

The relation between teaching the Arabic language using humour and reading comprehension at Elementary School in the Arab Sector in Israel

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Abstract

This research examines the extent to which the integration of humorous literary texts in teaching the Arabic language affects achievement in reading comprehension among Grade 4 pupils in the Arab sector in Israel. This research is the first one in the field. Research on the integration of humour in the study of Arabic language as first language does not exist so far. There are very few studies dealing with the integration of humour in the learning process of Arabic as a second language (only three were found). Hence, there are no studies dealing with the integration of humour in the educational field in the Israeli Arab sector. The research took place in one school in the Bedouin sector in the South of Israel. It was based on one experimental class and one control class. The study examined the level of the pupils' knowledge in all components of comprehension: explicit and implicit content, interpretation and integration, evaluating texts and drawing conclusions. The experimental classes studied six humorous stories whereas the control classes studied six stories without humour. The results of the experiment show that the achievements of pupils who learned comprehension using humorous stories was much higher than those in the control classes. In addition, a more positive learning environment was reported in the experimental classes.

Keywords: language education, humour in education, Arabic language, education, teaching.

1. Introduction

The teaching profession has been considered for many years as a serious and respectable profession and therefore, to link it to humour was somehow illogical. Despite this, something has changed in recent decades. The renewed interest since the 1980s in the research of

humour and laughter has led to many studies in areas such as medicine, sociology, psychology and also education. In education, the effects of integrating humour into education and creating a positive learning atmosphere in class, as well as teachers' and pupils' satisfaction with the teaching and learning process have been examined. In more focused studies, the effect of integrating humour on pupils' achievement levels in various subjects such as mathematics, literature and teaching languages has also been examined (Glenn 2002; Morreall 2008).

Despite multiple studies in the area of education and teaching, there is little research on this subject conducted in Israel, and not at all in the Arab sector in Israel. This research, dealing with the effect of humour on pupils' achievements in elementary schools in the study of the Arabic language, is the first of its kind. In general, the educational personnel in the Arab sector relate to integrating humour into teaching ambivalently. There are teachers who oppose the idea of mixing humour in teaching while others accept it positively. Those who avoid it, do so for three main reasons: the first one pertains to teachers' fears that pupils will deviate from proper learning procedures. The second reason is teachers' sense that they do not have appropriate tools to create humour themselves and/or to cope with humorous texts. The third reason is the fear that pupils will be disrespectful and teachers will lose control over them.¹

This research examines the extent to which the combination of literary and humorous texts in teaching the Arabic language affects pupils' achievements in comprehension among fourth grade pupils in the Arab sector in Israel.

2. Research findings with regard to integrating humour in teaching

Studies undertaken to date show that integrating humour into teaching encourages analytical, critical and creative thinking (Stopsky 1992; Garner 2006); increases pupils' attention, releases tension and increases the desire to learn (Gorham 1988; Kelley & Gorham 1988; Opplinger 2003; Gazit 2013); reduces fears of studying; builds a positive relationship between pupils and teachers and improves the way pupils evaluate their teachers (Cohen 1996; Wanzer et al. 1999; Kuperman 2006; Herzog & Strevey 2008; Al-Duleimi et al. 2016); builds communal spirit among pupils and encourage them to interact with each other; encourages taking risks; encourages students in general and those who are shy in particular to participate in activities, develops pupils' sense of humour and increases their self-esteem (Ziegler et al. 1985; Berk & Nanda 1998; 2006; Glenn 2002; Masselos 2003).

Teachers who employ humour in class are more appreciated by pupils than those who do not (Bryant et al. 1980; Fortson & Brown 1998). In addition, it was found that integrating humour into teaching produces an equal relationship between teachers and pupils (Cohen 1996), reduces teacher's fatigue, improves the teaching process and increases their self-esteem (Loomis & Kolberg 1993; McMahan 1999; Minchew 2001; Torok et al. 2004). Among some teachers, whether as a result of exposure to research findings on the subject or for other reasons, there is a tendency to integrate humour in teaching by telling jokes in lessons from time to time, bringing funny examples and pictures connected to the lesson, or hanging humorous expressions on classroom walls, and encouraging pupils to create humour (Martin 2007). Some studies report the frequent use of humour by some teachers in class at least three times per lesson in elementary and high schools (Bryant & Zillmann 1989; Neuliep 1991).

