (Febriani, 2024; Tunggay et al., 2025), the limitations of AI-assisted learning (Pido et al., 2025; Quang et al., 2025), and students' preferences between AI-generated and human feedback, which in one study of writing feedback were split nearly evenly (Escalante et al., 2023). Research on instructional humor has examined its emotional and cognitive correlates (Bieg et al., 2017; Bolkan et al., 2018) and students' perceptions of teacher humor in Indonesian EFL classes (Purwanti et al., 2025). Within the literature reviewed here, the two strands have not been brought together: no study we located asked students how they interpret a lecturer's humor in a course in which they also learn with AI. Students' perceptions matter for this question because students decide, task by task, whether to turn to AI or to the lecturer. Their accounts therefore show where the lecturer's role may be shifting, from being a primary source of linguistic information toward facilitating contextualized, social, and affective learning, and which aspects of teaching should be strengthened rather than displaced by AI.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore Indonesian Information Technology students' use of AI for English learning, their comparison of AI-generated and lecturer explanations, and their perceptions of their lecturer's humor in relation to engagement and AI use. It addresses four questions: (1) How do students use AI for English learning, and what benefits and limitations do they perceive? (2) How do students compare AI-generated explanations with the explanations of their English lecturer in this course? (3) How do students perceive their lecturer's humor in relation to their engagement? (4) How do students interpret the lecturer's humor in the context of their AI use? **Novelty statement:** Unlike previous studies, which examined either students' use of AI in English learning or teacher humor in EFL classes, this study examines lecturer humor in an English course in which every participant also learned with AI, and it asks students how they position that humor relative to AI. It contributes evidence from Indonesian IT students, a group with high everyday exposure to AI, and a student-derived account of which lecturer qualities remain distinct when AI explanations are always available.

B. Method

1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design (Bradshaw et al., 2017) to explore students' use and perceptions of AI in English learning (RQ1), their comparison of AI-generated and lecturer explanations (RQ2), and their perceptions of the lecturer's humor in relation to engagement (RQ3) and AI use (RQ4). This design was appropriate because the study aimed to stay close to participants' own accounts rather than to test a theory or measure effects. Data were collected through an online qualitative survey, that is, a questionnaire composed mainly of open-ended items. This format allows a whole cohort to answer in their own words and is suited to capturing the range of views within a group (Braun et al., 2021).

2. Research Setting, Time, and Course Context

The study was conducted in the Information Technology department at one vocational higher education in Indonesia, at the end of the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The English course is a compulsory 2-credit course. It was taught to three seventh-semester classes (7A, 7B, and 7C) by the same

lecturer and met once a week for 150 minutes over 16 weeks. The lecturer is one of the authors.

AI was part of most participants' English learning: all 40 participants reported using at least one AI tool for this purpose, 18 of them often or always and 19 sometimes (Table 1). The lecturer allowed AI for checking the word/ sentence meaning, grammar, giving explanation, or generating examples. The lecturer's humor was part of normal teaching and was not manipulated for the study. The humor types typically used in class were funny examples related to the material, self-disparaging remarks, playful teasing, and unrelated jokes both in Indonesian and English, or mixed. One example illustrates the kind of humor used in class. When teaching possessive pronouns, the lecturer showed that most possessive determiners take a final -s to become pronouns (your ? yours, her ? hers, our ? ours, their ? theirs), but that his remains his instead of becoming hiss. Her explanation was that a second s would make the word "too cold", because the letter s is pronounced es in Indonesian, which is also the Indonesian word for "ice". The joke is a bilingual pun tied directly to the grammar point being taught. It is therefore an instance of course-related humor (Bieg et al., 2017), and it also serves as a memory aid for an exception to the rule.

3. Participants

All students in the three classes were invited to complete the questionnaire, and participation was voluntary. Forty-two submissions were received from the 74 enrolled students. Two students submitted the form twice; only their first submissions were retained, giving 40 participants (7A = 10, 7B = 22, 7C = 8). The questionnaire did not ask for gender, age, or English proficiency, so the profile in Table 1 is limited to class, frequency of AI use, and the AI tools named. The adequacy of the data was checked through code saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022): when the responses were coded in order of submission, the last new code appeared in the 28th response, and the remaining 12 responses added no new codes. Because the participants were IT students who are likely to be comfortable with technology, their experiences may differ from those of students in other majors.

