

# Examining the Effect of Humorous Activities on the Humour Development of Preschool Children

Özge P. Sakaryalı<sup>1\*</sup>, Arzu Özyürek<sup>2</sup>, Ayşe Ç. Uçak<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Department of Child Development, Faculty of Health Sciences, Alanya Aladdin Keykubat University, Alanya, Antalya, Turkey;

<sup>2</sup>Department of Child Development, Faculty of Health Sciences, Karabük University, Karabük, Turkey;

<sup>3</sup>Alanya Child Development Center, Alanya, Antalya

## ABSTRACT

Humour has an important place in children's social and emotional development. In this study, it was aimed to determine the humour features of 36-72 months old children according to age. Data on children were collected from 296 parents, including 242 mothers and 54 fathers with children aged 36-72 months, who could be reached by the easily accessible sampling method. In the collection of data, a questionnaire form that is created for the development of humour and provided scope validity with expert opinions was used. The data obtained from the form, which includes expressions for humour production, humour transfer, humour enjoyment, participation in humour and humour preference, were examined according to the age of the children. In the analysis of the data, correlation analysis with percentage and frequency distribution was used. As a result, it was determined that children's humour transfer, humour production, humour enjoyment, participation in humour and humour preferences differed according to age. In general, it has been found that as the age of children increases, the development of humour increases. Suggestions have been developed by emphasizing the importance of supporting the development of humour in children from an early age.

Keywords: humour development, humour, early childhood, humour in children.

## INTRODUCTION

Social emotional development, which is defined as the child's ability to express himself/herself, control his/her emotions and be in harmony with the people around him/her, is important for the healthy development of children. Children's acquisition of social emotional skills from an early age ensures that their social relationships with others are more successful (Denham et. al., 2003; Denham, & Weisberg, 2004; Joseph, & Strain, 2003). There are many factors that affect social emotional development, which will closely affect development in childhood and relationships in later life, and one of these factors may be the sense of humour.

Humour, which is an effective mechanism for overcoming situational difficulties and coping with problems encountered in daily life (Thorson, & Powell, 1993), is defined as a way of reasoning with social, emotional, linguistic and cognitively meaningful components (Özkara, 2013). Humour is considered as the quality of an action or situation, speech or writing that evokes fun, playfulness, humour, strangeness and/or joy, and is also expressed as the ability to perceive things that are amusing and/or ridiculous and even to speak, write and express them. Humour, which is seen in all cultures, is a universal phenomenon and has an adaptive role in the change and development of the individual for centuries (Martin, 2007). Humour, which has the effect of preparing the ground for many results such as making you laugh, making you feel, making you internalize, making you dream, making you think, making you compare, and making you establish a cause-effect

relationship (Savaş, 2009), was considered by Freud (1905) as the healthiest defense mechanism. Because humour can help people avoid these negatives without losing their realistic perspective when faced with a negative situation. According to the psychoanalytic view, unlike other defense mechanisms, humour is the most superior defense mechanism because the situation that causes anxiety is confronted and the situation or event is dealt with through exaggeration and enrichment

**Corresponding Author e-mail:** o\_pin arcik@hotmail.com

**https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9652-2089**

**How to cite this article:** Sakaryalı ÖP, Özyürek A and Uçak AÇ. Examining the Effect of Humorous Activities on the Humour Development of Preschool Children, Pegem Journal of Education and Instruction, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2024, 1-8

**Source of support:** Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Karabük University Social and Humanities Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Decision No: 2019/14, Date: 18, September, 2019).

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

**DOI:** 10.47750/pegegog.14.04.01

**Received:** 25.03.2023

**Accepted:** 15.08.2023

**Published :** 01.10.2024

(Freud, 1960). In addition to Freud, Maslow (1954) and Rogers (1961) also stated that humour is an important characteristic of self-actualized people.

According to Özünlü (1999), who has conducted extensive studies on humour, it is the element of surprise that makes humour humorous, attracts attention and gathers attention. The process in which the element of surprise in humour is made sense of ends positively by relieving the tension and laughing. The effects of humour such as stimulating and increasing the laughter response that strengthens immunity (Leftcourt, & Thomas, 1998; Burns, 1996), reducing anger, anxiety and stress by increasing the morale of the person have been proven by experimental studies (Özünlü, 1999). As a result of many empirical studies, it has been revealed that humour has an important function in reducing the harmful consequences of depression, anxiety, stress (Abel, 2002; Neslek, & Derks, 2001; Kuiper et. al., 1993) and stress and coping with stress (Kuiper, & Martin, 1998; Newman, & Stone, 1996; Leftcourt, & Martin, 1986). According to researchers, the reason for the function of humour in reducing the negative effects of stress is the change in the perception of the problem situations faced by individuals (Kuiper et. al., 1993). In addition, humour contributes to the development of interpersonal relationships and helps to meet the need for belonging, which is known as one of the basic psychological needs of human beings (Neslek, & Derks, 2001). Humour, which appeals to people's emotions before their knowledge, can facilitate the acquisition of many affective characteristics such as being able to understand and empathise with others and being consistent within oneself (Aşiloğlu, 2013).

