

## Measuring Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Use of Humour during Lessons: A Questionnaire Study

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### Abstract

There is a common saying that if students like their teachers, they will start liking the subjects taught by them and be more attentive in the class. "A strict teacher can be successful but a humorous teacher can be more successful" (Vijay, et al, 2014:260-61). Hence, students' attitudes towards their instructors and subjects taught by them are determined only by the teachers' attitudes and their efficiency in delivering the contents. Not to mention, teachers who adopt a light-hearted attitude are often rated higher than other teachers not only based on the entertainment level, but also on credibility.

The purpose of this research is to measure the attitudes of fifth-year preparatory schools students, males and females, towards teachers' use of humour during lessons in the center of Basra city. It also investigates the advantages of using humour in teaching contexts and its vital role in motivating students' learning and improving their performance. Humour in this research refers to anything which is said or creates a feeling of fun and amusement in the classroom such as funny stories, funny comments, jokes or pun. Humour, according to this research, is used to illustrate, encourage, reduce anxiety, and attract students' attention.

The population of the research consists of fifth-year students studying at different Iraqi preparatory schools in the center of Basra city. The research sample includes (100) males and females students in both scientific and literary sections. The researchers use a questionnaire as a tool of the research. Thus, a questionnaire of (21) items has been designed to be distributed to (100) fifth-year preparatory school students, (51) males and (49) females.

The statistical means used by the researchers are the percentile ratio for the approval of the jury, T-test for one independent sample, T-Test for two equal independent samples and the weighted mean. To achieve the validity and reliability of the research, it has been displayed on specialists in educational guidance and psychology.

The results of the research demonstrate that there is statistically significant differences at significant level of (0.05). The calculated T-value for the variable of humour is (8.305) and the tabulation value is (1.660). Namely, the attitudes of students towards the variable of humour is high which indicates that most of fifth-year preparatory school students prefer the use of humour on the part of the teachers during lessons. Regarding the difference between male and female students' attitudes towards the use of humour by teachers according to the variable of gender, the results reveal that there is statistically significant difference between males and female students' attitudes towards the teachers' use of humour. The weighted mean for males is (51.159) whereas the weighted mean for females is (48.122).

Using T-Test for two independent samples, it is shown that the difference between males and female students is statistically significant at a level (0.05) In other words, male students display positive attitudes towards the teachers' use of humour during lessons more than the female students. Concerning the difference between male and female students' attitudes towards the use of humour by teachers according to the variable of Academic achievement, the results reveal that there is no statistically significant difference between students in both literary and scientific sections. The calculated T-value is (1.055) degree and Tabulated T-value is (1.660) degree, which is not statistically significant at the significance level of (0.05). This indicates that there is no differences between the two sections.

**Keywords:** Humour, Preparatory Schools, Benefits of Humour

### 1. Introduction

Recently, the use of humour in instruction has received widespread attention. Many experts and researchers espoused the psychological and pedagogical advantages of humour. Most studies show that humour and fun are intrinsically motivating and maintain interest during the lessons. They lay emphasis on the facilitative role of humour in creating positive and welcoming environment for language learning where students do not feel afraid or intimidated to speak in class even if they commit mistakes. Hence, humour generates an atmosphere in which anxiety levels are low and

comfort levels are high.

In fact, using humour in teaching and learning processes engenders an enjoyable environment conducive to learning a matter that improves students' proficiency and increases their attention. It entertains learners and this entertainment develops inherent motivation which is essentially in teaching. Students also become more active participants in the classroom and be more perceptive of the course material if it is presented to them in humorous way. Humour, besides, helps to illustrate as well as reinforce what is being taught. Further, humour enables students to express themselves freely without stress and embarrassment or fear to become an object of ridicule from classmates. Thus, humour, along with encouragement and praise should be one of the many useful teaching aids used by teachers to make their classrooms more inviting and contributing to learning.

