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## HUMOR IN CLASSROOM: INVESTIGATING STUDENT'S ATTITUDE AND DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES

**Shuchi Sablok**

Junior Research Fellow (JRF), Department of evening studies-Multidisciplinary research centre  
Panjab University, Chandigarh

Email id: [shuchisablok.ubs@gmail.com](mailto:shuchisablok.ubs@gmail.com)

**Vandna Maini**

Professor, Department of evening studies- Multidisciplinary research centre Panjab University,  
Chandigarh

Email id: [vandnamaini@yahoo.com](mailto:vandnamaini@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

*“Strike up a laughter in your class, students will starts listening to you.” It’s a common phenomenon that when teachers inculcate humor during lecture, students start paying more attention to the respective lecture. Also, teachers who use humor in classroom are often rated better by students than teachers who doesn’t. The purpose of this study is to measure student’s attitude towards use of classroom humor. The study also examines the association of student’s demographic variables (gender, age, pursuing degree) with their attitude regarding pedagogical humor. Results indicated a significant positive attitude of students towards use of classroom humor. Demographic variables don’t show any association with student’s attitude except in case of age. The study suggested that mature students favor humor more than young students.*

**Keywords:** *Age, Classroom Humor, Degree, Gender, Humor, Student’s Attitude.*

### Introduction

Humor is like a spice that flavors the often-bland soup of everyday life. It's that magical ingredient that can turn a mundane moment into a memorable one, a heavy situation into a lighter one, and even a tense atmosphere into one of camaraderie. At its core, humor is the art of finding amusement, pleasure, or joy in something, whether it's a cleverly crafted joke, a witty observation, or a silly moment. One of the fascinating things about humor is its universality. While what people find funny can differ substantially among individuals, person to person, culture to culture, there's something inherently human about laughter. It's a shared language that transcends barriers, connecting people across boundaries of language, age, and background. Humor comes in many forms, from puns and wordplay to slapstick comedy and satire. It can be as simple as a well-timed one-liner or as elaborate as a comedic performance. And in today's digital age, humor has found new avenues of expression through memes, viral videos, and social media jokes.



The application of humor in education has garnered a lot of attention lately. Humor in education is a valuable tool that can transform the learning experience from mundane to memorable. When used effectively, humor can engage students, promote a positive learning environment, and enhance comprehension and retention of material (Civikly 1986; Gorham and Christophel 1990; Booth-Butterfield and Booth-butterfield 1991, Rareshide 1993). One of the key benefits of incorporating humor into education is its ability to capture students' attention. Let's face it: sitting through lectures and reading textbooks can sometimes be dry and monotonous. Introducing humor, whether it's through jokes, anecdotes, or funny visuals, can inject energy and enthusiasm into the classroom. It grabs students' attention and makes learning more enjoyable, encouraging active participation and cultivating a sense of curiosity.

Moreover, humor can help to create a relaxed and supportive learning atmosphere. When students feel comfortable and at ease, they are more willing to take risks, ask questions, and engage in discussions. A lighthearted joke or a humorous icebreaker activity can break down barriers and build rapport between students and teachers, creating a sense of camaraderie and mutual respect. In addition to its impact on engagement and classroom dynamics, humor can also aid in the learning process itself. Studies have indicated that humor can enhance memory retention by making information more memorable. When students associate learning with positive emotions like laughter, they are more likely to remember the material long-term. Humor can also help to illustrate difficult concepts, making them more relatable and easier to understand.

However, it's important to use humor in education thoughtfully and responsibly. Not all jokes or forms of humor are appropriate for every audience or educational setting. Teachers should be mindful of cultural sensitivities, avoid humor that may be offensive or exclusionary, and always prioritize the educational goals of the lesson. Furthermore, humor should never overshadow the importance of academic rigor and content mastery. While humor can enhance the learning experience, it should complement, rather than replace, effective teaching strategies and curriculum objectives.

The present study aims to find out the student's attitude towards use of classroom humor and also to find any association or difference between student's attitude and their demographic variables (gender, age and type of degree).



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## **Review of Literature**

- What is Humor?

The Latin word for "moisture" is where the word humor originated. Humor was once used to describe bodily liquids such as blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile. It was thought that a person's disposition and state of health could be inferred from the balance of these four fluids (Webster, 1996). "Humor" was a Renaissance term for a shaky mental state or state of insanity. The 18th century saw a change in the definition of the term, which was thereafter used to characterize typical behavior (Robinson, 1977). There are numerous ways to define humor. It is dependent upon the components under observation.

