



Humour as Ethical Pedagogy in Indonesian Universities: Student Experiences, Effective Humour Types, and SDG 4-Oriented Teaching Strategies

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Abstract: A rigid and stressful classroom environment can reduce students' motivation and increase academic anxiety. Humour in learning serves as an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance engagement, reduce tension, and strengthen memory retention. However, not all types of humour positively influence the learning process. This study aims to identify the most effective types of humour and optimal strategies for their implementation in Indonesian higher education. Employing a qualitative-phenomenological approach, data were collected through structured interviews with 40 students from multiple universities. The findings reveal that academic humour is the most effective in improving comprehension and retention, while spontaneous humour promotes student engagement. In contrast, irrelevant or excessive humour tends to distract students from their focus. The study's novelty lies in integrating Islamic educational values with Western educational psychology to explain the role of humour in fostering a balanced, enjoyable, and ethically guided learning environment. The research aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) by emphasizing the importance of inclusive and engaging pedagogical practices that enhance the quality of learning in higher education. The study also provides practical recommendations for lecturers to apply humour responsibly as a pedagogical tool that supports motivation, engagement, and meaningful learning.

Keywords: humour in learning; Islamic educational psychology; pedagogical strategies; SDG 4; student engagement.

Abstrak: Lingkungan kelas yang kaku dan penuh tekanan dapat mengurangi motivasi siswa dan meningkatkan kecemasan akademik. Penggunaan humor dalam pembelajaran terbukti sebagai strategi pedagogis yang efektif untuk meningkatkan keterlibatan, mengurangi ketegangan, dan memperkuat daya ingat. Namun, tidak semua jenis humor berpengaruh positif terhadap proses pembelajaran. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis humor yang paling efektif dan strategi optimal dalam penerapannya di pendidikan tinggi Indonesia. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif-

fenomenologis, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara terstruktur dengan 40 mahasiswa dari berbagai universitas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa humor akademik merupakan jenis humor yang paling efektif dalam meningkatkan pemahaman dan daya ingat, sementara humor spontan dapat mendorong keterlibatan mahasiswa. Sebaliknya, humor yang tidak relevan atau berlebihan cenderung mengalihkan perhatian mahasiswa dari fokus pembelajaran. Kebaruan dari penelitian ini terletak pada integrasi nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam dengan psikologi pendidikan Barat untuk menjelaskan peran humor dalam menciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran yang seimbang, menyenangkan, dan beretika. Penelitian ini sejalan dengan Tujuan Pembangunan Berkelanjutan 4 (Pendidikan Berkualitas) dengan menekankan pentingnya praktik pedagogis yang inklusif dan menarik dalam meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran di pendidikan tinggi. Selain itu, penelitian ini memberikan rekomendasi praktis bagi dosen untuk menerapkan humor secara bertanggung jawab sebagai alat pedagogis yang mendukung motivasi, keterlibatan, dan pembelajaran yang bermakna.

Kata kunci: *humor dalam pembelajaran; psikologi pendidikan Islam; strategi pedagogis; SDG 4; keterlibatan mahasiswa.*

A. Introduction

A positive classroom atmosphere plays a vital role in shaping students' motivation and emotional well-being (Ahmed et al., 2020; Assadi, 2023; Zhang et al., 2025). In contrast, rigid and stressful conditions often reduce engagement, heighten anxiety, and limit creativity (Becker & Börnert-Ringleb, 2024; Hsu & Goldsmith, 2021). Integrating humour into learning can stimulate positive emotions, improve focus, and foster dynamic teacher–student interaction (Esseily & Rat-Fischer, 2022; Qamar et al., 2025). Humour is the quality of being amusing or comic, primarily as expressed in literature, speech, or behavior (Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2025). Studies have shown that humour increases students' attention and motivation while reducing academic anxiety (Banas et al., 2011; Garner, 2006; Wanzer et al., 2010). However, many educators still struggle to determine appropriate forms and levels of humour without losing academic rigor (Banas et al., 2011; Qiyang et al. 2022).

