
EFFECTS OF THE POWER OF HUMOUR IN TRANSFORMING STUDENTS' ATTITUDE AT THE JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LAGOS STATE

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Abstract

Humour is a powerful instructional tool that can foster a positive learning environment, enhance student engagement, and reduce classroom anxiety. Although, humour has been explored in various educational contexts, very few studies have examined its effect on students' attitudes towards Social Studies at the junior secondary school level. Hence, this study aims to fill that gap by investigating how the use of humour as a teaching method influences students' attitudes towards Social Studies. A quasi-experimental research design was adopted, involving 183 junior secondary school students studying Social Studies. The experimental group was taught using a humour-based instructional method, while the control group received instruction through the conventional lecture method. Data were collected using the Attitudinal Scale Questionnaire for Social Studies Students (ASQSSS), which was validated by experts in educational research and Social Studies teaching. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75. Data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, and ANCOVA. The results revealed a significant difference in the attitudes of students

taught using the humour method compared to those taught with the lecture method, in favour of the humour group [$F(1, 284) = 43.5; p < 0.05$]. However, there was no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students within the humour group [$F(1, 281) = 0.84; p > 0.05$]. The study concludes that humour can be effectively employed to enhance students' attitudes towards Social Studies.

Keywords: Humor, Attitude, Junior secondary school, Social Studies

Introduction

Educational researchers have identified numerous strategies that can enhance learning, one of which is the use of humour. Humour is employed to optimise educational benefits, including access to contemporary, research-based insights on how it nurtures creativity, enhances memory retention and supports a conducive learning environment (Sharpe, 2021). Humour is best understood as an emotion or effect; it is not a mere incidental human behaviour but rather an evolved one. Ehrlé, (2020) outlined five key elements associated with humour: humour appreciation, humour identification, humour comprehension, humour mirth response, and humour production. Humour appreciation refers to the affective experience that follows the comprehension of humorous content.

Humour comprehension addresses the cognitive processes involved in understanding a joke or comedic situation. Humour mirth response denotes the spontaneous physical reaction to humorous stimuli, typically manifested through smiling or laughter. Finally, humour production is an individual's capacity to generate humour. These five components, present in varying degrees, collectively define a person's unique sense of humour. Conversely, some scholars have speculated that humour may be intimately connected to belief systems. Carver (2013) suggests that any situation can be interpreted through multiple perspectives, depending on an individual's underlying beliefs. Humour, in this context, may arise from the ability to rapidly shift—almost to flicker—between contrasting viewpoints.

According to Oosthuizen (2021) humour influences individuals across various domains. It is impactful whether people succeed or fail in their endeavours. Often, when individuals are focused on achieving a goal, they become narrowly fixated and disregard other perspectives. However, adopting a humorous lens allows them to step back, reflect critically on their actions, and avoid overstatement or exaggeration. Humour, therefore, is not merely a tool for amusement; it also offers alternative viewpoints and reveals multiple dimensions of experiences and events.

The use of humour in social studies education has a positive influence on both teachers and students. It transforms classroom experiences by moving away from monotonous and disengaging routines, thereby fostering a more stimulating and enjoyable learning atmosphere. However, when incorporating humour into classroom practice, it is essential not to lose sight of its primary purpose. Humour should serve educational objectives, with the ultimate goal being to enhance students' learning experiences and improve the effectiveness of teaching. Onowugbeda, et al. (2024). investigated the impact of humour on students' academic achievement and found a statistically significant difference between the post-test mean scores of the experimental group, where humour was integrated, and the control group, where it was not. The results favoured the experimental group, leading to the conclusion that students exposed to humour during lessons performed better than those who were not.

A sense of humour can enhance personal resilience and boost self-confidence by helping individuals view challenges positively (Elias, 2014). Humour reduces stress, aids healing, and stimulates attention, making it easier for the brain to store and retrieve information (Sun et al., 2023). In classrooms, humour engages disinterested students, eases anxiety, and encourages linguistic creativity through jokes, puns, and wordplay. Notably, humour is even used as a trait in identifying gifted learners (Ulus et al., 2019). While many scholars recognise humour's educational benefits, research on its impact remains mixed. Cesur and Yaralı (2019) highlight humour's

role in promoting critical thinking, though their claims lack empirical backing. Humour's effectiveness is hard to generalise due to its emotional, cognitive, and cultural variability. Despite this, studies suggest it can support participation, especially among shy or withdrawn students, making them feel more included and confident (Low, 2024).

Social Studies is widely recognised for equipping individuals with essential knowledge, skills and values for meaningful participation in society. Altbach et al. (2019) affirms that education is regarded globally—regardless of a nation's developmental status—as a potent instrument for social, cultural, political, economic and technological advancement. It empowers individuals to play effective roles in their communities. To internalise the knowledge, skills and values embedded in Social Studies, there must be an effective medium of transmission. In this regard, humour provides a valuable channel for delivering these elements and ensuring meaningful learning.

