

**THE APPLICATION OF HUMOUR AMONGST CHILDREN IN THE
ACQUISITION OF THE MALAY LANGUAGE**

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ABSTRACT

Humour can be relatively defined as any type of utterance or action that may be perceived as funny and witty, and has the ability to put a smile on a child's face or even create laughter. The action of including jokes and spontaneous, witty remarks in utterances will deftly be applied to achieve a more amusing and fun atmosphere. This strategy is done with the purpose of entertaining children and audience at large. From the aspect of language learning and acquisition, particularly, the Malay language, humour is capable of giving input to children as well as creating a fun and joyful setting for children in their respective classrooms. When teaching language in other traditional methods, it is observed that children get easily bored and they have incepted in their minds that learning Malay, specifically, is presumably easy, thus they consider the teaching and learning process of Malay as too effortless to master. This study adopts the Relief Theory which is based on research related to the complex factors of the human learning experience. This study aims at discovering the effectiveness of the said theory. The application of humour in the acquisition of Malay among children has the ability to create a fun and exciting learning environment in classrooms. Findings show that there exists significant correlation between the teaching style for children and the application of humour in learning the Malay language.

Introduction

In the current era of globalisation, the prime function of the Malay language has been deemed neglected by the mass community. Tham Seong Chee (1977) asserts that a certain language not only serves as a medium of communication but it most importantly reflects the truest value of a society. He further claims the Malay language, in its entirety is that of a coastal language and was heavily influenced by other cultures and foreign languages such as Sanskrit, Chinese, Arabic, Portuguese, Dutch, Javanese and English. It is also interesting to note that there are both explicit and implicit meanings of the Malay language that the users employ during interaction. Among the explicit aspects of the language is the use of humour in the teaching and learning of Malay. Awang Sariyan (2005) affirms that the greatest languages in the world today evolve mainly because of their connection between the power in politics, economy, trade, and knowledge and the language users' civility. Zaitul Azma Zainon Hamzah (2006) further states that the Malay language needs to achieve a high economic status by exploring the global economic fields, industry, science and technology, engineering as well as the astronautic sciences. However, the planning and execution process must be initiated with great fervour and dedication among the aforementioned areas.

Abdul Ghani Ahmad (2000) explains that the use of course material is seen as a crucial factor in increasing student interest. This is essential to further facilitate with the students' language skills as well as to gain effective interaction. It is therefore pivotal for language lecturers to make high use of their creativity in applying a variety of suitable media sources to garner interest from the students. Through the use of media, it is believed that teachers are able to change the learning environment of the students from a linear type of instruction to a much more interactive form of teaching. The application or, even so, manipulation of language through the use of electronic media, computer software, graphics and others are deftly used to

maintain, if not increase the interest and concentration of students during the teaching and learning of a first language.

In a research, entitled *The Use of Humor in Secondary Social Studies Classrooms*, conducted by Miura and Jones (2005), they have stated that humour can be effectively used as a tool for capturing attention and it proved to be decidedly helpful for students in classroom learning. However, from further analysis by Miura and Jones (2005), it is found that humour may not be as effective if used inappropriately. They have identified the difference in the frequency of occurrence of humour in average and above-average classes. Findings concluded that there was no significant difference in the said classes. They have observed, at a percentage of almost 54.46% that humour had shown no significant impact in classroom learning, and merely five out of eight events failed to be of great help in the learning process. Due to this observation, the authors wish to conduct further research to investigate methods of effective use of humour in the acquisition of the Malay language.

Another research of interest is concerned with *Appropriate And Inappropriate Humor* (2006), conducted by Torok, McMorris dan Lin (2006). They have asserted that humour is one of the means of communication that could be identified through an individual's personal experience and it could be used successfully or otherwise. Torok, McMorris dan Lin (2006) also suggested four types of humour (sarcasm, sexual connotations, ethnic humour as well as aggressive humour) that is employed by teachers which is seen in the eyes of the students as bearing a negative impact for classroom learning. Although this research is not exclusively conducted to gain answers pertaining to effective communication, the procedures show focus on the varied suitability and appropriateness of humour. This research has piqued the authors' interest in conducting further research on the different types of humour in language learning.

