

**RESEARCH PAPER****The Impact of Teacher Immediacy and Humor on Undergraduate Student Classroom Engagement: Evidence from Pakistan****¹Dr. Tariq Hussain*, ²Zunaira Hakim Ali* and ³Dr Anjum Naz**

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***Corresponding Author:** tariq.ier@pu.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the impact of teacher immediacy and humor on undergraduate student engagement in Pakistani higher education. The primary goal is to identify how these behaviors influence engagement and to analyze gender and institutional differences in their effects. Through verbal and non-verbal communication, teacher immediacy lowers psychological distance and increases student engagement and motivation. Humor fosters an engaging learning environment that fosters creativity and joy, which is a great way to balance immediacy. Using a quantitative correlation methodology, 456 undergraduate students from 9 universities (4 public, 5 private) in Lahore were surveyed. A self-developed questionnaire that assessed student engagement, humor, and teacher immediacy was used to gather data. Relationships and predictive impacts were evaluated by statistical studies, such as regression and Pearson correlations. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between immediacy and engagement ($r = 0.538$, $p < 0.001$) and a moderate correlation between humor and engagement ($r = 0.462$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis showed immediacy as a stronger predictor of engagement ($\beta = 0.417$) than humor ($\beta = 0.287$). Male and private university students demonstrated higher engagement levels. Teachers should be trained to use immediacy and humor effectively, fostering engaging and dynamic classrooms. Gender-sensitive approaches are essential to ensure balanced engagement for all students. Public universities should adopt interactive teaching methods and enhance student-teacher interaction to boost engagement. Encouraging active participation through group work and discussions can further create an inclusive learning environment.

KEYWORDS Teachers' Immediacy, Verbal Immediacy, Non- Verbal Immediacy, Students' Engagement, Humour**Introduction**

Teacher immediacy, encompassing both verbal and non-verbal communication, plays a vital role in fostering a positive learning environment. Previous research has demonstrated that teacher immediacy behaviors, such as eye contact, body language, and vocal tone, significantly enhance students' motivation, involvement, and focus (Liu, 2021). Mehrabian (1969) first introduced the concept of immediacy, defining it as behaviors that reduce psychological distance between the teacher and students, promoting a sense of closeness. Studies by Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) further showed that teachers who exhibit immediacy are perceived as more credible and effective in their teaching.

Humor is an additional instrument that enhances classroom dynamics. It has been shown to create a more relaxed and engaging environment, improving students' emotional well-being and reducing anxiety (Benjelloun, 2009). Humor can also stimulate students' creativity and increase engagement by making learning more enjoyable (Lujan & DiCarlo, 2016). Fry (2017) contributed to this understanding by coining the term "gelotology,"

which refers to the study of laughter and its impact on human interaction. Humor in teaching can take various forms, such as storytelling, funny examples, and multimedia, making lessons more engaging and memorable (Lujan & DiCarlo, 2016; Bolkan et al., 2018).

In a classroom situation, immediacy and humor serve as communication strategies that enhance engagement. Verbal immediacy includes behaviors such as calling students by name, using humor, and encouraging participation, while non-verbal immediacy involves body language, eye contact, and physical proximity (Al Ghamdi et al., 2016). Together, these behaviors are believed to foster a deeper connection between the teacher and students, resulting in greater engagement.

Engagement is decisive for student academic achievement. Research indicates that engaged students are more motivated, keep information more effectively, and experience greater agreement with their learning (Reeve, 2004). Student engagement can be defined as the level of participation, interest, and effort students put in learning activities (Subramanian & Mahmoud, 2020). Students who are greatly engaged display positive emotional responses, such as curiosity and excitement, and actively participate in class activities. In contrast, disengaged students often exhibit passivity, lack effort, and withdraw from academic tasks (Chipangura & Aldridge, 2019).