### *1.1 The Purposes of the Research*

- 1-Measuring fifth-year preparatory school students' attitudes towards teachers' use of humour during lessons.
- 2-Exposing the difference between male and female students' attitudes towards teachers' use of humour during lessons according to the variable of gender.
- 3-Showing the difference between male and female students' attitudes towards teachers' use of humour according to the variable of Academic achievement, i.e., scientific section and literary section.

### *1.2 The Hypothesis*

The research is based on the hypothesis that there is statistically significance difference between fifth-year preparatory school students' attitudes, males and females, towards the use of humour by teachers during lessons.

### *1.3 The Scope of the Study*

This research is concerned with measuring the attitudes of fifth-year preparatory school students towards teachers' use of humour during lessons in the center of Basra city for the academic year (2015-2016).

### *1.4 The Significance of the Study*

This study is significant because it will engage in genuinely original research into an area of using humour in teaching in Iraqi preparatory schools which has received comparatively little scholarly attention. This study is also useful for prospective teachers. It will alert both students and teachers on the use of humour to create a comfortable environment with the aroma of interest and better comprehension. In a word, this body of literature will yield illuminating insights into the benefits of using humour in classroom. It promotes teachers to adopt new method of teaching that gets students' attention as well as makes learning more enjoyable.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### *2.1 What is Humour ?*

Humour is a term that is derived from Latin. It is originally used during the Renaissance as a physiological term to refer to the four primary fluids or humours of the human body, namely: blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy (Stowell, 1966:16-17). Humour is defined as an intentional action and skill that is deliberately practiced by an individual to cause amusement (Jauregui,1998:55). According to Giovacchini (1996:3), humour is a human attribute that creates a sort of harmony and balance between the psychology of individuals and the routine activities of real life. Crawford (1994: 57) defines humour as "any communication that generates a positive cognitive or affective response from listeners." From Martin and Lefcourt's standpoints humor is "the frequency with which the individual smiles, laughs, and otherwise displays amusement in a variety of situations" (1984:147).

Socially, humour is described as a medium of communication that may be done intentionally or unintentionally (Lynch, 2002:423; Raskin, 1985:100-104). Further, humour is identified as an "interpersonal emotion management . . . that strengthens or restores the feeling, norms of situations and creates amusement in itself generating positive emotions among members of an interacting group" (Francis et al.,1999:158). In the light of these definitions, humour is perceived as a communicative device that signals the mutual understanding between the producer of the humorous messages and the interpreter of these messages. It is a multifaceted phenomenon with an extensive variety of genuine capacities utilized in discourse.

Humour is of different types such as "pun, bon mot, fun, ridicule, nonsense, tease, irony, wit, satire and joke" (Attardo,

1994:7). It is a universal phenomenon shared by all people worldwide manifested in different linguistic forms that work primarily to evoke laughter. Moreover, humour is a blanket term that encompasses all loosely laughter related phenomena within the field of comedy and also refers to the cognitive and emotional mechanisms of response. Laughter is often used interchangeably with humour and a supposed symmetry has been established between the two. Philosophers like Aristotle and Plato base their definitions of humour on laughter and maintain that humour is what makes people laugh (Hay, 1995:155).

## *2.2 Benefits of Using Humour in Teaching*

Humour can be a powerful tool when used in the classroom. Teachers and educators of all levels and disciplines have praised the ability of humour to aid general education and the learning process. Thus, teachers can use different activities blended with humour such as commands and games whereby communication skills of the students are developed. They can also create various humorous situations spontaneously, for instance, telling jokes or a puzzle, using body gestures, telling stories that provoke laughter or using students' names and actions in full sentences as in grammar lessons. Subsequently, humour motivates students to be more eager to participate in all class activities in the communicative language classroom (Vijay, et al, 2014:259).