Despite the positive aspects of integrating humour in teaching, one must be careful how this is done in class. Teachers must take into account pupils' fears of being the subject of humour in front of other pupils, and refrain from using aggressive, sarcastic or humiliating

humour toward their pupils. This can be done as a means of educating pupils who are not concentrating, make mistakes, do not prepare required assignments or arrive late. Such behaviour is likely to have an even bigger impact when done in front of the whole class. In such circumstances, not only is hurt inflicted on a particular pupil, but the atmosphere in class will be tense and unpleasant and pupils will be afraid of making any sort of mistake, will be less critical, less creative, and their evaluation of the teacher will be lower (Bryant & Zillmann 1989; Gorham & Christophel 1990; Janes & Olson 2000; Kuipers 2006; Chabeli 2008; Platt & Ruch 2009).

3. Will material learned in a humorous manner be remembered better than material that is not?

The search for studies regarding humour and learning have not provided a clear answer about the effect humour has on learning achievements. That is why we tried to find studies regarding humour and memory that are close to our subject and perhaps support its scientific basis.

Gruner (1976) pointed out that out of the nine studies he examined, eight showed that those who learned with humour did not remember more and only one study showed that memory was better when learning with humour. Another study showed that material learned with humorous characteristics was remembered better for a period of one month after learning, but after a year, all differences were erased (Davies & Apter 1980). More recent studies have shown clear differences in remembering materials among those who learned with humour and remembered material more than those who learned material without humour (Derks et al. 1998; Schmidt & Williams 2001; Schmidt 2002; Mohan 2016).

In a study conducted by Ford et al. (2012) adult pupils who were exposed to humorous cartoons performed better on a math test compared to control group pupils who were exposed to non-humorous poems or nothing at all. In another study, Berk & Nanda (2006) investigated differences between humorous and serious versions of the same test content among graduate biostatistics pupils. The results showed a significant impact of humour on performance in descriptive statistics items, which is explained by reduced anxiety.

Martin (2007) concluded, on the basis of many research findings, that teachers interested in teaching with humour in order to make things easier for pupils, must ensure that the humour used is connected to the lesson content. Continuous use of humour throughout a lesson will have little effect on the ability to remember. Humour should be used sparingly and to emphasise key issues.

Despite the ambiguous results in the context of remembering materials through teaching with humour, based on the abovementioned studies, there is no doubt about other positive results accompanying teaching and learning using humour as aforementioned: a better learning atmosphere in class, higher motivation to study, reducing stress, pupils' greater appreciation for teachers, improved social atmosphere between pupils, encouraging creativity, teachers feeling better, greater satisfaction from teaching and higher self-esteem.

4. Pupils' need to produce humour and laughter in class

Do teachers understand that pupils feel the need to produce humorous and funny situations in class? In addition to what is written above about the functions of humour, there are more reasons why children and adolescents need to produce humour. First and foremost, one must remember that humour and laughter are integral parts of a baby's development from the

moment of birth until maturity. This is particularly noticeable in the early years until the age of approximately six, when children begin to study at school. Humour is one of the signs of children's mastery of the knowledge they have accumulated. When small children play, their play is accompanied by humour and laughter. The more they know what is right, the more they express their opinions about what is wrong, by using humour and laughter among other things (Sover 2009). That is to say, humour and laughter are both ways of learning and criticising. Children's need to employ humour as a practical tool for their ongoing development at school age is a natural continuation of the preschool period.

McGee & Shevlin (2009) argued that a sense of humour is perceived as a criterion for assessing popularity, and adolescents with a sense of humour are considered as having a higher social status. Petitjean & González-Martínez (2015), analysing a corpus of video-recorded French first-language lessons, showed how pupils sequentially organise laughter and smiling, and use them to pre-empt, solve or assess a problematic action. Through laughter and smiling, pupils display the actions they consider appropriate or inappropriate for the classroom and produce and monitor their institutional identities moment by moment.

