

K. Geethanadani, Dr. Saradha Rajkumar. (2021). Comic Relief and Young Learners - How Exposure to Plays Will Influence their Intellect?. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education (INT-JECSE)*, 13(2): 1238-1244. DOI: 10.9756/INT-JECSE/V13I2.211171

Received: 01.07.2021 Accepted: 04.10.2021

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## Comic Relief and Young Learners - How Exposure to Plays Will Influence their Intellect?

### Abstract

*The cognitive ability helps people understand the world and orient themselves with the general perspective they have in their minds. Young learners who are always in a quest for knowledge are busy awaiting to acquire new life experiences. It can happen throughout the entire span of life. Reading books that will educate their minds can be helping them unconsciously enhance their intellect. Here unintentionally, plays can be considered rendering enlightenment by entertaining them and enriching their minds. Comic relief in the farcical plays tells that life is loaded with possibilities. Hence, one could expect the unexpected. Focus is made on the comedies, which can be sarcastic or mocking but incur lessons. Oscar Wilde's saying, "If you want to tell the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they'll kill you", is the concept behind the study. Shakespeare is appreciated here as a writer for all ages and also for generations to come. Experience gained through perspectives with which a literary text can be approached is dealt with in the analysis. This proves that literature can enhance the necessary cognitive knowledge in young learners irrespective of their age and understanding capability. Further, the enormous contribution of literature as text in giving knowledge about life and purpose is also discussed.*

**Keywords:** Bardolator, Cognitive Theory, Normative Ethics, Comic-relief, Irony, Sarcasm, Farcical Comedy.

### Introduction

Comedy for children evokes excitement right from their younger age, and this feeling starts when the children laugh at the funny expression made by their parents or siblings from their age zero. A parade of bedtime stories they are exposed to from being a toddler sows the seeds of interest in literature in their brains. All these contain subjects like humour, fantasy, morals and makes them realise the aesthetic value of literature. Humour has a subversive quality but, in a way, sometimes achieves the target it sets. That thing which cannot be said in the mundane real context can be presented lightly, and softens the mood in certain situations. Children learn by repeating words and when observing the older generations by imitating them. This, which happens

unconsciously, makes them acquire the language on a linguistic level. Emoting accurately for various happenings around becomes a challenge for them as it is not possible naturally because situations in real life make them react either positively or negatively. They will definitely not know the effect it would cause. At this confusing stage in their life, books and elders come in handy. When elders state the solutions, it comes in the order of problem and solution rather than the problem, effect and solution. Here books can become the provider of the second important step. Reading books that are considered giving peace of mind can eventually add a piece of information to the mind as well. As tensions build up in a book, researchers deduced that the portions in the brain lit up with activity. Research in 2013 proved this statement using MRI scan results which are

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mentioned in a paper, according to Berns G.S (2013) reading novel created some short and long-term effects the connectivity in the brain.

The works taken for study are modern versions of 'Hamlet' and 'The Taming of the Shrew' by 'Shakespeare'. When read, these plays will kindle learners' interest to enjoy each scene as the characters in them get into their skin and give diverse perspectives and emotional experiences in the way they were presented when read or performed (S.S. Rajest, P. Suresh, 2018, 2019). Despite coming under different genres, the plays have one thing in common: sarcasm and a farce, making them attractive.

### Review of Literature

Dr Albert Cullum (1995), in his book, proudly expresses that for him teaching Shakespeare in a classroom rewards him with joy and also the way Shakespeare's character defines right and evil, that right is triumphant, and what is evil is always destroyed. He also states that when the students make friendship with Shakespeare, they will remain friends for an eternity. He says that acting helps them in expressing themselves and learn the impact of emotions on human beings.

Koste (1978) probes that reading a drama text helps the children develop their imaginations beyond visible things and helps transform the self.

Kirti Kapur (2009) discusses how the drama makes the children imbibe the experience from text and inculcate the new habit of using their physique, voices, and emotions to make the language their own, which develops their personality traits as a whole.

In their article, Ian Wilkie and Matthew Saxton (2010) declare about the beginning and development of performing ability in children. He says that early parent-child interaction constitutes the blueprint for a comic performance itself and that the quality of interaction between parent and child echoes the conditions for successful interplay between comedian and audience."

