

AN OVERVIEW OF PRE-SERVICE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS' HUMOR STYLES

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the humor styles of pre-service early childhood teachers. The population of the study was comprised of pre-service teachers being trained at the Department of Early Childhood Education of Afyon Kocatepe University. A total number of 214 pre-service early childhood teachers constituted the sample for this study. To gather data, a general information form and "Humor Styles Questionnaire" developed by Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) and adapted to Turkish by Yerlikaya (2003) were utilized. Mann-Whitney U test was used in order to find out whether the participants' humor styles differed according to their genders while Kruskal-Wallis H test was used in analyzing the data to detect any differences according to the participants' academic years of study. At the end of the research, it was revealed that significant differences existed between the pre-service teachers' humor styles and their genders together with their years of study.

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, Teacher Qualifications, Humor Styles.

INTRODUCTION

Persistence of the basic knowledge and skills needed to be taught in the preschool period is closely related to the quality of education. Gained knowledge, skills, attitudes and habits of individuals within this period are very effective on their later lives. Therefore, from early years, the quality of environments where children's growth, development and learning take place becomes even more important. One of the key elements determining the quality of early childhood educational services and experiences is the personal and professional characteristics of the early childhood educator.

Early childhood educators offer quality educational service with their knowledge, skills and attitudes while they also play a critical role in the acquisition of behaviors mentioned in the program by children through the use of methods, techniques and educational strategies they choose (Robertson, 1996, Tuğrul, 2005; Gürkan, 2007). In early childhood education, providing children with effective learning process in which they construct new

understandings by interacting with other people, objects and events depends on the teacher's integration of technical knowledge gained during the pre-service education and personal characteristics. Apart from the professional qualifications such as a broad and comprehensive knowledge in the field and in the implementation of the program, both of which are a preschool teacher should possess, a preschool teacher at the same time must have personal characteristics such as enthusiasm, confidence, achievement expectation, encouragement and assistance, orderliness, flexibility, warmth and humor (Erden, 2001; Ceglowski & Bacigalupa, 2002; Tatar, 2004; NAEYC, 2006; Kandir, Özbey & İnal, 2010; Dağlıoğlu, 2011).

Making use of humor which is one of the personal characteristics that early childhood educators should possess is vital for children at educational settings. Humor is one of the actions that motivate children to learn. The use of humor in education provides an active learning environment and thus makes the learning process more enjoyable. That is, teachers who use humor to create a positive learning environment and hereby facilitating the learning process are indeed making the children become more open to learning, more attentive and enthusiastic as well as establishing good rapport with the children so as to foster creativity and lighten the stress load. Lefcourt, Davidson, Shepherd, Phillips, Prkachin and Mills (1995), stated that individuals move away from their negative experiences thanks to humor while Abel (2002) claimed that individuals with a high sense of humor used more of their positive cognitive reasoning and problem solving strategies in the face of stressful events than compared to individuals with low sense of humor. Aslan, Alparslan, Evlice, Aslan and Cenkseven (1999) suggested that humor is one of the coping mechanisms for difficult situations and problems occurring in life in that humor protect the individuals from the solid facts of life while facilitating the necessary adaptation. For all these reasons, the use of humor at educational settings by an early childhood educator who knows the characteristics and needs of children has positive effects on children's learning (Roedelein, 2002; Küçükbayındır, 2003; Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray & Weir, 2003; Avşar, 2008).

Humor is very effectual on children's learning and is considered as a desirable personality trait. Individuals with a high sense of humor are thought to have some distinguishing characteristics such as optimism, self-esteem, stress management skills, positive self-esteem, autonomy and social skills. However, sometimes humor can be used in a negative way at interpersonal settings (Kuiper & Martin, 1998; Yerlikaya, 2003; Hampes, 2006; Martin, 2007; Yerlikaya, 2009). Martin et al (2003) identified four different humor styles in the daily use of humor by individuals. This also refers to individual differences in the use of humor. Two of the humor styles are positive and healthy while the other two are negative and unhealthy within the context of psychological well-being (Erickson & Feildstein, 2007). While "affiliative" and "self-enhancing" humor styles reflect the positive and adaptive characteristics of personality, "aggressive" and "self-defeating" humor styles address negative and maladaptive aspects of personality traits. The first two positive styles are negatively correlated with anxiety and depression and positively correlated with self-esteem, extraversion, openness and agreeableness. The last two are negatively correlated with agreeableness and conscientiousness and positively correlated with neuroticism, hostility and aggression (Martin et al, 2003; Kazarian & Martin, 2004; Saroglou & Anciaux, 2004; İlhan, 2005; Hampes, 2006; Tümkaya, 2006; Yerlikaya, 2009).

That early childhood educators use these positive and healthy humor styles at educational settings will facilitate the realization of effective and lasting learning. Incidentally, this requires the development of pre-service early childhood educators' humor styles. From this point of view, in this study it was aimed to investigate the humor styles of pre-service early childhood educators.