A study by Hillman (2011) explored the shared repertoire of humour practices in the creation of community within the context of a culturally diverse and multilevel adult Arabic language classroom consisting of two native speakers, five heritage language learners (HLLs), and three second-language (L2) learners. Hillman argued that these humour practices were not only sites for identity display and relational identity display for participants, but they also helped to mitigate tensions and contributed to the creation of a very inclusive, close-knit community with relatively low language learning anxiety. These humour practices created a beneficial context for the teaching and learning of Arabic culture and dialect.

Humour among adolescents often tends to be crude and aggressive. School is a hothouse for the development of adolescent humour. Adolescents are under many pressures: successful studies, physiological development, sexual development, personality consolidations and perceptions of their place in society. In order to withstand these pressures, adolescents use one of the most important tools to relieve tension and that is humour. Humour is a way of coping with obligatory norms, which adolescents must face (Freud 1976). At this age, sexual humour is most widespread (Sover 2009). Freud argued that, in adolescence, much use is made of absurd, verbal humour, such as verbal nonsense so as to overthrow obligatory logical thinking (Freud 1976).

Another factor must be added to these. Humour and laughter are part of humans' instinctive mechanisms. People who are exposed to a humorous or funny situation react to it mostly automatically, in an instinctive manner. For example, if someone in class falls down of his chair, some of the pupils will laugh immediately. This is an automatic reaction, as if the fall and the laughter happened at the same time. Those who laugh cannot control their reaction because it's an instinctive one. More than a few teachers are unaware of this and think that a child laughing in class is not disciplined. Children who are crudely told off or punished by teachers will be hurt because they do not understand what was wrong with what they did. According to the functions of humour mentioned above, teachers should pay attention to their pupils' need to produce humour and laughter in class so as to relate differently and more positively to their humour activities and their laughter reactions.

5. Learning languages using humour

Combining humour and education is a subject that has been studied in order to examine alternative teaching methods and optimise pupils' achievements in diverse knowledge areas such as teaching mathematics, teaching literature and learning foreign languages. There are

very few studies dealing with the integration of humour in the learning process of Arabic as a second language (only three were found). Research on the integration of humour in the study of Arabic language as the first language does not exist.

In second language research, several studies provide evidence of the benefits of including humour in the second language curriculum, such as positive effects on motivation, a more natural interaction with learners, and assessment of pragmatic proficiency (Bell 2009; Fung 2010; Bell & Pomerantz 2016). Prodanović-Stankić (2011) investigated the use of humour in teaching English as a second/foreign language. In her study, humour was used both as a tool to improve the learning environment, and as a resource for teaching new vocabulary or revising grammatical structures. The results indicate that humour can be applied to teaching English as a foreign language and improving pupils' proficiency levels. Moreover, using humour both as a tool and as a resource affected pupils' motivation and willingness to study.

Al-Duleimi et al.'s (2016) research results indicated that using humour to teach material significantly increases pupils' overall performance. This study provided some valid evidence that humour may maximise the learning outcomes in college classroom settings. McMahon (1999) pointed out in his article that every function of humour (see above) is relevant to the pedagogic process and to language learning in particular. Humour and language play can be used to increase learners' meta-linguistic awareness and expand their communicative/interpretive repertoires (Bell & Pomerantz 2014).

Azizifard & Jalali's (2012) study investigated the effects of context and humour on learning English functions in teaching English as a first language, for male and female first-year high school students. The results showed that a context with humour had a significant effect on learning language functions. However, the effect of a context without humour on learning language functions was relatively low. In addition, the results showed no difference between male and female participants' performance.

Hempelmann (2016) argued that the uses of humour in classrooms presented not in the form of isolated jokes or humorous items injected at random into classroom materials, but as a focused topic of study and the explicit theme of readings and writings, aligns with former research findings suggesting that humour can provide pupils with intrinsic motivation, insight into the workings of language, and a window into human interaction in general.