Significance of Research

The present research can be seen as beneficial for both the Ministry of Education as well as the Ministry of Higher Education in revising the nation's current education curriculum. Furthermore, Malay language lecturers can also benefit from this research as this can allow them to apply a diversity of teaching styles and techniques, particularly the application of humour, in order to attract student interest in learning the Malay language.

In addition, the Ministry of Education has designed and produced a high quality of human resource so as to hold strategic positions in the ministry. This is in line with the purpose of the Ministry of Education which is to prepare students to become a community that possesses academic and professional potential. This is necessary to facilitate with the growth, application and enrichment of knowledge, arts and technology for the nation. The Ministry, including academic teachers are the main driving force of language learning and they play an important role in providing professional careers for the students later in the future.

It is of utmost importance that teachers be advised to adhere to their professionalism, as regulated in the Education Act, Part (IX) Section 39 Article 2 (2009), and as educators, they serve as a professional resource in implementing the teaching and learning process of the Malay language, evaluating learning outcome, executing practice and guidance, as well as carrying out research on society especially at a higher level of education. Knowledge about learning styles can also bring awareness among teachers that one exclusive and best teaching strategy does not exist in the process of the teaching and learning of Malay (Dunn and Dunn, 1978, Price, 1989 and Orsak, 1990). Instead, teachers should make use of multiple approaches in planning out the most suitable teaching strategy in fulfilling each student's different learning styles and needs. Aside from that, the matching approach, as well as other approaches such as the provisioning approach can be implemented as an effective learning

style for the purpose of fulfilling different learning styles in class. Teachers, with the use of the flexing approach, could also assist their students in utilizing a variety of learning styles and strategies at the most optimum level. This would require teachers to pay particular attention to the learning style of each student and they can make full use of the three approaches suggested by Dunn and Dunn (1978), Price (1989) and Orsak (1990) in order for the students to achieve the most effective learning experience.

The significance of research is also based on the fact that students become more happy, creative and cheerful in Malay language classrooms by applying humourous techniques for each lesson. The fun atmosphere that is created during teaching-learning interaction seems to make boredom and disinterest dissipate from the students' minds. Due to this technique, the Malay language classroom will no longer be considered as frightening, strained, boring and tiring for students. It is the role of the teacher to inculcate within themselves the sense of responsibility towards their students, high and clear motivation as well as the sense of commitment and dedication for students to achieve greater excellence in the acquisition of the Malay language.

Operational Definition

The present research is focused on a discussion based on the application of humour implemented in the acquisition of the Malay language and these activities and types of humour should be understood in great detail. In this context, the definition of humour will be elaborated prior to other concepts relevant to this study.

Humour

In this study, humour connotes a scenario or situation which creates excitement and merriment among children. Humour is apparent by observing the language being used or from bodily gestures. When we discuss humour, what is relevant here is the use of humour through words. Humour in a language is created on the basis of the underlying meaning behind the words or utterance and how it is linked to the specific situation or scenario. Intonation is also deemed as integral in facilitating humorous utterances. Humour is also connected to funny words and actions which gives laughter and amusement to children. Humour can also be defined as the ability to express or even enjoy funny and witty utterances that bring joy to the children's hearts.

Bahasa Melayu

The Malay language is a system of sound signals that is used as a communication tool amongst a community. Bahasa Melayu, also called as Bahasa Malaysia, is officially revealed as Malaysia's national language since the beginning of the nation's independence on 31st August 1957. The Malay language is one of the Austronesian languages, which include Javanese, Aceh, Tagalog, Minangkabau, Kadazan, Iban and others. The Malay language is a language spoken by the Malay people as their first language. In this study, the Malay language being referred to is the Standard Malay language.