Table 1. Participant Profile by Class

Class	n	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	AI tools named most often
7A	10	1	4	4	1	Gemini (9), ChatGPT (7)
7B	22	1	9	11	1	ChatGPT (18), Gemini (11)
7C	8	0	3	4	1	ChatGPT (6), Gemini (1)
Total	40	2	16	19	3	ChatGPT (31), Gemini (21), Copilot (3), DeepSeek (3), other (9)

Note. Columns 3–6 show answers to "How often do you use AI to assist you in learning English?" No participant answered "never". Participants could name more than one tool.

4. Instrument and Data Collection

The questionnaire was developed by the researchers for this study, drawing on research on students' uses and perceptions of generative AI (Chan & Hu, 2023; Febriani, 2024) and on instructional humor (Bieg et al., 2017; Wanzer et al., 2010). It was created in Google Forms, and every item was written in English with an Indonesian translation; students could answer in either language. After name and class, it contained one closed item on the frequency of AI use (never, seldom, sometimes, often, or always) and five open items: (1) "What types of AI do you use?"; (2) "What do you think of using AI in learning English? Tell your experience in using AI."; (3) "Whose explanation do you understand better, the lecturer's explanation or AI's explanation?"; (4) "When explaining, the lecturer sometimes throws a joke or tells you something funny, while AI does not (particularly when you do not set it so). Do you think being a little humorous when explaining is good?"; and (5) "Write anything you want!" Responses were submitted between 9 and 14 December 2025 after the final exam and ensured not to affect the final score.

5. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All of each participant's open-ended answers were read together as one record. The analysis followed six phases: (1) familiarization through repeated reading of the original responses; (2) generating initial codes; (3) constructing candidate themes from related codes; (4) reviewing the themes against the coded excerpts and the full data set; (5) defining and naming the themes; and (6) writing up. Coding was primarily inductive and stayed close to students' wording. For RQ3, a deductive layer was added in which humor-related codes were mapped onto the behavioral, cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions of engagement (Hiver et al., 2024). Each participant's answer to item 3 was also classified as lecturer, AI, or mixed, and each answer to item 4 as positive, positive with reservations, neutral or relative, or negative. Codes were recorded in a spreadsheet with one row per participant, which allowed the number of participants contributing to each code and theme to be counted. These counts indicate how widely a view was shared, not how strongly it was held. Divergent cases were sought for every theme and are reported. Table 2 illustrates the analytic process.

Table 2. Example of the Analytic Process

Data excerpt (participant)	Initial code	Category	Theme (RQ)
"kalo ai kadang kadang ga jelas harus di tanya lagi" (AI is sometimes unclear and has to be asked again) (S22)	AI answer unclear; needs re-asking	Unclear AI explanations	Limits of AI (RQ1)
"Lecturers, because I can see the example and mistake directly and have more tips and trick for test TOEFL" (S06)	Lecturer shows examples and mistakes directly	Direct, interactive explanation	Preference for the lecturer (RQ2)

Data excerpt (participant)	Initial code	Category	Theme (RQ)
“Humor membuat suasana kelas lebih santai dan tidak tegang” (humor makes the classroom more relaxed and less tense) (S19)	Humor reduces tension	Emotional engagement	Humor and engagement (RQ3)
“membuat jarak Antara dosen dengan mahasiswa bebas ber ekspresi dan bertanya” (S03)	Humor reduces distance; freedom to ask	Social engagement	Humor and engagement (RQ3)

Note. S = student (S01–S40). Codes were developed from the original responses; English glosses are the authors’ translations.

6. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was addressed using the criteria described by Nowell et al. (2017). Credibility was supported by reporting the number of participants behind each theme, by presenting divergent cases alongside majority views, and by checking that every excerpt cited appears verbatim in the data set. Dependability and confirmability were supported by an audit trail: the coding spreadsheet records each participant’s original answers, codes, and theme assignments. Indonesian responses are quoted in the original and followed by an English translation; excerpts are presented with minimal editing and labeled with participant codes (S01–S40). Reflexivity was addressed because perceptions of a lecturer’s humor are open to social desirability bias, particularly when participants comment on someone who has authority over them (Bergen & Labonté, 2020).

7. Ethical Considerations

Participants were adults and were informed of the purpose of the study; participation was voluntary and did not affect grades. Names and e-mail addresses were removed before analysis and replaced with codes (S01–S40), and identifying details were removed from excerpts.