Humor is defined as the ability to laugh at things that are humorous or as the trait that makes anything hilarious in the Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2020). Consequently, humor is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as the mental ability to recognize, express, or appreciate something that is humorous, ludicrous, or discordant (Webster, 1996). According to the communicative viewpoint, Robinson offered a succinct explanation. According to him, humor is defined as "any communication that any of the interacting parties finds humorous and that makes them laugh, smile, or feel amused" (Robinson, 1977). From a linguistics perspective, comedy is any act that any of the participants undertake, whether through language or not. According to Raskin, the act is the outcome of two conflicting scripts: one is a cognitive structure that the native speaker has absorbed and symbolizes their limited worldly knowledge (Raskin, 1985). Presently, the term "humor" is typically used to characterize something that makes people laugh or that has an amusing characteristic.

- Studies on Benefits of Humor

Studies have proven that humor is more than just something to giggle at. People have long been believed to benefit physiologically and emotionally from humor, since those who laugh often and readily report feeling happier (Check, 1997; Ocon, 2015). Humor can be very effective tool, when employed in classroom. Humor has been acknowledged as a valuable tool for enhancing general education and the learning process by educators across various levels and specialties. As a result, teachers can employ a variety of humorous exercises, like games and directives, to help pupils improve their communication skills. Consequently, humor motivates students to be more willing to participate in all class activities (Vijay et al, 2014).



Humor, according to numerous experts and earlier studies, has a number of positive educational benefits. Reduced stress or anxiety (Benjelloun, 2009; Poirier & Wilhelm, 2014; Zundel, 2018) better classroom environment, more fun, improved student teacher compatibility and also encourages learning. Humor can be an effective method for drawing students' attention, particularly in lengthy and dull classes (Berk, 2002; Jeder, 2015). Deiter (2000) supports an idea that, humor can be a useful teaching tool when it comes to boring lessons that students dislike and find challenging and unpleasant. He states that, "boredom in classroom can kill student's intellectual interest and desire to pursue further in any subject."

Humor makes the learning process more comfortable and motivate students to attend class and study, which aids in the acquisition of challenging content (Aboudan, 2009; McCabe, Sprute, & Underdown, 2017; Zundel, 2018; Deiter, 2000). Additionally, humor strengthens memory and retention, sharpens problem-solving abilities (Poirier & Wilhelm, 2014), and raises concentration levels (Aboudan, 2009). Teachers who employ humor in classroom are also perceived as trustworthy (Poirier & Wilhelm, 2014), likeable and less frightening (Deiter; 2000; Appleby, 2018). As a result, the classroom atmosphere becomes more favorable and pleasurable (Deiter, 2000; Benjelloun, 2009) and barriers between teachers and students are lessened (Jeder, 2015; McCabe, Sprute, & Underdown, 2017; Aboudan, 2009).

For the instructor, there is an additional benefit to using humor. A favorable assessment from the student is one advantage, but the most significant one is "an increase in student satisfaction in the classroom leading to higher test grades" (Wanzer, 2002). According to a Ziv (1976) study, students who listened to hilarious music outperformed control groups on a creativity exam (Whisonant, 1998). There exists a correlation between the positive perspective that students have regarding their professors and their use of humor during class. Apart from offering a joyful learning environment, humor serves psychological and physical purposes. Psychologically, humor serves as "adaptive coping" tool by reducing student's negative test-related emotions including tension, worry, and anxiety. Physiologically humor reduces stress and growth hormone levels in blood (Berk, 2000). Similarly, humor in the classroom "reduces tension, allows self-disclosure, relieves embarrassment, disarms others, alleviates boredom, obtains favor through self-enhancement, entertains and expresses goodwill" (Gorham and Christopher, 1990). Humor also gives one a more positive outlook on life. According to Liu (2012), participants in a study who view comedic videos exhibit higher levels of hopefulness compared to those who watch non-humorous videos.