McNaughton, M.J. (1997) delineates that it develops the spoken language ability and gives an idea about the language rich context, which paves the way for good writing skills in children.

Bolton, G. (1979), adduces that language acquisition in children happens through drama, but it occurs discretely, "Drama is a cobweb and language is its strands."

### The Objective of the Study

- To show what comical aspects in plays will kindle the interest in reading;

- To portray that 'the plays' help them experience the emotions and react appropriately without facing real-life situations.

### Research Question

- How might the comic relief in plays emotionally influence and prepare the young learners to face society?
- Additionally, how can plays provide knowledge of experience to the level that stays unforgettable throughout a lifetime?

### Significance of the Study

The study shows that despite Shakespeare's plays being categorised as comedies, tragedies and history plays, there is an interplay of all the genres in his plays. Critics say that changing the last scene in Shakespeare's plays can quickly turn the tragic play into a comedy and comic play into a tragedy. In his "Preface to Shakespeare", Samuel Johnson defends that Shakespeare always intends to present situations in their natural way and make his 'audience laugh and mourn at the same time. This unique quality of Shakespeare makes him the greatest. English dramatists termed the one who loves him 'a bardolator'. The main intention is to show that plays, notably not Shakespeare's alone, are also meant for young learners. Plays learnt to make them know the intertextual context, ideals the characters embody, immerse them in the creative atmosphere they create in the texts, and act as 'affective respondents'. The play texts will help them shun the inhibitions to express themselves in the crowds when seen from a performance perspective. They understand that conversations are the most precious means of communication (Suman Rajest S, P. Suresh, 2018). Giving Make-believe situations encourages their creativity and helps develop their imagination. At the same time, it gives them the opportunity to use the language in different contexts, says Kapur, K (2009). It depicts that dramas and plays can develop a child intellectually. These farcical plays with comedy elements mixed with humour have some philosophical insights and a humanistic attitude that makes the characters applaudable.

### Theoretical Background

The theory employed in the study is Cognitive Theory, as the study focused here is the intellectual impact of plays in young learners. According to Jean Piaget's (2021), "Children have real understanding only of that which they invent themselves, and each time that we try to

teach them something too quickly, we keep them from reinventing it themselves." Though the children's education gives them specific ideas on attaining knowledge, literature nourishes their intellect. The plays analyzed are farcical hence, they will definitely supply food for their thoughts. Mikkonen, J. (2015), quotes Dorothy Walsh. She gives a statement about literature being an agent containing a cognitive value by saying that 'the arts have customarily been regarded as a source of intellectual nourishment' and artworks 'have been accepted as vehicles of insight, revelation, and enlarged comprehension' She also says that 'The cognitivists' believe that literature can give insignificant knowledge and insight in matters of human interest which was seen in analytic tradition alone so far. The theory incorporated to study the plays here is cognitive theory. Jukka Mikkonen says that a cognitive approach to literature is possible. The real evidence can be given not by giving psychological perspective but only by 'the practice of literature and study of it'.

Aravind et al. (2021) explored the 'cognitive theory of multimedia to dysphasia learners' vocabulary acquisition'. The researcher has presented that 'the multimedia instructional method of teaching' had influenced special learners' vocabulary acquisition at a meaningful level. The special learners 'could retain most of the vocabulary when the multimedia method was integrated with the teaching-learning process. If media could influence the special learners' education, why not the plays be expected to do the same for the other learners when the plays are prescribed at school and also read at their own expense of interest or being enacted.

## Methodology

Psychology defines Cognitive theory as 'an approach to psychology that attempts to explain human behaviour by understanding your thought processes'. 'Cognitive theories are characterized by their focus on the idea that how and what people think leads to the arousal of emotions and that certain thoughts and beliefs lead to disturbed emotions and behaviors and others lead to healthy emotions and adaptive behavior', according to Di Giuseppe, Raymond. Any reading done is for the sake of acquiring knowledge, and that could be language or even emotions.

