



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**THE INFLUENCE OF HUMOUR  
ON CREATIVE THINKING**

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**THE INFLUENCE OF HUMOUR  
ON CREATIVE THINKING**

**By**

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**This project was presented to the Faculty of Educational Studies,  
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the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

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## **DEDICATION**

Dedicated to:

Jesus Christ,  
my Lord and Savior from whom all knowledge comes forth;

Foong Lai,  
my wife whose love has carried me through all these difficult times;

Daryl and Alycia,  
whose creativity has been a superb source of inspiration; and

My grandmother, parents, brother and sister, and friends  
who constantly bug me to complete this work.



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By

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Faculty: Educational Studies

This study was carried out with the firm belief that everyone is born creative, has the capacity to be creative and can be induced to become more creative. Children at tender years show that they are creative until they entered school. The education process and our adult experience have taught us the “habit” of uncreative thinking. Infact, fun and humour have always been perceived as the opposite of work.

As such this study tries to uncover the positive effect of humour, specifically how it influences creative thinking. With this in mind, the research is carried out using the nonequivalent control group design where 2 classrooms were selected intact and the





Torrance Test of Creative Thinking: Figural Form (TTCT) was administered. The score is believed to be an indication of the subject's creative thinking ability.

Results of the analysis of data and the interpretations made are based on the t-test analysis. The findings show that (1) humour significantly influences creative thinking, that there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups; (2), the control group exhibits high post test score on creative thinking, significant even at alpha 0.01, possibly due to the subject's familiarity with the pre-test; and (3) the experiment group, however, showed a higher mean score in their creative thinking.

In conclusion, this study indicates that humour significantly influences creative thinking. Having a good laugh and sharing a few jokes does make a difference in their creative thinking, hence making them more creative.



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**PENGARUH HUMOR TERHADAP  
DAYA PEMIKIRAN KREATIF**

Oleh

**WONG HONG CHENG**

MAC 1998

Penyelia:      Profesor Madya Rahil Mahyuddin, PhD.

Fakulti:      Pengajian Pendidikan

Kajian ini dijalankan berdasarkan kepercayaan bahawa setiap insan dilahirkan kreatif, berupaya menjadi kreatif dan boleh didorong untuk menjadi kreatif. Kanak-kanak dari kecil lagi menunjukkan sifat kreatif sehingga mereka menjejak langkah ke alam persekolahan. Proses pendidikan serta pengalaman kita sebagai orang dewasa telah mengajar kita “tabiat” tidak berfikiran kreatif. Malah lawak jenaka dan keseronokan selalu dianggap bertentangan dengan sifat rajin berkerja.

Oleh itu, kajian ini berusaha mencari kesan positif humor, terutama dari segi pengaruh humor terhadap daya pemikiran kreatif. Maka, kajian ini dijalankan dengan



menggunakan rekabentuk “nonequivalent control group”, di mana 2 kelas dipilih dan diberi Ujian “Torrance Test of Creative Thinking: Figural Form (TTCT). Skor yang diperolehi dipercayai adalah petunjuk daya kreatif subjek.

Keputusan dari interpretasi dan analisis data adalah berdasarkan analisis-t. Hasil menunjukkan bahawa (1) humor mempengaruhi pemikiran daya kreatif secara signifikan, iaitu terdapat perbezaan yang ketara antara kumpulan eksperimen dan kawalan; (2) kumpulan kawalan menunjukkan skor pasca ujian (post-test) yang lebih tinggi, signifikan pada tahap alfa 0.01. Ini berkemungkinan kerana mereka telah biasa dengan pra-ujian (pre-test); dan (3) kumpulan eksperimen, bagaimanapun, menunjukkan min skor yang lebih tinggi.

Sebagai rumusan, kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa humor mempengaruhi pemikiran kreatif secara signifikan. Berjenaka dan ketawa memang membawa perbezaan pada tahap daya pemikiran kreatif, iaitu mereka menjadi lebih kreatif.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

In his speech during Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM) 18<sup>th</sup> Convocation 1994, the Vice Cancellor of UPM, Professor Dato' Dr Syed Jalaludin urged graduates not to cease learning. Instead the VC encouraged the graduates to always seek new knowledge and upgrade their skills in order to overcome changes. One such recommended skill is creative thinking (UNIPERTAMA, August 1994).

In Malaysia, this issue of creativity especially in education has been highlighted recently. According to Leo (1993) creativity is the 'in' thing today. School administration needs to be more creative to face the complex new challenges as we move towards the twenty-first century. The unprecedented pace of economic, political and social changes occurring in the world today, and in Malaysia in particular, demands that we need to be creative to cope with the changes. So, creativity is no longer a luxury. It is a necessity.