On the other hand, a humorous classroom does not have to be noisy, and the instructor does not have to be very amusing to make the students laugh. When viewed as a form of instructional strategy, comedy can be created in the same way as any other strategy that is



already being used in classrooms. When viewed as a form of instructional strategy, comedy can be created in the same way as any other strategy that is already being used in classrooms. Funny video clips, images, and comic strips (Deiter, 2000; Appleby, 2018) can be used as visual aids to create humor. Funny stories and anecdotes (Poirier & Wilhelm, 2014) can be used as lecture topics. Case studies, role plays, games, quizzes (Appleby, 2018), and group discussions can be used to get students to share their humorous experiences (Stambor, 2006; Klein and Moriarty, 2017).

However, humorous material should be related to the course content otherwise humor can also have unfavorable effects like distraction from learning (Zundel, 2018) and offensive behavior. Humor that is suitable and relevant to the course material naturally elicits good emotions in the students, which helps to maintain their attention and improves their capacity to process instructional instructions (Bolkan, Griffin, & Goodboy, 2018). To put it another way, using comedy in the classroom has a lot of positive educational and learning effects, provided that it is done tastefully and stays within the parameters of the teachings being taught to the students (Jeder, 2015, Zundel, 2018).

In conclusion, humor can be a useful teaching tool for a variety of academic areas. It's a creative approach to raising student attendance and raising achievement levels. It can serve as an introduction to a brand-new subject or theme, the beginning of a conversation, or the basis for an artistic endeavor. Humor can be an effective teaching strategy that improves student and instructor learning. It fosters an upbeat, enjoyable, and stimulating atmosphere. It is also a tool for helping students unwind, a way to focus their attention on a single subject, and a nice way to wrap out a lesson. Additionally, humor helps students and teachers connect, which relaxes them and makes them more open to asking questions and offering remarks. Additionally, it makes them more adept listeners. So, taking a self-report from student's about how they perceive humor when used in classroom can be a more reliable answer to measure effectiveness of pedagogical humor.

## **Hypothesis**

### **Students' attitude towards classroom humor**

H1: There is a positive attitude of students' towards classroom humor.

### **Association with student's demographics**

H2: There is a significant association of student's gender and their attitude towards classroom humor.



H3: There is a significant association of student's age and their attitude towards classroom humor.

H4: There is significant association of student's type of degree and their attitude towards classroom humour.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This research is descriptive and empirical in nature.

### **Need for study**

There is very scanty amount of research measuring students' attitude towards classroom humor. Humor has been researched in various other fields, but pedagogical humor research is still obscure. When teacher use humor in classroom, students are on the receiving end, thus self-report from students regarding their attitude or perception of classroom humor fills the research gap with a reliable answer. A student is a better person to report the effectiveness of classroom humor. But students come in a vast array of shapes, sizes and intellectual capabilities. Thus, student's attitude towards humor can also vary significantly based on various factors. This study aims to find out that differences among students and what attitude they have towards classroom humor.

### **Objectives of the study**

1. To measure student's attitude towards teacher's use of classroom humor.
2. To find the association of student's demographic variables like gender, age and type of degree with their attitude towards classroom humor.

### **Sample**

Questionnaire measuring student's attitude towards teacher's use of humor in classroom was distributed among 100 students of Panjab University, Chandigarh. 77 students participated from UG and PG classes, making response rate equals to 77%. Out of 77, 19 are male participants and 58 are female participants constituting 24.7% and 75.3% respectively of the total sample.





## Research Instrument

For measuring student’s attitude towards teacher’s use of classroom humor, questionnaire developed by AbdAli, A., Ashur, N., Ghazi, L. & Muslim, A. (2016) was adopted for the study. Participants were asked to rank 21 statements on 3-Point Likert Scale (Always=3, Sometimes=2 and Rarely =1). Cronbach Alpha for the given scale is .916, which is an indicator of good reliability of scale.

## Analysis and Interpretation

- **Student’s Attitude Towards Teacher’s Use of Classroom Humor**

To measure the attitude of students towards use of classroom humor, mean is used as a measure to understand what average of students have positive attitude towards humor in classroom. Also, one sample t test is calculated to find the difference of the attitude of students sampled with total population of students in Chandigarh.

**Table 1: One-Sample Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<b>Student's Attitude Towards Humor</b>	77	56.7403	4.40216	.50167

Table 1 shows the mean value of total 77 students. It can be inferred that; majority of students have a positive attitude towards teacher’s use of classroom humor with mean score of 56.7403 (M= 56.7403, S.D = 4.40216). The lower value of standard deviation shows there is less deviation or variance in the given data which means, most of the student’s responses are near to mean values.