Previous researches and scholars suggested that humour has many pedagogical values in education. It lessens pressure, enhances classroom atmosphere, expands enjoyment, builds understudy instructor compatibility and even encourages learning. Berk (2002:5) thinks that humour is a beneficial tool to focus students' attention especially in long lasting and boring classes. Deiter (2000:20) advocates the idea that humour could be an effective tool in teaching mundane lessons which the students do not relish and find them difficult and stressful. He declares that "dullness in the classroom can kill student intellectual interest in any subject and destroy all student desire to pursue additional study in the subject matter area". Besides, humour can be a successful tool to make teaching more enjoyable and creative turning students' negative perceptions off (ibid). Supporting the same idea, researches confirm that the attention span of students is short thus the instructors need to discover imaginative approaches to draw their consideration for the whole session as boring lessons without entertainment will result in negative learning environment. Added to this, students' product will not bear the fruits of the teachers' efforts (Vijay, et al, 2014:259).

The use of humour has also an advantage for the teacher. One benefit is "a positive evaluation from the student, but more importantly an increase level of student satisfaction in the classroom resulting in higher test grades" (Wanzer, 2002). A study by Ziv (1976) "revealed that students who listened to humorous records performed significantly better on a creativity test than control groups" (Whisonant,1998:13). Then, there is a relationship between students' positive attitudes towards their instructors and using humour in the course of their lessons. Humour not only does offer enjoyable educational environment but also has a psychological and physiological functions. Psychologically, humour plays an "adaptive coping" device by lessening the negative feelings of students during testing such as tension, stress and anxiety which "promotes an objectivity that buffers the negative response and provides a sense of empowerment over the testing situation." Physiologically, "humour decreases stress hormones such as serum, cortisol, dopac and epinephrine as well as growth hormone levels in the blood" (Berk, 2000:151). In a similar vein, Gorham and Christopher's (1990:58) assert that using humour in the classroom "reduces tension, facilitates self-disclosure, relieves embarrassment, saves face, disarm others, alleviates boredom, gains favor through self-enhancement, entertains and conveys goodwill." Furthermore, humour makes one's look for life more optimistic. In one study, it is found that participants who watch a comedy video are more hopeful than those who watch non-humorous video (Liu, 2012:23). Namely, humorous video increases one's positive moods making him/her discard negative attitudes.

Other significant benefits of humour in the classroom are spurring understanding of students and expanding their enthusiasm, diminishing uneasiness, catching their consideration, and encouraging learning. It serves to show, strengthen and make more conceivable the material being taught (Azizifard & Jalali, 2012:1193). Additionally, the use of visual items containing humorous situations and comics in the classroom are useful for teaching vocabulary and explaining dozens of grammatical items (Berwald, 2011:195). It also "increases instructional effectiveness, message persuasiveness and can be used as a means of clarifying course material" (Ziyaemehr et al, 2001:111). Humour too helps students recall presented study material and improves their ability to remember information ( Hayati et al, 2011:653).

As with different aspects of life, humour acts as a noteworthy part in social association. According to Provine's (2000:61), humour permits the self-effacing or hesitant students to take part in the classroom activities and potentially contribute without losing face, feeling uncovered or defenseless. This is of specific significance in a communicative language classroom where the focus is on verbal bona fide communication and social interaction. It is a method for participating those students who are excessively apprehensive or anxious to endeavour communicating in lessons.

Accordingly, humour breaks down the barriers in communication between the teachers and students and prompts learners to take part in a variety of classroom activities.

In sum, humour is a suitable educational device to teach and learn different subjects. It is an innovative way of encouraging class attendance and improving students' performance. It can be used as an introduction to a new lesson or theme; a starting point for a discussion, or creative activity. As a teaching tool, humour can make teaching experience gratifying not only for students but also for teachers. It creates a positive, fun and interesting environment. It is also a means of help to relax the students and a device which enables students to concentrate their attention to one topic and a pleasant conclusion of a lesson. Additionally, humour reminds students of the newly gained knowledge to prepare them for more serious work involving various mental processes. Furthermore, humour builds rapport between students and teachers making students relaxed, less inhibited about asking questions or making comments and good listeners.