This is further reinforced by our Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who said that being creative and coming up with creative designs and inventions is "the key to Malaysia becoming a scientific and progressive society. Creativity is not only necessary but imperative in our efforts to become an industrialized society by the year 2020" (The Star, 1993 & 1994).



In fact the 1993 Teachers' Day Theme "Guru Inovatif Dan Kreatif Menjayakan Wawasan" points out the government's emphasis on creativity in schools. By 1995, according to the Malaysian Education Minister, Dato' Amar Dr Sulaiman Daud, a new curriculum on innovation and creativity will be introduced in primary and secondary schools (The Star, 1994).

However, inspite of all the attention given to the importance of creativity, our schools are still paying exclusive attention to convergent thinking, as oppose to divergent thinking; a part of creative thinking. Most school teachers consciously or unconsciously are forced to adopt the 'production teachers' role, which defines their teaching activities as administering to the children the prescribed year's curriculum in the prescribed amount of time (Gracey, 1972). As a result, such emphasis on knowledge-centered and exam oriented schooling process "has taken a heavy toll on creativity of Malaysian students" (Yong, 1989).

### **Statement Of The Problem**

Creative thinking is an important aspect of an individual's functioning while humour has been proven to induce creative thinking (Bartlett, 1958). However in the increasing volume of psychological research on humour, too few authors have investigated the creative aspect of humour and the possible use of humour for encouraging creative thinking

(Ziv, 1983), especially in the educational setting. Therefore this research hopes to fill in the knowledge gap in the Malaysian education system.

According to Awang Had Salleh (1993), in his paper entitled “Promoting Creativity In School”, Malaysian school teaching and learning activities are still predominantly focused on convergent thinking which stresses conformity. As such creative thinking is not encouraged or developed. Furthermore Malaysian schools do not provide a place for any form of creative expression. Even though, our Vision 2020 aims to produce a creative society, the curriculum which still stresses the basic skills of 3R (Reading, ‘Riting, ‘Rithmetic) fails to produce a creative and artistic society. This is indeed a problem for the future as creatives are found to be effective problem solvers (Yong, 1993).

The problem of creativity is a paradox. We all possess the ability and capacity to become creative, but we learn to be uncreative. The education process that most of us experience at home and school, teach us the “habit” of convergent thinking.

Getzel and Jackson (1962) found that teachers preferred students with high IQ to those with high creativity, despite the fact that the creative pupils produced significantly more imaginative and original writing samples. They also found that teachers preferred the high IQ groups even though there were no differences in academic performance. This could mean that the teacher has a set answer scheme which the students should conform to. Any deviation was considered poor answers. Those who gave predicted or ‘safe’ answers were

rewarded. Subsequently many students just respond according to the teacher's thinking pattern, giving expected but uncreative answers.

Teachers fail to recognise and accept both high IQ and creative students. Instead they pay special attention to students with high IQ than to those with high creativity. According to Getzel And Jackson (1962), the highly intelligent students (with average IQ scores of 150) are not necessarily creative and that highly creative pupils do not necessarily have extraordinary high IQ scores. In other words, the mental processes that produce high IQ scores will not necessarily produce high scores on creativity tests. Both researchers' comment is noteworthy here, that highly creative pupils had somehow "learned" to get along without the support and encouragement of their teachers. How many such pupils fall by the wayside remains an open question. Even though some highly creative pupils do survive, and indeed thrive, such negative teaching simply cannot be justified.

Fun and humour has always been looked upon as opposite of work. Indeed the task of teaching and learning is not generally associated with fun and laughter (Low, 1990). It has always been looked upon as disruptive to both studies and discipline in school. This study, however, tries to uncover the positive aspects of humour and how fun and laughter in humour can enhance student's creative thinking. Furthermore, humour is much liked and enjoyed, especially by students, teachers and even principals.

In Malaysia, studies have not been carried out thus far to determine the relationship between humour and creative thinking in the educational setting. This alone is a problem in our academic world since creativity is important to an individual's well being (Lewis, 1991).

### **Purpose Of The Study**

Ziv (1983) found that there are observational, correlational and even theoretical bases for believing that there are significant relations between humour and creativity. Dodge and Rossett (1982) also suggested that humour can be a useful tool in the classroom.

It is, therefore, the aim of this study to determine the effects of humour on creative thinking. Specifically, the objective of this research is to test if humour has an effect on secondary school student's creative thinking.