Humour is considered from a cognitive and intellectual perspective. According to Galloway (1994), cognitive processes such as humour production and appreciation of humour are associated with high intelligence. There are also studies showing that there is a relationship between creativity, problem solving, verbal skills and humour (Belanger et. al., 1998; Murdock, & Ganim, 1993; Hampes, 1993). Humke and Schafer (1996) argue that humour is related to both producing innovation and expanding normal logic processes, while Belanger et. al. (1998). state that humour is related to cognitive rotations. According to the results of studies on humour, there is a positive relationship between humour and academic achievement (Chik, 2001). There are also findings that humour supports education by attracting students' attention (Prosser Jr., 1997). For this reason, there are opinions that humour should be included among learning-teaching strategies (Bergen, 1992). In addition to all these, humour is recommended as it plays an effective role in facilitating cognitive, personality, social and emotional development in children (McGhee, 2002).

Humour, which is a tool that human beings use as an element of relaxation even in difficult times, contributes to finding acceptable solutions to both individual and social problems as a result of stimulating creativity. Humour, which is passed down from generation to generation by human beings to solve problems, has an important contribution to culture in this respect. In today's world, humour is accepted as a superior feature of personality and people with positive personality traits such as creativity are thought to have a high sense of humour (Yerlikaya, 2007). It is seen that these people with high sense of humour can establish more positive and healthy relationships with other people around them (Kazarian, & Martin, 2004), are physically healthy (Abel, 2002; Fry, 1995; Kuiper, & Nicholl, 2004), have lower levels of depression and anxiety (Kuiper, & Martin, 1993, 1998; Kuiper et. al., 1993; Neslek, & Derks, 2001) and are more effective in coping with stress (Celso et. al., 2003; Fry, 1995; Panish, 2002).

In terms of child development, Masten (1986) found that children who both produce better humour and are in a more cheerful mood are more sensitive, productive and cooperative in the classroom. In addition, it is seen that these children are defined as more enterprising and more sociable by their peers. According to many studies on humour, there is a positive relationship between humour and self-esteem. Humour helps to improve self-esteem and sense of superiority (Keith-Spiegel, 1972). For example, Manke and Carlson (2003) conducted a study with 96 sibling pairs and concluded that the sibling with a more developed sense of humour had a higher level of self-esteem than the other sibling. According to the study conducted by McGhee (1989), children who meet with a sense of humour in early childhood, for example at the age of three, are both more talkative and more advanced in terms of language development. McGhee states that children learn to use humour as a tool to establish control and power over other people around them at a very early age.

Children are interested in subjects that contain humour from an early age. Considering the information that the sense of humour starts at an early age, the developmental, cognitive, social, emotional, cultural aspects of humour and its positive contributions, it can be said that it is important to address the issue from early childhood. When the literature is examined, it is seen that there are no measurement tools for humour in early childhood. In order to address the issue of humour from early childhood years and to use it for the benefit of the child, it is thought that the age-dependent development of humour characteristics in children should be examined, and this study aims to examine the humour characteristics of 36-72-month-old children according to age. Answers to the following questions were sought in the study:

- Is there a relationship between children's transfer of humour and age?
- Is there a relationship between children's humour production and age?
- Is there a relationship between children's enjoyment of humour and age?
- Is there a relationship between children's participation in humour and age?
- Is there a relationship between children's humour preference and age?

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study was designed in the relational screening model, one of the descriptive screening models. The study, in which numerical data are handled, is a quantitative study. A research model is all of the processes that describe a situation in the past or present as it exists and are applied for the realization of learning and the development of desired behaviors in individuals. In the general survey model, in a universe consisting of a large number of elements, a survey is conducted on the whole universe or a group of samples or samples to be taken from it in order to make a general judgment about the universe. The relational survey model is a survey approach that aims to determine the existence of change between two

or more variables together. In the relational survey model, it is tried to determine whether the variables change together and if there is a change, how it happens (Karasar, 2011).

### Study Group

The study group consisted of 296 children. The data were collected from 296 parents, 242 mothers and 54 fathers, whose children aged 36 months and over were attending preschool education institutions and who volunteered to participate in the study. Some personal information about the study group is given in Table 1.