6. Methodology

This is an empirical research based on a learning programme to investigate comprehension in the Arabic language using teaching and learning humorous literary texts. The research question is: "Whether, and to what extent, does integrating humour in teaching the Arabic language in the area of comprehension, affect the achievements of 4th grade pupils in elementary schools in the Bedouin sector in southern Israel?".

6.1. Participants

The research was carried out in two 4th year classes, out of five classes at an elementary school in a Bedouin village in southern Israel. Both classes work in similar learning environments. Pupils in both classes come from the same area, mostly from families of average socio-economic status. The two classes were chosen out of the three 4th grade classes at a school. 4th grade class 3 was the Experiment class, taught by the teacher who was a partner in this research; 4th grade class 2, which was the Control class, was taught by another teacher. The Experiment class, 4th grade class 3, consisted of 22 pupils, 9 of whom were boys

and 13 of whom were girls. The Control class, 4th grade class 2, consisted of 22 pupils, 10 boys and 12 girls.

6.2. Profiles of the two teachers participating in the study

The participating teachers are graduate students of Education. They are experienced teachers with ten years of teaching service. Their area of expertise is Arabic language and literature, and they have a rich experience in teaching the Arabic language. Both have taught the Arabic language for six years at the school where the experiment took place.

6.3. Procedure

The intervention programme in the Experiment class was carried out by the research partner teacher in accordance with the Israeli Ministry of Education curriculum for 4th grade elementary school classes and coordinated with staff teaching the Arabic language. The research partner teacher would teach pupils in the Experiment class six humorous texts, which are age appropriate folk stories (the titles are mentioned in the Appendix).

In the Control class, the other teacher taught regular texts without any humorous intervention (the titles are mentioned in the Appendix).

Each class is divided into four levels of achievement:

- a. Good level: Grade 80-100
- b. Average level: Grade 60-79
- c. Low level: Grade 40-59
- d. Very low level: Grade 0-39 (a unique level characteristic of Bedouin schools in southern Israel).

6.4. Research variables

Dependent variable: pupils' achievement in the subject learned – Arabic language in 4th grade.
Independent variable: Integrating humour into teaching Arabic language in 4th grade.

6.5. Research process

The research teacher shared the study with the team-teaching Arabic at the school. After the research aims and conditions were explained to the team, it was agreed who would be the appropriate parallel teacher in the Control class to work with the research teacher in the Experiment class. In addition, in consultation with the Arabic language teaching team, the research teacher chose the texts that would be taught in both classes: 6 texts without humour were chosen for the Control class and 6 texts with humour for the Experiment class.

The instructions for carrying out the experiment were as follows:

1. The two teachers will examine the level of the two classes prior to the beginning of the experiment by a pre-test.
2. A comprehension test will be carried out at the beginning of the experiment and after learning each story.
3. After 6 tests have been carried out in both classes, an identical final test will be carried out in both classes.

4. The research will examine the pupils' achievements in both classes in all tests in parallel, including the final test.
5. All tests are based on all components of comprehension (*Arabic Language Education for Grades 1-6 Curriculum* 2009). The components are as follows:
 - a. Overt content
 - b. Latent content
 - c. Interpretation and implementation
 - d. Evaluating text content

7. Results

Table 1. Identical pre-test: Comprehension pre-test results in both classes

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	7 (84.2)	7 (91)
Average level (60-79)	8 (60.1)	8 (65)
Low level (40-59)	5 (50)	5 (54)
Very low level (0-39)	2 (21)	2 (38)
Total Average Class Grade	61.1 %	69.76 %

The results of the pre-test (Table 1) indicate that the level of the control class is higher in all four levels. The average level is higher by **8.77%**.

Table 2. Test No. 1: Results of the first test in the Experiment class (3) after pupils were taught the first text, اشعب وحمارة (Magairy 2010. *Ashs'ab's Donkey*), and of the first test in the Control class (2) after pupils were taught the first text, القصر (*The Palace*)

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	17 (93.1)	9 (86)
Average level (60-79)	2 (71.5)	8 (66)
Low level (40-59)	3 (45.3)	4 (52)
Very low level (0-39)	0	1 (27)
Total Average Class Grade	84.5%	71.19%

From the results of the first test one can see a substantial advance of the Experiment class in comparison with the Control class in the good and the average levels. As for the low-level group in the Experiment class, one can see the advancement of two pupils moving from the low level to the average level and two pupils moving from the very low level to the low level. Regarding the average results, the difference between the two classes was **12.86%**.