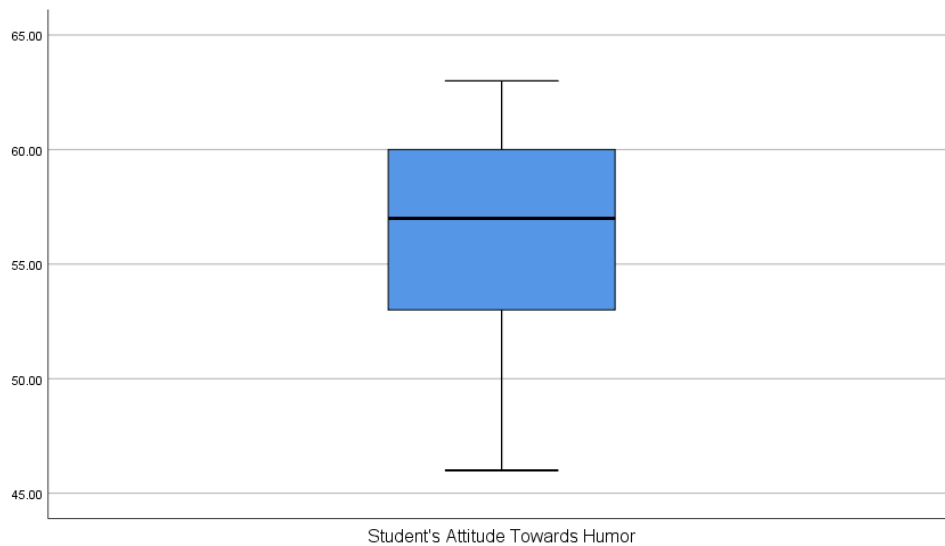
**Table 2: One-Sample T-Test**

Test Value = 0

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
<b>Student’s Attitude Towards Humor</b>	113.102	76	.000	56.74026	55.7411	57.7394

As the data was normally distributed and homogeneous, one sample t-test was used to examine how the student's attitude towards classroom humor, under this study is different than an average student in university. The above table 2 shows that there is significant difference in the sample participants and the population as the p value is  $<0.05$ , also the mean differences show positive lower and upper bounds. The findings shows that significant number of students have positive attitude towards teacher's use of classroom humor.

**Figure 1**



The figure 1 shows the boxplot of the sum of responses of all participants. The majority of responses are nearer to mean and also on the upper side of the graph which represents that students are majorly favouring use of classroom humor. Results been validated by various previous researchers like Bakar. F and Kumar. V (2022), they found positive perception of students toward classroom humor. In the given study, students explained variety of ways in which humor benefits them in their learning or during classroom lecture. So, as per the findings, **H1 is accepted.**

### **Association of Demographic Variables and Student's Attitude towards Classroom Humor**

#### **1. Student's gender and their attitude towards classroom humor**

To examine any difference in attitude of students towards teacher's use of classroom humor on the basis of their gender, means are compared using independent t-test as data was normally distributed and homogeneous. Results are shown below:



**Table 3: Mean differences of male and female students.**

Student's Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Male	19	55.9474	3.55080	.81461
Female	58	57.0000	4.64531	.60996

**Table 4: Independent T-Test results**

Student's Attitude towards Humor	T	df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
	-.904	75	.369	-1.05263	-3.37354	1.26827

The above table 3 shows the variation in mean scores of male and female students about their attitude towards classroom humor. There is slight difference in mean scores of male students ( $M = 55.9474$ ,  $SE = .81461$ ,  $N = 19$ ) and female students ( $M = 57.0000$ ,  $SE = .60996$ ,  $N = 58$ ), but this difference is not significant as the  $p$  value  $> 0.05$  (Table 4). So, it can be inferred that male and female students both have almost similar positive attitude towards use of classroom humor. The difference is insignificant  $t(75) = -.904$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Thus, **we reject the H<sub>2</sub>**, there is no significant association of student's gender with their attitude towards humor.