C. Results

The results are organized by research question. Table 3 summarizes the themes, the number of participants whose answers contributed to each theme, and an illustrative excerpt.

Table 3. Themes, Frequencies, and Excerpts

RQ	Theme	n (of 40)	Excerpt (English translation) and participant
1	AI as quick, flexible support for translation, explanation, grammar, and practice	31	“AI bisa memberikan penjelasan yang cepat, mudah dipahami, dan bisa diulang-ulang kapan saja” (AI can give quick, easy-to-understand explanations that can be repeated anytime) (S19)
1	Limits of AI: unclear, inaccurate, rigid, or answer-only responses	13	“kalo ai kadang kadang ga jelas harus di tanya lagi” (AI is sometimes unclear and has to be asked again) (S22)

RQ	Theme	n (of 40)	Excerpt (English translation) and participant
2	Preference for the lecturer: direct, interactive explanation	21	"Lecturers, because I can see the example and mistake directly" (S06)
2	Preference for AI: simpler and adjustable explanation	6	"bahasanya lebih sederhana dan bisa langsung menyesuaikan dengan kebutuhan saya" (its language is simpler and can adjust directly to my needs) (S14)
2	Mixed: both, each for different purposes	13	"Dosen memberikan pemahaman mendalam dan kontekstual, sementara AI menyediakan klarifikasi faktual dan fleksibilitas latihan optimal" (the lecturer gives deep, contextual understanding, while AI provides factual clarification and optimal flexibility for practice) (S23)
3	Humor relaxes the class and reduces tension (emotional)	12	"Humor membuat suasana kelas lebih santai dan tidak tegang" (humor makes the classroom more relaxed and less tense) (S19)
3	Humor relieves boredom and makes class enjoyable (emotional)	18	"Students need some refreshing such as jokes so that learning doesn't feel boring" (S02)
3	Humor supports focus, understanding, and recall (cognitive)	7	"saya lebih bersemangat mendengarkan, dan materi juga terasa lebih mudah dipahami" (I am keener to listen, and the material feels easier to understand) (S33)
3	Humor brings lecturer and students closer (social)	2	"bebas ber ekspresi dan bertanya" (free to express themselves and ask questions) (S03)
4	Humor as a human liveliness that AI lacks	7	"Dosen lebih ceria karena ada waktu-waktu untuk bercanda ketimbang AI" (the lecturer is more cheerful because there are times for joking, unlike AI) (S30)
4	AI can also joke	2	"jika mau ai menciptakan lolucon sambil menjelaskan itu sangat bisa, bahkan bisa menyesuaikan humor kita" (if you want AI to create jokes while explaining, it can, and it can even adapt to our humor) (S09)

Note. A participant could contribute to more than one theme.

1. Students' Use and Perceptions of AI in English Learning (RQ1)

All 40 participants reported using AI for English learning. The tools named most often were ChatGPT (31) and Gemini (21), followed by Copilot (3) and DeepSeek (3); nine named other tools. In their open answers, 31 participants described what they used AI for. The most common purposes were translating words and sentences (16), obtaining explanations of material (10), and checking grammar or sentence structure (8), followed by completing or checking tasks (6), speaking practice or conversation (6), generating examples

(5), and vocabulary (2). Students valued AI chiefly for its speed and availability. One explained that AI made learning “lebih mudah dan fleksibel karena saya bisa bertanya atau berlatih kapan saja” (easier and more flexible because I can ask or practice anytime) (S25), and another wrote that AI “bisa memberikan penjelasan yang cepat, mudah dipahami, dan bisa diulang-ulang kapan saja” (can give quick, easy-to-understand explanations that can be repeated anytime) (S19).

Thirteen participants also described limitations of AI. Four found AI explanations unclear or complicated; for example, “Kadang ai penjelasan ribet miss” (sometimes AI’s explanation is complicated, Miss) (S08) and “kalo ai kadang kadang ga jelas harus di tanya lagi” (AI is sometimes unclear and has to be asked again) (S22). Three reported inaccurate answers, including one who wrote that “AI sometimes can hallucinate” (S20). Two found AI responses off target or limited to bare answers, as in “Dari chatGPT itu terkadang hanya menuliskan jawabannya saja” (ChatGPT sometimes only writes the answer) (S29), and two described AI’s language as rigid or monotonous (S15, S24). One warned that AI use “can also lead to dependence” (S05).

2. Comparing AI-Generated and Lecturers’ Explanations (RQ2)

Table 4 shows how participants answered item 3.

