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**Laughing to Learn: Humour as a Pedagogical and
Critical Device in Contemporary Children's Literature**

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Abstract

This paper examines the multifaceted role of humour in contemporary children's literature, arguing that humour functions as both a pedagogical tool and a critical device. Through a qualitative thematic analysis of three popular children's books, including *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Matilda*, and *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, the study explores how humour enhances cognitive and emotional development while simultaneously challenging authority, institutional norms, and dominant ideologies. By synthesising literary theory, educational psychology, and poststructuralist childhood studies, this research illustrates how specific narrative techniques (e.g., irony, parody, and grotesque realism) effectively scaffold moral learning and cultivate interpretive agency in child readers. By reframing humour as central rather than incidental, the study contributes to interdisciplinary discussions that position children's literature as both an educational and subversive cultural form.

Keywords: *Children's literature, Humour, Pedagogy, Critical literacy, Subversion*

Introduction

In recent decades, humour has assumed a dynamic and increasingly central role in children's literature. No longer confined to the realm of comic relief, humour now functions as a complex narrative and rhetorical strategy (Yildiz and Kadizade 2023). Books such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney or *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka exemplify how laughter can be used to confront authority, reframe historical narratives, and engage young readers in meaningful reflection. Despite this growing prevalence, humour in children's books is still too often dismissed as incidental rather than instrumental to the broader educational and literary goals of the text (Silkuluwasha 2025).

Recent educational and cognitive research indicates that humour plays a pivotal role in enhancing learning and engagement. Humour aids cognitive processing by increasing attentiveness, stimulating curiosity, and improving retention (Haines 2023). On a psychological level, it promotes emotional intelligence by allowing children to process complex emotions through indirect, playful means. Furthermore, it fosters empathy by providing access to diverse perspectives and by humanising characters in morally ambiguous or challenging situations (Conners 2023). Importantly, humor is not merely instructive but also disruptive; it invites resistance, satire, and reinterpretation. In many contemporary children's books, humour acts as a mode of critique that challenges adult authority, institutional norms, and culturally dominant narratives. Through laughter, children are granted a voice and, in many cases, a means of ideological subversion (Silkuluwasha 2025).

However, the scholarly treatment of humour in children's literature has not kept pace with its narrative importance. While a substantial body of research explores themes such as trauma, identity, and moral education in children's texts, relatively little attention has been paid to humour as a pedagogical and critical-literary device (Yildiz and Kadizade 2023). This gap is especially evident in interdisciplinary scholarship that bridges education theory, childhood studies, and literary analysis. Humour is often marginalised as a stylistic flourish rather than examined as a serious method of instruction and critique.

This paper seeks to address this scholarly oversight by examining how humour in modern children's literature operates along two complementary axes: as a tool for teaching and as a mechanism for critical engagement. Drawing on literary theory, educational psychology,

and reader-response analysis, the study investigates a diverse set of humorous texts that reflect these dual functions.

This study argues that humour in contemporary children's literature should be understood as a double-edged device, one that not only instructs but also liberates. Humour facilitates learning by engaging cognitive and emotional faculties while simultaneously empowering readers to challenge the rules and ideologies embedded in adult-centric narratives. Through irony, parody, intertextuality, and visual comedy, authors create texts that entertain while simultaneously provoking thought and encouraging dissent (Haines 2023).

The significance of this work lies in its interdisciplinary approach. By integrating literary analysis with insights from educational theory and child psychology, the study illuminates how humour serves as a bridge between narrative pleasure and pedagogical purpose. In doing so, it positions humour not as an incidental feature of children's books but as a central mechanism for meaning-making, ideological negotiation, and cognitive development. This leads us to the guiding questions of the present study.

The first objective is to investigate how humour operates as a teaching tool, particularly in cultivating moral reasoning, social awareness, and emotional literacy. In addition, this study explores how humour also functions as a critical mechanism through which young readers question established norms, power hierarchies, and adult authority. Special attention is directed toward the thematic patterns and literary techniques that facilitate this concurrent pedagogical and subversive function. In doing so, the study positions humour as a narrative strategy capable of both shaping young minds and unsettling the very systems they are being socialised into.

Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualising Humour in Children's Literature

Humour in children's literature manifests in diverse forms, including slapstick, irony, parody, nonsense, satire, grotesque, and dark humour. Each serves distinct cognitive, emotional, and ideological purposes. Slapstick offers bodily engagement and instant gratification, while irony and parody require inference, allowing for deeper interpretive engagement and critique (Treichel et al. 2024). Authors such as Roald Dahl and Dav Pilkey blend multiple forms of humour to challenge

authority and captivate readers. For instance, in *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* (Wolf, Scieszka, and Smith 1989), parody and irony disrupt the traditional moral binary, inviting critical reflection from child readers (Blynova 2023).

Conceptually, humour allows for what Trites (2014) describes as "cognitive flexibility", a capacity to hold multiple perspectives simultaneously (Trites 2014). In texts such as *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket, humour coexists with tragedy, subverting the trope of the omniscient adult narrator and instead positioning the child as the interpretive authority. This type of narrative inversion fosters early metacognitive skills and interpretive autonomy (Çelikel 2023).

