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## **'If they laugh they will love the learning': Experiences of the Use of Humor by Adult Education Practitioners in Egypt and the United States**

Mohamed Serry

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‘If they laugh they will love the learning’: Experiences of the Use of Humor by Adult  
Education Practitioners in Egypt and the United States  
Mohamed Serry

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Masters of Science in Education

Adult Education and Human Resource Development

May 2023

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to the greatest two people that I've known. First, Jehan Ali. Thank you for being the best mother on Earth, for being my idol, my biggest supporter and my best friend. Second, Ashraf Serry. Thank you for being an example that I dream about following, for building this great family, for always helping me and for being the best father ever. I admire how the two of you went through tons of battles and won them all, without bragging or even mentioning it, and with always being faithful, positive and smiling.

This is also dedicated to my amazing sisters, Youmna, Yousra, Mariam, Asmaa and Joumana. Thank you for being the pure, strong and joyful souls that you are, for always having my back and for creating all of these beautiful memories that I have in mind.

Finally, this is dedicated to all of my friends and family, to the great people that I know in Egypt, in Harrisonburg and elsewhere, they all know themselves and they're all part of this. I want to specifically mention the two who went through this journey with me, Patrick Schell and Elona Gashi, it wouldn't be the same and it wouldn't be possible without your company, love and support

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I also want to acknowledge Ibn Al-Haytham, an extraordinary Arab scientist and philosopher from the 10th – 11th century, whose groundbreaking work on scientific method has greatly influenced me. His quotes, “We begin by observing the phenomena and gradually move on to establishing the measures and standards by which to understand them.” and “The seeker after truth should be humbler than the dust. The world crushes the dust under its feet, but the seeker after truth should humble himself so that even the dust could crush him. Only then, and not till then, will he have a glimpse of the truth.” has been guiding principles for me throughout this journey.

I was the luckiest to work at the Graduate School Office at James Madison University. Micheal Stoloff, Cheryl Doss, Pamela Bell and all the other amazing individuals working there were a great family that I had during my two years there. Also the great team of the Center of Global Engagement, that I had the pleasure to be one of their international students, and a coworker for a short but great period of time.

I cannot be thankful enough to the amazing six individuals who agreed to participate and tell their stories. Your efforts and cooperation are beyond appreciated, and will hopefully shade some light on such a crucial yet rarely highlighted topic.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the journey that led me to the present moment, the journey that brought to me all the good and bad, developed me and built my faith in

Allah, my god that I thank the most, my creator, guide, main supporter and only aim. And I acknowledge myself, for moving forward and fighting with faith through it all. الحمد لله

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## **Abstract**

This qualitative research studied the experiences of adult education practitioners from Egypt and the United States with the usage of humor. The problem was that humor is a commonly used communication and education tool, yet it is not studied enough within adult education contexts. The sample included three participants from Egypt and three from the United States. All six had adult education experiences in different contexts, including educational interventions in nonprofits, manufacturing contexts, and corporate office settings. The study aimed to determine the positive and negative results of humor on adult learners, also the practitioners' needs for a better usage of humor in the future, and their recommendations for other participants as well. Cross-cultural differences that might or might not emerge were also considered. The results showed how humor widely affects the learning experiences of adult learners, regarding the learning environment, learners' learning abilities, learners' interactions and impressions. Adult educators should perceive humor as a helpful tool, study their audience, and have confidence to use humor effectively. Future studies might consider interviewing a wider sample of participants, from more countries and from more adult education contexts. The field of AHRD might benefit from the results and stories of participants by having a better understanding of adult educators' experiences, views, and perspectives about using humor in adult learning activities.



## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Humor is a universal connector. Adult education is no exception. However, it is challenging to find methodology regarding the usage of humor in adult education. Though one might assume humor happens naturally and frequently in adult learning contexts that aim to foster impactful learning, that does not seem to be the reality. To address this gap, this research explores the use of humor in adult education work-related environments in Egypt and the United States by interviewing and documenting the experiences of practitioners in the field. Practitioners' sharing of their experiences using humor will allow for comparisons of experiences and how humor works similarly or differently between different cultures.