In Social Studies classrooms, humour contributes to an environment that is conducive to both teaching and learning. An atmosphere characterised by laughter, enthusiasm and joy often leads to more effective learning (Koch, 2023). Humour helps create such environments. A moderate use of humour can support educators in balancing the pressures of accountability, standardised testing and rigid mandates. It is compatible with brain-based learning approaches, both in enriching the context of instruction and supporting cognitive development. To realise the aims and objectives of Social Studies and to instil in Nigerian pupils the necessary knowledge, values and attitudes, humour presents a viable strategy for achieving these educational goals. Additionally, this study will consider gender and attitude as moderating variables in assessing the effects of humour on Social Studies learning.

The quality of instruction is widely acknowledged to depend heavily on the professional competence of teachers, who are regarded as the foundation of any effective educational system (Kola & Sunday, 2015). In Nigeria, recurring concerns about declining educational standards have been linked to various factors, particularly

those related to teaching practices. Scholars have highlighted the use of ineffective instructional methods as a major contributor to these challenges (Diab et al., 2021; Patuawa et al., 2023), prompting the exploration of alternative strategies such as teacher-guided discussions, discovery learning, inquiry-based approaches, and problem-solving techniques. However, despite the adoption of these methods in Social Studies instruction, outcomes have often remained unsatisfactory. Notably, the use of humour as a pedagogical tool has received limited scholarly attention, especially in fostering positive student attitudes. This study, therefore, aims to address this gap by examining the potential of humour to enhance students' attitudes towards Social Studies. The overall purpose of the study is to examine the effect of humour on students' attitudes towards Social Studies. Specifically, the study intends to:

- i. determine the difference in the attitude of students when taught using (i) humour and (ii) modified conventional lecture method; and
- ii. examine the difference in the attitude of male and female students taught Social Studies using humour.

Hypotheses

- Ho1: There is no significant difference in the attitude of students to Social Studies when taught using (i) humour and (ii) modified conventional lecture method.
- Ho2: There is no significant difference in the attitude of male and female students to Social Studies when taught using (i) humour and (ii) modified conventional lecture method.

Methods

This study employed a quasi-experimental design to assess the effectiveness of the strategies used in teaching Social Studies. The population for this study comprised all Junior Secondary School Two (JSS II) students offering Social Studies in public secondary schools within Lagos State. Education District V. Junior Secondary School Two (JSS II) students were chosen for two primary reasons. The study involved 183 JSS II students drawn from four schools, randomly selected from the three education zones of Badagry, Amuwo Odofin

and Ojo in Lagos State Education District V. The existing population in each class was used without alteration; that is, all students present in each selected class participated in the study. The selection of district and the schools used was done through Simple Random Sampling Technique. Two schools were randomly picked from Ojo zone. One served as experiment and the other as control. The experimental group consisted of 93 students with 52 males and 41 females. The control group consisted of 90 students with 44 males and 46 females.

The Attitudinal Scale Questionnaire for Social Studies Students (ASQSSS) was employed for data collection. The ASQSSS comprised ten items designed to capture respondents' attitudes in two key areas: their disposition towards specific topics in Social Studies and their attitude towards instructional materials provided by the teacher. The instrument was subjected to a validity assessment by Social Studies experts, who are seasoned researchers in the field. In addition, experienced secondary school Social Studies teachers provided valuable input on the instruments. Their reviews focused on aspects such as face validity, content validity, grammatical accuracy and clarity of expression. The revised instruments were subsequently re-evaluated for face and content validity by the research supervisors. Reliability was established through the test-retest method, and the correlation was computed using Cronbach's Alpha formula. The ASQSSS was trial tested in two schools each from Ojo Local Government and AmuwoOdofin Local Government Areas of Lagos State. When subjected to Cronbach's Alpha, the instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.75. The quantitative data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically the mean and standard deviation, to organise and summarise the characteristics of selected data sets. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to determine statistical differences in students' scores, using a confidence level of 0.05.