Table 4. Participants’ Answers to “Whose Explanation Do You Understand Better?”

Answer	n (of 40)	Main reasons given
Lecturer	21	Explains directly; shows examples and mistakes; can be asked immediately when something is unclear; “more human”
AI	6	Simpler language; quick; adjustable to the student’s needs
Both or mixed	13	Both are easy to understand; each has strengths; depends on the student or the task; expressed as a proportion (“60:40”)
Total	40	

Preferences were not uniform: 21 participants preferred the lecturer, 6 preferred AI, and 13 gave mixed answers. Students who preferred the lecturer emphasized directness and the chance to ask. One chose lecturers “because I can see the example and mistake directly and have more tips and trick for test TOEFL” (S06), and another preferred “hearing the explanation directly from her rather than using ai” (S24). One student added that lecturers “not only explain narratively, but also teach from the heart” (S05).

Students who preferred AI emphasized simplicity and control: its explanations used “bahasanya lebih sederhana dan bisa langsung menyesuaikan dengan kebutuhan saya” (simpler language and can adjust directly to my needs) (S14). Simplicity thus divided the participants, because some found AI explanations simpler than the lecturer’s whereas others (S08, S22) found them more complicated. The participant who answered “60:40” illustrates this tension: “Honestly saya lebih paham penjelasan Ai, tapi bukan berarti penjelasan Miss itu susah dipahami, ada kalanya penjelasan Miss itu

lebih mudah dipahami daripada ai karena kata katanya ribet jadi menurut saya 60:40 deh" (honestly, I understand AI's explanation better, but that does not mean your explanation is hard to understand, Miss; sometimes your explanation is easier than AI's because its wording is complicated, so I would say 60:40) (S35). The 60 referred to AI and the 40 to the lecturer, so this student relied mainly on AI but turned to the lecturer when AI's wording became complicated. Several mixed answers described a similar division of labor, such as "I understand the lecturer's explanation better, but AI helps me when i need simpler explanations" (S17).

3. Students' Perceptions of Lecturer Humor and Engagement (RQ3)

Thirty-eight participants viewed the lecturer's humor positively. One approved with a reservation ("Ya sedikit", yes, a little) (S27), and one considered it a matter of personal preference: "it's relative, it's different for each person, there are those who can only focus in a serious situation and there are also those who are tense in that conditions" (S12). No participant rejected humor outright. Eleven answered with a brief affirmation and gave no reasons. As noted in the Method section, this largely positive picture must be read in light of the wording of item 4. The 29 participants who gave reasons are presented below according to the engagement dimension to which their reasons most closely relate.

Emotional engagement was mentioned most often. Eighteen participants said that humor relieved boredom or made the class enjoyable, for example, "Students need some refreshing such as jokes so that learning doesn't feel boring" (S02). One described humor as a brake: "kalo penjelasan terus tidak ada bercanda atau bisa di bilang rem penjelasan bisa jadi membosankan" (if the explanation goes on without joking, or what you could call a brake, it can become boring) (S22). Twelve said that humor relaxed the class and reduced tension, as in "Humor membuat suasana kelas lebih santai dan tidak tegang" (humor makes the classroom more relaxed and less tense) (S19).

Seven participants linked humor with cognitive engagement, that is, focus, understanding, or recall. The same participant continued that humor helped "sehingga saya lebih mudah fokus dan tidak cepat bosan" (so that I can focus more easily and do not get bored quickly) and made it easier to remember the material (S19), and another wrote that with humor "saya lebih bersemangat mendengarkan, dan materi juga terasa lebih mudah dipahami" (I am keener to listen, and the material feels easier to understand) (S33). Two participants described social engagement. One wrote that humor makes the "jarak antara dosen dengan mahasiswa bebas ber ekspresi dan bertanya" (distance between lecturer and students open, so that students are free to express themselves and ask questions) (S03), and another that it makes the lecturer "terlihat lebih akrab dan mudah didekati" (seem friendlier and more approachable) (S23). Students did not mention motivation or self-esteem, and they described humor in general terms rather than referring to particular jokes.