This study also tries to determine the levels of creativity among the students.

It is hoped that this study will contribute to a more in-depth understanding of humour and creativity in relation to the Malaysian educational setting.

### **Hypothesis**

In this experiment, the author is specifically looking at the effect of humour on creative thinking among Malaysian Six Form students. The hypothesis is that humour will significantly increase their creative thinking (as scored by TTCT).



This study adopts The Nonequivalent Control Group Design, which is a Quasi-Experimental design. The hypothesis is as follows:

1. HO : There is no significant difference in the creative thinking score between the treated and the untreated groups
2. HO : There is no significant difference in the creative thinking score between the pre-test and the post-test of both groups

### **Significance Of The Study**

Creativity is the foundation for all problem solving and decision making skills (Dunn, Dunn and Treffinger, 1992) and the school is the best place to teach this skill. The ultimate goal of all education programmes is to ensure that what is learnt will be applicable and useful in life. In reality, problems in life do not come in a prearranged manner, together with instructions. As such an individual must be creative to assimilate ideas, schemata, knowledge and experiences learnt in order to overcome life's problems.

When faced with new problems, a non-creative will follow the usual problem solving strategies, thus resulting in conformity and stale ideas. In contrast, the creatives are able to critically evaluate an idea or performance, while willing to bring about changes to the status quo. They are motivated to seek unique accomplishments and are easily bored by

routine work. The creatives dare to be different in order to break free from the conventional ideational restrictions that make breakthrough impossible (Yong, 1993). As such, creative thinking must be encouraged and enhanced to its fullest, even in school.

If we want to see the total achievement of Vision 2020, according to the Malaysian Prime Minister Dato' Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (The Star, 8 Jun 1994), Malaysians from all walks of life must be creative and competitive. It must start from the root, SCHOOL. Therefore it is significant that teachers must provide the conducive climate for student's creative expressions. It means our teaching and learning activities must bring forth a new generation that is creative, able to compete and face the challenges of the twenty-first century (Awang Had Salleh, 1993). As such, this study has a strong bearing in achieving our country's noble Vision 2020.

Introduction of creative thinking across curriculum is aimed at helping the gifted students in Malaysia from falling victim of uncreative and unchallenging curriculum by suggesting more creative, innovative and unconventional curriculum and teaching strategies. Feldhusen and Kroll's (1991) research among the gifted children indicates that gifted children are bored in the conventional classroom. They found out that these children often begin with positive attitudes towards school but fail to maintain these attitudes because of the lack of appropriate challenges; where curriculum and teaching strategies are not at a suitably high and challenging level, uncreative, and not at a pace commensurate with their abilities. They ended up losing their motivation to learn and become underachievers. Failure

to bring out their fullest creative and gifted potential is indeed a social tragedy (Gallagher, 1985).

According to Guilford (1967) “creativity is the key to education in its fullest sense, and the answer to man’s most serious problems”. Failure to help students realize their potential means the failure of education’s main goal (Parker, 1989; Arieti, 1976), which is why this study must be carried out.

Humour can be a very useful tool to capture students interest and attention. It hooks students to the subject and at the same time creates an enjoyable fun-filled atmosphere. Some research studies (Low, 1990; Torrance, 1978; Powell and Andresen, 1985) claim that humour and creative activities might have therapeutic value. Lewis (1991) for example, argues that supported creative expression leads to mental health. Torrance (1965) suggests that the goal of all major therapies is to aid individuals to become more creative, so that they can cope more adequately with the stresses of life. He quoted Wilt (1959) who claims that creative activities “may be a chimney to carry away the smoke, an escape valve for the pent-up steam”. Garfield, Cohan & Roth, (1969) found the creatives to be more healthy and confident as compared to the non-creatives. As such, humour and creative activities must be incorporated into the present Malaysian education system, which stresses the importance of this study. Therefore, the recent plan (The Star, 8 June 1994) by the Malaysian Education Ministry to introduce a new curriculum on innovation and creativity by 1995 was indeed timely.

Schools have been continuously urged to create an environment which stimulates creativity or creative thinking. This can be enhanced by employing correct and effective teaching-learning strategies (Gallagher, 1985). However, it has been repeatedly argued that creativity, if unguided may result in destructive behavior (Gowan, 1972) and if stifled may create unbearable pressure for the creative individual. But when creativity is rewarded and accepted, instead of becoming destructive, it becomes an asset (de Bono, 1992) both to the creative individuals and to the world, at large. Therefore the researcher is convinced that humour is the best tool to enhance this domain.

