Exploring humour within the early childhood period from children's and teachers' perspectives

Betul Yilmaz[1], Feyza Tantekin Erden[2]

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to examine humour from the perspectives of 60-72-month-old children and their teachers in Turkey. A phenomenological method was used to collect data through semi-structured interviews, which included each child making a drawing about something they thought was 'funny'. Teachers were also interviewed via semi-structured questions related to children's humour. Data collected from 22 children and five teachers were analysed using McGhee's humour development theory and Martin's descriptions of four humour styles. The humour produced by our sample mainly included items related to incongruity. Teachers described children's humour development in terms of how the children behaved within their social group, and some believing that children who do not make jokes about their peers, have no humour development. Our findings pointed to a lack of awareness of the benefits of humour to the learning process and early years' education, particularly with teachers needing to account for age, developmental level and cultural differences.

Introduction

Any change in a person's lifestyle and environment affects the problems they face (Pala & Gönen, 2018). Therefore, at various times in their lives, people need to utilise different types of strategies to deal with their problems and find ways to be happy. One of these strategies is humour, which McGhee (2002) defined as a source of providing a variety of benefits in people's life. Humour helps people to develop a more positive perspective when dealing and coping with negative emotions such as fear, insecurity and hopelessness (Samson et al., 2014). In addition to engaging in social relationships and connecting with other people, humour can be a facilitator because it helps people better express themselves and develop self-confidence (McGhee, 2002). It can be defined as a tool that performs different functions in people's lives by focusing on amusement and joy. Even when the context of humour that people use changes, its practice can be considered a lifelong necessity.

Culture is another dimension that influences children's humour (Mireault & Reddy, 2016). Understanding or production of humour may differ in different cultures. To illustrate, in Western cultures humour is seen as an indicator of intelligence and creativity (Sternberg, 1985), whereas in Eastern cultures such as in Chinese culture, this situation is perceived in an opposite way (Jiang et al., 2011; Yue, 2011). This cultural difference related to humour is also observed in seeing humour as a coping mechanism. That is why, in Eastern countries, humour is not accepted as a way to cope with problems (Abe, 2006; Chen & Martin, 2005; Nevo et al., 2001). Therefore, the need for studying humour and trying to develop further understanding related to humour in different cultures may arise to make more accurate explanations related to humour in children.

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[1] Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Tokat, Turkey, e-mail: betul.yilmaz@gop.edu.tr, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0278-3689

[2] Middle East Technical University, Faculty of Education, Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Ankara, Turkey, e-mail: tfeyza@metu.edu.tr, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6060-1877

Humour and Young Children

Humour is considered to contribute to children's intellectual, physical, moral, social and emotional development (Bergen, 2003; Loizou & Recchia, 2019; McGhee, 2002). For example, to understand the alternative meaning of something or concrete humour, children need to reach for more complex thoughts, and this process requires the development of cognitive skills (McGhee, 1974. In addition to cognition, humour has benefits in terms of social development, as it readily facilitates interactions between people of different ages, genders and backgrounds (Klein & Kuiper, 2006; Loizou & Recchia, 2019). Humour is also thought to benefit children's moral development. According to McGhee (1974), children in the heteronomous stage laugh at actions in stories with humorous punch lines, whereas children in the autonomous stage might also laugh at the unintentional actions of a protagonist. As they grow older, children develop the ability to better judge what is right, wrong and funny. This affects their ability to make moral judgements and decisions (Bergen, 2018). In addition to the child's development, when integrated into educational settings, humour can benefit children's learning (Chabeli, 2008). Several studies have also suggested that the use of amusing cartoons or jokes promotes learning in the classroom by supporting the development of children's memory (Schmidt, 2002; Schmidt & Williams, 2001; Ziv, 1988).

Thus far, several ideas have emerged concerning the specifics of how humour, evidently beneficial during a child's early years, actually affects their development. Many of these are based on a theory established by McGhee (1979).

Mcghee's Humour Development Theory

In explaining how children understand, appreciate and produce humour, McGhee (1979) provided a detailed description of how children develop humour and argued that incongruity that is about the abnormalities in an ordinary situation is the main source of children's humour and that the humour behaviours exhibited by children differ from those exhibited by adults. McGhee (1979) also stated that cognitive development is important for humour development; he was highly influenced by Piaget's cognitive development theory. Like Piaget, McGhee defined the humour development of children in four stages: incongruous actions towards objects (18–20 months), incongruous labelling of objects and events (20–24 months), conceptual incongruity (2–7 years) and humour with multiple meanings (7–11 years). The 60-72-month-olds considered in the current study were thus assumed to be in the third stage of humour development; hence, the focus of this research was to investigate the characteristics of conceptual incongruity among them. Conceptual incongruity suggests that children make jokes not only about themselves but also about others. The jokes that children make at this stage can also be abstract and complex. Moreover, because of the development of skills related to previous actions, children begin to make more jokes about themselves. McGhee described this period by saying that children appreciate and produce humour by being aware of the 'violations of the perceptual appearances of things' (McGhee, 1984, p. 230).