Results

Hypothesis One; There is no significant difference in the attitude of pupils taught Social Studies concepts using (i) humour and (ii) conventional method

Table 1: ANCOVA of Effect of Treatment on Students' Attitude towards Corruption and Drug Abuse

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1178.840 ^a	1	589.420	6399.821	.000
	406.019 ^b	1	203.010	43.486	.000
Intercept	299323.961	1	299323.961	3250007.362	.000
	664849.764	1	664849.764	142413.937	.000
Teaching_Strategy	1178.840	1	589.420	6399.821	.000
	406.019	1	203.010	43.486	.000
Error	26.156	181	.092		
	1325.835	183	4.668		
Total	300429.000	182			
	667018.000	287			
Corrected Total	1204.997	286			
	1731.854	286			

a. R Squared = .978 (Adjusted R Squared = .978)

Table 1 shows the results of effect of experimental treatment on the attitude of students to social studies when taught with humour. The results show that there was a significant difference in the attitude of students taught using humour and lecture method in favour of those exposed humour method [$F(1, 284) = 43.5$; $p < 0.05$]. Therefore, the hypothesis that says there is no significant difference in the attitude of pupils to social studies when taught using humour is rejected.

Ho2. There is no significant gender effect on students' attitude to Social Studies when taught using (i) humour and (ii) conventional methods.

Table 2: Summary of ANCOVA of Gender Effect on Students Attitude to Social Studies in Humour Group

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta Squared
Corrected Model	433.578 ^a	5	86.716	18.769	.000	.250	
Intercept	5027.639	1	5027.639	1088.187	.000	.795	
Pre Test	.000	0000	
Gender	6.134	1	6.134	1.328	.250	.005	
Teaching Strategy	5.164	1	5.164	1.118	.291	.004	

Source	Type Sum Squares	III df of	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Gender * Teaching Strategy	7.714	1	3.857	.835	.435	.006	
Error	1298.275	91	4.620				
Total	667018.000	93					
Corrected Total	1731.854	92					
a. R Squared = .250 (Adjusted R Squared = .237)							

The results in Table 2 shows analysis of covariance of gender effect on students' attitude to social studies when taught using humour and conventional methods. The table shows that the pretest is significant ($F(1, 281) = 1.33$; $p > .05$). This indicates that there was difference in the entry levels of the males and females before the treatment. The results further indicate no significant difference ($F(1, 281) = 0.84$; $p > .05$) in the attitude of male and female students in the humour group. This shows that a null hypothesis which states that there is no significant gender effect on students' attitude to social studies when taught using (i) humour and (ii) conventional methods is not rejected.

Discussions

The study revealed a significant difference in students' attitudes towards Social Studies, with those taught using humour performing better than those taught through the conventional lecture method. This finding aligns with prior research which reported that humour can positively influence student learning outcomes, particularly in early and foundational education settings (Çelik & Gündoğdu, 2016; AbdAli et al., 2016; Bolkan et al., 2018). The use of humour in teaching may foster a more relaxed classroom atmosphere, reduce student anxiety, and sustain attention—factors known to enhance engagement and academic achievement.

In addition, while male students recorded slightly higher mean scores than their female counterparts, the ANCOVA results showed no statistically significant gender difference in achievement. This indicates that humour-based instructional strategies benefit both male and female students equally. The result supports global efforts to achieve gender equity in education, as outlined in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and affirms that well-designed instructional approaches can yield inclusive outcomes (Acharya,

2021; Murray, 2021). These findings carry important implications for educational practice, particularly in areas of teacher training, curriculum development, and instructional design. Social Studies teachers have adopted a range of innovative strategies such as inquiry-based learning, role play, and discussion methods (Grant et al., 2022). This study contributes to that growing body of work by highlighting humour as an effective pedagogical tool capable of improving students' attitudes and achievement in Social Studies and potentially in other subject areas as well.

Conclusion

The study concludes that humour strategies can significantly stimulate students' interest when consistently applied by Social Studies teachers. The use of humor in the classroom supports learners in acquiring knowledge and internalising values in a relaxed and enduring manner. They also provided a useful means of simplifying complex concepts in Social Studies, making them more accessible to students. Furthermore, humour was shown to be an effective strategy for instilling positive values and attitudes essential for societal development. Notably, the strategies proved equally effective for both male and female students.

Recommendations

Given the significant positive impact of humour as a teaching strategy on students' attitudes towards Social Studies, it is recommended that Social Studies teachers adopt humour-based instructional approaches in their daily classroom practice. Humour can be used to introduce lessons, reinforce key ideas, and create an engaging classroom atmosphere that encourages student participation. The findings suggest that conventional methods may not be as effective in fostering positive attitudes toward Social Studies. Therefore, schools should consider a shift from predominantly lecture-based instruction to more interactive and student-centred strategies. Humour-based instruction, when appropriately applied, can serve as a powerful tool to enhance students' attitude and make Social Studies more relatable to students' daily lives. As the study revealed no significant gender differences in students' achievement when exposed to humour-based instruction, it

reinforces the importance of adopting teaching strategies that benefit all learners regardless of gender. Educators should be encouraged to implement inclusive instructional methods like humour, which have been shown to engage both male and female students equally.

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