Humour that is relevant to the material helps students grasp complex concepts more easily and retain information longer (Haydon et al., 2023; Qamar et al. 2025). It also strengthens teacher–student relationships, promoting an inclusive and supportive classroom environment (Hackworth, 2024). Conversely, irrelevant or excessive humour may distract learners and hinder comprehension. Hence, identifying the most effective types of humour and their optimal use is essential for maximizing educational impact (Ngai et al., 2025; Zhou & Lee, 2024).

Previous research confirms that humour has benefits in reducing stress (Martin et al., 2003; Savage et al., 2017), boosting engagement (Garner, 2006), and improving memory (Wanzer et al., 2010). Nonetheless, gaps remain regarding which types of humour work best and how to integrate them responsibly. From a psychological standpoint, humour lowers affective barriers, enabling students to process information more efficiently. However, if culturally insensitive or excessive, it can be counterproductive (Savage et al., 2017).

Western educational psychology provides a theoretical framework for understanding these benefits. Humour is considered a pedagogical strategy that can increase student engagement and reduce academic anxiety. Superiority Theory (Plato & Aristotle) states that humour can improve self-confidence and reduce awkwardness in social interactions. Relief Theory states that humour helps reduce emotional tension, including academic stress (Freud, 1905). In the context of education, Incongruity Theory explains that humour that arises from a mismatch between expectations and reality can stimulate students' critical thinking (McGhee, 1979). Humour relevant to the learning material can also improve students' recall of the concepts taught.

Wanzer et al. (2010) demonstrated that incorporating humour relevant to academic material can enhance student engagement and motivation in learning. When lecturers deliver material in a fun way, students are more active in discussions, ask questions, and are more responsive to learning. Educational psychology theory supports this finding by explaining that academic humour stimulates positive affective states, increasing students' attention and interest in the subject matter. However, humour that is irrelevant or tends to deviate from the main topic can decrease the focus and effectiveness of learning.

Furthermore, Banas et al. (2011) state that humour can create a more relaxed classroom atmosphere and reduce the academic anxiety often felt by students, especially when facing heavy assignments or exams. According to Freud's Relief Theory, humour helps individuals release excessive emotional stress, making them more comfortable in receiving new information. In the context of education, a tense and stressful atmosphere can inhibit information processing in the brain. Therefore, the appropriate use of humour can make students more relaxed and more easily understand the material being taught without being burdened by excessive stress.

Garner asserts that humour makes learning more engaging and improves students' recall of academic information. This is supported by Incongruity Theory (McGhee, 1979), which explains that when a person experiences a mismatch in expectations (for example, hearing something humorous while still related to academic material), the brain is more likely to retain the information for a more extended period. Thus, academic humour associated with a particular concept or theory will be more effective in strengthening long-term memory, which ultimately has a positive impact on students' understanding and retention of the material. In addition to increasing motivation and understanding, humour contributes to students' self-confidence, especially when facing exams or presentations, as found by Martin et al. (2003). When the classroom atmosphere is more relaxed, and students are familiar with humour-based interactions, they feel more comfortable expressing their ideas publicly. In addition, humour can also reduce tension in stressful situations, such as when facing academic evaluations. Thus, humour is a tool in delivering material and a means to build students' courage and mental resilience in facing academic challenges.

Humour can be a rigorous pedagogical tool when framed by both Western educational psychology and Islamic educational ethics. In Western scholarship, humour enhances attention, lowers anxiety, and deepens processing when it is instruction-relevant, thereby reducing extraneous cognitive load and reinforcing core concepts (Alsakaker, 2025; Bala, 2016; Erdođdu & akirođlu, 2021; Hensley, 2023; Le & Pham 2025; Sarasati & Nugraha, 2025; Sweller, 2011). It also supports intrinsic motivation through relatedness and positive affect within the classroom community (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Recent higher-education studies suggest that playful, well-designed activities can enhance engagement and recall without compromising academic rigor (Hackworth, 2024; Ngai et al., 2025; Zhou & Lee, 2024).