In contrast to McGhee's explanation of humour in terms of the cognitive perspective, Martin et al. (2003) focused on the socio-emotional outcomes of humour.

Martin's Humour Styles Theory

People's humour styles can differ, and in Martin's (2007) theory, four different humour styles are presented: two adaptive and two maladaptive. Within the adaptive styles, the first type is self-enhancing humour, in which a person makes jokes about themselves but not about others, and these jokes are not humiliating. People who exhibit this humour style have a positive outlook towards life and can laugh about themselves, particularly when they are experiencing difficult situations (Martin, 2007). Because children with self-enhancing humour become confident and self-assured, they can develop a more desirable position within their social group, and their feelings related to self-worth can result in increased pro-social behaviours (James & Fox, 2019). The other adaptive style is affiliative humour, which facilitates relationships between people, and those who have this type of humour love to make others laugh without

resorting to sarcasm (Martin, 2007). Thus, children who have this humour style tend to have a high level of social acceptance and popularity within their social group (Klein & Kuiper, 2006).

Maladaptive humour consists of two styles: self-defeating humour and aggressive humour. The former can be used to establish social relationships and be part of a social group by denigrating oneself by revealing weaknesses and making jokes that humiliate oneself. However, in the long term, this type of humour damages a person's emotions and self-esteem (Martin, 2007). This humour style can cause low self-esteem and inner neediness, which in turn may cause one to be unappealing to others (Klein & Kuiper, 2006). The second type of maladaptive humour is the opposite of self-defeating humour, in which people adopt an aggressive humour style by enhancing themselves and making humiliating jokes about others. In the long term, as such jokes damage a person's relationships, this humour style can be harmful to the person (Martin, 2007). Even if in the short term, exhibiting aggressive humour can bring acceptance within their social group, in the long term, these children might have a difficult time developing affiliative humour and ultimately experience group rejection (Klein & Kuiper, 2006). Thus, it is necessary to consider the effects of humour styles on the physical adjustment and social competence of children and, consequently, to examine young children's humour styles.

Klein and Kuiper (2006) stated that Martin's humour styles theory does not provide an explanation for the development of children's humour styles. However, they did suggest that humour styles begin to develop in the early years of human development. For example, infants' and young children's interactions with caregivers, peers and teachers can provide clues about the children's current and possible future humour styles (Klein & Kuiper, 2006). Therefore, this theory is focused on the different ways in which people use humour. For example, some children use humour to cope with stress, while others use it as a way to show aggression (Führ, 2002). Others, such as Halfpenny and James (2020), stated that Martin's adaptive and maladaptive humour styles can be used to explain children's cognitive empathy, affective empathy and sympathy. Moreover, Erikson and Feldstein (2007) sought to investigate the relation between the psychometric properties of children and different humour behaviours using Martin's humour styles. Fox et al. (2013) also emphasised the importance of the early years of development in determining humour styles among children because this allows parents and teachers to better understand children's needs in terms of humour and to support them in developing adaptive humour styles. For example, by providing the necessary modelling, activities, environment and classroom management, parents and teachers can support children's humour development.

In addition to theories which try to explain children's humour, several other studies also improve the understanding related to children's humour. For example, Loizou (2006) tried to understand children's humour by examining their responses to pictorial humour. In another study conducted in 2011, she analysed children's humour via the photos children took with disposable cameras. Also, Loizou and Kyriakou (2016) analysed children's production and appreciation of verbal and visual humour. Studies in the literature not only try to provide a better understanding of children's humour but also attempt to explain the importance of humour regarding children's development and argue that humour is highly related to children's cognitive, social, emotional and language development (Bergen, 2021; Gidwani et al., 2021; Martin & Ford, 2006; Oppliger, 2003; Shultz, 2017). From this point, including humour in classrooms becomes an important question. For example, studies which discuss the importance of humour within classrooms emphasise the positive effects of humour in promoting children's learning and creating a positive classroom atmosphere (Bryant & Zillmann, 2014; Lovorn, 2008; Oppliger, 2003). While Ağçam and Ünsal (2019) found that teachers believe humour contributes to children's self-esteem, attitudes toward school and communication with their teachers and peers. Finally, humour differences between cultures and the importance of broadening the approach to humour by considering cultural differences is another important research area. To illustrate, Jiang et al. (2019), Guo et al. (2011), and Yue (2011) explained how humour differs among Chinese students in comparison to students from Western cultures. Similarly, Sahayu et al. (2022) stated that even if Indonesian children exhibit similar humour characteristics to McGhee's humour development theory, different patterns of children's humour behaviours are actually

observed. Thus, even if universal theories of humour provide a useful guide, culture-specific humour explanations are necessary.

