

APPLICATION OF HUMOR AS A LEARNING STRATEGY TO REDUCE STUDENT ANXIETY AND STRESS

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Article Info

Received: July 23, 2025

Revised: August 4, 2025

Accepted: August 23, 2025

Online Version: September 21, 2025

Abstract

Effective learning is not only determined by the teaching materials provided, but is also influenced by the psychological condition of students. Anxiety and stress experienced by students in the learning process often become obstacles that hinder understanding and reduce students' motivation to actively participate in academic activities. One approach that can be applied to overcome this is the use of humor as a learning strategy. This study aims, first, to describe the application of humor as a learning strategy. Second, to analyze and describe the application of humor as a learning strategy in reducing student anxiety and stress. The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques of interviews, observation, and documentation. The results of the study indicate that first, the application of humor as a learning strategy goes through several stages: humor selection, timing of humor application, and humor's impact. Second, humor, applied appropriately can reduce students' anxiety and stress levels, strengthen their engagement in the learning process, and improve understanding of the material presented. In addition, humor contributes to building a more harmonious relationship between educators and students, and encourages a more positive mindset towards learning. Thus, humor can be considered a learning strategy that has a positive impact on improving the quality of the educational process.

Keywords: Humor, Learning Strategies, Student Anxiety and Stress



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Journal Homepage <https://journal.zmsadra.or.id/index.php/edunalar>How to cite: Siraj, A. Y. H., Arrasyid, M. H., & Bella, S. (2025). Application of Humor as a Learning Strategy to Reduce Student Anxiety and Stress. *Education Journal*, 1(2), 95–100. <https://doi.org/XX.XXXXX/edunalar.v1i2.1420>Published by: Yayasan Zia Mulla Sadra

INTRODUCTION

Academic anxiety and stress are common challenges experienced by students at all levels of education. High academic pressure, parental expectations, and social demands can impact students' psychological well-being and hinder the learning process. A study by Fara Nenti & Dani Firmansyah (2023) found that when a teacher can create a pleasant learning environment and make students feel comfortable, this can attract students, or in other words, foster a passion for learning within them. Therefore, learning strategies are needed that can create a more comfortable learning atmosphere and reduce student psychological stress. Several previous studies have shown that humor can function as an effective strategy in creating a more enjoyable learning environment. For example, research by Rahmawati (2022) found that the use of humor in teaching has a positive impact on student learning motivation and engagement in class. Wijaya & Prasetyo (2023) also revealed that humor can reduce academic anxiety by increasing social interaction and strengthening the relationship between teachers and students. Thus, humor not only serves as entertainment but also has significant pedagogical benefits in learning. An emotionally conducive learning environment serves a function comparable to that of the traditional teachings of Islam in the context of learning. Fahrur Roji et al. (2025) revealed that a pleasant and cheerful atmosphere is a crucial factor in supporting an effective learning environment. This indicates that comfort in the learning process not only contributes to cognitive achievement but also plays a significant role in supporting students' emotional aspects. Therefore, implementing humor as a learning strategy to reduce student anxiety and stress can be a relevant and applicable approach. Thus, this strategy also strengthens the affective dimension, which supports overall academic success.

Nugroho & Sari (2024) noted that classes that incorporate humor into their learning experience improvements in both student engagement and learning outcomes compared to classes that solely employ conventional learning methods. From a psychological perspective, humor acts as a coping mechanism that helps students better manage academic stress. Furthermore, research by Pambudi & Irwansyah (2023) showed that groups that incorporate humor into their learning experience significant improvements in learning achievement compared to groups that do not. These findings indicate that the use of humor can have a positive impact on student learning outcomes. Furthermore, using humor in learning can increase student engagement, motivation, understanding of the material, social interaction, and emotional well-being.

In addition to its psychological benefits, humor also contributes to increased information absorption and understanding of academic concepts. A study by Lestari & Anggraini (2023) revealed that humor relevant to the subject matter can help students remember concepts better and increase engagement in learning. This suggests that humor can be used as a tool that not only improves the classroom atmosphere but also strengthens the overall learning process.