Table 3. Test No. 2: Results of the second test in the Experiment class (3) after pupils were taught the second text, دراهم جحا (Matah 2012. *Juha's Money*), and of the second test in the Control class (2) after pupils were taught the second text, الفيل يا ملك الزمان (*The Elephant King of Time*)

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	17 (93.5)	10 (88)

Average level (60-79)	3 (72)	7 (67)
Low level (40-59)	2 (46.5)	4 (53)
Very low level (0-39)	0	1 (25)
Total Average Class Grade	86.2%	70.95%

From the results of the second test one can see that the Experiment class grades are quite steady at the two first levels. There are very slight changes of 0.4% in the good level and 0.5% in the average level. One significant change in the Experiment class is that one pupil from the low level passed to the average level. The difference between the total average grades between the classes is **15.7%**, which means more advancement in the Experiment class with 2.84% relative to the last test.

Table 4. Test No. 3: Results of the third test in the Experiment class (3) after pupils were taught the third text, أشعب والسّمك (Magairy 2010. *Ash'ab's Revenge towards the Fish*), and of the third test in the Control class (2) after pupils were taught the third text, محفظة النقود (*The Wallet*)

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	17 (93.8)	11 (88.6)
Average level (60-79)	3 (77)	6 (66.9)
Low level (40-59)	2 (51)	4 (55.3)
Very low level (0-39)	0	1 (28)
Total Average Class Grade	87.5%	73.8%

The results of this test show continuous advance. The grades of the low level in the Experiment class climbed up 5.5% and the average level climbed up 5%. A slight change can be seen at the good level with a 0.3% increase. At this stage as in the previous one, there are no pupils in the very low level. The average level is **13.7%** higher in the Experiment class, 2% less than in the previous test.

Table 5. Test No. 4: Results of the fourth test in the Experiment class (3) after pupils were taught the fourth text, جحا وكلام الناس (Al-Bakri 2013. *Juha and the Peoples' Sayings*), and of the fourth test in the Control class (2) العنكبوت والنملة after pupils were taught the fourth text العنكبوت والنملة (*The Spider and the Ant*)

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	17 (93.5)	10 (80)
Average level (60-79)	4 (75)	7 (63)
Low level (40-59)	1 (54)	5 (50.5)
Very low level (0-39)	0	0
Total Average Class Grade	88.5%	67.8%

From the results of the fourth test, one can see that the Experiment class pupils keep the same grades with a slight increase of 1% in the total average. At the low level one of the pupils climbed to the average level. As for the only pupil in the low level there is a slight advancement of 4%. In the Control class there is a substantial decline at the good level grades. Both classes have no pupils in the very low level at this stage. The difference between the total average grades of the two classes is **20.7%**. It is the biggest difference at this stage and

is quite exceptional because of the substantial decline at the good level grades in the Control class, which it is not easy to account for.

Table 6. Test No. 5: Results of the fifth test in the Experiment class (3) after pupils were taught the fifth text, جحا والسائل (Al-Bakri 2013. *Juha and the Beggar*), and of the fifth test in the Control class (2) after pupils were taught the fifth text, السمكات الثلاث (*Three Fish*)

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	17 (93.4)	11 (91)
Average level (60-79)	4 (78.6)	7 (70)
Low level (40-59)	1 (57)	3 (54.6)
Very low level (0-39)	0	1 (30)
Total Average Class Grade	90%	76.5%

The outcome from the fifth test shows us that the average of the Experiment class climbs up 1.5%. We can see an increase of 3% at the low level and a very slight decline of 0.1% at the good level. There is an increase of 3.6% in the total average level. The difference of the total average grades between the two classes is now **13.5%**, which is quite similar to the results of tests 1 to 3.