In the current study, during the data analysis process, both McGhee's and Martin's explanations of humour were used to present the data more meaningfully. McGhee (1974 2002) is one of the theorists who has explained humour development from a constructivist perspective. His theory provides developmental stages and explains incongruity humour (James & Fox 2019). According to James and Fox (2019) and Martin et al. (2003), the strong links between humour styles and psychological adjustments ultimately provide a valid explanation for understanding humour styles. Therefore, these theories can be used to explain the study findings through a theoretical framework. Data about children's humour development and styles are necessary to understand what humour means in the classroom and how teachers can meet children's needs by learning about what makes them laugh. Whereas data from children can help to develop a better understanding regarding children's humour, the data collected from teachers can also be an extremely valuable source to learn about their views, knowledge and approach to the humour of children. Therefore, the current study provides teachers, parents and researchers with insights that will enable them to better understand children's humour and offer appropriate environments and experiences in accordance with children's humour development.

In this study, the researchers examined how children appreciate and produce humour as well as how early childhood teachers' view the humour presented by children. To achieve this aim, the researchers obtained data through interviews with the participating children and teachers to determine what made the children laugh as well as what the teachers knew about the humour produced by the children. The following research questions were addressed in this study:

RQ1: What humorous elements do 60-72-month-old children include in their drawings?

RQ2: How do 60-72-month-old children explain the humorous/funny "things" represented in illustrations of books presented?

RQ3: How do teachers describe the sense of humour and humour styles of the children in their classes?

Method

Study Design

Using a phenomenological approach, this study aimed to collect in-depth data from children about their understanding and production of humour and to gather teachers' views on humour in the classroom and the children's use of humour. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological research enables researchers to collect data regarding the experiences of an individual or their views on a specific concept or situation. Therefore, in the current study, the researchers used phenomenological research, and as suggested by Creswell (2007), interviewed the participants to obtain direct responses on the topic.

Participants

Both children and teachers of early childhood education participated in the current study. Convenience sampling, in which the participants are selected according to their accessibility and proximity to the researchers, was adopted (Creswell, 2007). In all, 22 normally developed children in the age group of 60–72 months (10 female; 12 male) were selected. The median of children's age was 66 months. The reason for including only 60-72-month-old children in this study lies in their developmental characteristics. Also, the participating children were living in the city centre and were from families of middle and high socioeconomic status. According to Fabian and Mould (2009), children grow, develop and mature due to the effects of nature and nurture. In this regard, older children normally show more developed language and cognitive skills compared to younger children, and as a result, can be more comfortable expressing themselves within the data collection process. The children in this study were chosen from five classrooms of a public preschool that provided permission and was suitable for researchers' access in Tokat, a small

city in the Black Sea region of Turkey. Consent for their participation was obtained from their parents and teachers. These children attended preschool either in the morning or in the afternoon. Three of the five classrooms were morning classrooms, and the other two were afternoon classrooms. Four or five children from each classroom participated in the study.

In addition, five teachers who taught these participating children were included in the study. The age range of the teachers was 26 to 39 years old, and all five had graduated from public universities with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Their teaching experience varied from 4 to 16 years. All five participating teachers who taught 60-72-month-old children knew the participants and were able to observe them in terms of humour appreciation and humour production; therefore, these teachers could provide the anticipated data.

Instruments

For data collection, the researchers utilised semi-structured interview questions for both the children and teachers. After a review of the relevant literature, the first version of the questions was formulated. After conducting a pilot study and gaining expert opinions, interview questions for the children and teachers were adapted to make them more understandable in terms of sentence structure, wording and the number of questions. Thus, the researchers developed the final version of the interview questions. Expert opinions were obtained from three professors from the early childhood education department of a public university within Turkey. In addition to the questions, a humorous illustration was chosen from a children's picture book according to the Evaluation Form of Humorous Factors in Children's Books developed by Johnson (2010) and adapted to Turkish by Pala and Gönen (2018). For the illustration, approximately 80 books were examined, and the final book chosen was 'Ben Sandalye Değilim' (I am not a Chair), written by Ross Burach and translated by Nuran Hatırnaz (2018).

In addition to expert opinions regarding the book and illustration choice among books, a pilot study was conducted with six children from a private kindergarten in Tokat. Given the pilot study results, no changes were made to the interview questions used in this current study. However, the manner in which the researchers started the data collection process changed from that used in the pilot study. For example, the children were shy to talk to the researcher, so a story-reading component was added at the beginning of the research to help the children develop a closer relationship with the researcher. Also, because the term "humourous illustration" was not meaningful for children in the pilot study, the researchers decided to instead use the word "funny" when talking to children participating in the main study. In the pilot study, the choice of illustration was also included. For this process, five illustrations from each category of Johnson's evaluation form were chosen based on expert opinions, and the final illustration was selected after a process of elimination based on the children's ideas about whether the illustration was funny and what they had understood from the illustration. Finally, as a result of the experiences gained through the pilot study, the final version of the main study was prepared. Table 1 presents examples of the interview questions posed to the participating children.