In Islam, humour serves not only as entertainment but also has educational and social functions. The Prophet Saw. was known as warm and sometimes used humour to teach Islamic values without demeaning or hurting others. In a hadith narrated by Abu Dawud, the Prophet once said: "*I also joke, but I do not say anything but the truth*" (HR. Abu Dawud). From this, Islam supports humour as long as it is not excessive, stays within ethical boundaries, and serves a good purpose, including education. Some classical scholars, such as Imam Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulumuddin*, also mentioned that good humour could strengthen teacher-student relationships and create a comfortable learning environment. From the perspective of Islamic psychology, good humour can

be a form of tarbiyah or coaching that strengthens the emotional connection between educators and learners, thus accelerating the understanding of knowledge.

Within Islamic educational thought, humour belongs to akhlaq mahmudah when it is truthful, moderate, and purposive, educating with compassion and wisdom (Hassan, 2022; Michael, 2021; Usman et al., 2023). Classical sources valorize communication that lightens learners' burdens (*tahfif*) while preserving moral intent, a stance consistent with contemporary analyses of Islamic pedagogy that emphasize ethical formation alongside cognition (Subiyantoro et al., 2020; Usman et al., 2025). Comparative work on Islamic education likewise highlights the integration of knowledge with character, positioning the teacher's manner, including measured humour, as formative for learners' intellectual and moral growth (Arizona et al., 2025; Djannah et al., 2025).

This synthesis aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education), which emphasizes the need for inclusive, equitable, and engaging learning that fosters cognitive, social, and ethical competencies (Awini et al., 2024; Tafese & Kopp, 2025; Tatto, 2021). In practical terms for Indonesian higher education, instruction-relevant humour can serve as a low-cost, high-impact lever to widen participation, support well-being, and enhance learning quality, core dimensions of "quality" debated in comparative education (Hackworth, 2024). Framing humour through Islamic ethics and evidence-based pedagogy provides lecturers with an actionable model to use humour that is truthful, respectful, and concept-anchored to advance motivation, reduce anxiety, and deepen understanding, while honouring institutional and cultural values.

Although extensive studies have confirmed the psychological benefits of humour for learning motivation, engagement, and memory, most existing research remains grounded in Western educational psychology and predominantly employs quantitative-experimental designs. There is still limited empirical evidence that critically explores humour through the integration of Islamic educational ethics and students' lived experiences, particularly within the context of Indonesian higher education. Furthermore, prior studies rarely differentiate systematically between types of humour and their specific pedagogical impacts. This gap necessitates a phenomenological investigation that positions humour not only as a psychological strategy but also as an ethical pedagogical practice aligned with SDG 4.

Based on these theoretical considerations, this study aims to explore three central research questions, starting with an investigation into how the use of humour

by lecturers influences student motivation and engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify which types of humour are most effective in improving comprehension and retention of learning material from an educational psychology perspective. Finally, it addresses the practical strategies lecturers can adopt to implement humour effectively and ethically in the classroom, ensuring that academic focus and integrity are maintained alongside pedagogical innovation.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach supported by quantitative descriptive data to explore students' lived experiences regarding humour in higher education (Creswell & Creswell, 2022; Smith, 2004; Watson, 2025). The research was conducted from September to November 2024. The primary objective was to investigate how humour influences students' motivation, engagement, and comprehension in classroom contexts, while ensuring transparency in participant selection and data integration. A qualitative design was chosen because it allows a deep exploration of students' perceptions, emotions, and cognitive interpretations related to humour. The phenomenological method was applied to capture students' authentic experiences and reflections about lecturers' use of humour during teaching. Quantitative tools such as Likert-scale ratings were used to support and contextualize these qualitative insights.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity and relevance (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Campbell et al., 2020). The inclusion criteria comprised active undergraduate or postgraduate students currently enrolled at higher education institutions in Indonesia who have participated in at least two courses taught by lecturers frequently employing humour in instruction. Furthermore, participants were required to be willing to engage in both structured interviews and questionnaire-based responses.