## Analysis and Discussion

The dramas and plays, utilized for performance and studied, can effectively enhance the language skills in writing and speaking to mould the young minds. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare multifacetedly portrays the characters' grief, making the readers believe that murder cannot be taken as a weapon to end the

grief and pain due to abandonment. Which, when taken as a performative text, will surely make children believe that 'Revenge is an act of passion; vengeance of justice. Injuries are revenged; crimes are avenged', as said by Samuel Johnson. Analyzing the texts that provide a farcical situation gives cognitive knowledge of the situation, and the experience gained is remarkably remembered as comedy is inserted to relieve the tragic tensions.

Hamlet is a play where life lessons are loaded. Say one mans' greed could spoil many lives. Shakespeare, though employing all the literary devices designed it is a tragedy. It is flooded with sarcasm; the protagonist Hamlet and many more characters in the play have much emotional turmoil due to the death of their fathers and siblings. Hamlet, the prince, is informed of the kings' death, his father, and on arrival also hears his mothers' remarriage to his deceased father's brother Claudius. He, who is dependent on his father, is engulfed by grief and the loss of motherly care. A ghost appears, announcing that it is his father's and asking him to avenge for his murder. Hamlet stands unconvinced that Claudius, who his Uncle might be the murderer. Hence, he devises a plan and brings actors to stage a play that contains a plot resembling his father's murder act. His Uncle is made to witness it and on the course of which disturbed Claudius exists showing guilty expression.

Hamlet confirms his cunning nature and sets to kill. When reading the play, one thing is sure that though Hamlet finds the truth from the fathers' ghost, he takes pain to investigate to prove his Uncle's guilt. Dilorio, in his article, says that children, though pushed to difficult situations, could use their literary intellect to react as Hamlet does. He closely examines the reactions of Claudius to confirm his guilt and, in one place, even rethinks whether to forgive or kill him, which in the end, he does. According to him, Maegan Sugrue (2017) argues that this act of Hamlet is a judgment providing justice. However, murder is an evil act whether one commits it for good or not. 'Is it right to commit an evil act in order to rid the world of a worse evil? Is it damnation to allow evil to remain because one desires to abstain from committing evil?'

Hamlet was witty but always sarcastic though the grief engulfed, in Scene 2. He mocks his friend Horatio who tells him that he came to see the funeral procession of King Hamlet, and Hamlet gives an exclamatory remark that he has come to see his mother's wedding.

In the Gravediggers scene, Act V, one can see the clowns who are the gravediggers talk philosophically and logically, which is not expected of a layman. This also amuses Hamlet and the readers. The first gravedigger asks the

second about Ophelia's death. Act V Scene 1 lines, page 1. This scene shows how the law is bent for the privileged and the gravediggers' witty sense. Ophelia who is dead, but the cause of death is questionable because if she had willingly drowned, it must be a suicide. In that case, no Christian burial is allowed for killing oneself. This act is sighted as "delightful nonsense relieving grim tragedy" by George. W Keeton in the review of his book '*Shakespeare's Legal and Political Background*'. It is delightful since Hamlet also shows his when he says, 'Does this guy realise what he's doing? He's singing while digging a grave.' In his encounter with the gravedigger, he marvels at the wisdom he possesses, in Act v, scene 1.

The scene, when closely examined, shows how a person loses the primary identity of being called a man or a woman too when the soul departs the body. Hamlet again, out of curiosity, asks him from when he had been the gravedigger, he says on the day King Hamlet defeated Fortinbras. Furthermore, when Hamlet raise the question of when was Fortinbras defeated, he mocks Hamlet saying, 'You don't know that? Any fool could tell you, it was the day that young Hamlet was born—the one who went crazy and got sent off to England'. These clever remarks made shows that fools can be witty too. Not only these, the gravedigger even gives a wise explanation as to how a man goes crazy? and answers that it was by losing his mind strangely. Next, he says that men rot before their death because of evil deeds and explains to Hamlet why a Leatherman's skin will take longer, maybe nine years, to rot, as his trade makes his skin tanned and leathery. Later, when Hamlet finds Jester Yorick's death, he asks Horatio, his friend, whether Alexander the Great's Skull smells as bad as Yorick's. When Hamlet affirms, he says that however great one seems, he ends up as dirt that is used as a hole concealer later. This scene shows the grim reality on earth, which Hamlet also explains when he says that deceased Yorick's skull could visit his lady's chamber and reveal that the perfumes they use are of no use as every being smell bad once dead. Hamlet is very humanitarian in his approach to life and situations in life, which is found in his monologue that starts contemplating life and death, 'To be, or not to be: that is the question: ...' in Act 3 Scene 1. lines 55-85. These lines show how his mind is in smog and confusion, and he is doubtful about people's attitude towards life.