Table 1. Interview questions for children

Category of Question	Example Questions
Views on drawing	What do you see in the picture? Do you think that it is funny? Why is it funny? Or what is it not funny? What are the factors that make this picture funny? What would you add to this illustration to make it funnier?

For the teachers' interview questions, a pilot study was conducted with two teachers who taught the children during the pilot study period, as it was confirmed that these teachers understood the questions and would provide relevant answers to the research questions. Table 2 presents a sample of questions posed to the teachers.

Table 2. Interview questions for teachers

Category of Question	Example Questions
Demographic Information	Which university did you graduate from? How many years of teaching experience do you have? Have you ever taken any courses or seminars regarding humour?
Views on Humour Development of their Students	How do you define the humour development of C*?

Data Collection Procedure and Ethics

Before data collection, necessary permission was obtained from the Ethics Committee of a state university in Ankara, Turkey, and from the Turkish Ministry of National Education. Then, the researchers contacted the school principal and teachers for access to the children. A consent letter was sent to the parents, informing them about the study and its procedures. Parents were then asked to sign a document stating that they consented to their children's participation in the study. The children were also verbally asked whether they would like to participate in the study and that their willingness to participate would significantly help (Fraenkel et al., 2012). The classrooms where the data was collected included 60-72 months old. Thus, the ones who provided necessary permissions were included to the study. The data were collected by the first author of the study. Thus, the author began to develop rapport with the participant children by introducing herself to increase their willingness to join the main study by telling them, 'Today, I will tell you a story, and after that, we will do an activity. By doing so, the researcher was able to gain some information about the children, including their names, which allowed her to get to know the children better and create rapport. The researcher started to tell the children a story with the help of props, such as clothespins and rope, to attract the children's attention as well as to provide a more enjoyable experience. The text of the story presented to the children is provided in the following paragraph:

> 'There is a child called Ali. His most favourite activity is drawing, and every day, he draws a lot of pictures about what he sees around him. In the morning, he draws himself by looking at the mirror. One day, Ali takes his pencils and paper and goes outside. First, he looks at the sky and sees a lot of clouds, so he decides to draw the sky. After a while, he sees a car, a tree, and a house, and he draws all of them. Then, he gets tired and decides to go home, but on his way home, he sees something interesting. What do you think it can be?'

At the end of the story, the children were encouraged to offer ideas about what Ali saw on his way home. After recording their ideas, the researcher asked, 'The event was very funny. What could it have been?', thus encouraging the children to think about a funny incident. Rather than directly asking the children to create a funny drawing, this approach helped them think about funny incidents that they could illustrate in their drawing. The researcher then explained that Ali tried to draw what he saw, but he could not because he did not know how to create a funny drawing and therefore needed help from the children to draw the picture. At this point, the researcher asked the children if they could draw a funny picture of Ali.

The story was read to all children in the classroom, and they were all involved in the drawing activity, but only the drawings created by the participant children and by children who wanted to share and talk about their drawings and created a drawing considering the 'funniness' concept was included in this study. Some of the children created drawings that were not connected to the story, and the researcher eliminated those drawings. The storyline is provided in the pictures shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Storyline used in the data collection process

The data were collected with the teacher present in their classroom to ensure that the children felt comfortable communicating with the researcher. The audio recording method was used to avoid the risk of missing any data. The researcher also took notes during the interviews about her interpretations and additional questions to ask (Creswell, 2007). After the children completed their drawings, the researcher asked each child to talk about the funny elements and the story behind the drawing in the one-on-one interviews. The researcher asked questions such as 'What did you draw in your picture?', 'Why did you include those things?' and 'Why are they funny?'. Thus, the researcher had a chance to learn what the children laughed at by asking them questions related to their drawing. As the children drew their pictures in the classroom, the researcher asked for their responses to the questions in a quiet part of the classroom, and this process was carried out just after the drawing process to avoid losing the children's attention on the topic. The word "funny" was used rather than humorous because the word "funny" is usually more familiar to children. Thus, to avoid confusing them, the children were asked for their funny drawings rather than humorous drawings. This process, which included the story reading, drawing, and child interviews, took approximately 30–40 minutes to complete.

The researcher showed the illustrations taken from the picture books in the second part and presented the interview questions. This activity was conducted after the drawing activity to avoid the influence of illustrations on the children's drawings. Children's answers were taken during the one-on-one interviews in a separate room to remove any distractions. This process took approximately 10–15 minutes for each child.