This is a qualitative study that addresses a knowledge gap in the literature about adult education practitioners' use of humor cross-culturally. From an insider-outsider stand point, this study follows an appreciative inquiry methodology with a comparative structure in studying the situational use of humor in adult education in both Egypt and the US. The limitations of the study and research process will be provided, in addition to recommendations for future research and studies.

This chapter provides the background of the study, the problem statement, the rationale of the study, the scope of the research and its significance. This chapter helps the reader navigate through the next chapters of literature review, methodology, findings and recommendations by providing an understanding of the context, scheme and the challenge this research seeks to address.

### **Background**

Humor is an important force when dealing with the real-world challenges and issues (Boverie et al., 1994). Yet, researchers have suggested that the role of humor in organizational life has tended to be neglected in the business of organizational analysis

(Thomas & Al-Maskati, 1997). More specifically, Civikly (1986) suggests there is often a separation between everyday uses of humor and the use of humor in teaching and learning processes. Clearly, there is an opportunity to explore the integration of humor in the teaching and learning of adults and creating an opportunity to better understand how adult education practitioners use humor in their practice. This investigation can further inform the field of AHRD given it has the potential to inform design, delivery, and implementation of learning experiences for employees in the workforce.

### **Statement of the problem**

Because humor provides a positive learning experience, the field of human resources development needs to explore the experiences, benefits, struggles and suggestions of adult education practitioners' use of humor, in a way that supports humor being used when needed, and avoided when it might do harm.

Vanderheiden (2021) cites the work of Drerup, (2019) as he stated that humor is usually a point of discussion in educational contexts. Vanderheiden (2021) then elaborates that most research discusses humor within school contexts, with limited research available regarding humor in adult education specifically. Additionally, exploring the cross-cultural nature of humor is imperative in a multicultural and global world and is not, as of yet, extensively studied and published based on the research literature searches conducted for this thesis study.

Taking into consideration the expansive multicultural and global world today it is essential to better understand differences of culture and background, and to bring in how humor is viewed. Garcia and Charaudeau (2015) mentioned that across different cultures, there is no specific situation or context that can always be perfect for the use of humor. Across different cultures, the situational contexts in which humor is used changes dramatically. Accordingly, it is important to study the experiences of adult education

practitioners, allowing them to inform the building of methodologies or interventions that may help adult education practitioners to use humor in their work.

### **Rationale**

This project aims to capture the experiences, benefits, struggles and suggestions of adult education practitioners from Egypt and the US with both experiencing and using humor as a tool in adult learning. Discerning when and when not to use humor is essential to ensure achieving the intended results. Also, through the comparative site analysis of the USA and Egypt, this research project sought to understand the impact of culture and environment on how learners perceive the use of humor, as well as how practitioners use humor. Pauwels (2021) stated that even though humor is usually situated with an intention of positive impact, it can have serious negative impact if without considering how it will be perceived by different audiences from different cultures. In essence, humor is a tool that needs to be studied and used carefully in order to achieve the objective positive outcomes.

This research studies the experiences with humor of adult education practitioners by asking questions about their experiences as learners and as educators. Also, participants are asked about their views and ideas on the use of humor in adult education. These questions aim to explore the whole experience of humor for adult education practitioners, in a way that covers multiple angles and aspects of their experiences and perspectives.

### **Research question(s)**

This research project studied the experiences of adult education practitioners' use of humor in the US and Egypt, to inform improving humor use in workplace settings. The primary research question is: What are adult education practitioners experiences using humor in the US and Egypt? Related questions are as follows:

What are their experiences as adult learners?;

What are their experiences using humor as adult educators?;

What might help in making their experiences using humor as educators better?; and what are their recommendations about using humor for other practitioners?

The questions are exploratory and open-ended allowing participants latitude to share their experiences in a way that can inform positive changes in adult education practice.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research raises awareness about the experiences, benefits, struggles and suggestions of adult education practitioners from Egypt and the US in using humor as a tool. Studying how humor affects adult learners and how human resource development practitioners perceive and use it, can inform how the use of humor creates better learning experiences at work. Also, the impact of culture and environment on how adult learners perceive and experience humor in educational contexts might be better understood. How adult education practitioners use humor in such contexts will be better understood through this exploratory study, leading to a positive impact in adult education and building healthier training and working environments where humor is neither over or under used.