Literature Review

A research conducted by Harun Hassan (2002) concerning communication skills among trainee teachers in USM adopted the qualitative research method whereby a partially structured interview was carried out, observation and analysis of documents were also used to obtain relevant findings. The research subjects involved 12 trainee teachers from the School of Educational Studies, USM. They were undergoing their teaching practice for 15 weeks in and around Penang Island. All of the subjects were graduates from Matriculation, Diploma as well as Sijil Tinggi Pelajar Malaysia (STPM) levels with no teaching experience. Participants were selected based on purposive sampling (Gay and Airasian, 2003). The research procedure involved four stages; planning, execution, data analysis and the overall report. The findings were reported according to certain categories and primary themes outlined from the analysis conducted. Three categories concerning verbal communication include intonation, clarity of articulation and fluency of the participants during the teaching and learning exercise. As for non-verbal communication, three categories were derived from the research, in which they include facial expression, eye-contact and gestures. For verbal communication concerning intonation, findings reported that majority of the participants employed a seemingly boring and monotonous intonation. It is summarised that 12 trainee teachers failed to demonstrate good use of intonation in their teaching as they adopted a rather dull and an unvaried intonation in their speech. In terms of fluency of the teachers, some of them tend to stutter and their speech become less fluent. This is due to their limitations in grammar, over-reliance on textbooks, restriction to the needs of the curriculum and also memorisation of facts instead of explaining these facts for students to comprehend the subject in hand more effectively. It is also observed that there were notable facial expressions displayed by the subjects such as expression indicating stiffness, seriousness, too much smiling or too little smiling, panic, anxiety and lack of confidence.

Harun Hassan (2002) also stated that an effective teacher is capable of transferring knowledge to their students by reducing, if not completely eliminating distractions during classroom instruction. The ability for teachers to adopt the basic skills to ensure the students' mastery of a subject can be taken as proof of the teachers's achievement in their value of work. Effective teaching can only happen when there is mutual communication and interaction between lecturer and student (Habibah Elias and Rahil Mahyuddin, 1995). From that, teachers will be able to ascertain a positive response from their students without limiting their participation in class. Facial expression is equally vital in achieving effective learning during the teaching process. It is also worthy to note that teachers who always put a smile on their faces will be loved by their students and this can be used to encourage students to obtain the knowledge that is propogated to them with much ease. The strategy of adopting humour in teaching can be helpful in terms of creating a warm and stree-free atmosphere. Naturally, students will become more relaxed and focused during the teaching process (Habibah Elias and Rahil Mahyuddin, 1995).

A research, entitled *The Application and Evaluation of Humor when Teaching Statistics*, conducted by Friedman et. al., (2002), suggested that humour is adopted as a teaching aid that can serve to enrich the learning process. This research concerning the use of humour among university students was conducted by arranging an interview session involving 38 students. Findings from respondent feedback showed that humour did help in the learning process by providing entertainment, facilitating in attention and focus, influencing students' positive disposition, increasing motivation, reducing boredom and creating less tension in the students' cognitive states. This technique may be suitable for students who show negative disposition towards a certain subject. By applying this technique, teachers are able to make the students interested and pay more attention towards the teaching and learning process. Friedman et. al., (2002) also suggested that during the commencement of a course, the

teacher should make use of the humour technique. This way, students are more inclined to feel more comfortable and develop a closer bond with their teachers.

Another research of interest, entitled *Laugh and Learn: Using Humor to Reach and Teach Teens*, conducted by Koplewicz (2002) suggested that it is not easy for students at an early stage of education to smile and laugh and this rarely happens in classrooms. Teaching at the elementary level is commonly different due to reasons such as lack of interesting visual aids, infrequent use of humour, longer teaching periods and over-reliance on the story-telling method of teaching. Koplewicz (2002) indicated that 3.5 million teenagers in America suffered from depression. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, 10% to 15% of children and adolescents showed symptoms of depression. Arnold (2004) suggested that teachers should play their role in monitoring these teenagers and provide them with a weekly professional therapy. Researchers should seek answers to the reasons, correlations and explanations as to why these teenagers behave the way that they do. Teachers should also gain enough class experience as to identify and handle these teenagers during class. The use of humour can be seen as an effective medium to release stress and control emotions.