4. Lecturer Humor in the Context of AI Use (RQ4)

Seven participants contrasted the lecturer's humor with AI, even though only item 4 mentioned the two together. They described humor as what "distinguishes AI from a lecturer" (S05) and as "more human and lively" (S11),

described AI as lacking “emosi untuk melakukan candaan” (the emotion to joke) (S28), and wrote that the lecturer’s jokes are “lebih seru daripada kek ai” (more fun than, like, AI) (S08). One participant extended the contrast beyond humor: “AI tidak bisa menggantikan suasana kelas atau interaksi langsung seperti humor atau pengalaman pribadi yang biasanya disampaikan dosen” (AI cannot replace the classroom atmosphere or direct interaction, such as the humor or personal experiences that lecturers usually share) (S25).

Two participants challenged the premise of item 4. One wrote that “jika mau ai menciptakan lolucon sambil menjelaskan itu sangat bisa, bahkan bisa menyesuaikan humor kita” (if you want AI to create jokes while explaining, it can, and it can even adapt to our humor) (S09). The other explained that AI adapts to the user’s personality and had answered his jokes with jokes of its own after he started joking (S18). For these students, humor was not something AI lacked but something it could produce when prompted.

D. Discussion

1. AI as a Flexible but Imperfect Resource (RQ1)

The participants’ use of AI for translation, explanations, grammar, and practice is consistent with earlier findings that AI enhances accessibility, personalization, and learner autonomy in English education (Bernal Párraga et al., 2025; Febriani, 2024; Huang et al., 2025). The limitations students raised, namely unclear or complicated answers, inaccuracy, and rigid language, correspond with the limitations in contextual feedback and interaction identified by Pido et al. (2025) and with the concerns about accuracy and over-reliance reported by Quang et al. (2025) and Chan and Hu (2023). The use of AI to complete tasks also raises questions of academic integrity that the national guideline addresses (Ditjen Diktiristek, 2024) and that future studies could examine.

2. Lecturer and AI Explanations: A Non-Equivalent Comparison (RQ2)

The majority preference for the lecturer, alongside a substantial group with mixed views, differs somewhat from the near-even split between AI-generated and human feedback reported by Escalante et al. (2023), although both studies found that each source had clear advantages. We interpret students’ reasons as distinguishing between the informational accessibility of AI (codes such as “quick”, “anytime”, and “adjustable”) and the interactive, pedagogical value of the lecturer (codes such as “direct explanation”, “shows examples and mistakes”, and “can ask immediately”). This distinction is the researchers’ interpretation of these codes, not a phrase used by the students. The divided views on whether AI is simpler or more complicated than the lecturer suggest that what students value is the fit between an explanation and their current understanding, which the lecturer can adjust in real time and which AI adjusts only when the student asks well. This reading is consistent with the argument that effective use of ChatGPT for language learning requires new digital competencies (Kohnke et al., 2023).

Two qualifications limit this interpretation. First, the comparison was not between equivalent sources: students compared a lecturer who knew the course, its materials, and its students with general-purpose AI tools that they usually consulted without that context. Contextual explanation is therefore not

necessarily an inherent human advantage, because AI output can be contextualized through detailed prompts or uploaded course materials. Second, the comparison concerned one lecturer, so the findings describe students' views of this lecturer rather than of lecturers in general.

3. Humor, Engagement, and the Limits of Self-Report (RQ3)

Students' accounts of humor as relieving boredom, reducing tension, and helping them focus are consistent with findings from an Indonesian university EFL class, where students reported that lecturers' humor reduced anxiety, relieved boredom, and increased participation (Purwanti et al., 2025). They can also be read through the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982): a more relaxed and less tense atmosphere may lower the anxiety that discourages participation in language classes (Horwitz et al., 1986). In terms of engagement, the accounts concerned mainly its emotional dimension, less often its cognitive dimension, and only rarely its social dimension (Hiver et al., 2024).

The findings also differ from the literature in three ways. First, unlike the review by Lee and Amini (2024), which links humor with motivation and self-esteem, students in this study did not mention either; the value they placed on humor concerned atmosphere and attention. Second, some students reported that humor made material easier to understand and remember, whereas experimental evidence shows that humorous examples integrated into lesson content can lower test performance (Bolkan et al., 2018). Perceived ease of understanding should therefore not be equated with learning gains. Instructional humor processing theory predicts that benefits depend on the humor's relevance to the content (Wanzer et al., 2010), and the effects of humor differ by type, with course-related humor associated with enjoyment and aggressive humor with anxiety (Bieg et al., 2017). Because students described humor in general terms, the present data cannot show which types of humor produced the perceptions they reported. Third, the largely positive accounts are likely to be partly an artifact of the design. Item 4 invited agreement, the form was not anonymous, and students may have been reluctant to criticize a lecturer who had authority over them (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). The two divergent answers, which treated humor as a matter of degree or personal preference, are therefore informative: they suggest that the benefits students described are not universal.