### 3. Methodology

This section focuses on the procedures adopted by the researchers to fulfill the aims of the study, i.e., measuring the attitudes of fifth-year preparatory school students towards the use of humour by teachers during lessons, showing the difference, according to the variable of gender, between male and female students' attitudes towards teachers' use of humour and showing the difference between male and female students' attitudes towards the use of humour by teachers according to the variable of Academic achievement. It also comprises the population of the research, the sample of the research, the steps of constructing of the instrument of the research, finding the validity of the instrument besides the statistical means used in the research.

#### 3.1 The Population of the Research

The research population are fifth-year males and females students studying in preparatory school in the center of Basra city.

#### 3.2 The Sample of the Research

The sample of research consists of (100) students, (51) of them are males and (49) are females. They are randomly selected from fifth-year students in preparatory schools in the center of Basra city, cf. Table (1).

Table 1. The Sample of the Research

No.	Names of Schools	Location	Gender		Section	
			males	females	scientific	literary
1	Al-Faraheedi preparatory school for girls	AL-Tibaa	-	23	13	10
2	Al-Farabi preparatory school for boys	Al-jameit	22	-	10	12
3	Al-Farabi preparatory school for girls	Al-jameit	-	11	5	6
4	Al-Nakheel preparatory school for girls	Commercial	-	8	8	-
5	Ghanem Swadi preparatory school for boys	ALMaqel	14	-	14	-
6	Al-Mutanabbi preparatory school for boys	Breha district	15	-	-	15
7	Al-Idrisi preparatory school for girls	Four streets	-	7	-	7
Total			51	49	50	50
			100		100	

#### 3.3 The Instrument of the Research

In order to construct the tool of the research, the researchers follow the following steps:

1. An open questionnaire form is given to a specimen of (16) fifth-year students, eight of them are males and eight are females, cf. appendix (1). Later, they are excluded from the sample of research. The return rate was 100%.
2. After collecting the questionnaire forms from students and having an access to literature and previous studies, the researchers build the items of the questionnaire. Consequently, the questionnaire comprises (21) items.

#### 3.4 The Validity of the Instrument

To evaluate face validity, the questionnaire is displayed on a jury consisting of five specialists in the fields of educational guidance and psychology. They are asked to give their opinions and remarks regarding the adequacy of the items of the questionnaire, cf. appendix (2). All items have appeared to be valid and the proportion of the agreement is (80%), cf. Table (2). Hence, the final version of the questionnaire consists of (21) items.

Table 2. The Percentage of Approving Questionnaire Items

No.	Items of the Questionnaire	The Jury	Approvers' Number	%
1	1, 2, 3, 4, 10, 13	6	6	100
2	16, 18, 20	6	5	83
3	5, 6, 7, 8, 9	6	6	100
4	11, 12, 14, 15	6	5	83
5	17, 19, 21	6	5	83

### 3.5 The Administration of the Questionnaire

When the items of the questionnaire become full, it is applied to a sample of (100) fifth-year students in preparatory school in the center of Basra city, (51) of them are males and (49) are females, cf. appendix(3).

### 3.6 The Statistical Means

The researchers use following statistical means:

1. The percentile ratio for the approval of the jury.
2. T-test for one independent sample.
3. T-test for two equal independent samples to compare between males and females.
4. the weighted mean to show the difference between males and females students' attitudes towards the use of humour by teachers (Milhem, 20:2005).

## 4. Results and Discussion

This section includes an overview of the research findings and a discussion of these findings in the light of the research specific purposes.

### 4.1 First Aim

Measuring fifth-year preparatory school students' attitudes towards teachers' use of humour during lessons.

After distributing the questionnaire among male and female students, it is found that the calculated T-value for the variable of humour reached at (8.305) which is greater than the tabulation value of the T-Test that is about (1.660) degree, cf. Table (3).