McDermott and Rothenberg (2000), in their research, *Humour*, expressed that an effective teacher is seen as the one who possesses certain qualities, such as vigilance for clarity, organisation, preparation, content and, most importantly, love for their students. This marks that humour may not be able to be delivered effectively when the teacher is being too critical. There are a few types of humour that can be used to demonstrate teacher-student potential when there is enough evidence supporting the use of humour in class. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) also claimed that students showed enthusiasm when their teachers applied humour during classroom interaction and this made the teaching and learning process more exciting and cheerful.

Theory of Humour: Relief Theory

The Relief Theory can be defined as the liberation or disengagement of an individual's flaw or weakness. When this weakness or tension is fully emancipated, for example, through humour through sexual connotations, sarcasm, nonsensical remarks or ramblings, then that individual's feelings will transform into laughter. Lynch (2002) expressed on a general note, that jokes and humour play a vital role in determining an individual's personality and way of thinking about oneself, and in effect, their interaction and communication with other people. In retrospect, humour was seen as a necessity in the life of the society.

The Relief Theory is one of the prominent theories in humour, as introduced by Spencer (in Smuts, 2006) and Freud (1928). Mahony (2000) defined the element of humour as the sensitivity of the person towards humour or sense of humour. A person who is seen as humorous is likely to practise humour in their life as they are more inclined to appreciate humour in various situations (Svebak, 1974).

Humour in the Acquisition of the Malay Language

The researchers have found an effective method of applying humour to children in the acquisition of the Malay language through certain teaching styles, be it visual, kinaesthetic, tactile, auditory, in groups or individual tasks. The presentation of the research findings is based on 20 samples of visual humour as illustrated below.

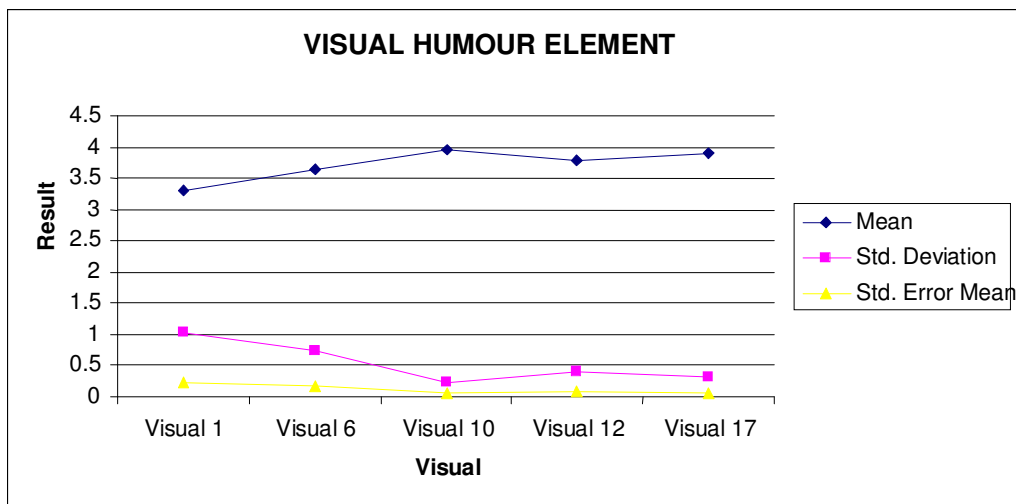


Figure 1: Visual Humour (output created based on the line graft indicating mean for each respondent)

As illustrated above, Figure 1 displays 20 samples of visual teaching style. With the use of humour in visual aids, it is seen as an effective stimulant when a comedic film is being shown. It is also found that the application of humour manages to evoke excitement for children to study in the Malay subject. Visual 10 indicates the highest mean, which is 3.9500 while the standard deviation is .22361 and the related item is 'When I read the instruction, I will most likely remember'. This happened because the students show fondness in watching the comedy due to the reason that certain words in the film's dialogues are displayed and highlighted during the show. Such words include 'teddy bear', 'suis on' ('switch on'), 'disqualified', 'plastic', 'bombastic' and 'queen control'. This exercise is purposely adopted

to create a fun learning experience in the Malay language classroom. The use of humorous material and witty actions of the teacher in front of class are seen as effective methods to capture the students' attention during the teaching process.