4. Humor in the Context of AI (RQ4) and the Complementarity of AI and Lecturers

The contrasts students drew between the lecturer's humor and AI echo the premise of item 4, so they cannot be taken as independent evidence that students see humor as uniquely human. Two findings nonetheless qualify that premise. Some students extended the contrast in their own words, describing AI as rigid and emotionless and the lecturer as lively, cheerful, and able to share personal experience, which suggests that what they valued was the social delivery of humor by a known person rather than the jokes themselves. This reading is consistent with research identifying communication, support, and presence as central to learner–instructor interaction (Seo et al., 2021). At the same time, two students reported that AI could joke and even adapt to their humor, in line with evidence that AI-generated jokes can be rated as funny

(Gorenz & Schwarz, 2024). For these students, humor was not a dividing line between humans and AI.

Taken together, and as the researchers' synthesis rather than a theme that students were asked about, the findings suggest a complementary rather than competitive relationship between AI and the lecturer. Students valued AI for speed, flexibility, simplicity, and repeated practice, and they valued the lecturer for direct explanation, the chance to ask, and an enjoyable, relaxed atmosphere. This pattern aligns with research showing that AI can enrich English learning while students continue to recognize the importance of human teachers (Akbarani, 2024; Du, 2023; Xie, 2025). Because the study did not compare humor with other lecturer qualities, such as empathy or feedback, the suggestion that humor is one of the resources through which students perceive the lecturer's human presence should be tested in future research.

5. Novelty, Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

The novelty of this study lies in obtaining students' own comparisons between a lecturer's humor and AI in a course in which every participant also learned with AI, and in showing that some students no longer regard humor as something AI lacks.

For English lecturers, the findings imply that AI can support routine explanations, translation, and individual practice, while class time can be used for direct explanation, responding to students' questions, and relational teaching. Lecturers can also teach students to prompt AI for explanations at the right level, which may address both the complaint that AI is complicated and the preference for AI's simplicity. Drawing on the literature rather than on the present data, humor appears most beneficial when it is related to the lesson content and non-aggressive (Bieg et al., 2017; Wanzer et al., 2010) and may distract when it is built into explanatory examples (Bolkan et al., 2018). Professional development programs for lecturers could therefore address such human-centered practices, and not only technological skills, in preparing lecturers for AI integration (Sablok & Maini, 2025).

The study has several limitations. The data come from 40 seventh-semester IT students in three classes taught by the same lecturer, who are likely to be more comfortable with technology than students in other majors, and their perceptions of humor may reflect this lecturer's style and their familiarity with her. The lecturer was also one of the researchers, which may have encouraged socially desirable responses. The questionnaire was the only data source, and its open answers were often brief and could not be probed further. Future research could combine anonymous, neutrally worded questionnaires with interviews and observation, distinguish types of humor, include more majors and lecturers, compare lecturer and AI-generated humor, and relate humor and AI use to measured learning outcomes.

E. Conclusion

This study explored how 40 Indonesian IT students used AI in an English course, how they compared AI and lecturer explanations, and how they perceived their lecturer's humor. Regarding the first question, all participants used AI for English learning, mainly for translation, explanations, and grammar, and valued its speed and availability, although about a third noted that AI answers could be

unclear, inaccurate, or rigid. Regarding the second question, 21 participants understood the lecturer's explanations better, 6 preferred AI, and 13 gave mixed answers; the lecturer was valued for direct explanation and the chance to ask, and AI for simplicity and adjustability. Regarding the third question, nearly all participants viewed the lecturer's humor positively and associated it mainly with less boredom, a more relaxed atmosphere, and, for some, easier focus and understanding, while two saw its value as limited or dependent on the person. Regarding the fourth question, seven students contrasted the lecturer's humor with AI, describing AI as rigid and the lecturer as lively, whereas two noted that AI can also joke. These are students' perceptions, gathered with items that invited agreement, rather than measured effects.

In practical terms, English lecturers can allow AI to support routine explanations and individual practice while using class time for direct explanation, students' questions, and relational teaching, and they can help students prompt AI for explanations at the right level. Professional development programs for lecturers should address these human-centered practices alongside technological skills when preparing lecturers for AI integration.

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