2.2 Pedagogical Dimensions of Humour

From an educational perspective, humour supports both emotional and cognitive development. Vygotsky's theory of scaffolding (1978) suggests that humour can lower affective barriers to learning, facilitating the absorption of abstract or uncomfortable material (Ali and Bardaie 2023). Bandura's social learning theory (1986) underscores the role of modelling and vicarious reinforcement in learning, both of which are activated when children engage with humorous characters navigating moral or social dilemmas (Bandura and Hall 2018). Ziv (1988) empirically demonstrated that humour enhances memory retention, a finding supported by later neuroscience research on emotional salience (Kilpatrick and Flaksman 2025).

Additionally, humour fosters emotional literacy by allowing children to process complex experiences in a psychologically safe way. Trousdale (2021) highlights the socialising force of communal laughter in developing empathy and ethical insight (Trousdale 2021). When readers laugh at absurdity, injustice, or reversal, they also engage with prosocial values such as fairness, humility, and compassion. This duality makes humour an effective tool for both moral development and critical engagement.

2.3. Humour as a Critical and Subversive Force

Beyond its pedagogical value, humor also functions as a critical device that enables ideological resistance. Drawing from Bakhtin's theory of the *carnavalesque* (1984), scholars recognize the power of humour to invert social hierarchies, mock dominant discourses, and liberate marginalised

voices (Azariah 2024). In books like *Captain Underpants*, *Matilda*, and *Lemony Snicket's* works, adult authority figures are often ridiculed, and child protagonists reclaim agency through rebellion, wit, and creative problem-solving. These texts embody the spirit of Bakhtin's grotesque realism, using exaggeration and absurdity to dismantle normative ideologies (Васильев 2024).

Critical pedagogy further strengthens this analysis. Freire (1970) argued that education should be dialogic, not prescriptive, aimed at liberating the learner through questioning, not compliance (Mínguez-López and Kalogirou 2024). Humorous children's literature enacts this philosophy by inviting readers to critique rules, challenge injustice, and reimagine power. The humour is not incidental but constitutive of the text's critical function. It creates a participatory experience in which laughter becomes a mode of resistance (Low 2024).

Poststructuralist childhood studies also inform this discussion. Scholars such as Lesnik-Oberstein (1998) argue that childhood is a socially constructed category, often policed by adult narratives (Marke 2024). Humorous texts, especially those involving metafiction or unreliable narration, destabilise this construction. These elements enable the child to function as both a subject and an interpreter, thereby challenging adult assumptions regarding authority, control, and the nature of innocence.

2.4. Theoretical Frameworks and Synthesis

This study is grounded in three interconnected theoretical frameworks that elucidate humour's dual role as both instructive and critical.

Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory highlights the transformative potential of laughter to overturn social hierarchies and challenge existing authority via exaggeration, parody, and grotesque realism. Within children's literature, such inversion enables kid characters to mock adults, challenge norms, and assert agency, transforming comedy into a platform for ideological resistance.

Freire's critical pedagogy conceptualises education as a liberatory, dialogic process rather than just knowledge transmission, empowering learners to question conventions and confront oppression. Humorous narratives reflect this process by depicting opposition to unfair authority (e.g., repressive educators or institutions) and establishing textual environments where youngsters investigate fairness, dissent, and moral intricacy.

Reader-response theory and poststructuralist childhood studies perceive children not as passive recipients of texts created by adults, but as active co-creators of meaning. Humour enhances this agency by encouraging many readings, promoting metacognitive thought, and enabling readers to navigate irony, absurdity, and unreliability according to their own perspectives.

These perspectives together reframe humour from a mere embellishment to a fundamental tool for meaning-making, ethical inquiry, and ideological critique. They demonstrate that comedy in children's books serves not simply as a source of delight but also as a means of fostering intellectual independence, emotional understanding, and social commentary.

2.5. Research Gap and Significance

Despite the rich intersection of humour, education, and literary form, humour in children's literature remains under-theorised in academic discourse. Current scholarship often limits its analysis of humour to its function as a pedagogical technique or stylistic device, thereby failing to adequately acknowledge its ideological function or critical capacity. Furthermore, few works explore humour through an interdisciplinary lens that integrates literary analysis, child psychology, and education theory.

This study addresses that gap by systematically analysing humour's dual role: as a pedagogical tool that supports learning and as a critical device that subverts normative ideologies. By examining how contemporary children's books use humour to engage, instruct, and empower young readers, the study contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that sees humour not as secondary but as central to children's literary and educational experiences.

Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Approach

This study employs a qualitative thematic textual analysis to examine the use of humour as both a pedagogical and critical device in contemporary children's literature. This approach is appropriate for uncovering recurring patterns, literary strategies, and ideological functions embedded in narrative and visual elements. By analysing representative texts

through close reading and theoretical framing, the study aims to uncover how humour shapes reader engagement, fosters learning, and challenges dominant norms.