## 2. Student's age groups and their attitude towards classroom humor.

To measure any association of student's age with their attitude towards classroom humor, means are compared using ANOVA, as the data was normally distributed and homogeneous. The given age groups were Below 15, 15-20 yrs, 20-25 yrs and Above 25. But most of the students were within two age groups i.e. 15-20 yrs and 20-25 yrs. Results are shown below:

**Table 5: Mean differences of different age groups of students.**

Student's Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
15-20 yrs.	64	56.6406	4.23653	.52957
20-25 yrs.	13	61.0000	1.77951	.49355

**Table 6: ANOVA results.**

	Mean square	df	F	Sig.
Between Groups	205.344	1	13.177	.001
Within groups	15.583	75		

Table 5 shows the mean differences of students within different age groups. The students within 15-20 yrs of shows less mean score ( $M = 56.6406$ ,  $SE = .52957$ ,  $N = 64$ ) than students within 20-25 yrs of age group ( $M = 61.0000$ ,  $SE = .49355$ ,  $N = 13$ ). The results of anova, as per table 6, depicts that the said difference significant as  $p$  value  $< 0.05$ . so, the findings show that, there is a significant difference in student's age and their attitude towards classroom humor. It can be inferred from the results that the mature students within 20-25 yrs of age group, shows more positive outlook towards use of classroom humor than the young students of age group of 15-20 yrs. Some studies have validated this result that teachers prefer to use humor with mature students than young ones, as mature students better acknowledge the humor and recognize its purpose easily and they are also not easily carried away with laughter. Thus, mature students understand and appreciate the classroom humor better than young ones. Because mature students experience humor in classrooms more often than younger ones (Rareshide, S W., 1993). Thus, from the above results we can say that there is a significant association of student's age and their attitude towards classroom humor. So, **H3 is accepted.**

### 3. Student's pursuing degree and their attitude towards classroom humor.

To measure the association of student's pursuing degree and their attitude towards classroom humor, means are compared using independent t-test, as the data was normally distributed and homogeneous. Students pursuing degree was divided into UG i.e. under-graduation and PG i.e. post-graduation. The results are shown below:

**Table 7: Mean differences of different pursuing degree of students.**

Student's Pursuing Degree	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
UG	57	56.9298	4.04819	.53620
PG	20	56.2000	5.36656	1.20000



**Table 8: Independent T-Test results**

Student's Attitude towards Humor	t	Df	Sig. (2 tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
	.635	75	.527	.72982	-1.55831	3.01795

The table 7 shows the mean difference of UG and PG students. It can be inferred from the results that there is almost no difference in student's attitude towards classroom humor among UG and PG students. Humor is used on all types of classes, among all types of students, UG or PG, young or mature. But there is no significant difference in mean scores of UG and PG students as  $p$  value  $> 0.05$ . Results of table 8 also shows that there is no effect of student's pursuing degree on their attitude towards classroom humor as  $t(75) = .635$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Both under graduate and post graduate students have similar attitude towards classroom humor and agrees to various psychological and physiological benefits of humor. The results of the study have been corroborated by another study of Berk. R. A. (1996) where both graduate and undergraduate students evaluated humor based on three outcomes like humor reduce anxiety, helps in better learning and brings one's effective performance. The results revealed that difference of their reports were insignificant. Both graduate and undergraduate students have similar evaluation regarding humor strategies and its benefits which ranged from Very Effective to extremely Effective. So, from above results, it can be concluded that there is no significant association of student's pursuing degree with their attitude towards classroom humor. So, **H4 is rejected**.

### Summary

The study aimed to find student's attitude towards teacher's use of classroom humor and the findings suggested that most of the students prefer use of humor and they have a positive attitude towards classroom humor. Students concurred to various psychological and physiological benefits of humor. The mean scores of survey statements showed that majority of students are in favor of humor benefiting in building teacher-student relationship, promoting comfort and reducing stress or anxiety among students. Students strongly believe that humor lightens the mood and make the lessons fun not boring. Overall mean results display that students have positive attitude towards teacher's use of classroom humor. Students also supported the previous studies about benefits of humor, that humor attracts students' attention, act as a teaching tool to apprehend difficult topics. Overall, humor has a psychological impact on students' mental health and learning.



Another aim of the study is to find out the association of student's demographics with their attitude towards classroom humor. Results elucidated that age has a significant association with student's attitude towards humor, implying that mature student prefer humor than younger ones. The reason can be that mature students acknowledge and comprehend humor and its purpose much better than young students. Furthermore, gender and pursuing degree of students shows no association with student's attitude towards humor. All types of students either male or female, UG or PG exhibited similar positive attitude towards use of classroom humor.

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