### **Definitions:**

The following is a list of definitions, operationally defined to convey clarity in meaning in the rest of the thesis:

- Adult Education Practitioner: in this research, it refers to people who work on educational efforts for adults in their work contexts.
- Humor: The quality-usually expressed through writing or speaking- of being comic or funny. (Martin et al. 2003)
- Adult Education: in this research, it refers to the educational experiences of adult professionals in work contexts
- Culture: “the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior.” Spradley, (1980, p. 22)

- Cross-cultural: observational studies within members of different cultural groups (Brislin, 1976).
- Qualitative study: A study that relies on unstructured data collection methods, such as observations, interviews, surveys and documents, to discover themes and findings in order to inform a better understanding of the world. (Maxwell, 2013)
- Appreciative inquiry: A methodology that aims to inductively determine strengths through community members' views, in order to maximize on these strengths for developmental purposes (Richards, 2016).
- Comparative inquiry: A study that compares phenomena and happenings from different surrounding conditions. (Taves, Barlev, 2023)
- Insider-outsider researcher: A researcher that has knowledge of the research area, yet keeps a level of detachment to remain objective and prevent biases. (Johnson, 2012)
- Creative confidence: The ability to generate original ideas and the courage to act on those ideas. (Kelley, 2013)

**Limitations:**

The study explored the experiences of a noticeably small sample. This is in terms of numbers, as only six participants were interviewed. Also the sample in cultures is small, as only experiences in Egypt and the United States are studied. The study only focused on adult education experiences that took place in professional contexts, such as workplace training and workshops. This emphasis was not specific to industries or sectors. The study excluded educational interventions in school contexts, such as university lectures for students. It also excluded adult education for society development, such as literacy programs or communities' awareness campaigns.

**Ethical Considerations:**

The research procedures were approved by the International Review Board, under the approval number 23-3845. All participants were provided with all the research and participation details before signing a consent form. Participants could stop their participation at any time if needed. The identities of all participants were coded to protect participants' identities and privacy. Also the research interviews phase took into consideration not to ask any question that might cause any sort of physical, mental or emotional harm to participants. The consent form, participation email and interview questions are all included in the appendix of this study.

In the next chapters, related literature to the topic will be discussed, also the methodology the research procedures followed, the analysis of the findings, how these findings connect to the literature and what are the implications and conclusions accordingly, all to build an understanding of experiences of adult educators with humor.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study explored the experiences using humor of adult education practitioners in the US and Egypt. Humor affects how we deal with issues and problems by simplifying the challenges and their consequences.(Boverie et al., 1994). Humor is a neglected tool when dealing with professional and work related negative encounters (Thomas & Al-Maskati, 1997). More specifically, Civikly (1986) suggests there is a separation between relying on humor in our daily life and in educational contexts. This research aims to highlight this gap by understanding how adult education practitioners use humor in their practice, which can further inform the field of AHRD when designing, delivering, and implementing learning experiences for employees in the workforce. Some of the benefits of doing so are discussed below, in alignment with adult learning theory.