For the final part of the study conducted with the teachers, the researcher asked semi-structured interview questions, but before this, she provided information about the confidentiality of the research. To avoid missing important data, the researcher asked the teachers to permit audio recordings; all participants agreed to it. The researcher also took full notes during the interviews, recording the points that required additional questions and her interpretation of the participants' answers (Creswell, 2007). The one-on-one interviews were conducted in a separate room to avoid distractions and took approximately 10–15 minutes for each participant.

Data Analysis

First, the audio recordings of the participant interviews were transcribed by the first author. In qualitative research, coding offers an understanding of chunks of data and allows for the capturing of the major points provided in the respondents' answers (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Therefore, in the current study, the main points from the teachers' and children's responses were coded. This coding process was undertaken by two different coders. One of the coders was the first author of the study and other coder was another researcher both of whom hold master's degrees in early childhood education and work as research assistants in education faculties at public universities. Deductive coding, in which the researcher begins by developing the codes and then afterwards conducting the analysis (Rivas, 2012), was used for the coding process in the current research. Almost all the codes were matched between the two coders; however, for some codes, the words and phrases were replaced by more generic terms to facilitate better understanding. The codes were determined using the Evaluation Form of Humorous Factors in Children's Books developed by Johnson (2010) and adapted to Turkish by Pala and Gönen (2018). Thus, the categories under McGhee's conceptual incongruity stage related to humorous illustrations were applied to the items in the children's drawings, as listed in Table 3. In addition, to create codes related to teachers' views on children's humour behaviours, Martin's explanation related to adaptive and maladaptive humour styles was used. Tables 3 and 4 provide a detailed explanation of the categories and codes used in the analysis of the data collected from children and teachers.

Table 3. Types of humour appreciated at different developmental stages

Age	Corresponding Stage(s)	Pictorial Humour Types	Verbal Humour Types	Situational Humour Types
1-2 years	McGhee's Stage 1 and Stage 2 Piaget's Sensorimotor		Non-language sounds Nonsense words Rhyming Erroneous labelling of objects	Pretend play with objects Tickling and body contact
2-7 years	McGhee's Stage 3 Piaget's Preoperational	Objects with incongruous features Physical deformities Caricature and exaggeration Masks, clowns	Joke telling Repetitious rhyming Slapstick	Mastered skills Body parts and potty humour Pranks and mischief Clumsiness
7+ years	McGhee's Stage 4 Piaget's Concrete Operations		Puns Knock-Knock jokes Irony Satire Riddles	Teasing Social mistakes made by peers Practical jokes

Note. Retrieved from Humour in children's picture books by Johnson (2010).

Table 4. Martin's Humour Styles

Type of Humour Style	Name of the Humour Style
Adaptive Humour Styles	Self-enhancing: Positive humour toward self
	Affiliative: Positive humour toward others
Maladaptive Humour Styles	Self-defeating: Negative humour toward self
	Aggressive: Negative humour toward others

Findings

Humorous Elements Included by 60-72-Month-Olds in Their Drawings

To encourage the children to produce humour, the researcher asked them to create a 'funny' picture, and when they finished, the researcher asked questions, such as 'What are the things in your drawing?', 'What are they doing in the drawing?', 'What are the things that make this drawing funny?' and 'Why do you think that they are funny?'. The findings from the children's drawings and comments in terms of their humour production were categorised and coded, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Factors included in funny drawing

Categories	Codes
Conceptual incongruity	Big/little people Giving human features to unloving things Giving animal features to people Unusual physical features Unusual combination of things
Physical deformity	Unusual size and number of body parts Unusual shape-colour of body parts
Caricature	Hurting somebody else Unusual/unappropriated behaviours of things
Exaggeration	Exaggerated number of things Exaggerated little or big size of things
Costume	Clown Nurse

The categories were prepared in accordance with the Evaluation Form of Humorous Factors in Children's Books developed by Johnson (2010). Table 3 shows that there were children who produced humour in every category within the form; however, they primarily produced humour using conceptual incongruity. The following drawings and statements from the children offer an understanding of their humour.

Figure 2. C13's drawing

There is a weird girl with a moustache. She also has more than one leg and a bottom on her belly. This is funny.

As illustrated in Figure 2, some of the children chose to include unusual physical features for the characters in their drawings. When asked why they drew such a picture, they most often responded that giving people different and weird features makes them funny.

In the second category, adding unusual features to objects or people was another way that the children created humour, with some of the children making absurd changes in terms of the colour, shape, size or number of something, as illustrated in the drawing below.

Figure 3. C17's drawing

There are two men in the drawing. One of them has very big ears. He tries to lower his head, but he cannot because his ears are too big. The other man also has big ears and is very tall. He tries to touch the floor with his hands but cannot do so because of his height.