As a method, thematic analysis enables the identification of recurring motifs, character dynamics, narrative techniques, and discursive structures that reveal how humour functions across pedagogical and subversive dimensions. The analysis integrates perspectives from literary criticism, childhood studies, and educational theory, in keeping with the interdisciplinary nature of the research question.

3.2. Data Collection and Text Selection

The study focuses on a purposefully selected corpus of six widely known, diverse, and humorous children's books published in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Textual selection was determined by criteria including popularity, critical acclaim, stylistic diversity, and the demonstrable use of humour across various registers (verbal, visual, narrative). All texts are accessible to readers aged 7–13 and exhibit recurring patterns of child–adult role inversion, satirical tone, and multimodal humor.

The selected texts are:

1. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* by Jeff Kinney (Kinney 2013)
2. *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka (Wolf, Scieszka, and Smith 1989)
3. *Matilda* by Roald Dahl (Dahl 1988)

Each text was read and annotated with attention to narrative structure, illustrations, character development, and thematic cues. Additional supporting materials, including author interviews, reader reviews, and critical essays, were consulted to triangulate interpretations and capture both authorial intent and reader response.

3.3. Analytical Framework

Analysis was conducted using a three-tiered framework, designed to assess how humour operates pedagogically, critically, and stylistically:

3.3.1 Use and Type of Humour

This dimension focuses on identifying the types of humour employed in each text, such as slapstick, parody, irony, satire, nonsense, and grotesque, and examining the medium through which humour is delivered, including textual narration, illustration, interactivity, or multimodal combinations. It also considers whether the humour serves as momentary comic relief or is structurally embedded within the narrative.

3.3.2 Pedagogical Function

The second tier assesses how humour supports learning objectives. This includes moral and emotional development, such as fostering empathy, resilience, and ethical reasoning; cognitive engagement through literacy scaffolding; and the modelling of prosocial or antisocial behaviours that prompt critical discussion among readers.

3.3.3 Critical Function

This component explores humour's role in subverting authority and norms. It analyses how texts invert power dynamics, presenting children as agents and adults as absurd or antagonistic, and how narrative techniques such as unreliable narrators or metafiction encourage critical interpretation and resistance.

3.3.4 Theoretical Integration

Each book was interpreted through three theoretical lenses. Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque was used to identify mechanisms of inversion, grotesque realism, and resistance through satire. Freire's critical pedagogy helped uncover how texts stimulate critical reflection on social norms and hierarchies. Reader-response theory and poststructuralist childhood studies provided insight into the ways children may interpret, resist, or reconstruct the humorous material. This multi-framework analysis allows the study to capture both authorial strategies and reader-oriented effects, aligning with recent calls for multidimensional analysis in children's literature studies (Nikolajeva 2014; Sipe 2007).

3. 5. Limitations

Consistent with the nature of qualitative research, these findings are interpretive, being inherently shaped by both the textual selection and the specific analytical focus employed. Humour is culturally specific and may be interpreted differently by children across linguistic, national, or developmental contexts. Additionally, comprehension of irony or satire often depends on age and exposure, which is not uniformly distributed among readers.

Thematic and Analytical Discussion

4.1. Humour as a Pedagogical Device

Humour in modern children's literature has crucial educational purposes, functioning not only as comedic relief but also as a complex narrative device that fosters literacy development, emotional resilience, and moral reasoning (Silkiluwasha, 2025). In the three chosen works, humour supports abstract and intricate subjects, making them accessible, entertaining, and suitable for young readers. Each work exemplifies a distinct approach by which humour stimulates pedagogical engagement, be it through irony, graphic satire, or narrative inversion.

4.1.1 Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Visual Irony and Emotional Intelligence

Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* illustrates the integration of visual-verbal interaction with deadpan comedy to enhance emotional literacy and critical thinking skills. The protagonist, Greg Heffley, often portrays himself as a victim of injustice; however, the images frequently contradict or undermine his account. For example, Greg states: "The school consistently presents awards for 'Most Popular' or 'Best Looking,' yet they never include categories for individuals like myself." However, the neighbouring cartoon depicts Greg self-satisfactorily voting for himself numerous times, indicating narcissism rather than indifference.

This cognitive dissonance, between Greg's statements and the imagery, encourages readers to scrutinise narrative credibility, an essential critical reading competency. Children are encouraged to draw inferences, identify hypocrisy, and participate in interpretive reasoning. Lombardi et al. (2022) assert that this narrative style fosters metacognitive awareness,

enabling readers to acknowledge the manufactured and subjective nature of stories (Lombardi et al., 2022). Furthermore, employing low-stakes humour concerning shame, puberty, and social discomfort fulfils a developmental function. The narrative employs exaggerated yet familiar scenarios, such as Greg's apprehension around the "Cheese Touch," to establish a secure environment for readers to address their concerns, so fostering resilience and empathy.

4.1.2 Matilda: A Distorted Amplification for Ethical Guidance

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* utilises hyperbole and horrific comedy to emphasise moral teachings regarding justice, resistance, and intellectual empowerment. The teaching role of comedy is grounded in the stark juxtaposition between the protagonist's inner resilience and the harshness of the surrounding adults, particularly Miss Trunchbull. The headmistress's extreme behaviour is rendered so hyperbolic that it approaches satire: "She entered the classroom wielding a riding crop, using it to indicate students as though she were choosing racehorses."