Of the children in the study group, 32.4% were aged 36-47 months, 34.8% were aged 48-60 months, 32.8% were aged 61-72 months, 51.7% were girls and 48.3% were boys. While 68.2% of the children were the first child, 49% were two siblings. 41.6% of the mothers and 38.9% of the fathers were in the 31-35 and 36-40 age groups, respectively; 40.5% of the mothers and 49.7% of the fathers were undergraduate graduates, 25% of the mothers were housewives and 35.5% of the fathers were self-employed.

### Data Collection Tools

In order to collect the data, measurement tools and literature related to the subject of humour were examined and an item pool containing expressions for evaluating humour in children was created. The item pool included 21 items for evaluating humour in preschool children. It was paid attention that the

**Table 1: Personal Information about the Children and Parents in the Study Group**

<i>Age</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
36-47 month	96	32,4	Girls	153	51,7
48-60 month	103	34,8	Boys	143	48,3
61-72 month	97	32,8			
<i>Birth Order</i>			<i>Number of Sibling</i>		
First	202	68,2	Single child	109	36,8
Middle	34	11,5	Two child	145	49,0
Last	60	20,3	Three and over	42	14,2
<i>Mother's Age</i>			<i>Father's Age</i>		
26-30	66	22,3	26-30	22	7,4
31-35	123	41,6	31-35	84	28,4
36-40	88	29,7	36-40	115	38,9
41 and over	19	6,4	41 and over	75	25,3
<i>Mother's Education</i>			<i>Father's Education</i>		
Primary	8	2,7	Primary	10	3,4
Middle	11	3,7	Middle	10	3,4
Last	60	20,3	Three and over	42	14,2

Age	f	%	Gender	f	%
<i>Mother's Age</i>			<i>Father's Age</i>		
26-30	66	22,3	26-30	22	7,4
31-35	123	41,6	31-35	84	28,4
36-40	88	29,7	36-40	115	38,9
41 and over	19	6,4	41 and over	75	25,3
<i>Mother's Education</i>			<i>Father's Education</i>		
Primary	8	2,7	Primary	10	3,4
Middle	11	3,7	Middle	10	3,4
High School	84	28,4	High School	74	25,0
Associate Degree	49	16,6	Associate Degree	23	7,8
Undergraduate	120	40,5	Undergraduate	147	49,7
Master	24	8,1	Master	32	10,8
<i>Mother's Profession</i>			<i>Father's Profession</i>		

items for humour production, humour transfer, enjoyment of humour, participation in humour and humour preference were written in a simple language, were understandable and contained a single judgement. In the study, expert opinion was taken for face validity, one of the interpretive validity types. Face validity involves obtaining expert opinion on the extent to which the statements in the measurement tool are related to the subject (Karakoç, & Dönmez, 2014). The items for evaluating humour in children were presented to expert opinion. One child development, one preschool education and one measurement and evaluation field expert was asked to evaluate the items in terms of their suitability for the purpose and clarity. After the expert opinions, two items were removed, three items were corrected and four new items were added to the draft form. Thus, the content validity of the 23-item draft form was ensured. "Always", "rarely" and "never" ratings were added to the form. The total Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of the form was determined as 0.90.

### Data Collection

Some of the parents were reached when they brought their children to school and some of them were reached online. In this way, the data obtained from the parents who completed the form completely were included in the study. The items in the questionnaire form were grouped as humour transmission, humour production, humour enjoyment, humour participation and humour preference.

### Data Analysis

In the analysis of the data, percentages and frequencies of personal information about the study group were given,

and correlation analysis was used to examine the differences according to the age of the children.

### FINDINGS

The results of the correlation analysis of children's humour transmission, humour production, enjoyment of humour, participation in humour and humour preference by age are given in Tables 2-6.

According to Table 2, there is a low level positive correlation between the age of the children and the situation of telling others about the funny events they have experienced, heard and witnessed, which expresses humour transmission ( $r=0,149$ ,  $p<0,05$ ;  $r=0,153$ ,  $p<0,01$ ;  $r=0,159$ ,  $p<0,01$ ).

According to this, as the age of the children increases, the situation of transferring their humorous experiences also increases.

According to Table 3, there is a low level positive correlation between the situations of making others laugh by making up different stories expressing humour production, making an effort to make others laugh, expecting a laughing reaction from others with meaningless behaviours and words, changing words and using them for humour and children's ages ( $r=0,116$ ,  $p<0,05$ ;  $r=0,126$ ,  $p<0,05$ ;  $r=0,128$ ,  $p<0,05$ ;  $r=0,171$ ,  $p<0,01$ ;  $r=0,129$ ,  $p<0,05$ ). According to this, as the age of the children increases, the situation of making an effort to make others laugh with different stories, meaningless behaviours or words, in other words, the situation of producing humour also increases.