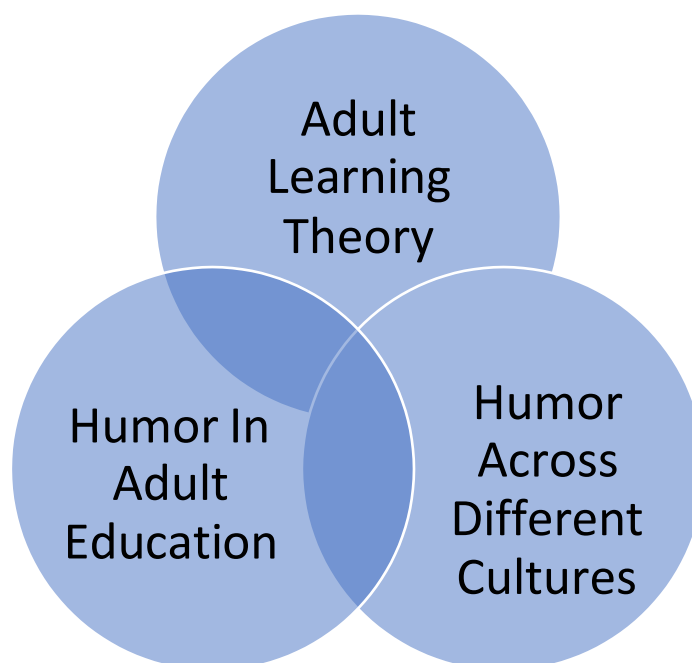
The following literature overview provides a foundation to explore the impact of humor on adult education. The researcher examined the following sources for existing research on humor in adult learning: *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*,; *Human Resource Development Quarterly*; *Springer International Publishing*; *Frontiers in Psychology* and others. Specific terms used were: adult learning theory; humor in adult education\); humor in the workplace; and cross-cultural humor. The following search engines were used in order to search widely for humor and its relationship with adult learning in professional contexts.: JMU Libraries, Google Scholars, Microsof Academic and BASE. Additionally, when research articles of interest were found, they were examined closely by reading the main sections of each article, starting with the abstract to make sure that the article fits what the purpose and topic of research in this thesis to ensure relevance to this study. Pertinent references within those articles were subsequently sought in order to explore their relevance to this study. The findings of this review elaborated the importance of consideration of adult learners' learning needs, including humor as one of the impactful tools,

either positively or negatively if misused; while also taking into consideration the cross-cultural aspect of humor, in terms of how different audiences from different backgrounds perceive and understand humor.

This literature helps inform an understanding of the research questions in this study by highlighting the main aspects that, from the researcher perspective, address the research topic. These aspects are as follows:

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework- Adult Learning and Humor across cultures*



Looking at the above figure, this study explores the usage of humor in adult learning contexts in two countries. Accordingly, studying the adult learning theory literature grounds this study, also studying literature about humor in adult education, which is the area that this study is exploring in the experiences of adult education practitioners. Finally, the study takes into consideration the aspect of the difference in cross-cultural perception, understanding and



usage of humor between Egypt and the United States. Accordingly it is important to study literature related to cross-cultural humor too.

By studying the literature in these three areas. The study looks at the intersection of those three areas, and will be building and connecting the findings to the found literature in this section. The following sections will explore each of the research literature domains in detail.

### **Adult Learning Theory**

This study is informed by Knowles's adult learning theory (1977) that states there are differences in assumptions of learning with adults (andragogy) versus children (pedagogy). The theory claims that there are five assumptions of the needs of adult learners: learning is self-directed, adult learners come with their old experiences to the learning context, they want to learn what they see to be beneficial for them, they want to solve problems during the learning experience, and they rely on internal motivation rather than external during the learning. It is important to realize that adult learners are usually self directed and self motivated. Gehring, (2000) elaborated how adult learners come to the learning experience with their previous knowledge and experiences, and that they often come with specific and identified learning needs. Merriam, (2001) added another assumption that is also related to how adult learners come with specific needs, but she added that adult learners are motivated when they can link the learning with how they can use it in their lives. However, through his literature study, Murray, (2014) discovered that reaching the planned learning outcomes with adult learners is hugely dependent on the educator-learner relationship. Thus relationships are critical in adult education learning encounters.

Exploring humor as an essential communication element in the development of positive educator-adult learner relationships is informative. This research study aims to explore the effects of such elements on learners and educators in adult education. Because

based on the cited literature, educator-learner communication and relationship can significantly impact the success of adult learning efforts.

### **Humor in Adult Education**

Humor has an impact on the whole learning experience and is potentially capable of breaking unwanted boundaries between educators and adult learners. Humor serves as a bridge for educators to create a more comfortable environment that raises learners' self-confidence (Brandt, 2003) and boosts motivation (Boverie et al., 1994). This is an important aspect when facilitating or educating groups of adults. According to adult learning theory (Knowles, 1977), internal motivation is key for engaging adults. Internal motivation can encourage the sharing from previous work experiences and generate rich discussion in the learning setting. For these reasons, it is necessary to study the experiences of adult education practitioners' and consider the impact of humor.