This depiction of authoritarianism is absurdly unpleasant, yet it instructs children to identify the misuse of authority. Miss Trunchbull's harshness is overt; it is ludicrous, exaggerated, and hence prompts moral contemplation without emotionally overwhelming the reader. (Uslu, 2023) observes that this strategy allows young readers to safely examine ethical concerns through humour rather than experiencing distress.

Matilda's ultimate victory, achieved through intelligence, telekinesis, and strategic subversion, exemplifies a dual sort of empowerment that is both intellectual and moral. Her pranks are not simply acts of defiance; they are calculated and just, reinforcing themes of bravery, intellect, and equity. Consequently, comedy serves as a mechanism for generating both amusement and ethical development, in addition to providing motivation.

4.1.3 The Authentic Narrative of the Three Little Pigs: Parody and Analytical Reasoning

Jon Scieszka's *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, illustrated by Lane Smith, employs postmodern parody to impart media literacy and narrative analysis. Alexander T. Wolf narrates his perspective of the story, asserting that the entire episode was a misinterpretation triggered by a sneeze: "It's not my fault that wolves consume adorable creatures such as bunnies, sheep, and pigs." That is simply our nature.

The humour resides in the wolf's justification and the discord between his assertions and the familiar fairy tale. Children acquainted with the original tale are encouraged to assess alternative accounts, thereby exposing foundational notions of bias, subjectivity, and perspective-taking (Kperoba and Kperob, 2022).

The journalistic style, along with Smith's stark, angular graphics, emulates the visual characteristics of crime reporting. It implicitly questions the media's influence in constructing "truth" and prompts young readers to consider: Whose narrative is being conveyed? Who derives advantages from this version? The book promotes critical literacy, enabling youngsters to understand that narratives can be altered and that "truth" is frequently fabricated.

The educational significance of this literature resides not in explicit moral instruction but in its encouragement of critical and autonomous thought, a skill essential for democratic education and lifelong learning.

4.1.4 Key Findings

In the three chosen works, humour plays a vital instructional role by alleviating emotional barriers to challenging emotions and topics, therefore improving children's engagement with intricate concepts. Instead of serving only as a superficial form of amusement, humour in these works facilitates the reader's intellectual and emotional growth in structured and intentional manners.

Humour fosters interpretive scepticism, especially via unreliable narrators and visual irony. In *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, the disparity between Greg's narration and the corresponding visuals instructs young readers to interrogate textual authority and seek deeper significance beyond superficial assertions. Likewise, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* encourages readers to evaluate the narrator's reliability and the fabricated essence of truth in narrative construction.

Furthermore, comedy offers frameworks for ethical conduct and analytical examination. Matilda's astute and principled defiance of authority not only captivates but also illustrates how intelligence and bravery can be employed properly. These comedic representations enable readers to confront moral dilemmas in a non-threatening manner, enhancing emotional literacy and empathy.

Moreover, the writings augment literacy and cognitive abilities using multimodal techniques and intertextual allusions. The synergistic

interaction between visual and textual elements in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, alongside the parodic genre subversion found in *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, provides children with enhanced capacity to make complex connections, understand subtle meanings, and analyse sophisticated narrative structures.

In accordance with Vygotsky's scaffolding theory (1978), humour in these narratives diminishes the emotive filter, hence facilitating learning accessibility. By introducing abstract or unsettling ideas like injustice, hypocrisy, and identity inside amusing circumstances, toddlers can participate in cognitive rehearsal that is both enjoyable and significant. Additionally, based on Bandura's notion of vicarious learning (1986), these comedic characters function as behavioural exemplars. Readers are encouraged to examine, evaluate, and possibly replicate Matilda's principled defiance or Greg's imperfect yet illuminating self-awareness within their own social environments.

This corroborates research in educational psychology indicating that humor not only augments attention and memory but also improves moral comprehension and critical analysis when integrated into emotionally engaging, low-stress educational settings (Kaboocha et al. 2025). In these children's literature, comedy is not ancillary to learning; it is fundamentally and ideologically essential to the narrative's educational purpose.

4.2. Humour as a Critical and Liberatory Device

In modern children's literature, humour serves not just as a source of amusement or educational aid but also as a potent instrument of cultural critique and ideological subversion. Utilising Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, which positions humour as a means to subvert social hierarchies and ridicule authority (Jennings-Tallant, 2019)(Bakhtin, 1984), the chosen texts leverage comedy to contest adult supremacy, institutional inflexibility, and narrative authority. Each narrative creates a realm where the follies of authority are revealed, allowing youngsters to confront the notion that rules and standards are socially constructed and, hence, subject to scrutiny or defiance.