While a large amount of research has been conducted on teacher immediacy and humor discretely, there is limited literature on the shared impact of these factors on student engagement, particularly in the context of Pakistani classrooms. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how the incorporation of immediacy and humor in teaching influences undergraduate student engagement in Pakistan.

The significance of this study lies in its latent to update teaching practices. In today's educational landscape, where technology and varied learning environments play a growing role, teachers must adopt strategies that cultivate engagement and motivation. Humor, beside immediacy, offers a dynamic move toward creating a positive and interactive learning environment. By exploring these aspects, this research will add to the understanding of how pedagogical strategies can be adapted to augment student engagement in higher education.

This study will also deal with gender differences in student engagement and look at whether the impact of teacher immediacy and humor varies between students at public and private universities in Pakistan. Understanding these tones will provide precious approaching into the varied requirements of students in different educational settings. As a result, the findings of this study could have significant implications for improving teaching effectiveness and student results in the context of Pakistani higher education.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have highlighted the positive effects of teachers' immediacy and humor on student engagement. Teachers' immediacy behaviors, such as eye contact, smiling, and vocal variety, are positively correlated with students' affective learning and engagement (Gorham & Cristophel, 1990; Zhang, 2011). Humor in teaching also enhances motivation and student perceptions of teacher credibility (Bolkan et al., 2018). Research indicates that teacher behaviors significantly impact student engagement, suggesting that incorporating humor in the classroom can improve engagement (Gorham & Cristophel, 1990). The combination of immediacy and humor creates a learning environment that is both comfortable and stimulating for students, which can lead to increased participation and deeper learning. As a result, teachers who actively engage with their students through these behaviors tend to see higher levels of student satisfaction and academic success.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework discusses how teachers can influence classroom dynamics through immediacy, a concept coined by Mehrabian (1969). Immediacy behaviors, including both verbal and nonverbal cues, reduce psychological distance between teachers and students, fostering a more engaging learning environment. The teacher's voice tone, body language, and eye contact can affect students' comfort levels and engagement in the classroom (Qin, 2022). Immediacy has been linked to improved student learning outcomes and communication (Liu, 2021). Furthermore, the emotional tone set by a teacher's use of humor can enhance the immediacy effect, making students feel more at ease and motivated to participate. Teachers who skillfully integrate both immediacy and humor in their teaching strategies help students feel more connected to the material, increasing engagement and fostering a positive classroom climate.

Teachers' Immediacy

Immediacy, as defined by Mehrabian (1969), refers to behaviors that create a sense of closeness and connection. Teachers' use of immediacy behaviors, such as body orientation, smiling, and maintaining eye contact, can significantly enhance student motivation and engagement (Liu, 2021). Studies by Thweatt and McCroskey (1998) suggest that students perceive teachers who exhibit immediacy behaviors as caring, which positively impacts their learning. Liu (2021) found a positive relationship between verbal and nonverbal immediacy and student motivation. Non-immediacy, on the other hand, is perceived negatively and can be seen as a form of misconduct, even without other misbehaviors (Thweatt&McCroskey, 1996). This highlights the importance of teacher behaviors in shaping classroom dynamics and student attitudes. The physical and emotional closeness created by immediacy behaviors is essential in making students feel more involved and valued, directly influencing their engagement levels.

Verbal Immediacy

Verbal immediacy refers to communication behaviors such as addressing students by name, involving them in discussions, and providing immediate feedback. Gorham and Cristophel (1990) found that verbal immediacy is positively associated with student motivation and participation. Additionally, SÖZER (2019) observed that when teachers share personal anecdotes and interact with students, it fosters engagement. Verbal immediacy encourages students to engage in discussions and contributes to a positive classroom environment (Liu, 2021). This form of immediacy also plays a key role in making learning more personalized and meaningful, as students feel recognized and valued when addressed directly by their teachers. The more teachers actively engage with students through verbal immediacy, the more likely students are to participate actively and retain the course content.