According to Rajesh. K (2019), normative ethics defines that happiness to oneself is anthropocentric and Hamlet, later out of grief, acts with a chauvinistic attitude when he thinks of killing Claudius to avenge the murder of King Hamlet.

In '*The Taming of the Shrew*', though Katherina has a Shrewd nature deep down, she respects her father. In the early periods of history, women were valued for the dowry they accompanied, but Petruchio respects her as a woman but not as a commodity. The study is to show that proper handling of situations could lead us to betterment in life. In this play, people are seen either in disguise or pretending to be mannered, resulting in shame. Actually, the play itself is enacted to make fun of a commoner named Christopher Sly, who disguises as a 'Lord' as instructed. The play's story had its resemblance to various other folklores, and a source even claims that the shrew might even be Socrates's wife who was tamed, and a text says that Petruchio, Katherina's husband, mentions in his dialogue as well. The play is controversial since it shows that women with shrewd nature had to be 'tamed' and believed in portraying the female submissiveness and misogynistic attitude of men. In his write-up "on directing *The Taming of the Shrew*", critics like Aspinall and Conall Morrison say that Shakespeare portrayed reality and satirized the patriarchal society. In the play, Petruchio always calls Katherine 'Kate', sometimes repeating it. The Baptista, a wealthy merchant, announces that Bianca is to be married only after her elder sister gets a suitor. This results in Bianca's suitor's trying to find a match for Katherine. Petruchio, whose father is dead, is in pursuit of a rich wife; hence, when Hortensio asks him to help, he disguises himself as a music tutor to woo Katherine and marry her. He is a man who likes challenges, and nothing else matters in front of money in, Scene 2.

Grumio, Petruchio's servant, gives a statement that proves the temper of his master, which foreshadows that Katherine will be made submissive as in Scene 2. Hence, when he was about to meet her after Hortensio's encounter with her, Petruchio tells him that when Katherine calls names and abuses him, he is determined to interpret it as a sweet song or words of praise scene 3. He even convinces Katherine too at their first confrontation, making her confused and doubts whether he was a fool when he speaks highly of her,

'Why? I find you very gentle. 'Twas told me you were rough and coy and sullen, and now I find that to be a lie. For you are pleasant, courteous, a bit slow in ..... Why you don't limp!'(scene 3)

He tells Baptista that her daughter is pleased to marry him immediately saying, that was the reason for her rudeness in front of them, saying that she shows - 'modest of the dove'. These situations presented in the play partly give the readers the sweet realization that intelligence is not only speaking words of wisdom but also

manipulating situations for their own good. Petruchio mildly foreshadows that he is determined to curb the nature of Katherine. This is seen when he calls her 'Kate' at various occasions beginning from the place when he greets her saying, "Good morrow, Kate", "Plain Kate", 'You must be married to no man but me, for I am he that's born to tame you, Kate, and bring you from a wild Kate to a gentle Kate' (Scene 3) which ironically means that he treats her like a 'cat' who should be tamed. Later, in the play, when the marriage is fixed between the grooms, Petruchio's excellent intellect becomes fabulously epitomized. He comes to the church a little late in a faded cloth and rides a broken horse which makes others wonder, but his servant Grumio guesses rightly that his master is acting so with something in mind, which foreshadows later results in the play. The critics say that Shakespeare, through Petruchio, tries to show the male dominance and the submissiveness of women as an expected tradition and a proven rule for nature. But few argue that he intends to make people realize that the renaissance period suppressed women, and also there is a notion that during his time, only young lads appeared as women hence it was just for the entertainment of the onlookers, he presented certain scenes showing arrogance towards women. Jonathan Miller, the director of the '1980 BBC Television Shakespeare', 'Shakespeare also sees it as a lesson to commons, here's another, more complex way of reading it than that: which sees it as being their particular view of how society ought to be organized in order to restore order in a fallen world'. What could not be expected is sympathy in a farcical play written and categorized as a comedy. Shakespeare also symbolized the nature of men and their love for games and sport, proving this play is not misogynistic or anti-feministic. Ann Thompson (2003) is convincing this fact that 'the fact that in the folktale versions the shrew-taming story always comes to its climax when the husbands wager on their wives' obedience must have been partly responsible for the large number of references to sporting, gaming and gambling throughout the play. These metaphors can help to make Petruchio's cruelty acceptable by making it seem limited and conventionalised.'