4.2.1 The Authentic Account of the Three Little Pigs: Narrative Authority and Media Partiality

Jon Scieszka's *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* exemplifies postmodern parody as a means of ideological critique. By recounting the traditional fairy tale from the viewpoint of the antagonist, the wolf, Scieszka encourages readers to interrogate prevailing narratives and the power structures that underpin them. The wolf asserts:

The true narrative remains unknown, as no one has ever been privy to my perspective."

This ironic flip destabilises the conventional narrative and reveals how perspective and framing influence perceived truth. The wolf's extravagant defence, that he demolished the pigs' abodes owing to a chill and a sneezing episode, serves as a ludicrous justification, yet it also reflects the actual rationalisations frequently employed by those in authority.

Lane Smith's angular, shadow-laden pictures enhance this ambivalence by depicting the wolf as both malevolent and empathetic, while the pigs seem self-satisfied and unreliable. The multifaceted irony encourages young readers to identify bias, to interrogate which voices are elevated, and to reflect on how narratives, similar to news, can be distorted. The book provides a light-hearted yet penetrating course in media literacy and critical interpretation, adeptly utilising Freirean pedagogy by fostering a dialogue with the text instead of delivering absolute truths.

4.2.2 Matilda: Grotesque Realism and Defiance of Authority

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* utilises horrific comedy and hyperbole to reveal the absurdity and brutality of institutional and familial power. Miss Trunchbull, the despotic headmistress, is depicted in grotesquely horrible terms:

She was an immense and formidable presence, a tyrannical figure who instilled fear in both students and educators."

This caricature elevates her from a simple disciplinarian to a grotesque emblem of authoritarian excess, representing the coercive nature of

institutions that stifle creativity and originality. Her punitive methods, such as yanking children by their hair, are so exaggerated that they become comical, enabling readers to confront the truth of institutional abuse through satire rather than experiencing trauma.

Matilda's reprisal is equally enlightening. Employing her intellect, acumen, and ultimately her telekinetic abilities, she undermines the adult-dominated hierarchy not via sheer force but with cunning deception and tactical defiance. A memorable moment features her use of chalk to influence the headmistress through a spectral message on the blackboard, an action that is simultaneously amusing and symbolically emancipating:

The chalk commenced inscribing... 'Agatha, this is Magnus.' Disburse my small Bumblebee her remuneration...

In this context, humour serves as a conduit for justice, redefining power as an entity that can be restored via intellect, unity, and ingenuity. Dahl employs the horrific and the comedic to foreground ethical concerns, thus prompting young readers to perceive their agency within inequitable systems.

4.2.3 Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Daily Irony and Systemic Disenchantment

Diary of a Wimpy Kid, though rooted in quotidian school experiences, employs irony, sarcasm, and visual incongruity to challenge societal standards, adult duplicity, and peer conformity. Greg Heffley, the protagonist, consistently depicts himself as a victim of injustice, while his own conduct often undermines this self-perception. For instance, he expresses dissatisfaction:

I believe it is time to begin performing kind acts for others. This ensures I am protected in the event I am inadvertently dispatched to a military academy."

This statement, presented with ironic reasoning, comically reveals moral self-interest masquerading as benevolence, prompting readers to contemplate their own motivations. Kinney employs this satirical framing to present moral ambiguity; children are not invariably virtuous, and adults are not consistently smart or just.

The institutional critique in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is more nuanced than in *Matilda*, yet equally impactful. Educational systems are shown as bureaucratic, unreliable, and theatrical, with educators frequently lacking

comprehension or support for their students. For example, when Greg's endeavour to join the safety patrol fails, the school disproportionately punishes an innocent individual, exposing institutional dysfunction rather than ethical discernment.

The comic strip format, characterised by simplistic illustrations that frequently contradict the written narrative, introduces a dimension of visual sarcasm, encouraging the reader to engage in deciphering the "true story" underlying Greg's unreliable narration. The novel subtly yet persistently challenges adult authority and societal conventions, enabling young readers to examine the notion that institutions and narratives are frequently imperfect and subject to scrutiny.

4.2.4 Humour as Emancipation

In each of these three writings, humour transcends mere entertainment; it emancipates. It invites youngsters to question authority, challenge conventional narratives, and conceive alternate realities. Bakhtin's claim that "laughter degrades and liberates" (1984) is powerfully illustrated in these narratives, where children utilise humour not just to mock absurdity and oppression but also to navigate and empower themselves through it, employing comedy as a means of resistance and negotiation. Furthermore, by equipping children with the analytical skills to recognise hypocrisy, injustice, and narrative distortion, these books fulfil a vital role that corresponds with Freire's concept of dialogic, liberatory education. By undermining established hierarchies and immutable truths, hilarious literature empowers youngsters to perceive themselves as ethical agents who can interpret, interrogate, and ultimately transform their surrounding universe.

4.3. Devices and Techniques in Humour Delivery

The humour of *Matilda*, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* is generated through a diverse assortment of stylistic and narrative strategies that fulfil both educational and analytical objectives. These devices, spanning sarcasm, visual contradiction, grotesque exaggeration, and metafiction, are essential to the works' engagement with readers, construction of meaning, and subversion of prevailing ideologies.