Considering the findings of various previous studies, the application of humor as a learning strategy has great potential to improve the quality of education. This research is expected to enrich the understanding of how humor can be used effectively in educational contexts, thereby providing solutions for educators in reducing student anxiety and stress. Thus, humor is not only a means of entertainment, but also a strategy that can contribute to students' psychological well-being and academic success. The main objective of this study is to examine how the application of humor as a learning strategy can reduce student anxiety and

stress. By understanding this, this research is expected to provide recommendations for educators in creating a more conducive learning atmosphere.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques used are observation, documentation, and interviews. To describe the concept of applying humor as a learning strategy in reducing student anxiety and stress, the researcher used observation and documentation of previous journals and books. Meanwhile, to analyze and describe the application of humor as a learning strategy in reducing anxiety and stress of students in grade 1 Diniyah PP. Bustanul Ulum Mlokorejo, the researcher used three data collection techniques. The interviews were conducted with the homeroom teacher, grade 1 students, and the ustadz (teacher) in charge of the subject.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Applying Humor as a Learning Strategy to Reduce Student Anxiety and Stress

Humor comes from English, meaning fun or mischievousness. The Oxford English Dictionary defines humor as the amusing quality of action, speech, or writing. Humor is an affective, cognitive, or aesthetic aspect of a person, stimulating, or arousing events such as amusement, joy, or amusement, or as laughter or smiles.

Humor has probably existed since humans learned language, or even longer. Humor, as a source of joy, may have been inherent in humankind since its inception. Tracing its origins, humor comes from the Latin word *umor*, meaning fluid. As early as 400 BC, the Ancient Greeks believed that human mood was determined by four bodily fluids: blood (sanguine), mucus (phlegm), yellow bile (choler), and black bile (melancholy). The balance of these fluids determined mood. An excess of any one of them would lead to a particular mood. Blood determined a happy mood (sanguine), mucus (phlegmatic), yellow bile (choleric), and black bile (melancholic). Each of these fluids had its own characteristics that affected each person. A lack of blood caused a person to become less angry.

Humor as a noun means humor and fun. Humor also means a pleasant description of a situation. Humor as a verb means to please and entertain. In the Complete English-Indonesian Dictionary and Indonesian-English Dictionary, humor means mood. In Arabic, humor is called *fakahah*, which has the root words *fakiha-yafkahu-fakahatan*, which means to be funny and joking (verb), funny and joke (noun). The root word *fakaha* also means "joking around." In Javanese, we know it as "*guyon parikeno*."

Types of humor can be distinguished by how they are formed or created. There are nine types of humor as follows: Exaggeration, Incongruity, Surprise, Slapstick, Absurdity, Human predicaments, Ridicule, Defiance, and Verbal humor.

In education, the application of humor in learning has become a learning strategy that is increasingly being studied, particularly in efforts to address minor psychological disorders such as anxiety and stress experienced by students. Various studies have shown that humor has a positive influence on students' mental health and can create a more inclusive and enjoyable learning environment (Wahyuni & Lestari, 2023; Fitria & Handayani, 2021).

Teachers play a strategic role in creating a classroom atmosphere that supports students' emotional well-being. Humor, delivered appropriately and without exaggeration, can break tension, reduce awkwardness, and improve interaction between individuals in the classroom (Hartati, 2021; Ahmad & Nasution, 2022). In fact, research by Wibowo and Astuti (2019) suggests that teachers who frequently use lighthearted humor in their teaching sessions tend to

be more liked and respected by students, as it creates a comfortable and non-intimidating learning environment.

In addition to impacting the classroom atmosphere, humor also encourages student participation. Humor can be used to build emotional closeness, bridge gaps between teachers and students, and increase students' intrinsic motivation to participate in learning (Safitri & Hidayat, 2021). Contextual humor, lighthearted jokes related to the material, and witty satire on common learning mistakes can be used to strengthen students' retention of learning content (Yusuf & Herlina, 2021; Laila & Fauzi, 2023).

Psychologically, anxiety and stress can arise from academic pressure, social demands, and fear of failure. Humor can function as a defense mechanism, enabling students to respond to stress more adaptively (Yuliana & Saputra, 2020). A study by Pranata and Kurniawan (2020) found that the use of humor in teacher-student communication has been shown to reduce students' emotional distress, particularly in the context of exams or class presentations.

In research by Rahmadani et al. (2022), students who participated in classes incorporating humor demonstrated lower stress levels compared to students in classes with academic pressure. These findings align with the results of an experimental study by Kurniasih and Fitriani (2020), which demonstrated that the consistent use of humor, both visual and verbal, throughout a semester can improve material retention and reduce learning anxiety in students.

From a pedagogical perspective, humor can be positioned as an approach that supports humanistic learning theory, which emphasizes the role of emotions and psychological well-being in the learning process. This theory positions students as whole individuals, meaning that their learning success is not only measured by cognitive abilities but also by their emotional health and social well-being (Nugroho & Maharani, 2020; Syahrial et al., 2023).

However, educators need to remember and understand that not all humor is universally acceptable and acceptable. Humor containing racial, religious, or derogatory elements can actually exacerbate student anxiety and create social exclusion in the classroom (Puspitasari & Widodo, 2020). Therefore, teachers need to develop humor that is positive, educational, and inclusive.