Represent varied academic disciplines, including humanities, education, social sciences, and natural sciences, to ensure broad representation. A total of 40 students from five universities across Java were selected, with a balanced representation by gender and academic background. Two complementary data collection methods were used. First, through structured interviews, participants answered ten core questions exploring the psychological and pedagogical effects of humour in class. While the responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 =

Strongly Agree), follow-up qualitative probes encouraged participants to elaborate on their experiences. Second, open-ended reflections were employed to capture nuanced personal experiences, offering detailed examples of when humour enhanced or hindered learning engagement.

Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's framework (Miles et al., 2014), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Quantitative data provided descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) that identified patterns of agreement or disagreement among students. These numerical results were integrated with thematic analysis from the qualitative interviews to produce an in-depth interpretation. For example, when Likert-scale results showed strong agreement that humour reduced academic anxiety, qualitative narratives were examined to explain *how* and *why* students felt more relaxed and motivated. This integration ensured that quantitative results offered measurable trends, while qualitative data provided rich contextual explanations, achieving methodological complementarity and enhancing analytical depth.

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation across data types (interviews and Likert-scale responses) and participant diversity (different universities and disciplines) (Denzin, 2012; Marlina et al., 2024). Peer debriefing and expert review by educational psychologists verified interpretive accuracy. Reliability was ensured through the maintenance of transparent coding procedures, verbatim transcription, and consistent thematic categorization. The study adhered to the ethical standards for human research. Informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the data collection process. No sensitive personal information was disclosed.

In summary, the methodology integrates qualitative phenomenological depth with quantitative precision to capture a holistic understanding of humour in educational psychology. By clarifying the selection criteria and illustrating how data types were interwoven, this revised section reinforces methodological transparency and aligns with best practices for pedagogical research in Indonesian higher education.

C. Results and Discussion

1. The Impact of Humour on Student Motivation and Engagement

To empirically assess the role of humour in the learning process, the researcher distributed a structured questionnaire comprising 10 items focused on student

motivation and engagement. To facilitate a clear descriptive analysis, the responses were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree), with the findings interpreted through mean scores and standard deviations.

Table 1. Calculation Results (Data from 40 Students)

No.	Question	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
1	Lecturers who use humour make me more motivated to learn.	4.2	0.68
2	I feel more comfortable and relaxed in class when the lecturer injects humour into the delivery of the material.	4.5	0.52
3	The humour used by the lecturer helped me understand the material more easily.	4.3	0.65
4	I am more interested in attending lectures when the lecturer uses humour.	4.1	0.72
5	Humour in teaching improved my interaction with the lecturer and classmates.	4.4	0.58
6	I am more active in asking questions or participating in class when the lecturer uses humour.	3.9	0.74
7	It is easier to remember material that is explained with humour than material that is delivered seriously.	4.0	0.71
8	The use of humour by lecturers reduces boredom in lectures.	4.6	0.50
9	Humour in lectures helps me cope with academic stress.	4.3	0.66
10	I am more likely to attend lectures attentively when the lecturer uses humour in teaching.	4.2	0.64

The analysis presented in [Table 1](#) demonstrates a strong consensus among students that humour significantly enhances motivation and engagement, as evidenced by the overall mean scores ranging from 3.9 to 4.6 with relatively low standard deviations. Specifically, the data highlights that humour is most effective at alleviating boredom, which received the highest rating (Mean = 4.6, SD = 0.50), whereas its impact on stimulating active classroom participation was rated lowest (Mean = 3.9, SD = 0.74), suggesting that while humour successfully fosters a positive atmosphere, it does not automatically guarantee increased behavioral interactivity.