A qualitative study conducted by Vanderheiden, (2021) aimed to study humor in adult education to answer how and why humor is important in adult education. Researchers used an online questionnaire shared with participants who had adult education experiences. The results showed that humor had a positive impact on both the learning environment and the learning outcomes. The results revealed that the impact was due to an increase of motivation related to humor. Also the increase in attention, engagement and active learning related to humor contributed to achieving positive impact.

Humor affects the levels of fear and stress of adult learners. This can lead to the learners sharing their own experiences and resources. Bartzik, Peifer. (2021) conducted a cross-sectional study with 118 employees. The study explored how humor impacts workload stress. The study found that employees who use humor reported less stress levels during challenging situations than others who did not use humor. The study also found that inappropriate use of humor can lead to increased levels of fear and stress. Supporting

Brandt's (2003) finding that an educator making any attendee the center of a joke, leads to learner detachment. Brandt (2003) also found that individual attendee focused humor leads to building a wall of fear and discomfort with the rest of the learners, as they may then be expecting to be under the spotlight when the educator uses humor again. Humor use needs to be selective and purposeful as it can cause negative damage instead of positive learning.

Another important aspect is related to how humor eases the conversation when educators discuss with professionals their knowledge gaps and learning needs. Thomas and Al Makati (1997) maintain that humor can be a medium to convey non-threatening messages about sensitive topics and can help prevent the negative impact of feedback on professionals. Boverie et al. (1994) elaborate that humor can switch people's perception on experiences from negative and problematic to challenges they are encouraged to take on a positive note.

These elaborations support the purpose of the study to focus on adult learners in work related educational contexts that include going through such situations on a regular basis, especially when dealing with work related learning gaps of employees and how they perceive such remarks, which enforce them to go through educational experiences due to a specific lack of knowledge or skill.

Humor has been found to impact adult learning motivation, deliberate practice, engagement, and achieving learning goals (Brandt, 2003; Bartzik, Peifer, 2021; Thomas and Al Makati, 1997; Vanderheiden, 2021). Studying the experiences of adult education practitioners in a manner that leads to a better understanding of how to use humor positively and eliminate negative impacts on adult learners, which is essential for the development of the field of HRD, in terms of creating comfortable and beneficial learning experiences for professional adult learners.

## **Humor Across Different Cultures**

While the research shows how humor can benefit adult learners in the workplace, it is also important to take culture into consideration. Humor is a common tool of human interaction globally (Jiang et al., 2019). The patterns in the relationship between humor and psychological well-being are similar across cultures (Jiang et al., 2019). Yet, there are differences in each culture and how humor is perceived (Jiang et al., 2019). Vanderheiden and Mayer (2021) maintain the social identity variables of sex, age, family status, politics, religion, and other socio-cultural and individual influences impact how humor is perceived.

Humor can be influenced by social identity variables. This supports the rationale for interviewing participants from two different cultures on their experiences with humor in adult educational contexts. Cultural and intersectional social identity variables can also have a negative impact on learners' interpretation of humor. Schermer and Kfrerer (2019) found that prior humor studies did not consider the negative impact of humor on mood, mental state, and social interaction of perceivers. The mixed methods study of 4701 participants in 15 countries asked, through a questionnaire, about how different humor styles affect their self-esteem. They found that the same humor styles had different impacts, ranging from very positive to very negative on participants from different countries. This suggests that it is important to take into consideration culture and humor to identify appropriate humor styles to prevent negative impact on culturally contextualized learning .

Asking open ended questions, about positive and also negative experiences with humor, as learners and as educators, helps to create a full understanding of humor in adult education. When we understand that humor is a tool that can be used positively or negatively, we will consider it more carefully in creating learning experiences.