According to Table 4, there is a low level positive correlation between the situation of laughing when told something funny, which expresses liking humour, and the age

of the children ( $r=0.183$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). According to this, as the age of the children increases, the situation of laughing at funny things, i.e. liking humour, also increases.

According to Table 5, there is a positive low-level relationship between the level of asking questions to understand the situation in which others laugh ( $r=0.169$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), which expresses participation in humour, and the level of trying to make younger children laugh with games such as “cee” game ( $r=-0.139$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Accordingly, as the

Table 2: Correlation Results of Children’s Transmission of Humour by Age.

<i>Expressions to convey humour</i>		<i>Child Age</i>
Tells others about funny things that happened to him/her.	r	0,149*
	p	0,010
He/she tells others about the funny events he/she heard.	r	0,153**
	p	0,009
He/she tells others about the funny events he/she has seen and witnessed.	r	0,159**
	p	0,006
Likes to make others laugh.	r	0,112
	p	0,053
He/she often tells about the events he/she has experienced/known in a funny way.	r	0,108
	p	0,065

Table 3: Correlation Results of Children’s Generation of Humour by Age.

<i>Expressions for Generating Humour</i>		<i>Child Age</i>
Makes others laugh by making up different stories.	r	-0,116*
	p	0,046
Makes an effort to make others laugh.	r	-0,126*
	p	0,031
Does meaningless behaviour and expects laughter from others.	r	-0,128*
	p	0,028
Says meaningless words and expects laughter from others.	r	-0,171**
	p	0,003
Makes changes in words and uses them for laughter.	r	-0,129*
	p	0,027
Makes others laugh by changing his/her body, gestures and mimics.	r	-0,068
	p	0,245
He/she tries to make others laugh by changing his/her voice tone.	r	-0,005
	p	0,927

Table 4: Correlation Results of Children’s Enjoyment of Humour According to Age.

<i>Expressions of Enjoyment of Humour</i>		<i>Child Age</i>
He/she likes to joke.	r	0,049
	p	0,404
He/she is happy to be joked with.	r	0,030
	p	0,602
Laughs when something funny is told.	r	0,183**
	p	0,002

Table 5: Correlation Results of Children’s Participation in Humour by Age.

<i>Statements on Participation in Humour</i>		<i>Children’s Ages</i>
He/she sympathises with humorous people.	r	0,099
	p	0,089
Finds excuses to laugh.	r	-0,100
	p	0,085
Asks questions to understand the situation in which others are laughing.	r	0,169**
	p	0,004
Attempts to make younger children laugh with games such as “Cee”.	r	-0,139*
	p	0,016

Table 6: Correlation Results According to Age on Children’s Humor Preference.

<i>Expressions Regarding Humour reference</i>		<i>Children’s Ages</i>
Prefers to play games with humorous content.	r	0,071
	p	0,224
Prefers stories with humorous content.	r	0,087
	p	0,133
Prefers to watch films with humorous content.	r	0,119*
	p	0,041
Says “I made a joke” to express a situation he/she wants to be laughed at.	r	0,029
	p	0,624

age of the children increases, the level of asking questions to understand the situations in which others laugh increases, while the situation of trying to make younger people laugh with “cee” games decreases with increasing age.

According to Table 6, there is a low level positive correlation between the preference for watching films with humour expressing humour preference and the age of the

children ( $r=0,119$ ,  $p<0,05$ ). According to this, as the age of the children increases, the preference for watching films with humorous content, i.e. the preference for humour, also increases.

## DISCUSSION

In the study, it was determined that as the age of the children increased, the situation of transferring their humorous experiences also increased. It was determined that there was a low level positive correlation between the age of the children and their ability to tell others about the humorous events they had experienced, heard and witnessed. It is thought that this situation may be related to children's language and cognitive development. As children get older, they become more competent in deciding whether what they hear contains humour and laughter elements, remembering these events in their minds and telling them to others. A study conducted in the literature on this subject is in parallel with the findings of this study. Another area where language and cognitive development are close is humour development. The verbal emergence of humour requires the recognition of logical inconsistency in word games. This situation occurs as a result of the integration of cognitive processes with the meaning system of language (Ortonty, 1979). In another study, it was stated that children's metalinguistic awareness starts to develop slowly in early childhood and gradually accelerates until the primary school age (Acarlar et.all., 2002).