4.3.1 Lexical Play and Narrative Deception

Narrative misdirection is fundamental to the wolf's inconsistent and even ridiculous recounting of events in *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*. His rationale for demolishing the pigs' houses, "I had a severe sneezing cold", exemplifies a dual interpretation of the term "blowing" in both physical and metaphorical contexts. The pun functions on several levels: it is biologically feasible, humorously absurd, and thematically ironic. The lineage of the wolf,

I am uncertain how the entire Big Bad Wolf narrative originated, yet it is fundamentally erroneous," establishes a tone of feigned sincerity, so tricking the reader into momentarily empathising with a figure typically regarded as the antagonist.

This method familiarises youngsters with rhetorical deflection and promotes critical assessment of narrative voice, illustrating how comedy can foster interpretative scepticism and reveal faulty narration. In *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, humour arises from Greg's efforts to manipulate language for self-promotion, which ultimately backfire through contradicting illustrations or ironic results. For example, he states: "The most effective method to achieve fame would be to engage in foolish behaviour on television." The humour arises from the easy normalisation of celebrity through absurdity, as well as Greg's inability to recognise that his own conduct frequently exemplifies this pattern. The comedic misdirection resides in the disparity between his statements and the readers' observations, inciting contemplation on purpose versus perception. These situations foster media and ethical literacy, encouraging young readers to differentiate between appearance and reality.

4.3.2 Visual Wit and Irony

In *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, visual humour serves a fundamental purpose. The comic-strip format employs exaggerated facial expressions, slapstick imagery, and spatial interplay between text and images, rendering it very useful for visual learners. An illustrative instance arises when Greg laments about bullying, despite the illustration depicting him as the evident aggressor. This mismatch between art and text serves as a recurring joke and an educational tool, instructing children to critically evaluate multi-modal narratives and to interpret beyond superficial

assertions.

This sarcastic strategy is both humorous and instructive; it requires the reader to act as an interpreter, reconciling contradictory information, so enhancing inferential thinking and critical engagement.

4.3.3 Grotesque Realism and Hyperbole

Roald Dahl's *Matilda* used grotesque exaggeration well to satirise repressive characters and emphasise kid liberation. Characters like Miss Trunchbull are shown in grotesque terms:

She possessed a stubborn chin, a harsh mouth, and diminutive haughty eyes.”

Her excessive punishments, such as swinging children by their pigtails or confining them in the “Chokey,” function as both comedic elements and symbolic critiques of authoritarian education. The grotesque alienates the reader from the tragedy, enabling them to find humour in cruelty while also acknowledging its wrong. This approach corresponds with Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, wherein humour serves as an instrument of both degradation and emancipation. The grotesque serves to delight while simultaneously revealing the absurdity of authority institutions, empowering readers to support the child's subversive victory.

4.3.4 Metafiction and Narrative Consciousness

The *True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* also fosters metafictional awareness in children. By overtly contesting a familiar narrative and framing it as a partial media account, the book instructs young readers that narratives are fabricated, not impartial. The phrase “Once upon a time” is immediately succeeded by “Everybody knows the story of the ‘Three Little Pigs.’” “Or at least they believe they do,” indicates a whimsical interruption of narrative anticipation, encouraging readers to critically examine whose perspective they are engaging with. This promotes reader engagement and interpretation, a characteristic of critical literacy and poststructuralist childhood theory. Children are enabled not just to absorb narratives but also to interrogate and reformulate them.

4.3.5 Technique as Ideology

Collectively, these devices -- wordplay, visual irony, grotesque exaggeration, and metafiction -- render comedy a multifaceted, ideologically infused tactic. They involve readers on cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions, assisting children in understanding the intricacies of narrative, authority, and societal conventions. Instead of simply embellishing the story, these approaches constitute the structural foundation of humour's educational and critical functions, underpinning the dual objectives of teaching and subversion.

Discussion

5.1. Synthesis of Key Findings

This study has shown that humour in modern children's literature serves as an effective dual-purpose tool, promoting both cognitive growth and critical engagement. Thematic textual examination of six popular works reveals that humour is not only ornamental or entertaining but also a fundamental component of narrative structure and ideological framing.

Humour pedagogically improves reading and comprehension by merging accessible language with visual-verbal synergy, exemplified in *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, where handwritten fonts, cartoon images, and Greg Heffley's sardonic internal commentary facilitate narrative fluidity and reader engagement. In *Matilda*, Roald Dahl explores themes of parental neglect and institutional abuse through exaggerated caricatures and comic reversals, thereby establishing a psychologically safe environment for readers to navigate complex emotional experiences.

Quantitative research is increasingly substantiating these educational outcomes. Ziv's seminal research (1988) revealed that pupils subjected to hilarious pedagogy remembered 15–20% more material compared to their counterparts in traditional classes. Kim and Payne (2020) demonstrated that humour facilitates memory consolidation via emotional salience, whereas Andarab (2019) revealed that hilarious media markedly improved vocabulary acquisition and alleviated anxiety in young language learners (Kim and Payne 2020; Andarab 2019). These findings substantiate the assertion that humour is not only captivating but also demonstrably helpful in fostering cognitive and emotional growth.