METHOD

This survey-type study is descriptive in nature as it aims to investigate whether pre-service early childhood educators' humor styles differ significantly from gender and academic year variables.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of the students at Afyon Kocatepe University, Faculty of Education, Department of Early Childhood Education. 214 pre-service early childhood educator constituted the sample for this study based on voluntariness.

Data Collection Tool

To gather data, a general information form inquiring demographical characteristics of the students and “Humor Styles Questionnaire” developed by Martin, Puhlik-Doris, Larsen, Gray and Weir (2003) and adapted to Turkish by Yerlikaya (2003) were utilized in order to measure the four different dimensions (affiliative humor, self-enhancing humor, aggressive humor and self-defeating humor) regarding the individual differences in daily use of humor. The questionnaire included items to assess four different types of humor; thus it was composed of four sub-scales. These subscales are named as Affiliative Humor, Self-enhancing Humor, Aggressive Humor and Self-defeating Humor. The scale included seven point Likert type ratings ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” and each of the subscales included eight items. In “Humor Styles Questionnaire” there were eleven items scored in reverse direction. The scores from each subscale showed the frequency of use of the related humor style. Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficients derived for each subscale during the adaptation process are found as for Affiliative Humor, .74; for Self-enhancing Humor, .78; for Aggressive Humor, .69 and for Self-defeating Humor, .67. Test-retest reliability coefficients for each subscale were found as .88, .82, .85, .85 respectively (Yerlikaya, 2003).

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the data gathered, demographical information regarding the participants was given by making use of descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage values. In order to find out whether the scores of the pre-service early childhood educators displayed normal distribution, Shapiro-Wilk test was utilized. Since the scores did not show normal distribution Mann-Whitney U, a non-parametric test, was used in order to find out whether the participants’ humor styles differ according to their gender while Kruskal-Wallis H test was used in analyzing the data to detect any differences according to participants’ academic years. Significance level in this study was set as .05 which refers to a significant difference in case of $p < .05$ whereas $p > .05$ addresses a non-significant difference (Büyükoztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz & Demirel, 2011).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Demographical information regarding the participants in the sample was given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographical Characteristics of Pre-service Early Childhood Educators

Demographical Characteristics	Academic year										
	1 st year		2 nd year		3 rd year		4 th year		Total		
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	
Gender	Female	83	86.5	28	75.7	34	87.2	38	90.5	183	85.5
	Male	13	13.5	9	24.3	5	12.8	4	9.5	31	14.5
	Total	96	100	37	100	39	100	42	100	214	100
Age	17-21 years	91	94.8	25	67.6	19	48.7	3	7.1	138	64.5
	22 years and above	5	5.2	12	32.4	20	51.3	39	92.9	76	35.5
	Total	96	100	37	100	39	100	42	100	214	100

Table 1 shows that 85.5 % of the pre-service early childhood educators are female; 14.5 % are male, 64.5 % are between 17 and 21 years old while 35.5 % are 22 years old or above.

Mann-Whitney U test results of the scores according to the participants' gender are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Mann-Whitney U Test Results of the Scores According to the Participants' Gender

<i>Humor Styles</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Mann-Whitney U</i>	
				<i>U</i>	<i>p</i>
Affiliative Humor	Female	183	110.6	2266	0.073
	Male	31	89.1		
Self-enhancing Humor	Female	183	108.2	2711	0.694
	Male	31	103.5		
Aggressive Humor	Female	183	102.5	2003	0.010*
	Male	31	133.4		
Self-defeating Humor	Female	183	105.6	2495.5	0.284
	Male	31	118.5		

*p<.05

Table 2 shows that there was no significant difference found between participants' gender and the their mean scores of affiliative humor ($U_{(F-M)}=2266$, $p>.05$), self-enhancing humor ($U_{(F-M)}=2711$, $p>.05$), self-defeating humor ($U_{(F-M)}=2495.5$, $p>.05$) whereas a significant difference was apparent between the mean scores of aggressive humor ($U_{(F-M)}=2003$, $p<.05$) and the participants' gender. In addition, mean scores mentioned in Table 2 also reveals that aggressive humor style scores of males outnumbered the mean scores of females.

In terms of studies of humor carried out so far, it can be seen that a number of studies have discussed the effect of gender and gender roles on humor styles. Such research has found out that using aggressive humor style was more common among males compared to females (Saroglou & Scariot, 2002; Yerlikaya, 2003; Kazarian & Martin, 2004; Chen & Martin, 2007; Avşar, 2008; Erözkan, 2009; Traş, Arslan & Mentiş-Taş, 2011). Yerlikaya (2007) found out that aggressive and self-defeating humor styles were more common among male students. Führ (2002), in a survey of students aged between 11-14 years old, stated that males used aggressive and sexual humor more often while females use humor just to amuse themselves with an increasing amount accompanying their growth. Likewise, Kazarian and Martin (2006) claimed that males used all four types of humor more than females; commonly aggressive and self-defeating humor. After a short literature analysis, it is obvious that the results of the studies conducted so far are consistent with the findings of this study.