Table 3. T-Test Results of the Research Sample

The Variable	The Sample	Freedom Degree	Weighted Mean	Standard deviation	Assumed Mean	Calculated T-value	Tabulation Value	Significance Level
humour	100	99	49.670	9.235	42	8.305	1.660	0.05

The results of the first aim show that there is statistically significant differences at significant level of (0.05). On the other hand, the calculated T-value is (8.305) and the tabulation value is (1.660). That is, the attitudes of students towards the variable of humour is high which indicates that fifth-year preparatory school students prefer the use of humour on the part of the teachers during lessons. This attributes to the fact that students at this age have psychological openness that qualifies them to enjoy humour, thus using humour during lessons is considered as an outlet for their feelings and a means for expressing and releasing them. Needless to say that using humour in classroom makes students more in line with the teacher. Therefore, the teacher who uses humour attracts students' attention and makes lessons more lovable for them.

Additionally, students prefer teachers' use of humour during lessons since it relieves the boredom of the lectures as well as contributes to understanding of difficult lessons and implants them in the minds of students. Besides, fifth-year students during this phase of study usually suffer from stress and psychological pressure, given that this stage prepare them to critical and difficult period which makes the use of humour during lessons as a vent to their tension and the pressures of social and family life.

As a result, using humour reduces levels of stress and anxiety, increases productivity, and overall satisfaction with life makes students feel comfort. Further, the use of humour during lessons makes students feel safe, not afraid of the teacher and inspires them to take part in classroom activities. It also creates good rapport between the students and

teachers, thus generates a comfortable learning environment, increases motivation and comprehension as well as retention of information. According to Nguyen (2007:284), "building teacher–student rapport is a key aspect of teaching. A comfortable classroom climate is encouraged because the belief is that students can learn better in such an environment."

#### 4.2 Second Aim

Exposing the difference between male and female students' attitudes towards teachers' use of humour as far as the variable of gender is concerned. As to the second aim, the results demonstrate that there is statistically significant difference between males and female students' attitudes towards the use of humour by teachers during lessons. The weighted mean for males is (51,159) whereas the weighted mean for females is (48,122). Using T-Test for two independent samples, it is shown that the difference is statistically significant at a level (0,05) between males and female students. That is, when measuring their attitudes towards the variable of humour, the researchers find that the male students display positive attitude towards the use of humour by the teacher during lessons more than the female students, cf. Table (4). Thus, males are more interested in humorous teachers more than females. Reasons for this can be assigned to the fact that males are attempting to be found funny more often than females are. They typically enjoy humour or produce it in order to deal with difficult situations or release tension and anxiety (Moroschan et al, 2009:149). Besides, society does not encourage the sense of humour in girls as much as boys. It seems that females are characterized by seriousness and they usually regard humour as an inappropriate and offensive trait. As said by (Liu, 2012:22-23), "females are more careful about their responses on humour to avoid being derisive or immodest. Because of the appropriate behaviour assigned on women, they are less likely to show their enjoyment on humour."

Table 4. T-Test Results of the Differences between Male and Female Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Use of Humour

Gender	Sample	Weighted Mean	Standard deviation	Freedom Degree	T-value		Significance Level
					Calculated	Tabulated	
males	51	51.159	8.432	98	2.775	1.660	(0.05) statistically significant
females	49	48.122	9.852				

The results in Table (4) indicate that males have more tendencies towards humour than females. This is because males have a sense of humour more than females, so they prefer the teacher' use of humour during lessons.

#### 4.3 Third Aim

Showing the difference between male and female students' attitudes towards the use of humour by teachers according to the variable of Academic achievement, i.e., scientific section and literary section.

The research results exhibit that there is no statistically significant difference between students of literary and scientific sections as regards their attitudes towards teachers' use of humour during lessons. The calculated T-value is (1.055) degree and Tabulated T-value is (1.660) degree, which is not statistically significant at the significance level of (0.05). It illustrates that there is no differences between the students of literary and scientific sections, cf. Table (5).