### **Scope Of Research**

#### **Focus of Research**

Research on humour and laughter has been rather sparse, and it is hardly directly related to creative thinking. For example, Doris and Fierman (1956) studied the relationship between humour and anxiety; Markiewicz (1974) on the effects of humour on persuasion; and Hampers (1992) on the relations between intimacy and humour. This study, however, only focuses on the effects of humour on school students creative thinking.

### **Strategy Employed**

To date there are two major strategies to enhance creative thinking.

- a. Provide students with a series of skills and procedures to enable them to use more of the available knowledge that they already possess.
- b. Create an environment that encourages intellectual risk taking and rewards unique and original thinking.

In this study, the attention is only on investigating the influence of humorous atmosphere (environment) on creative thinking.

### **Samples**

This experiment will only be limited to Lower Six Form students. They are chosen based on the time schedule which is free from year end public examination (i.e. Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia). Furthermore adolescents are most characterized by a fun-oriented, frolicsome outlook towards life (Rosenhiem, 1974). As such, humorous and creative activities are most interesting to them.

### **Number of School**

Considering the finance and time factors, this research will be limited to students in one school only.

### **Limitation**

This study tries to limit the jokes to 10 minutes. Furthermore the researcher uses the student's jokes to create humour. Time allocated may have an effect on the overall result. Nevertheless, the time limit is set so as to enable the instrument (TTCT) to be administered within the hours allocated.

This study only seeks to determine the influence of humour on creative thinking. As such, this research will not cover the levels of creative thinking among the subjects.

### **Definition**

In this study, the definitions of major terms used are:

#### **Humour**

For the purpose of this study, the author is adopting the Chambers Family Dictionary's definition of humour, that is "a mental quality that apprehends and delights in ludicrous (absurd, laughable) and mirthful (merriness, delight, laughter) ideas; that which causes mirth and amusement". So, to have a sense of humour is the "ability to see the absurd or amusing" (Holt Basic Dictionary). When something is referred to as humourous, it carries that characteristic of witty, incongruous, amusing, imaginative, funny, comical, and able to induce laughter.

In this research, humour is operationally defined as the mirthful and amusing ideas from the jokes by the researcher and the subjects, and shared among the subjects, which is able to induce laughter among the subjects.

### **Creative Thinking**

Although the works of researchers like Treffinger (1986), Ziv (1976, 1983), Torrance (1965), and Guilford (1965, 1967) have led to better understanding of the various theories of creativity, there is still no common agreement on a single definition of creativity. Infact though there exist much literature on the topic of creativity, researchers have yet to commonly agree on one acceptable theory and definition of creativity (Treffinger, 1986).

Based on the works of creativity, to date, there appears to be four types of definitions of creativity; which refers to the person, the process, the product and the environment (press). In this research, the author uses the definition of creativity by Torrance (1974), which reads,

“A process of becoming sensitive to problems, deficiencies, gaps in knowledge, missing elements, disharmonies, and so on; identifying the difficulty, searching for solutions, making guesses or formulating hypothesis about the deficiencies; testing and retesting this hypothesis and possibly modifying and retesting them; and finally communicating the results.”

Torrance’s definition is adopted for this study because it has the most balanced view on creativity. Although he focuses on the process, he nevertheless acknowledges that

researchers must “at any one time be alert to the other three aspects of creativity” (Torrance, 1965). In addition, this research instrument and theory are based on Torrance’s. It is therefore appropriate that his definition is used.





## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Introduction**

The 1993 Teachers Day Theme “Guru Inovatif Dan Kreatif Menjayakan Wawasan (Innovative and Creative Teachers Make the Vision A Success)” shows the Malaysian Education Ministry’s maturity in realizing the importance of creativity in achieving our noble Vision 2020. Steps are taken even to award ministry staff who show “innovative administrative skills” (The Star, 24 April 1993).

The Malaysian Education Ministry has urged every educational mechanism to be creative or at least to support and accept creative efforts. A new curriculum on innovation and creativity was planned to be introduced in the Malaysian primary and secondary school system by 1995 (The Star, 8 June 1994). Underlying these Malaysian Education Ministry’s recent efforts to promote creativity in school is the fundamental belief that creative thinking is important.

More importantly, studies (Ziv, 1976, 1983; Rouff, 1975; Treadwell, 1970) directly relating humour and creative thinking give similar conclusions that there is a significant correlation between humour and creative thinking, and that humour can be a useful approach to creativity research (Treadwell, 1970).