Table 7. Test No. 6: Results of the sixth test in the Experiment class (3) after pupils were taught the sixth text, مسمار جحا (Al-Bakri 2013. *Juha's Nail*), and of the sixth test in the Control class (2) after pupils were taught the sixth text, الملك الحكيم (*The King and the Wise Man*)

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	17 (94)	11 (93)
Average level (60-79)	4 (78.8)	8 (71.2)
Low level (40-59)	1 (58)	2 (51)
Very low level (0-39)	0	1 (29)
Total Average Class Grade	90%	78%

The sixth test shows slight changes in the Experiment group. The pupil at the low level acquired an additional 1%. In the Control class one can see that one pupil went down to the very low level. The total average grades in the Experiment group is stable. The difference between the classes regarding the total average class grade is **12%**.

Table 8. Identical final test: Results of the final comprehension test in both classes

	Experiment class: 3	Control class: 2
Good level (80-100)	16 (92.2)	9 (86.8)
Average level (60-79)	3 (74.1)	7 (75.6)
Low level (40-59)	2 (58.3)	4 (58.6)
Very low level (0-39)	1 (28)	2 (29.5)
Total Average Class Grade	83.7%	72.9%

The final test reveals that one pupil went down to the low level and another one to the very low level. However, there has been significant progress in the Experimental class from the

starting point with the pre-test total average class grade of **61.1%** to the final test with a total average grade of **83.7%**, which means an advancement of **22.6%**. In the Control class there was a slight advancement from **69.76%** at the pre-test to **72.9%** at the final test which means an advancement of **3.14%**.

Table 9: Summary of the results of all tests

Experiment class (3)							
Pre-test	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Test 5	Test 6	Final test
	Magairy 2010 <i>Ash'ab's Donkey.</i>	Matah 2012. <i>Juha's Money</i>	Magairy 2010 <i>Ash'ab's Revenge towards the Fish.</i>	Al-Bakri 2013. <i>Juha and the Peoples' Sayings</i>	Al-Bakri 2013. <i>Juha and the Beggars</i>	Al-Bakri 2013. <i>Juha's Nail</i>	
61.1	84.6	86.2	87.5	88.8	90	90	83.7
Control class (2)							
Pre-test	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3	Test 4	Test 5	Test 6	Final test
	Abu Hadra et al 2011. <i>The Castle</i>	Abu Hadra et al 2011. <i>The Elephant King of Time</i>	Abu Hadra et al 2011. <i>The Purse</i>	Abu Hadra et al 2011. <i>The Spider and the Ant</i>	Matah 2012. <i>The Three Fish</i>	Matah 2012. <i>The King and the Wise Man</i>	
69.76	71.19	70.95	73.8	67.8	76.5	78	72.9

8. Discussion

The research aim was to examine the link between integrating humour into teaching Arabic using humorous texts, and pupils' achievements in reading comprehension. This connection was examined through teaching six humorous stories in the Experiment class 3, in comparison to teaching six humourless stories in the Control class 2. When comparing research results between the two classes the following data emerges:

Test results from the Experiment class according to the four levels in the class:

- 1. Good level (Grade 80-100):** According to the pre-test results, there were **7** pupils in this group. Their average grade was **84.2**, in contrast to the final test in which there were **16** pupils with an average grade of **92.2**. That is to say, there was a significant improvement in that nine pupils moved from average to good level.
- 2. Average level (Grade 60-79):** According to the pre-test results, there were **8** pupils. In the final test, there were **3** pupils. As such, **5** of the pupils went up to the good level.
- 3. Low level (Grade 40-59):** According to the pre-test results, there were **5** pupils. In the final test, **2** remained. That is to say, **3** pupils went up one or two levels.
- 4. Very low level (Grade 0-39):** According to the pre-test results there were **2** pupils. In the final test, only **1** remained. That is to say, one pupil went up from the very low level.