The first significant finding of this study reveals that humour used by lecturers has a significant psychological impact on students' motivation and engagement in learning activities. Data analysis from structured interviews and Likert-scale results indicates that the majority of respondents (Mean = 4.2; SD = 0.68) strongly agree that humour enhances their interest and comfort in the classroom. These results demonstrate that humour functions not merely as entertainment but as a pedagogical stimulus that improves the emotional climate of learning.

From a psychological perspective, humour reduces academic tension and promotes a relaxed cognitive state, which facilitates deeper learning ([Banas et al.,](#)

2011; Wanzer et al., 2010). Students reported that humorous interactions during lectures made them feel more connected to the lecturer and peers, thereby encouraging active participation. This aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2019, 2020), which posits that a sense of relatedness and a positive emotional connection enhance intrinsic motivation.

From an Islamic educational perspective, humour is viewed as a form of *tahfif* (lightening the burden) and *ta'dib* (ethical instruction) that promotes emotional balance and moral refinement. The Prophet Muhammad Saw. is narrated to have said, "Indeed, I joke, but I only tell the truth" (HR. Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi), emphasizing honesty, wisdom, and moderation in humour. This Prophetic principle of truthful humour provides an ethical lens for interpreting the findings. In this study, students consistently rated instruction-relevant humour as the most beneficial form, with academic humour scoring highest for comprehension and retention (Mean = 4.15), while absurd/satirical humour scored lowest (Mean = 2.53). This pattern suggests that humour contributes to learning quality when it remains truthful, respectful, and concept-anchored rather than merely entertaining." Thus, humour in Islamic pedagogy is not only a cognitive aid but also a moral practice that nurtures empathy and joy in learning without violating ethical boundaries (Al-Ghazali, 2005; Bolandhematan, 2019).

When viewed within the framework of SDG 4, these findings underscore that humour plays a crucial role in creating inclusive, equitable, and engaging educational environments. By reducing students' anxiety and increasing their motivation, humour supports emotional well-being, one of the key indicators of educational quality, as noted by Ngai et al. (2025) and Zhou & Lee (2024). Humour as an experiential learning strategy encourages positive emotions that enhance cognitive and social development.

The integration of humour in higher education also supports Target 4.7 of SDG 4 (Awini et al., 2024; Tafese & Kopp, 2025; Tatto, 2021), which focuses on developing learners' social and emotional competencies through transformative learning experiences. Islamic education's emphasis on compassion (*rahmah*), balance (*wasathiyah*), and joy (*farah*) resonates with these global goals, illustrating that humour can be a bridge between spiritual and psychological well-being in learning (Sahin, 2017). This first finding underscores that humour, when ethically and pedagogically aligned, serves as a dual tool for psychological relief and motivational enhancement. It enables the formation of a classroom culture that values both

intellectual engagement and emotional connection, positioning humour as an essential component of SDG 4 in Indonesian higher education.

2. Types of Humour and Their Effectiveness in Learning

To evaluate the varying pedagogical impact of humour, this study categorized the assessment into four distinct types grounded in educational psychology: academic humour, which integrates directly with the subject matter through anecdotes or puns; relational humour, designed to foster rapport between lecturers and students via relevant personal stories; spontaneous humour, characterized by natural, unplanned interactions; and absurd or satirical humour, which employs irony regarding academic situations within ethical boundaries. To measure the perceived efficacy of these approaches, the responses from 40 students were analysed using descriptive statistics, and the detailed findings regarding the mean and standard deviation for each humour type are summarized in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation for the Types of Humour

No.	Types of humour	Mean	SD
1	Academic Humour	4.15	0.82
2	Spontaneous Humour	3.90	0.86
3	Relational Humour	3.53	1.10
4	Absurd/Satirical Humour	2.53	1.02