As mentioned earlier, the mean for Visual 10 is 3.9500 and the standard deviation is .22361. It is observed that there is a slight difference with the results for Visual 17 whereby the mean indicates 3.900 while the standard deviation is .30779. This is so due to the reason that children show interest in answering visual items 10 and 17 as they are extremely fascinated with learning when teachers use funny and relaxing visuals in class.

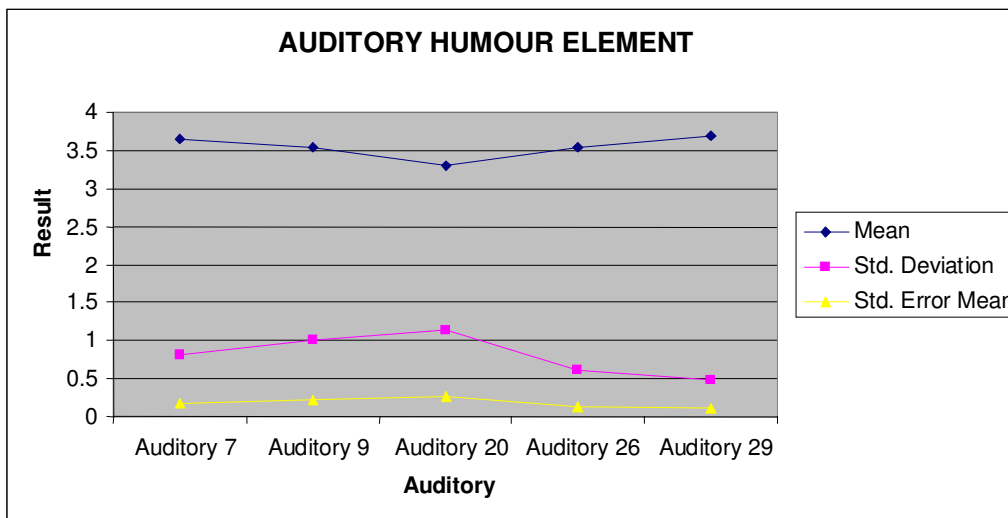


Figure 2: Auditory Humour (output created based on the line graft indicating mean for each respondent)

From the illustration above, Figure 2 shows 20 samples of auditory teaching style and the use of humour is seen as an effective stimulant in attracting the interest of students in learning the Malay language. This auditory learning style involves hearing capability. The mean for the Auditory 29 item indicates the highest mean, 3.7000 while the standard deviation is .47016. This item is related with '*I learn more when doing acting rather than listening to a lecture*', whereby children show tendency to record facts that they have learnt and listen to them in the

car, while doing homework and before going to bed. It is believed that such dialogues that they had listened to during the film can build laughter. An example of an utterance that sparked up laughter is '*Sekali imbas tengok macam kingkong pun ada si Jojo tu..hehe..*' ('*at a glance, Jojo looks like a king-kong..hehe..*'). From observation, it is found that the children enjoyed listening to a lesson that inserted humour as that they are able to relax and free their minds from learning anxiety. When they listen to humourous materials, they will feel entertained and this is an effective method in motivating student interest especially when learning Malay.

Aside from that, Figure 2 also demonstrates the mean for Auditory 9, which is 3.5500 and the standard deviation is .99868 while for Auditory 26, the mean also indicates 3.5500 and the standard deviation is .60481. There is a slight difference between the two items as the children show particular interest in answering both Auditory 9 and Auditory 26. This auditory learning style apparently signifies that there are a variety of individual teaching styles that can be adopted to attain a unique teaching and learning experience.