Non-verbal Immediacy

Non-verbal immediacy behaviors, including body language, eye contact, and facial expressions, also play a critical role in enhancing student engagement. Teachers who display friendliness, humor, and openness through non-verbal cues create a supportive classroom atmosphere that motivates students to participate (SÖZER, 2019). Gunter (2007) found that non-verbal immediacy behaviors, such as smiling and friendly gestures, improve student motivation by making the classroom environment more relaxed and approachable. Non-verbal cues, when combined with appropriate humor, create an environment in which students feel more comfortable and willing to engage with the material. This, in turn, fosters an interactive and supportive classroom culture where students are encouraged to ask questions, share ideas, and collaborate with peers.

Humor in the Classroom

Humor has been found to enhance learning by creating a positive emotional environment that fosters engagement. According to Garner (2006), humor can build rapport between teachers and students, making learning more enjoyable. Gorham and Cristophel (1990) demonstrated that humor is significantly correlated with teacher immediacy and student learning. Humor helps alleviate tension and fosters a sense of connection between students and the instructor, which improves classroom dynamics (Wanzer&Frymier, 1999). Studies show that humor can improve retention of course material, particularly when it is used in a context that is relevant to the lesson (Aboudan, 2009). However, the use of humor should be intentional and linked to the content being taught to maximize its effectiveness (Aboudan, 2009; Bieg&Dresel, 2018). Overuse of humor can undermine its impact, and humor should be used appropriately according to the difficulty of the material (Machlev&Karlin, 2016).

Types of Humor

Humor can be categorized into two main types: contiguous and integrated. Contiguous humor is unrelated to the instructional content, while integrated humor is directly linked to the lesson and enhances the educational message (Bolkan et al., 2018). The Instructional Humor Processing Theory (IHPT) suggests that humor, when used appropriately, positively affects students' learning by increasing engagement and information retention (Machlev&Karlin, 2016). Humor, especially when integrated into the lesson content, can help students make connections between ideas, making the material more memorable and easier to understand.

Humor and Student Learning

Research by Hackathorn et al. (2011) supports the idea that humor, when integrated with the content, enhances student learning, especially at the comprehension level. Humor serves as a motivational tool that reduces boredom and encourages participation (Bolkan et al., 2018). However, it is important to balance the use of humor to avoid distractions and ensure that it contributes to the learning objectives.

Instructional Humor Processing Theory (IHPT)

The IHPT proposes that humor elicits a positive emotional response, which in turn improves cognitive processing and retention of information (Machlev&Karlin, 2016). The theory suggests that humor, when relevant to the educational content, can significantly enhance students' understanding and engagement with the material. Studies by Bolkan and Goodboy (2015) further support this by demonstrating that humor fulfills students' psychological needs and improves learning outcomes.

Student Engagement

Student engagement is a critical factor influencing academic achievement. Research indicates that engaged students are more motivated to participate in class, leading to improved academic performance (Subramanian & Mahmoud, 2020). Engaged students exhibit high levels of effort, positive attitudes, and ownership of their learning (Deng, 2021). Teachers can foster engagement by using immediacy behaviors and humor, which help create an interactive and supportive classroom environment. By using both humor and immediacy behaviors, teachers can cultivate a positive classroom atmosphere where students are motivated to participate actively and take ownership of their learning.

In summary, the literature suggests a strong relationship between teacher immediacy, the use of humor in the classroom, and student engagement. Teachers who

employ immediacy behaviors and humor create a more engaging and supportive classroom environment, which leads to improved student motivation and learning outcomes. Future research should further explore the relationship between these variables and investigate the most effective ways to incorporate humor into teaching strategies.

Material and Methods

The research design for this study follows a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The study aims to examine the correlation between teachers' immediacy and the incorporation of humor with student engagement. It was conducted in Lahore, involving 456 undergraduate students from 4 public and 5 private universities. The sample was selected using a multistage sampling technique, with 221 male and 235 female students, including 232 from public and 224 from private universities.