The example in Figure 3 reveals that some of the children thought that they could create funny situations by assigning unusual features to their characters. Therefore, in their drawings, they created imaginary events caused by these unusual physical features and used these cause-effect situations to produce humour. In addition, the children created situations in their drawings that they thought were funny.
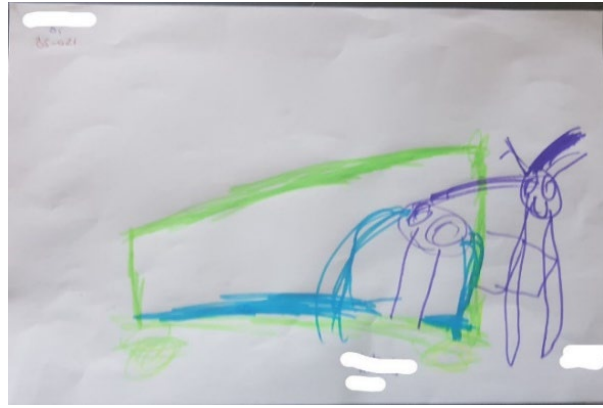
Figure 4. C21's drawing

In the drawing, there is a girl whose hair is caught in the car door. The girl is crying, and the entire car is getting wet because of her tears. The boy outside the car is laughing at the girl, because he was the one who had closed the door.

This scenario could be viewed as a negative situation. However, when the child was asked to talk about the drawing, he argued that the interaction between the two characters was funny. This was accepted as evidence that children use caricatures to produce humour.

In the analysis process, McGhee's humour development stages were used to offer interpretations of the children's responses related to their production of humour. McGhee (2002) offered a similar explanation for this age group, stating that children can produce humour in this age group based on the third level of his theory (i.e., conceptual incongruity).

Explanation by 60-72-Month-Old Children of the Humorous Factors in the Illustrations Provided

After asking the children to create funny drawings and then explain their drawings, the researcher showed one humorous illustration and asked questions to obtain the children's ideas about the picture. In the picture, there was a giraffe that was illustrated like a chair with a rabbit and hippopotamus sitting on the giraffe, who looked surprised. The children were asked questions about the illustration, such as 'What do you see in the drawing?', 'What do you think about this drawing?' and 'Is this funny? Why?'.

The illustration that was presented to the children included a conceptual incongruity theme. To provide a clearer understanding, the illustration was presented separately. All children could describe the characters in the drawings and talk about the animals depicted. Except for one child (C4), all the children stated that the giraffe illustration was a funny picture. The children were asked why they found the drawing funny; their responses are provided in Table 6 according to the categories from the literature.

Table 6. Children's views on the humorous illustration

Categories	Codes
Conceptual incongruity	Chair giraffe
Caricature	Amazed face

While commenting on the illustration, children primarily focused on the absurdity of the giraffe being a chair because, ordinarily, this is not possible. The comments from some of the children are presented below.

The hippopotamus is reading a book, and the rabbit is sleeping. However, they are doing this on the giraffe. A giraffe is not a chair. This is funny. (C2)

In addition to the incongruity within the illustration, some of the children found the facial expressions of the animals humorous. This situation falls within the caricature category (Johnson, 2010). For example, C7 (pointing to the giraffe) said, 'The giraffe's face is very funny and shows amazement when the animals sat on the giraffe'. However, C4 did not find the drawing funny, explaining that

The hippopotamus is just sitting, and the rabbit is just reading a book. Here, the rabbit is laughing. These are not funny things. They are usual. Because they are sitting on the giraffe, it may be a little funny, but not that much. (C4)

These extracts show that the children appreciated the humorous illustrations by realising the incongruity and explained this through differing aspects of the incongruity that they recognised, such as the giraffe being a chair or having different facial expressions.

Teachers' Description of the Sense of Humour and Humour Styles of the Children in Their Classes

For the teacher interviews, the questions focused specifically on the children within their classroom who had participated in making funny drawings as part of the study. The aim of these questions was to determine whether there was an overlap between the way in which children produced humour and the way in which the teacher explained the children's humour. Therefore, the question, 'What are the humorous characteristics that C* shows in the classroom?' was asked to the teachers in each classroom. In their responses, the teachers mainly focused on how the children used humour rather than commenting on the children's development in terms of humour understanding, appreciation or production. McGhee (1974) described the use of physical humour that negatively affects relationships in two main styles: adaptive and maladaptive. Maladaptive humour concerns the use of humour that harms the self or others, whereas the aim of adaptive humour is to provide joy to oneself and others. There is no sarcasm, humiliation or negative criticism in adaptive humour.