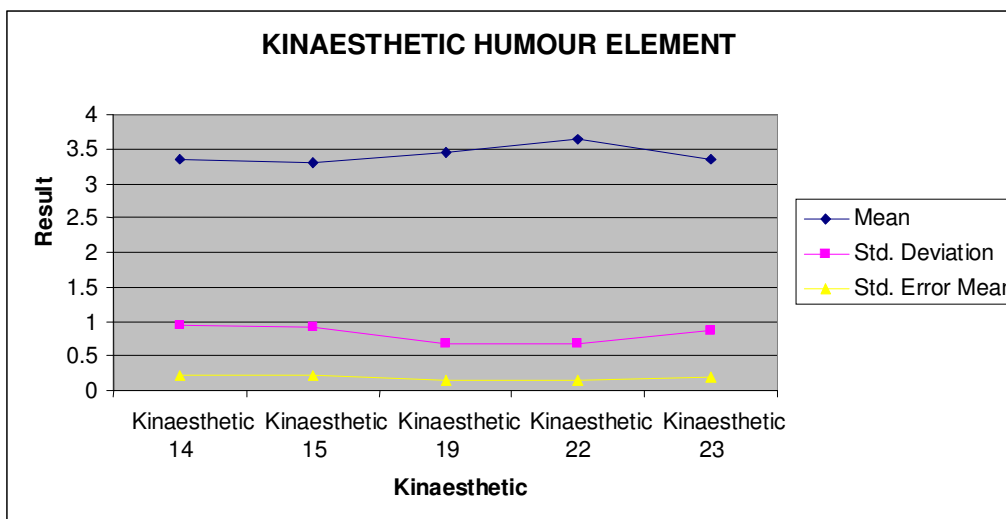


Figure 3: Kinaesthetic Humour (output created based on the line graft indicating mean for each respondent)

Figure 3 indicates 20 samples for kinaesthetic teaching style which involves the use of humour as a stimulant in Malay language learning. The term kinaesthetic learning style involves learning with movement and making use of bodily gestures. For Kinaesthetic 22, this item constitutes the highest mean, 3.6500 while the standard deviation is .67082. The related item is *'when i crack a joke, i remember what i have learnt'*. This item is considered the highest mean as realistically speaking, it seems impossible for the teacher to match the teaching style with the learning style that is deemed fit for each individual student's needs. The mean for Kinaesthetic 14 is 3.3500 and the standard deviation is .93330. There is a slight resemblance to item 23, which is 3.3500 and the standard deviation is .87509. There is notable similarity between the mean for both items as children show interest in responding to these items. Kinaesthetic 14 is concerned with *'I learn more than what i do in class projects'* while Kinaesthetic 23 is involved with *'I am more than willing to crack a joke with my other friends'*. Due to this reason, students with kinaesthetic learning styles show greater tendency to include humour as a way to eradicate boredom when learning Malay.

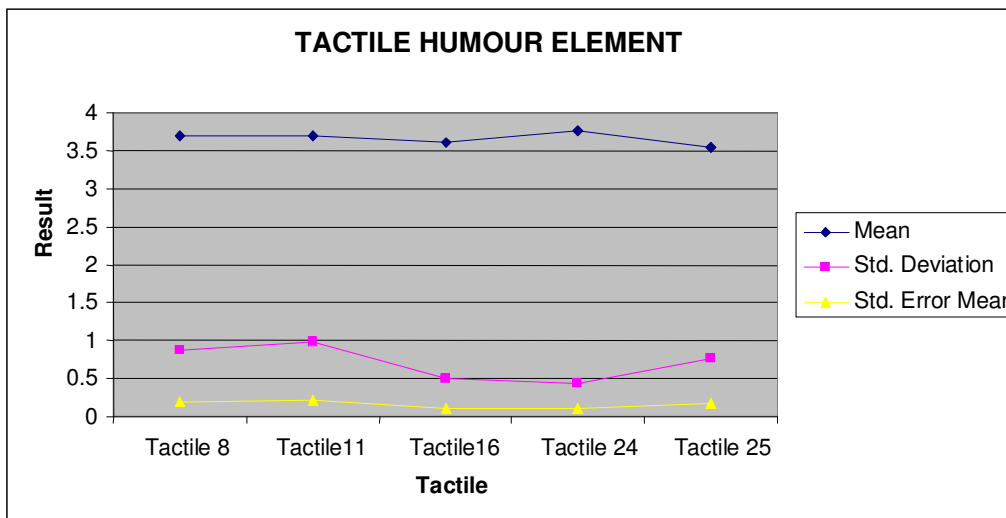


Figure 4: Tactile Humour (output created based on the line graph indicating mean for each respondent)