Table 5. T-Test Results of Students' Attitudes Towards Teachers' Use of Humour According to Variable of Academic Achievement

Section	Sample	Weighted Mean	Standard deviation	Freedom Degree	T-value		Significance Level
					Calculated	Tabulated	
scientific	50	51.000	7.137	98	1.055	1.660	(0.05) Not statistically significant
literary	50	48.880	11.958				

These results explain that the fifth-year preparatory school students in scientific and literary sections are similar in their attitudes towards the use of humour by teachers during lessons. This is due to fact that they have the same age and the same thinking. From the researchers' viewpoint, the current results reveal that the variable of humour has a

relation with age rather than with the scientific or literary section.

## 5. Conclusion

The findings of the research show that the attitudes of students towards the variable of humour is high which indicates that most of fifth-year preparatory school students prefer the use of humour on the part of the teachers during lessons. According to the variable of gender, there is statistically significant difference between males and female students' attitudes towards the teachers' use of humour. That is, male students display positive attitudes towards the teachers' use of humour during lessons more than the female students. As regards the variable of Academic achievement, the results reveal that there is no statistically significant difference between students' attitudes towards the teachers' use of humour in both literary and scientific sections.

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## Appendixes

### Appendix(1)

Dear student: The researchers aim to do a study entitled (Measuring Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Use of Humor during lessons: A Questionnaire Study). Being a member of the sample, we offer you the following questionnaire requesting answers to all items of the questionnaire by putting a tick (✓) in front of the alternative you find suitable. Needless to mention your name with many thanks.

Q. Why do you prefer the use of humour by teachers during lessons?

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Ammar Muslim

*Appendix(2)*

No	Names of jury	Specialization	Place of Work
1	Dr. Abd AL-Kareem Khalif	Psychological Guidance	Open Educational College in Basra
2	Dr. Talib Serahan Al-Maliki	Psychological Guidance	Open Educational College in Basra
3	Assist. Lect. Salman Faidh	Psychological Guidance	Open Educational College in Basra
4	Assist. Lect. Mohammed Khalid	Educational Guidance	Gifted students School
5	Dr. Kamal Moony	Psychological Health	Open Educational College in Basra
6	Assist. Lect. Ansaaf Musa	Educational Guidance	Open Educational College in Basra

*Appendix(3)*

Gender:

Section:

Dear student: The researchers aim to do a study entitled (Measuring Students' Attitudes towards Teachers' Use of Humor during lessons: A Questionnaire Study ). Being a member of the sample, we offer you the following questionnaire requesting answers to all items by putting a tick (√) in front of the alternative you find suitable. Needless to mention your name with many thanks.

No.	Items	Always	Sometimes	Rarely
1	Teachers use' of humour during lessons encourages class attendance.			
2	Teachers' use of humour in classroom attracts students' attention to the lessons.			
3	Students feel relaxed when teachers use humour during lessons and don't hesitate to ask them a lot of questions.			
4	Humour makes lessons more enjoyable and alleviates the boredom.			
5	Humour helps students to remember the gained knowledge.			
6	Using humour by teacher in classroom has a positive psychological impact on students.			
7	Using humour during lessons increases the students ' sense of comfort and reduces stress, anxiety and fear.			
8	Using humour in class creates a positive learning environment.			
9	Humour helps to solidify the scientific material in the minds of students.			
10	Humour helps students overcome shyness and encourages them to interact with the teacher in class.			
11	Using humour in teaching is considered one of the modern educational methods.			
12	It is necessary that teachers use some humour during lessons.			
13	Humour motivates students to participate in classroom activities.			
14	Humour makes the relationship between teachers and students more open and flexible.			
15	Teachers' use of humour during lessons increases students' understanding of the study materials.			
16	Humour is an innovative way of improving students' performance.			
17	Humour is an effective tool to maintain mental health.			
18	Using humour by teachers increases students' motivation for learning.			
19	Humour is an effective learning tool to teach subjects which are difficult to comprehend.			
20	Students prefer the teacher who uses humour in classroom to one who does not.			
21	Using humour during lessons stimulates students ' creative work.			