The detailed analysis of the results presented in [Table 2](#) reveals a clear hierarchy in the pedagogical effectiveness of humour types. Academic humour emerged as the most superior method (Mean = 4.15), facilitating improved comprehension and retention; this finding corroborates Cognitive Load Theory, which posits that content-relevant humour strengthens conceptual connections in long-term memory. Following this, spontaneous humour (Mean = 3.90) proved highly effective in fostering engagement, a result consistent with the Affective Filter Hypothesis that links a relaxed classroom atmosphere to increased cognitive receptivity. In contrast, relational humour (Mean = 3.53) was found to be instrumental primarily for building rapport between lecturers and students rather than directly enhancing subject mastery. Finally, absurd or satirical humour received the lowest rating (Mean = 2.53), suggesting that irony can be counterproductive by causing confusion or distraction that hinders information retention.

The second major finding highlights that not all types of humour produce the same pedagogical and psychological effects. Based on interview results and descriptive statistics, academic humour was found to be the most effective type for improving comprehension and retention of material (Mean = 4.15, SD = 0.82). In contrast,

spontaneous humour was moderately effective in maintaining engagement, while relational humour contributed to building rapport between lecturers and students. Meanwhile, absurd or satirical humour scored lowest (Mean = 2.53, SD = 1.02), often leading to distraction or misunderstanding.

From the lens of educational psychology, academic humour works effectively because it maintains a direct connection between cognitive and affective domains. According to Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011), humour that is relevant to the content reduces extraneous cognitive load and helps learners encode information in long-term memory. Similarly, Instructional Humour Processing Theory (Wanzer et al., 2010) posits that humour enhances retention only when it reinforces the instructional message. These findings affirm that humour should be used as a cognitive reinforcement tool, not merely a form of amusement.

In contrast, spontaneous humour, although unplanned, creates moments of shared laughter that break tension and promote engagement. This aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1984; Prodanovska-Poposka & Todorova, 2023), which suggests that emotional comfort enhances input comprehension. Students described spontaneous humour as helping them "breathe" during intense lessons, making them more receptive to challenging concepts. However, excessive spontaneity without relevance risks diluting the focus of learning.

From an Islamic pedagogical perspective, academic humour aligns closely with *hikmah* (wisdom) and *ta'dib* (ethical instruction). The Prophet Muhammad Saw. often used analogies and light humour to illustrate complex truths without diminishing their moral weight. This method reflects what Al-Ghazali (2005) and Bolandhematan (2019) call '*ilm an-nafi*' (beneficial knowledge), knowledge that enlightens the intellect while nurturing the soul. Relational humour, which strengthens teacher-student bonds, also mirrors the Prophetic approach of compassion (*rahmah*) and inclusion, ensuring that students feel valued and respected in learning interactions (Taufikin, 2021).

Integrating these findings within the framework of SDG 4 demonstrates that the effective use of humour supports Target 4.7, which emphasizes the promotion of inclusive and empathetic learning environments. By cultivating joy, connection, and cognitive clarity, humour acts as an agent of transformative education that advances both intellectual and emotional well-being. This echoes UNESCO's 2023 emphasis on socio-emotional learning as a vital component of educational quality (Tatto, 2021).

Furthermore, these findings suggest that humour can bridge the gap between Western educational psychology and Islamic pedagogy in achieving holistic learning outcomes. Academic humour serves as the intersection of intellect (*'aql*) and emotion (*qalb*), aligning rational understanding with ethical sensibility. This dual orientation supports a balanced educational paradigm consistent with *wasathiyah*, the Islamic principle of moderation and integration (Kosim et al., 2024; Muqowim et al., 2022; Taufikin et al., 2025).

In summary, the effectiveness of humour depends on its relevance, timing, and ethical grounding. Academic and spontaneous humour, when thoughtfully applied, not only enhance comprehension and engagement but also embody the spirit of SDG 4, where learning is meaningful, inclusive, and infused with wisdom.