Societies have identified many role behaviors for men and women according to gender. These gender roles also reflect on the humorous behaviors of individuals. According to Kotthoff (2006) femininity and masculinity in gender roles and adjectives attributed to these roles are one of the factors determining which type of humor is appropriate for each gender. Gender stereotypes assign more aggressive roles to males in comparison with females (Deceker & Rotondo, 2001; Roeckelein, 2002). Therefore it can be stated that aggressive gender roles attributed to males emerge as the types of humor styles males prefer.

Kruskal-Wallis H test results regarding the scores from Humor Styles Questionnaire according to pre-service early childhood educators' academic years are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis H test results regarding the scores from Humor Styles Questionnaire according to pre-service early childhood educators' academic years

Humor Styles	Academic Year	n	Mean Rank	sd	Kruskal-Wallis H testi		
					χ^2	p	Paired Comparison
Affiliative Humor	First Year	96	93.1	3	9.392	0.025*	1-2
	Second Year	37	118.3				1-3
	Third Year	39	119.1				1-4
	Fourth Year	42	119.6				
Self-enhancing Humor	First Year	96	104.1	3	1.858	0.602	-
	Second Year	37	101.8				
	Third Year	39	118.2				
	Fourth Year	42	110.4				
Aggressive Humor	First Year	96	113.6	3	6.428	0.093	-
	Second Year	37	119.1				
	Third Year	39	90.9				
	Fourth Year	42	96.5				
Self-defeating Humor	First Year	96	114.4	3	3.087	0.378	-
	Second Year	37	97.8				
	Third Year	39	109.6				
	Fourth Year	42	98.3				

*p<.05

Table 3 presents no significant difference between pre-service early childhood educators' academic years and their self-affiliative ($\chi^2= 1.858, p>.05$), aggressive ($\chi^2= 6.428, p>.05$) and self-defeating ($\chi^2= 3.087, p>.05$) humor styles; in contrast, the difference between pre-service early childhood educators' academic years and their affiliative humor scores ($\chi^2= 9.392, p<.05$) was found out to be significant. According to the rank means affiliative humor style scores of pre-service early childhood educators who were in their first year of university education were found out to be significantly lower than those of other participants who were in their second, third or fourth years.

The correlation between the academic year of pre-service teachers and their humor styles has been a less common issue to be dealt with throughout the studies in the field. According to the literature, Kazairan and Martin's (2004) study on Lebanese university students, İlhan's (2005), Aşar's (2008), Sümer's (2008) and Erözkan's (2009) studies on Turkish university students all showed that the difference between humor styles and academic year at university was not statistically significant. To compare the results of this study with those of the studies conducted so far, the similarity of the findings, except for affiliative humor style, was remarkable. Affiliative humor style, which is one of the adaptive humor styles, is basically free of hostility and a style that develops interpersonal relations as a means of tolerance. Affiliative humor, on the other hand, is positively correlated with moods such as cheerfulness, self-esteem, intimacy, satisfactory relationship. Saroglou and Scariot (2002), as a finding of their study, stated that affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles were in direct proportion to self-acceptance and openness. Durmuş (2000) suggested that individuals with a high sense of humor used more frequently the optimistic and self-confident coping strategies. Kuiper and Martin (1993), in their study on university students, concluded that students with a high sense of humor had more positive self-concept and more control over their own lives while they also experience fewer negative emotions. Moreover, Sümer (2008) claimed that university students' mean scores of affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles were higher than those of aggressive and self-defeating humor styles both of which are considered as maladaptive

styles. In parallel with the findings of the aforementioned studies, similar findings were reported from the studies on Belgian high school students (Saroglou & Scariot, 2002), Lebanese university students (Kazarian & Martin, 2004) and eventually Canadian people (Martin et al, 2003). It can be stated that number of years spent at university increased with age allow the individuals to better understand themselves and people around them so these individuals develop more extrovert interpersonal relationships (Ilhan, 2005; Hampes, 2006; Erözkan, 2009). Therefore, pre-service early childhood educators in their second, third or fourth years use affiliative humor style more than the freshmen due to the fact that they establish better interpersonal relationships and positive moods such as intimacy and dominance of positive emotions increased with age.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Teacher qualifications are one of the important factors affecting the quality of education. As in other professions, these qualifications have a crucial role in determining the tasks and responsibilities of teachers, enhancing teacher performance and eventually training pre-service teachers according to such qualifications pre-determined.

As a result of this study, which aimed to investigate whether pre-service early childhood educators' humor styles differ according to gender and academic year variables, aggressive humor style scores of male pre-service teachers were found out to be higher than that of females. On the other hand, affiliative humor style scores of pre-service teachers who were in their first years at university were significantly lower than those of second, third and fourth year students.

Some suggestions may be put forward in parallel with the results of this study. Pre-service education of early childhood educators may include activities designed for developing their humor styles. Future studies may aim to investigate other factors (such as socioeconomic level, age, type of high school graduated, stress and anxiety level, subjective well-being, self-esteem, shyness, emotional intelligence) likely to affect humor styles of pre-service early childhood educators. Also cross-cultural studies with a high number of participants will contribute a lot to the literature so that researchers can have more opportunity to compare their findings.

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