Petruchio makes everyone agree to his appearance fashion, telling that Katherine is marrying him and not the dress. Later after the wedding ceremony is over, he leaves with Katherine to his home. Katherine almost falls prey or succumbs to his attitude soon from the girl who commands, "If you love me, stay!" to begging to accept her wish, which is proven. When she says, "Patience I pray you, 'twas an accident" and 'I pray you, husband, be not so angry. The meat was good enough I think, it is

evident that she even goes to the level of pleading Petruchio not to hurt his servants and accepting any food that was provided.

Petruchio slightly shows Katherine how she has been in her house by acting rude, but ironically, that is why his servants' actions quote him "He's killing her with kindness". In his monologue, he reveals his intentions in the final pages of Scene 5,

'Thus have I begun my campaign, and it is my hope to have it end successfully. She ate no meat today, nor shall she eat none. Last night she slept not, nor tonight she shall not. As with meat, some fault I'll find ..... I'll gladly listen'

In the last scene, Petruchio finally accomplishes his task where she agrees to everything, which is evident in the scene where Petruchio argues that what they see is a sun but the real thing that appears is the moon.

When Petruchio, Hortensio and Lucentio meet at Lucentio's house. There Katherine and Hortensio's wife, addressed as 'Widow', have an argument on whose husband is fortunate or mean. Here Hortensio's wife shows her hot temper and Katherine exposes her love for Petruchio indirectly. Then the three men have a bet over proving whose wife is most obedient among the three. Hence, they send servants to fetch each, but only Katherine appears promptly asking, "What is it you will that you send for me?" for which Lucentio and Hortensio are astonished, and Petruchio proudly says, 'It means peace and love and a quiet life, and to the point, a very happy marriage'. Then in the last scene, Katherine also dictates a sermon about an obedient wife. She says they should not frown as it spoils the looks and their husband is their lord and works hard to keep her happy. When he strives hard to earn for a living, the wives stay secure and safe at home. She says they expect 'love, fair looks, and true obedience'. And adds that it is the duty of a woman owes to her husband.

Scholars and critics argue that Shakespeare has used the Elizabethan trend and also have taken the idea from William Caxton's work as per Alfred Tolman's translation which was a story written for his 'daughters' as 'a guide on how to behave appropriately' in, 'a *treatise on the domestic education of women*' which features 'an anecdote' by a husband telling correct way for a husband to abide and show obedience. All these features analysed in the play features how anything can be changed or looked. It also indicates sometimes certain things do not appear as they are but turns into something else. The situation presented can

educate children that people are masked and also changes should be expected.

## Conclusion

When poetry written by great poets, say Keats, Shakespeare, John Milton and Shakespeare, for example, are prescribed for study, why not farcical plays. The schools introduce "All the world's a stage" from the pastoral comedy 'As You Like It' to make children understand that man has to face many challenges that are in store at different stages of life. Likewise, in Macbeth 'The Witches' encounter that is taught in the value education classes enlightens the young learners with the knowledge that man can be easily manipulated by igniting the greed for power and made to commit a brutal murder despite him being a steady and law-abiding soul. Hence, it is evident that cognitive knowledge can be enhanced through reading plays as numerous life experiences are exhibited with situations in them. Though they are farcical in nature, they provide food for the intellect, which can never be forcefully registered in their minds by teaching or giving pieces of advice of any kind from the elders. The analysis in the study proves that text can be approached beyond the idea as a source of entertainment and appreciating the aesthetic value of literature.

## Limitation of the Study

The cognitive approach and its contribution to young learners through the literary text are discussed using Shakespearean farcical plays. This can be further analyzed using other Shakespearean plays or even plays written by other renowned writers in literature exploring different genres.

## Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest existing in this paper.

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