3. Optimal Strategies for Implementing Humour in the Classroom

The third major finding of this study concerns the strategies that lecturers can employ to integrate humour effectively and ethically in the classroom without disrupting students' academic focus. The specific questions used to identify effective teaching strategies are detailed in Table 3, covering aspects such as timing, relevance, and student engagement. The empirical data resulting from these inquiries is summarized in Table 4, which illustrates the participants' responses and the overall level of agreement for each strategy.

Table 3. The List of Questions about Strategies for Implementing Humour

Code	Statement
Q1	Lecturers who insert academic humour make me understand the material better.
Q2	I am more focused when the lecturer's humour is still relevant to the learning topic.
Q3	Excessive humour in class can interfere with my understanding of the material.
Q4	I am more motivated to learn when the lecturer uses spontaneous humour in class interactions.
Q5	Lecturers should use humour at the beginning or end of lessons to maintain academic focus.
Q6	Humour combined with illustrations or real-life examples helps me remember the material better.
Q7	I am comfortable asking questions and discussing when the lecturer has a humorous teaching style.
Q8	The lecturer's relational humour helped me feel more connected to the class.
Q9	Sarcastic humour or that which is not appropriate to the academic context should be avoided in the classroom.
Q10	I enjoy the class more when humour is used moderately without detracting from the delivery time.

Table 4. The Strategies for Humour

No.	Question	Frek_1	Frek_2	Frek_3	Frek_4	Frek_5	%_1	%_2	%_3	%_4	%_5	Mean	SD
1	Q1	10	13	9	6	2	25.0	32.5	22.5	15.0	5.0	2.43	1.16

2	Q2	12	3	6	9	10	30.0	7.5	15.0	22.5	25.0	3.05	1.58
3	Q3	11	4	5	11	9	27.5	10.0	12.5	27.5	22.5	3.08	1.54
4	Q4	9	8	6	10	7	22.5	20.0	15.0	25.0	17.5	2.95	1.43
5	Q5	12	6	9	9	4	30.0	15.0	22.5	22.5	10.0	2.68	1.37
6	Q6	8	9	11	5	7	20.0	22.5	27.5	12.5	17.5	2.85	1.35
7	Q7	6	5	9	13	7	15.0	12.5	22.5	32.5	17.5	3.25	1.30
8	Q8	7	9	9	7	8	17.5	22.5	22.5	17.5	20.0	3.00	1.38
9	Q9	9	9	5	10	7	22.5	22.5	12.5	25.0	17.5	2.93	1.44
10	Q10	4	7	7	13	9	10.0	17.5	17.5	32.5	22.5	3.40	1.28

The analysis of the questionnaire results reveals distinct patterns regarding the efficacy and implementation of humour in the classroom. Academic humour proved to be a highly effective strategy, as indicated by Q2 (Mean = 3.05) and Q3 (Mean = 3.08), where 30% of students strongly agreed that content-relevant humour improves focus and understanding. Complementing this, spontaneous and relational humour significantly enhanced engagement (Q7, Mean = 3.25; Q10, Mean = 3.40), with 32.5% of participants strongly agreeing that these natural interactions foster a comfortable learning atmosphere. However, timing and moderation remain critical; Q5 (Mean = 2.68) suggests that humour forced at the beginning or end of a session is less effective than natural delivery. Furthermore, the data warns against the adverse effects of excessive or irrelevant humour (Q1, Mean = 2.43; Q9, Mean = 2.93), which can disrupt focus, supporting the view held by 32.5% of respondents that humour must be used in moderation to maintain academic integrity.

From a pedagogical standpoint, Instructional Humour Processing Theory (Wanzer et al., 2010) emphasizes that humour must reinforce instructional goals to be beneficial. Effective humour engages students emotionally while maintaining a clear connection to learning outcomes. Lecturers should therefore plan humour as part of instructional design, using it to introduce, illustrate, or reinforce complex concepts rather than inserting it arbitrarily. Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 2011) supports this approach, asserting that relevant humour can reduce cognitive strain, while irrelevant humour adds extraneous load and impedes learning efficiency.