Simultaneously, the essential role of comedy becomes equally important. Modern children's literature frequently uses humour as a means of resistance, empowering young readers to question authority and scrutinise prevailing standards. Jon Scieszka's *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* parodies courtroom language and media prejudice by presenting the wolf's viewpoint, so changing a well-known tale into a comedy that fosters scepticism toward official narratives. These books not only entertain but also exemplify critical literacy and enable readers to identify manipulation, bias, and complexity.

The interaction between narrative structure and substance is pivotal to this dual function. Techniques including satire, irony, unreliable narrative, and grotesque exaggeration collaborate with subjects such as school discipline, familial instability, and social conformity to create writings that entertain and challenge. By employing these tactics, authors redefine the kid reader as an interpretative agent, able to navigate ambiguity, question authority, and engage in ideological critique. Thus, comedy moves beyond being solely a literary device to function as an educational and political intervention.

5.2. Interdisciplinary Implications

This research integrates concepts from educational psychology, literary theory, and childhood studies, positioning comedy as a crucial interdisciplinary link that connects cognitive growth, ideological critique, and narrative empowerment in children's books. In the chosen texts, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, and *Matilda*, humour functions not as a mere embellishment but as a fundamental mechanism that enhances learning, cultivates critical thinking, and alters power dynamics between adult and child viewpoints.

From an educational perspective, humour closely correlates with Vygotsky's scaffolding theory, which underscores the necessity of offering accessible, supportive learning environments that alleviate anxiety and improve understanding. Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* illustrates this through its hybrid narrative-visual format: the handwritten typography, expressive illustrations, and Greg's sardonic tone synergistically support literacy for young readers, especially those who may be disenchanted by conventional text. Bandura's social learning theory elucidates how children emulate behaviours and emotional reactions from characters; Greg's erroneous decision-making and clumsy moral reasoning provoke both criticism and compassion, prompting

readers to contemplate their own social interactions within a psychologically secure environment. Theoretical insights are substantiated by empirical evidence: Vance (1987) demonstrated that humour can enhance retention by 15–20%, while Kim and Payne (2020) established significant correlations between humorous stimuli and emotional memory consolidation, indicating that humor is not only engaging but also pedagogically efficacious (Vance 1987; Kim and Payne 2020).

Simultaneously, comedy functions as an instrument of resistance and critique, aligning with Freire's framework of critical education. Freire contended that learners had to be active participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge, challenging prevailing ideas. In *Matilda*, Roald Dahl used grotesque exaggeration and ironic characterisation to undermine adult authority, most shown by Miss Trunchbull, whose harshness is depicted as silly through comic hyperbole. *Matilda's* defiance, executed through intellect, wit, and eventual magical retribution, embodies a Freirean model of liberation: the child learner as an agent of transformation rather than a subject of domination.

Through a literary theoretical perspective, specifically utilising Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, humour is perceived as a subversive aesthetic that overturns hierarchies and ridicules existing conventions. This is clearly exemplified in *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, where Jon Scieszka employs parody to reinterpret a classic fairy tale from the antagonist's viewpoint. The novel satirises media bias and narrative authority by emulating journalistic and legal discourse, prompting young readers to reflect on the artificial essence of truth and perspective. This story inversion not only elicits humour but also enables youngsters to scrutinise the credibility of prevailing narratives, an action fundamental to both Bakhtinian and poststructuralist concepts of interpretative agency.

The intersecting frameworks of educational theory, critical pedagogy, and literary criticism elucidate humour's multifaceted function in children's literature. It facilitates developmental learning, demonstrates resistance against inequitable structures, and repositions the child as an autonomous interpreter. Humour not only entertains readers but also encourages them to contemplate, interrogate, and envision alternative possibilities within and outside the text.

5.3. Reframing Children's Literature

The findings of this study challenge traditional hierarchies in literary judgement, where comedy is generally seen as less serious or pedagogically significant than themes of pain, morality, or identity. Such assumptions disregard the intellectual, emotional, and ideological intricacies inherent in hilarious children's literature. By demonstrating that humour accommodates ethical ambiguity, emotional depth, and subversive critique, this study argues for the repositioning of humour not at the margins, but at the very core of children's literary instruction. In the chosen books, humour does not diminish experience; it enhances it.

In *Matilda*, Roald Dahl used irony and grotesque exaggeration to challenge authoritarianism in personal and educational contexts. The ludicrous nature of Miss Trunchbull's punishments and the overt ineptitude of Matilda's parents elicit amusement while simultaneously exposing profound critiques of institutional neglect and adult hypocrisy. Similarly, *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* acts as a parodic intervention into the canon of fairy tales, casting doubt on the moral absolutism of traditional narratives. Scieszka's employment of unreliable narration and parodic legal terminology reconfigures a familiar narrative into an instrument for examining perspective, bias, and the construction of truth. In *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, Jeff Kinney employs self-deprecating comedy and visual irony to make Greg Heffley sympathetic while quietly revealing the performative paradoxes of adolescence, where social posturing and emotional instability intersect in narratively complex manners.