A self-developed questionnaire was used to measure three key variables: teachers' immediacy, the incorporation of humor, and student engagement. The questionnaire included a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The section on teachers' immediacy consisted of 14 items, divided into verbal and non-verbal categories, assessing feedback, gestures, vocal expressions, and praise/criticism. The humor section contained 15 items regarding students' perceptions of humor as a teaching tool. The engagement section included 21 items, categorizing engagement into cognitive, behavioral, and affective types.

Validity of the instrument was confirmed by 3 experts, and reliability was tested with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.898. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) showed a satisfactory Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.734, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires with prior consent from university administrations and students. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Data analysis was performed using SPSS, with Pearson correlations to examine the relationships between the variables. Independent sample t-tests were applied to analyze differences between students from public and private universities, as well as gender differences in perceptions of teachers' immediacy and humor. The findings of this study are expected to contribute valuable insights into how teacher behaviors influence student engagement, providing implications for improving teaching strategies in higher education. The results may help inform policies and practices that foster a more engaging and effective learning environment.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Correlation between Teachers' immediacy and overall Students' engagement

		Teachers' Immediacy	Students' Engagement
Teachers' Immediacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.538
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	455	455
Students' Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.538	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	455	456

The analysis of the relationship between teachers' immediacy and students' engagement shows a moderate to strong positive correlation. The Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.538, indicating a relatively strong relationship between the two variables. This means that as teachers exhibit more immediacy behaviors, such as eye contact, smiling, or engaging with students through verbal and non-verbal cues, students tend to be more engaged in the classroom. The p-value is 0.000, which is less than the common significance level of 0.05, suggesting that the correlation is statistically significant and not due to random chance. This reinforces the reliability of the finding. The sample size for this analysis is 455 students, which ensures that the results are representative and robust. The strong positive correlation indicates that immediacy behaviors play an important role in fostering student engagement, suggesting that teachers who engage in immediacy behaviors are likely to have more engaged and motivated students. The findings emphasize the importance of teacher behaviors in enhancing student participation and attention during lessons.

Table 2
Correlation between Teachers' incorporation of Humor and overall Students' engagement

		Humor	Students' Engagement
Humor	Pearson Correlation	1	.462
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	456	456
Students' Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.462	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	456	456

The data analysis reveals a moderate positive correlation between teachers' incorporation of humor and students' engagement. The Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.462, indicating a moderate relationship between these two variables. This suggests that as teachers incorporate more humor into their teaching, students' overall engagement tends to increase. The correlation is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.000, which is well below the threshold of 0.05, meaning the relationship observed is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The sample size for this analysis was 456 students, which supports the reliability of the findings. The results underscore the importance of humor in the classroom, showing that humor can positively influence student engagement. The correlation value of 0.462 demonstrates that while humor has a meaningful impact on engagement, it is not a perfectly linear relationship. This suggests that other factors may also contribute to students' engagement, but humor plays a significant role. The statistical significance of the result further supports the idea that incorporating humor into teaching strategies can be an effective way to enhance student participation and motivation in the classroom.

Table 3
Regression Analysis of the Predictive Influence of Teachers' Immediacy and Humor on Students' Engagement

Mode	Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.928	.182		5.08	.000
Immediacy	.452	.045	.417	10.04	.000
Humor	.311	.045	.287	6.89	.000

In the regression analysis, the constant term (B = 0.928, p < 0.001) represents the expected value of students' engagement when both teachers' immediacy and the incorporation of humor are at zero. The significant p-value indicates that this constant term is significantly different from zero, meaning that engagement has a baseline value even in the absence of immediacy and humor.

The coefficient for immediacy ($B = 0.452, p < 0.001$) shows that for every one-unit increase in teachers' immediacy, students' engagement increases by 0.452 units. The standardized coefficient ($Beta = 0.417$) represents the change in students' engagement in standard deviation units for every one-standard deviation change in immediacy. This means that immediacy has a positive and statistically significant effect on engagement, and the magnitude of this effect is relatively large when considering standard deviation units.