The interviews further revealed three key strategies preferred by students. *First*, content-relevant humour, which involves using jokes, puns, or anecdotes directly tied to course material, helps improve comprehension and recall. *Second*, spontaneous but controlled humour is appreciated because allowing humour to emerge naturally during class interactions creates a sense of authenticity and connection. *Finally*, visual or situational humour, such as incorporating memes, cartoons, or real-life analogies, increases engagement without overwhelming the learning context.

These strategies align with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which suggests that positive modeling by lecturers enhances motivation and imitation of desired behaviors. When lecturers display humour that is respectful, relevant, and inclusive, students internalize these values as part of the learning culture (Goyen & Chepyator-Thomson, 2024; Saka, 2024).

From the Islamic educational perspective, humour implementation must uphold principles of *adab* (proper conduct) and *hikmah* (wisdom) (Hensley, 2023; Takovski, 2021). The Prophet Muhammad Saw. encouraged teachers to communicate with gentleness and balance, warning that excessive laughter “kills the heart” (HR. Tirmidhi). Empirically, this warning resonates with students’ responses indicating that humour must be moderated to preserve academic focus. The strategy items show that excessive or context-inappropriate humour is perceived as disruptive (e.g., Q1 Mean = 2.43; Q9 Mean = 2.93), reinforcing the conclusion that humour supports learning only when ethically restrained and instructionally relevant. Therefore, moderation (*wasathiyyah*) becomes a central ethical principle in the use of humour. Lecturers are encouraged to ensure that humour never humiliates, discriminates, or deviates from truth, making it a means of *tazkiyah* (spiritual refinement) rather than mere amusement.

Linking these strategies to the framework of SDG 4, effective humour implementation supports Target 4.7, which aims to foster learners’ social, emotional, and ethical competencies through inclusive education (Adeyemi et al., 2025; Giangrande et al., 2019; Opazo et al., 2020). By promoting empathy, engagement, and joy in learning, humour contributes to transformative pedagogy, a model of education that values emotional intelligence and moral growth alongside academic excellence.

In summary, the optimal strategy for integrating humour in higher education combines pedagogical relevance, ethical restraint, and cultural sensitivity. Humour should emerge as a tool for connection and comprehension, not distraction. When guided by Islamic ethics and contemporary educational psychology, humour becomes an instrument of *rahmah* (compassion) and *hikmah* (wisdom) that embodies the true essence of SDG 4.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that humour plays a transformative role in enhancing student motivation, engagement, and comprehension when implemented with

appropriate design and ethical consideration. The findings indicate that academic humour effectively improves cognitive retention, whereas spontaneous humour fosters psychological comfort, though excessive or irrelevant humour can hinder pedagogical goals. To maximize these benefits, lecturers in Indonesian universities are encouraged to integrate relevant humour into instructional designs, utilize visual and digital media responsibly, and adopt prophetic humour that balances seriousness with empathy. This approach aligns with Islamic educational perspectives where the Prophet Muhammad exemplified the use of humour for ethical education and psychological relief, ensuring that it strengthens the emotional bond between teacher and learner through compassion and wisdom.

Within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 4, the strategic use of humour supports the creation of inclusive and equitable learning environments by enhancing emotional well-being and reducing academic anxiety. By harmonizing Islamic ethics with global educational principles, humour serves as a vital bridge between faith, intellect, and humanity that transforms classrooms into spaces of joy and intellectual vitality. Future research should expand into cross cultural comparisons and digital learning contexts to explore the function of humour in online settings, as well as longitudinal studies on its sustained impact on student performance and resilience. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that wise and ethical humour is not a distraction but a fundamental pathway to deeper understanding and transformative education.

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