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that implementing humor as a learning strategy significantly contributes to creating a healthy learning environment. With thoughtful, planned implementation, and considering students' needs, humor can not only reduce stress and anxiety but also strengthen social relationships, improve the classroom atmosphere, and increase overall learning effectiveness.

The Application of Humor as a Learning Strategy to Reduce Student Anxiety and Stress in Grade 1 Diniyah PP. Bustanul Ulum Mlokorejo

Data from several interviews demonstrates the perceptions of homeroom teachers, students, and religious teachers regarding the use of humor as a learning strategy to reduce student anxiety and stress. One student said:

"What makes me anxious when studying is when my teacher assigns me to present in front of the class, and at that time, I'm still unprepared for the material, which makes me afraid to do so. Besides fear (anxiety), I also feel nervous when presenting my work, feeling nervous and lacking the ability to process the words I want to say. I also sometimes feel stressed when there's too much homework piling up, or tests suddenly coming up, which sometimes makes me reluctant to be in class."

Yunus Suhendra, a student, also shared what the teacher usually does to manage anxiety and stress:

"Teachers usually joke (humor) during the learning process. I feel that this lightens the initially serious atmosphere in the classroom, transforming the students' drowsiness and boredom into a happy and entertained atmosphere. The teacher's humor keeps our brains from stressing out from constantly thinking about the lesson."

His friend, Farel Danielo, added:

"I personally prefer studying with a humorous teacher (teacher). I believe a humorous teacher can connect with students more easily, understand their situation, and be more able to entertain and support them in maintaining their enthusiasm for learning. In my opinion, a humorous teacher can create a closer relationship with students, which makes it easier for students to ask questions or consult, whether about the lesson or about other student problems."

Faris also shared the humor frequently used by the Ustadz:

"The humor I convey is usually in the form of entertaining life stories, experiences, stories from the Abu Nawas, or tales from past generations. From some of the things conveyed, there's usually a message that I can learn from and apply in my daily life. Or, if there's a negative side, I can learn to avoid it."

In an interview with Ustadz Ubaidillah, the homeroom teacher, he said:

"Using humor in situations when students appear anxious can be very effective as long as it's done carefully and considers the situation. Because students are not the same; some are serious, others are just playing around. The right humor can lighten the mood and make students feel more comfortable and refocus."

He added, "Humor in learning isn't always easy; it must be adapted to the context of the teacher's teaching style, as humor can be offensive or affect students' abilities."

Ustadz Aqil Dimas, the class teacher, also added a discussion on the application of humor as a learning strategy to reduce student anxiety and stress. He said: "Often, learning becomes boring, uninteresting, and classes become ineffective. In this regard, there are various strategies commonly employed by some teachers, including quizzes and learning media that can help improve student focus. One such strategy is the inclusion of jokes or humor, or jokes interspersed throughout the material."

However, he added: "However, there are limitations to humor itself. Not all material can be humorized. Humor itself can be incorporated when children begin to feel bored, but only partially. It shouldn't be interspersed with jokes from beginning to end. If the lesson is filled with jokes from beginning to end, it's feared that the children won't focus on the material, but will instead focus on the humor delivered by the teacher."

However, it's important to remember that not everything can run optimally; there are bound to be obstacles and shortcomings. In an interview with Ustadz Aqil, he stated: "There are obstacles that arise when using humor with students. For example, there's a fear that the jokes might hurt their feelings or leave a bad impression on the students who hear them. Sometimes the humor doesn't resonate with the students' logic. For example, there are differences in thought patterns. For example, jokes made by one teacher and jokes made at a different frequency, so they respond to the humor differently."

From the interview above, it can be concluded that anxiety and stress in the learning process can arise from situations that require mental preparedness, such as impromptu presentations, piling up assignments, or other unexpected events. This anxiety not only impacts students' courage but also affects their ability to learn. In this context, implementing humor as a learning strategy has been shown to have a positive impact on creating a more enjoyable, fluid, and friendly classroom atmosphere. Humor is believed to relieve tension, reduce fear and nervousness, and build emotional closeness between teachers and students. However, it's important to remember that the humor used must be appropriate to the context and the students'

personalities. As teachers, we must be wise in choosing humor to ensure it doesn't offend, hurt feelings, or distract students from the core learning material.

CONCLUSION

Based on the description above, this study concludes that the application of humor as a learning strategy significantly reduces student anxiety and stress. The results reveal that the use of humor in the learning process can create a relaxed and enjoyable learning atmosphere. This certainly stimulates students' enthusiasm for learning. Students do not feel pressured or even stressed while studying. However, this study is limited to one school and a specific age group. Therefore, further research at other educational levels and a quantitative approach are needed for broader generalizations.

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