Likewise, the coefficient for humor ($B = 0.311, p < 0.001$) shows that for every one-unit increase in humor, students' engagement increases by 0.311 units. The standardized coefficient ($Beta = 0.287$) indicates the change in students' engagement in standard deviation units for every one-standard deviation change in humor. Although humor also has a positive and statistically significant effect on students' engagement, its impact is slightly smaller than that of immediacy.

Mutually immediacy and humor are noteworthy predictors of engagement, with p -values less than 0.001, meaning that these factors are statistically reliable in explaining variations in student engagement. However, immediacy ($Beta = 0.417$) has a stronger relationship with engagement compared to humor ($Beta = 0.287$). This implies that immediacy is a more powerful predictor of engagement, with each unit increase in immediacy leading to a larger increase in engagement than each unit increase in humor.

These results suggest that both immediacy and humor positively influence students' engagement, but immediacy plays a more substantial role. For every one-unit increase in immediacy, engagement increases by 0.452 units, while for humor, the increase is 0.311 units.

Conclusions

This study walked around the impact of teacher immediacy and humor on student engagement in the context of Pakistani higher education, focusing on both public and private universities. The findings confirm the significant role that both teacher immediacy and humor play in enhancing student engagement. Specifically, the study revealed a moderate to strong positive correlation between teachers' immediacy behaviors—both verbal and non-verbal—and student engagement. Similarly, humor also showed a moderate positive relationship with engagement. These results underline the importance of teacher behaviors in fostering a more engaging and interactive classroom environment.

Moreover, the study highlighted notable gender and institutional differences. Male students demonstrated higher levels of engagement compared to female students when teachers exhibited immediacy and humor. Students from private universities were also found to be more engaged than their counterparts in public universities under similar teacher behaviors. These gender and institutional variations provide valuable insights into the diverse needs and expectations of students in different educational settings.

The regression analysis further emphasized that immediacy has a stronger predictive effect on engagement compared to humor, with each unit increase in immediacy leading to a larger increase in engagement. While humor also positively impacts engagement, its effect is somewhat smaller. This finding suggests that teachers who actively engage with students through immediacy behaviors, such as eye contact, body language, and vocal tone, are likely to foster higher levels of student engagement and motivation.

In conclusion, the study underscores the significance of adopting both immediacy and humor as effective pedagogical strategies to enhance student engagement. Teachers who incorporate these behaviors can create a more positive and stimulating learning environment, which ultimately contributes to improved academic outcomes. The findings

have practical implications for enhancing teaching practices in higher education institutions in Pakistan, offering guidance on how to better engage students in both public and private universities.

Recommendations

- **Enhance Teacher Training on Immediacy and Humor:** Educators should be trained to incorporate both verbal and non-verbal immediacy behaviors, such as using eye contact, positive body language, and engaging vocal tone. Additionally, teachers should be encouraged to use humor effectively to create a relaxed and engaging classroom atmosphere.
- **Promote Gender-Sensitive Teaching Approaches:** Since male students exhibited higher engagement than female students, it is important to explore gender-responsive strategies that ensure equal engagement opportunities for both genders. Teachers should be aware of these differences and adapt their approaches accordingly.
- **Foster Engagement in Public Universities:** Given that students from private universities showed higher engagement, public universities should implement targeted strategies to increase engagement, such as more interactive teaching methods, better student-teacher interaction, and creating a supportive learning environment.
- **Encourage Active Student Participation:** Teachers should create more opportunities for students to participate actively in class discussions and activities. This can be achieved through group work, interactive assignments, and encouraging students to express their thoughts and opinions.
- **Further Research on Contextual Factors:** Additional studies should explore how other factors, such as class size, technology, and teaching resources, interact with teacher immediacy and humor to influence engagement, particularly in different cultural and educational contexts.

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