It can therefore be suggested that humour improves reading comprehension when used to teach Arabic as a first language, at all levels. The most remarkable rise took place from the average to the good level: 5 out of 8 pupils. The effect is also noticeable at the low level, from which 3 out of 5 went up to a higher level. The other effect found is at the very low level in which one of the two pupils went up to a higher level. We can conclude that, in the Experiment class, the use of humour positively influenced 9 out of the 22 pupils at all levels. One can also learn from the research results that there is a gradual increase in pupils' achievements in the Experiment class from one test to the next, even though there was a decline in the final test in relation to achievements in the six experimental tests. However, in relation to the pre-test, there is a significant increase of **22.6 percent**.

The results from the Experiment class correlate with previous studies that examined the influence of learning through humour on remembering learned material (Derks et al. 1998; Schmidt & Williams 2001; Schmidt 2002). This is expressed even more clearly in Prodanović-Stankić's 2011 research which indicates that humour can be applied to teaching Arabic as a foreign language and improving pupils' proficiency level. Moreover, using humour both as a tool and as a resource affected pupils' motivation and willingness to study.

Results of the Control class according to the four levels in the class:

1. **Good level (Grade 80-100):** According to the pre-test results, there were 7 pupils at this level. In the final test, there were 9 pupils, that is, there is an increase of two pupils.
2. **Average level (Grade 60-79):** According to the pre-test results, there were 8 pupils at this level. In the final test, 7 pupils remained, that is to say, one pupil moved up to the good level.
3. **Low level (Grade 40-59):** According to the pre-test results there were 5 pupils at this level. In the final test, 4 remained. Here too, we see one pupil moving up to a higher level.
4. **Very low level (Grade 0-39):** According to the pre-test results, there were 2 pupils at this level. After the final test, 2 remained. That is to say, there was no change.

From the results emerging from the Control class, one can understand that class learning had a minor effect on pupils' achievements. Only one pupil from the average level went up to the good level and another went up from the low level to the good level. That is to say, the positive effect of learning affected 2 out of the 22 class pupils. For all the other pupils there was no change. The positive change between the pre-test and final test was only **3.14 percent**.

According to the report of the research teacher, learning in the Experiment class using stories integrating humour influenced the learning climate during teaching. The pupils participated and cooperated during learning. One could see greater learning interaction among pupils, and pupils experienced enjoyable learning. These findings correlate with prior studies with similar findings in teaching a second language using humour (Bell 2009; Fung 2010; Bell & Pomerantz 2016). In contrast, the information received from the Control class was that pupils lacked proper motivation to learn. These findings correlate with the findings of Azizifard & Jalali's (2012) research which showed that a context with humour had a significant effect on learning English language functions. However, the effect of a context without humour on learning language functions was relatively low.

9. Conclusion

This research examined the extent to which the integration of humorous literary texts in teaching Arabic language affects achievement in reading comprehension among Grade 4 pupils in the Arab sector in Israel. The results obtained from the Experiment class reveal that there was a constant improvement in the pupils' grades from one test to another. The difference between the starting point (measured with the pre-test) and the final test was **22.6%**, which is a significant result regarding the aim of the research. In the Control class, the advancement was minor, only **3.14%**. If we compare pupils' advancement between the two classes, the conclusion is that teaching Arabic as a first language in 4th year classes in an Arab-Bedouin village in southern Israel using humour in relation to reading comprehension is preferable to teaching this area of knowledge using stories without humour.

From the teacher who participated in the study we also learnt that integrating humour into teaching led to increased learning motivation among pupils, and to a significant improvement in their achievements. Moreover, the findings clearly demonstrate that teaching using humorous texts constituted a significant factor in improving the class learning climate. These results correlate with previous studies that found that integrating humour in teaching encourages analytical, critical and creative thinking (Stopsky 1992; Garner 2006); enhances pupils' attention, releases tension and increases the desire to learn (Kelley & Gorham 1988; Gorham 1998; Opplinger 2003; Gazit 2013); reduces fear of learning, builds a positive link between pupils and teachers and improves how pupils evaluate their teachers (Cohen 1996; Wanzer et al. 1999; Herzog & Strevey 2008; Kuperman 2006; Al-Duleimi et al. 2016).