One of the important findings of the study is that as the age of the children increases, the situation of making an effort to make others laugh with different stories, meaningless behaviours or words, that is, the situation of producing humour also increases. It is thought that this situation may be related to children's social development and seeing humour as a way to attract the attention of other individuals. In a research, Yörükoğlu stated that it is not easy to say exactly when the ability of humour is acquired (Yörükoğlu, 1964). Harms says that for a child in the anal period, a sudden and surprising event makes the child laugh (such as a falling man, disability, obesity), while in the phallic period, interest in exciting tales, humorous animal stories, riddles and rhyming words increases. In this period, what makes the child laugh is extraordinary and surprising. It is known that at this age the child has no logically meaningful awareness. Children whose sense of humour does not yet go beyond humorous words and behaviours cannot understand and convey anecdotes (Yörükoğlu, 1969). Morreall (1997) states that the best way to make the other person laugh in a play is to make some individuals talk about a subject that the audience knows but they do not know. He stated that even when a simple humour is in question, it is funnier if the individual listening does not

understand the joke, and that here one laughs not at the joke but at the lack of comprehension, that is, at the meaningfulness. In another study, humour was recommended in the social development of children in terms of stimulating the mind to learn and to ensure that what is learned is put into permanent memory, and to increase the sense of curiosity by developing imagination (Keskin, 2020).

In the study, it was determined that as the age of the children increased, the situation of laughing at things with funny content, that is, liking humour, also increased. It is thought that perceiving that something told contains humour with mental skills and reacting with laughter is closely related to both cognitive and language development. As the age of children increases, their receptive language skills also increase. It is stated that the development of attention and perception levels, which are closely related to receptive language skills, will help self-expression skills by increasing the level of emotional intelligence. McGhee stated that the ability of humour in children is an emotional intelligence skill like many other skills, and that the understanding of humour based on incompatibility at certain points is an important variable in revealing a child's cognitive development. It was stated that children's production of verbal humour is parallel to the progress in language development (McGhee, 1971).

In the study, it was determined that as the age of the children increased, the level of asking questions to understand the situations in which others laughed increased, while the situation of trying to make younger children laugh with "cee" games decreased. Asking questions to understand the reasons for a situation is related to cognitive development. This is expected to increase with age. "Cee" games can be seen as games played mostly with young children. A research supports the findings of the study and it is said that the humour ability of children, which will positively affect their whole lives, starts to develop with the "ceee!" game played in the first weeks of their lives (Chernomas, & Shapiro, 2013). Children's playing such games may have decreased depending on the characteristics of the developmental period, or if they have siblings and have witnessed such games, they may model similar behaviours. In this study, children were not asked whether they had younger siblings and this can be considered as one of the limitations of the study. It is also possible that parents did not have an environment in which they could witness these behaviours in their children.

In the study, it was determined that as the age of the children increased, the level of watching films with humour content, i.e. the preference for humour, also increased. Considering the age-dependent development of humour development, it was determined that the level of liking for humorous elements may also increase with increasing age.

Again, a study in the literature on humour conducted with 101 children in early childhood and primary school age reached similar results and concluded that children found the videos with humour content funny by showing them to each other with signs (Eskidemir Meral, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

In this study, in which the relationship between children's humour characteristics and their ages was examined, it was observed that 36-72-month-old children's humour transmission, humour production, enjoyment of humour, participation in humour and humour preferences differed according to age, and in general, humour development increased as the age of children increased. The results obtained in the study are listed below:

- As the age of children increases, the situation of conveying their humorous experiences also increases.
- As the age of children increases, the level of making an effort to make others laugh with different stories, meaningless behaviours or words, in other words, the level of producing humour also increases.
- As the age of the children increases, the situation of laughing at funny things told, i.e. liking humour, also increases.
- As the age of children increases, the level of asking questions to understand the situations in which others laugh increases, while the level of trying to make younger children laugh with "cee" games decreases.
- As the age of children increases, the level of watching films with humorous content, i.e. preferring humour, also increases.

## SUGGESTION

As a result, it can be said that more studies on humour in early childhood are needed. Considering its positive aspects, humour can be used to support children's development and to regulate educational content. Children can benefit from humour in a way that can be used to cope with negative situations, to accept themselves in social environments and to express their feelings. Studies can be conducted on how children's reasons for laughing may differ according to age group, how children react to what kind of humour elements in which situations, and whether there is a change in the understanding of humour according to the gender of children. Examining children's humour in social environments

through direct observation can provide more concrete data on children's humour.

## LIMITATION

The study had some limitations. The study was conducted with only preschool children and it could be considered a limitation. Only quantitative data were collected in the study.

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