Figure 4 illustrates 20 samples of tactile teaching style in which the use of humour is seen as an effective method of attracting the interest of children in learning Malay. This particular learning style involves the palpation technique or the sense of touch. The highest mean indicated from the graft is from Tactile 24 which is 3.7500 while the standard deviation is .44426 and the item mentioned is '*I learn more with acting compared to listening to my other friends*'. This proves that learning can be done in multiple ways; that observation and information processing can happen and be experienced by humans in different lights. In other words, each individual possesses their own unique learning style. Students adopting tactile learning show great appeal for learning Malay by jotting down notes and re-enacting funny moments from the films shown.

Finally, the mean for Tactile 8 is 3.700 and the standard deviation is .86450 while the mean for Tactile 11 is 3.700 with .97872 in standard deviation. There is a similarity in the means for both items as students show inclination to answer both the Tactile 8 and Tactile 11 items. It is also observed that these tactile students have the tendency to write down notes that have humour in them. Dunn (1978) stated that learning style is defined as method that a student chooses to process and retain new information.

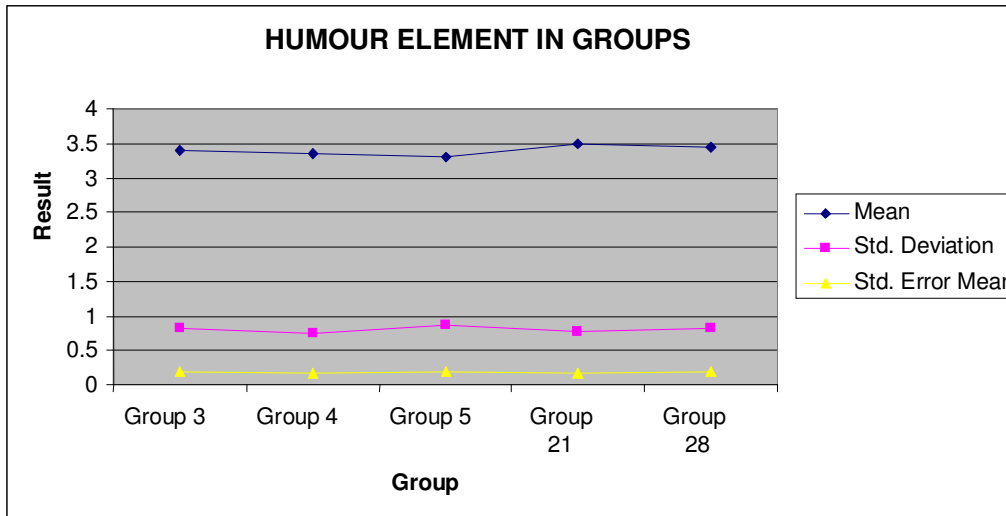


Figure 5: Humour in Groups (output created based on the line graft indicating mean for each respondent)

As illustrated in Figure 5, the graft indicates 20 samples of teaching style according to groups that adopt the use of humour in learning Malay. The mean for Group 21 is the highest out of the other groups with a mean of 3.5000 with a standard deviation of .76089. This item is concerned with *'I enjoy doing work with a class peer'* whereby children are taught according to their own inclination to teaching style and through this, their academic performance will significantly soar higher. After watching the comedic film, students are asked to form groups for discussion and a mini drama presentation during class. It is observed that children feel great excitement and fervour when learning together in groups.