Table 7. Teacher's views on their students' humour behaviours

Categories	Codes
Maladaptive Humour	Uses physical humour that affects relationships negatively
Adaptive Humour	Likes to laugh and make jokes Uses humour on his/her own Shares humour with others Reflects usual things in a funny way
No Humour	Does not use humour

According to the teachers' descriptions, some children showed both adaptive and maladaptive humour (Table 7). However, some of the teachers described some children as having no humour at all. To explain maladaptive humour in children, the teachers stated that children sometimes used physical humour, but because this humour hurt others, it adversely affected their relationships, and these children were not chosen by others to play with. An example of this situation concerning C7 was given by T2:

His physical development is better than his classmates'. He makes a number of physical jokes, and this is too much for the other children. Their relationships are affected adversely. He causes pain to the other children. My warnings help to restrict his behaviour.

For the second category, adaptive humour, the teachers described different ways, such as sharing humour with others and reflecting humour in a funny manner; for example, some of the children used humour within their social group. To create humour, they needed to have others around them, and as a result, they liked to make other children laugh and enjoy things with them. In this context, T5 described C19 as follows:

She has a good sense of humour. She gets on well with her friends. Her social abilities are developed, and her relationships with friends are strong. When playing with classmates, she enjoys role-playing and makes jokes and calls her friends to join her. After creating a play or humorous situation, she includes her friends in it.

The final category that was created from the responses to this question included children who were perceived by their teachers as having no sense of humour when they were found not to incorporate humour into their play and communication. The teachers stated that they had not observed humour from these children and were not sure what they would laugh at. For example, C2 was described by T1 as:

I have not seen any humour in him. He does not use humour in his relationships or play.

Finally, T4's ideas on C15 for this code were as follows:

He is a sweet-natured child. Some children can laugh at inappropriate things. However, C15 does not participate in this kind of humour. He smiles at everything, but I did not observe any humorous behaviour in him.

Summary

Several findings were revealed from the data of this current study. First, the children showed humour behaviours parallel to McGhee's humour development theory, and in producing humour in their drawings, they used related items. In the explanations of their drawings, the children also explained the logic of their humour. While commenting on the humorous illustration, the children could understand the main idea of the illustration and explain why the illustration was funny, identifying the conceptual incongruity within the illustration.

In the teacher part of this current study, the teachers generally identified humour as a source of joy and satisfaction and argued that humour must be part of every aspect of people's lives. In early childhood education, humour can benefit children's development, learning and communication. The teachers commented that humour should be utilised within the classroom; however, they did not think about including humour within their lesson planning, teaching, classroom management and/or communication with children. For them, humour had to occur spontaneously within the classroom. When asked about their students' humour behaviours, the teachers primarily commented on the humorous behaviour observed while the children interacted with one another. If no humorous behaviour was observed for a specific child, the teachers described this child as exhibiting no humour behaviour or lacking humour development. These findings reveal how children and teachers approach humour in early childhood education. In the next section, the findings of the related literature are discussed.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to examine how children appreciate and produce humour, as well as what the views of early childhood teachers were regarding humour in children within their classroom. An analysis of the findings revealed that the children exhibited humour behaviours in parallel with McGhee's theory. Furthermore, an examination of the teachers' views revealed that they primarily focused on whether the children socially exhibited humour behaviours. That is, having humour development was related to the children's observable humour behaviours within the classroom and among their peers. Regarding the findings of the current study, there is related literature that provides both contradictory and parallel ideas.

Humour from Children's Perspective

An examination of the categories created from the children's drawings revealed findings similar to those reported by certain previous studies (e.g., Loizou (2011)). Rather than asking the children to draw, Loizou asked them to take photographs of funny things and then explain why they were funny. Her results indicated that children's humour is mainly based on incongruity; this finding is supported by our current investigation. Moreover, Loizou and Kyriakou (2015) noted that children use incongruities such as colour violation, humorous symbols, feature violations and violence. Similar categories also emerged from the current study. Violence, for example, was observed in some of the drawings produced by a sample of 60-72-month-old children from a preschool in Tokat, Turkey. Their explanations for why their drawing was funny included 'making somebody else hurt', which illustrates similar humour production patterns. In addition, a notable feature of the violation category was the unusual presentation of the various elements of their drawings.

According to McGhee, humour capacity develops with the development of cognitive skills. Cognitive changes affected by age result in changes in children's humour appreciation and production (Johnson, 2010). In the current study, the children produced drawings related to the categories described for their age group and developmental stage. McGhee (2018) stated that, with age and developed cognitive abilities, children begin to understand more complex humorous situations. From this perspective, the

results of the studies support each other.

In addition to humour production, humour appreciation was considered in the study. Almost all children focused on the incongruity within the illustration presented to them. This revealed the children's capability to understand humour. Similarly, Loizou (2006) found that young children can recognise and appreciate humour by understanding the incongruities of a provided situation. This situation can be utilised to test children's schema development because children laugh when something does not fit their schemas. With age, the number of schemas increases and children's understanding of humour develops. Loizou (2006) explained this situation using McGhee's description of the conceptual incongruity stage and Brown's visual incongruities category, as they provide a suitable explanation for how children understand the humorous items in a picture. In terms of understanding children's ideas about what is funny in a provided illustration, Chik et al.'s (2005) findings can be used to corroborate the ideas expressed by the children in Tokat regarding their understanding and appreciation of humour within the illustration presented to them in terms of its incongruities.