As stated previously, this study is the first of its kind and is a breakthrough in the field of research into humour used in teaching Arabic as a first language. To validate the findings in this research, we recommend that further studies on teaching Arabic using humour at elementary schools and in the Arab educational system at all levels be carried out. In addition, it is recommended that the effect of implementing humour in teaching should be examined on a gender basis between boys and girls.

Notes

¹ These assessments are based on the knowledge we accumulated from our colleagues during many years of teaching (there are no studies concerning this issue in the Arab world). Similar results occurred in teaching English language in Pakistan (see Ali et al. 2015).

Appendix

List of humorous stories learned in test class:

Al-Bakri (2013). *Juha and the Peoples' Sayings*. Beirut: Dar – Elruki.

البكري، 2013. جحا وكلام الناس. بيروت/لبنان: دار الروقي.

Al-Bakri (2013). *Juha and the Beggar*. Beirut: Dar – Elruki.

البكري، 2013. جحا والسائل. بيروت/لبنان: دار الروقي.

Al-Bakri (2013). *Juha's Neil*. Beirut: Dar – Elruki.

البكري، 2013. مسمار جحا. بيروت/لبنان: دار الروقي.

Magairy (2010). *Ash'ab's Donkey*. Aleppo: Dar Alarkam

مغايري، 2010. حمار اشعب. حلب/سوريا: دار الارقم.

Magairy (2010). *Ash'ab's Revenge towards the Fish*. Aleppo: Dar Alarkam.

مغايري، 2010. اشعب والسماك. حلب/سوريا: دار الارقم.

Matah (2012). *Juha's Money. Arabic Is Our Language*. A book for 4th grade in elementary school. Tel-Aviv: The Ministry of Education in Israel. pp. 103-107.
مركز التكنولوجيا التربوية 2012. العربية لغتنا، كتاب الصف الرابع، تل أبيب. 103 – 107.

List of stories without humour learned in control class:

Abu Hadra, F., Younis, A., Ganaiem, A. (2011). *The Castle*. The new in reading and understanding for 4th Grade. Dar-Elhuda and the Ministry of Education in Israel. pp. 72-73.

أبو خضرة، ف.، يونس، أ.، غنايم، أ. (2011) الجديد في القراءة والفهم للصف الرابع، دار الهدى، وزارة التربية والتعليم، إسرائيل. 72-73.

Abu Hadra, F., Younis, A., Ganaiem, A. (2011). *The Elephant King of Time*. The new in reading and understanding for 4th Grade. Dar-Elhuda and the Ministry of Education in Israel. pp. 88-90.

أبو خضرة، ف.، يونس، أ.، غنايم، أ. (2011) الجديد في القراءة والفهم للصف الرابع، دار الهدى، وزارة التربية والتعليم، إسرائيل. 88-90.

Abu Hadra, F., Younis, A., Ganaiem, A. (2011). *The Purse*. The new in reading and understanding for 4th Grade. Dar-Elhuda and the Ministry of Education in Israel. pp. 99-102.

أبو خضرة، ف.، يونس، أ.، غنايم، أ. (2011) الجديد في القراءة والفهم للصف الرابع، دار الهدى، وزارة التربية والتعليم، إسرائيل.

Abu Hadra, F., Younis, A., Ganaiem, A. (2011). *The Spider and the Ant*. The new in reading and understanding for 4th Grade. Dar-Elhuda and the Ministry of Education in Israel. pp. 74-75.

أبو خضرة، ف.، يونس، أ.، غنايم، أ. (2011) الجديد في القراءة والفهم للصف الرابع، دار الهدى، وزارة التربية والتعليم، إسرائيل. 74-75.

Matah (2012). *The Three Fish*. Tel Aviv: pp. 39-40.

مركز التكنولوجيا التربوية (2012) العربية لغتنا، كتاب الصف الرابع، تل أبيب/إسرائيل. 39-40.

Matah (2012). *The King and the Wise Man. Arabic Is Our Language*. Tel-Aviv. A book for 4th grade. Tel-Aviv. pp. 218-221.

مركز التكنولوجيا التربوية (2012) العربية لغتنا، كتاب الصف الرابع، تل أبيب/إسرائيل. 218-221.

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