In reference to the graft above, the mean for Group 3 is 3.4000 while the standard deviation is .82078. There is a slight difference with Group 28, whereby the mean indicates 3.4500 and the standard deviation is .82558. There is a small difference as students are inclined to answer the Group 3 item, in relation to *'I am able to complete my work faster as I work with my other peers'* and also the Group 29 item, which entails *'I prefer doing projects as a group'*. It is

also worthy to note that students find it easier to learn with at least one other peer, and they demonstrate greater success in completing the discussion and mini drama when working in their groups.

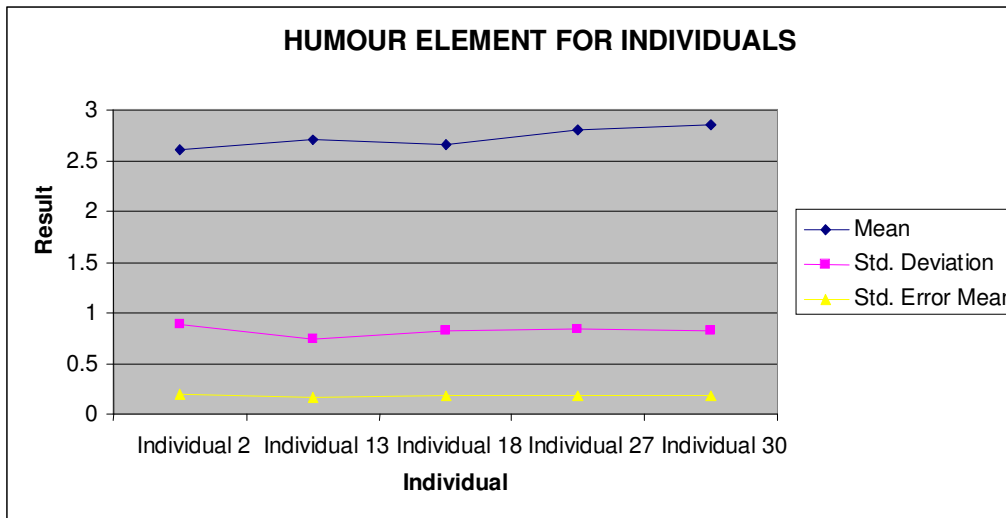


Figure 6: Humour for individuals (output created based on the line graft indicating mean for each respondent)

From Figure 6 above, the graft illustrates 20 samples of teaching style for individuals and the use of humour in learning Malay can bring enjoyment to the students. The mean for Individual 30, which is the highest item, is 2.8500 while the standard deviation is .81273 and the item indicated is '*I learn to complete group projects*'. During the comedy show, students learn by themselves and perform witty actions without assistance from their peers. According to Roswell (2004), it is believed that students learn more effectively when they get themselves involved with the experience, by which they are given the chance to make use of tools provided and work within their groups. Apart from that, students are encouraged to become active in participating in various activities such as witty discussions and mini drama acts.

From the graph above, it is found that the mean for Individual 2 is 2.6000 while the standard deviation is .88258 and the mean for Individual 18 is 2.6500 with a standard deviation of .81273. There is a slight difference between the means as students show interest in responding to the Individual 2 and Individual 18 items. The research findings are believed to be beneficial in inculcating awareness on the different varieties of learning styles adopted by the students in language classes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has proved that the application of humour in the Malay language classroom in schools is indeed significant. Although the current curriculum outlined by the Curriculum Development Centre is considered successful in assisting with Malay language learning, this research is believed to contribute more to the curriculum. However, this research does not come without certain limitations. This is notable in the distribution of humour among children where it has been least successful in helping students to improve in the said subject. After careful consideration on certain aspects, it is suggested here that a new curriculum should be implemented. It is hoped that the curriculum would become more holistic and this can later guarantee a greater need to master the Malay language among Malay children in schools. Students should also play their role by changing their attitudes and demonstrating more enthusiasm to properly use and master the Malay language. The view among students that the Malay language is an easy subject because of its use for daily communication should be eradicated as it requires an elaborate amount of time and dedication to become fully competent users of the language.

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