The universality of humour is also provided in the evidence from the present study, given that previous studies conducted in different countries with differing cultures regarding their sense of humour have reported that incongruities are a common element found in the appreciation of humour across cultures. Guo et al. (2011) stated that culture is an effective factor in humour along with cognitive development and that people adapt their humorous behaviours to the expectations of society. For example, in some cultures, children typically change their humorous behaviours with age to show that they are mature. Thus, humour develops with improvements in cognitive skills, but the effects of culture are undeniable.

Children's Humour from Teachers' Perspectives

The final findings of the current study revealed how the teachers explained children's humour behaviours. In the maladaptive humour category, the teachers explained that some of the children used humour in a negative manner. For example, they used physical jokes that their peers did not like, and because of these jokes, these children became undesired peers within their social environment. According to Oberjohn (2002), while humour increases the level of peer acceptance and friendships, when used in a negative manner, such as teasing, acceptance among peers becomes more difficult and friendship bonds are weakened by these negative behaviours. Martin (2007) also explained this process in his studies, in which the children use maladaptive humour to feel better, but as a result, harm both themselves and others. Veatch also referred to the relationship between violence and humour in his theory (as cited in Sayar, 2012). Because children are aware that violence is an inappropriate action, it is considered humorous to them. As this goes against expected behaviour, even if humour is seen as a powerful tool for developing positive social relationships (Kuipers, 2010), it can negatively affect such relationships, depending on the way it is utilised.

While describing children's humour and how it is produced, the teachers also mentioned the use of adaptive humour that was not aimed at harming others but served instead to heighten their enjoyment. According to McGhee (1979), children start to produce humour at the age of 3–6-years-old, depending on the level of their cognitive processing. While Morrison (2008) explained humour with linguistic abilities, Lang and Hoon (2010) and Ghayas and Malik (2013) argued that the production of humour requires creative abilities.

Finally, some of the teachers in the current study described some children in their classroom as having little or no humour development. In explaining the reasons for this, they stated that such children were silent, sweet-natured and calm; while the relatively active and social children had a more developed sense of humour. However, when their drawings and statements on the drawings were examined, all the children were seen to produce humour, as described in McGhee's humour development stages. When the descriptions from the teachers regarding humour development in their children were examined, it appeared certain that their observations reflected their cultural attitudes. In their study of Greek and Chinese children, Guo et al. (2011) exemplified how culture affects humour. They found that, particularly

in China, children's humour responses decrease with age and the development of cognitive skills. Clearly, children are affected differently by their cultures (Greenfield et al., 2003; Wellman et al., 2006). Therefore, even when children go through similar processes in terms of cognition and humour development, differences in their cultures affect their humour.

Conclusion

The current study revealed that the participating children exhibited characteristics similar to McGhee's description in terms of humour. Even if humorous behaviour changed depending on gender, culture or background, the source of humour was similar in all children. This finding was the same for both children's appreciation and their production of humour. In addition to the data collected from the children in this study, the teachers provided data regarding what they understood about children's humour. There were some concerns about the teachers' explanation of the children's humour behaviours that occurred within their classroom, in that they evaluated the children's humour development solely by observing the children's social relations with their peers. Therefore, it could be said that the teachers needed more information in terms of observing the children's humour development, even when the children exhibited these humour behaviours within their social interactions. To conclude, there are ways to not only understand but also support children's humour development, and certain teaching practises within the classroom can enhance the development and use of humour among the students.

Further Research

The current study can be utilised as a basis for future research that can include a larger sample including participants from differing schools, locations and age groups. By doing so within Turkey, children's humour development can be examined more comprehensively. In addition, parents can be included in similar future studies because they play an extremely vital role in their children's overall development, which includes humour development. Furthermore, as seen in the current study, culture plays a role in people's humour development. Thus, collaborative studies can be conducted with members of other cultures. In the current study, semi-structured questions and qualitative methods were used to obtain a sufficient understanding of the participants' views; however, to reach more participants, quantitative research methodologies can be utilised. Only in-service teachers were included in this study, and in the process of learning more about their views regarding humour, it was revealed that they had not received any formal training in this area. Therefore, it should be considered relevant to better determine how the views of teacher candidates in Turkey regarding humour can be more fully developed and utilised in their future teaching careers. In doing so, how best to enable them to utilise what they have learnt about children's humour use and development within their future lesson planning, teaching, classroom management and/or communication with children should be determined.

Declarations

Authors' Declarations

Publisher's Declarations

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