These writings not only entertain but also empower child readers to analyse complex storylines, navigate ambiguity, and discern ideological signals behind superficial comedic elements. By doing so, they validate the reader's analytical ability and emotional acumen. Children are redefined as autonomous interpreters and ethical actors, rather than passive consumers of adult-constructed morality, capable of engaging with and resisting the ideological frameworks offered to them.

This reframing parallels recent trends in childhood studies, which consider children not as unfinished adults in need of moral education but as rhetorically capable and socially positioned individuals. In this context, humour serves as a potent medium for youngsters to examine contradictions, challenge authority, and assert interpretative agency. It is

precisely this capacity to laugh, to ponder, and to question that renders humour not secondary to literary seriousness but necessary to it.

5.4. Contribution to the Field

The current study presents a systematic dual-axis framework for analysing humour in children's literature, functioning as both an educational tool and a critical methodology. This framework emphasises the cognitive advantages of humorous narratives and their ideological subversions, encouraging future research to explore humour as a multi-dimensional medium encompassing form, rhetoric, and meaning-making, rather than merely as content. This method prompts researchers to investigate the role of humour in augmenting ethical complexity and reader agency in literary and educational contexts.

The study demonstrates that widely recognised commercial children's books, often perceived as dull or formulaic, contain significant subversive ideas, promote cognitive engagement, and raise moral questions. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* employs ironic narration and visual humour to enhance children's comprehension and encourage reflection on self-presentation and social dynamics. *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs* employs parody to subvert traditional narratives, encouraging readers to engage in critical thinking regarding media by prompting them to question their perceptions and interpretations. *Matilda* employs grotesque exaggeration and situational irony to illustrate the uneven distribution of power, prompting readers to consider resistance as a more appropriate response than obedience.

These textual strategies are effective not only aesthetically but also in educational terms. Research in educational psychology indicates that humour positively impacts cognitive function. Ziv (1988) demonstrated that humour enhances memory retention by 15–20%. Additionally, Skiveren (2024) indicated that humorous stimuli enhance long-term recall and elevate the emotional significance of the material presented. The findings indicate that humour serves not as a distraction from learning but as a legitimate and effective pedagogical tool, particularly in narratives where irony, satire, and subversion enhance interpretative depth.

In addition, the concept of literary value in children's literature is broadened through this study by focusing on works such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, *Matilda*, and *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*. It posits that popular texts, often overlooked in academic discourse, can be

intellectually rigorous, emotionally resonant, and pedagogically transformative when examined through the lenses of humour and critical literacy.

5.5 Future Research Directions

While this study has focused on six English-language texts, future research could benefit from a broader cultural and formal scope. Investigating non-Western humorous children's literature may reveal culturally distinct uses of satire, irony, or subversion. Similarly, comparative studies of humour in translated texts could illuminate how language and cultural adaptation affect humour's pedagogical and critical functions. Another promising avenue lies in digital and interactive children's narratives, where humour is often multimodal, participatory, and dynamic, inviting new forms of reader engagement and critical reflection. These directions would expand the global and technological relevance of humour studies in children's literature.

Conclusion

This study has shown that humour in modern children's books is not just a way to make them laugh; it also serves as a way to critique ideas while also helping kids grow mentally and emotionally. The research, which looked at a group of well-known books like *Matilda*, *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, and *The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs*, found that humour helps people think for themselves, teaches them how to think morally, and makes them less likely to obey unfair rules. Instead of making serious themes less serious, humour in these works helps people deal with moral complexity, power dynamics, and emotional growth through techniques like visual irony, parody, unreliable narration, and grotesque exaggeration. These findings enhance our comprehension of children's literature by reconceptualising humour as a fundamental, rather than peripheral, component of both pedagogy and critique. The research expands upon Bakhtin's carnivalesque theory to elucidate how comic inversion undermines adult authority and elevates child agency. Freire's critical pedagogy is reflected in texts that prompt readers to interrogate institutional norms and reconceptualise social possibilities, while reader-response theory validates the child as an active co-constructor of meaning. In this manner, humor transcends mere rhetorical

embellishment, evolving into a form of participatory education that cultivates empathy, scepticism, and ethical discernment in young readers. This study's contribution is its interdisciplinary perspective and its reassessment of popular children's literature as significant sources of literary and educational value. This study presents commercially successful texts, frequently marginalised in academic discourse, as sophisticated instruments for cultivating emotional intelligence and conducting cultural analysis. By positioning humour at the convergence of literary form, pedagogical purpose, and ideological examination, the study contests traditional hierarchies that favour seriousness over levity in scholarly assessments of children's literature. Subsequent research may expand this dual-axis framework by inquiring: How are mechanisms of humour modified, or diminished, in the translation of children's literature across cultural contexts? What forms of critical engagement are facilitated when humour is rendered interactive, as exemplified by gamified storytelling or digital picture books? As children's literature evolves across various platforms and languages, humour persists as a significant yet underexamined domain for comprehending how young readers are instructed not only to laugh but also to think critically, question, and envision alternatives.

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