Understanding the cultural differences in when and how people use humor, enables us to better use humor effectively across cultures. Schermer and Kfrerer (2020) studied

intercultural and intracultural humor. The word intracultural means within a single culture and language, while intercultural means between cultures, namely that multiple cultures and languages were included in the research. Schermer and Kfrerer (2020) highlighted significant differences in humor perception across participants from four different English speaking countries, and how participants view and use humor differently. This discovery suggests that humor is not always a widely used tool to deal with stressful situations, and that in stressful situations, different cultures use humor in different portions and styles.

Given the previously discussed research literature, culture plays a huge role in how humor is viewed. Adult education practitioners need to take into consideration how different audiences and learners perceive humor and when and how they use it, especially when working on learning experiences with diverse groups or with adult learners from another country and culture.

This thesis study took into consideration the cultural aspect to explore possible differences in adult education practitioners' experience in Egypt and the US. This might lead to practitioners using humor more inclusively, and to them adding different humorous elements to their content depending on the cultural and environmental surrounding of their learners. In turn, adult learning might experience a positive improvement regarding how inclusive, suitable and comfortable it is for adult learners from different countries, cultures, and backgrounds.

## **Summary**

The reviewed literature considered adult learning theory, specifically how the educator-learner and learner-learner relationships affect the learning environment and reaching the desired learning outcomes. The literature regarding humor in adult education suggests that humor can positively affect the learning experience as a whole, regarding how humor can positively address adult learners' needs, motivation, and comfort in the learning

environment. However, humor can negatively affect the same aspects of adult learning by increasing stress for professionals, or fear of being used as a humorous example by the educator— if the educator used such strategy during the learning experience. Negative humor use that targets individuals can be harmful.

Humor across cultures is a critical topic. How different cultures perceive, understand, use and deal with humor vary. Adult learners from different cultures perceive and use humor dissimilarly. Even in similar situations, learners in different countries use humor in a wide range of ways and rates. This study was directed by these findings, in terms of sampling, which took into consideration interviewing participants from two different cultures, while making sure that they had adult educating experiences. Also the interview questions clearly asked about positive and negative experiences they encountered with humor, either as educators or learners. The study also adopted a comparative approach when analyzing literature, to highlight how different cultures and contexts experienced humor, with respect to the adult learning theory and what adult learners need and expect, in order for them to have a successful learning experience.

The next chapter presents the research methods used in this study, explaining the process in depth regarding the appreciative inquiry approach used to understand the experiences of adult education practitioners using humor in Egypt and the United States.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

This chapter details the qualitative methodology behind the project, aligned with the research questions. The chapter begins by building a foundation of what is meant by appreciative and comparative inquiry methodologies. After stating the research questions, the chapter then explains the appreciative inquiry process that took place, then the details of the setting, participants sampling and their background and the interview questions. The chapter ends by discussing the procedures limitations and elaborating procedures of protection for the study participants.

This research begins with semi-structured interviews with three participants in Egypt and three in the United States in Arabic and English, respectively. The interview transcriptions are then coded for the analysis. Accordingly, themes and sub-themes emerge and then are triangulated with the literature and the researcher's contextual interpretation. Findings are reported in the discussion chapter.

Creswell (2003) explained that qualitative research is suitable when we are working on explaining the connection and relationship between variables. Creswell (2003) stated:

Qualitative research is particularly useful when the researcher wants to explore how variables are related to one another, when the researcher wants to understand the context of a phenomenon, and when the researcher wants to describe complex and multifaceted phenomena that cannot be captured by a single measure. (Creswell, 2003, p. 180).

This study aims to explore the experiences of adult education practitioners with the usage of humor in cross-cultural contexts by interviewing participants from Egypt and the United States. This is done through an appreciative inquiry approach, as the findings and recommendations of the study are all built on the input of participants. Also the study aims to

be a positive step towards a better experience for learners and educators in adult education through studying the shared experiences of adult education practitioners, which follows the aim of appreciative inquiry of having a positive and constructive perception towards the future. (Richards, 2016).

The study also adopts a comparative inquiry approach in its data analysis phase, specifically when analyzing the similarities and differences between the experiences of practitioners in Egypt and the United States. This is in order to build a wider understanding that takes into consideration the cross-cultural aspect as well.

Schweisfurth, et. al, (2022) clearly stated that research working on comparing pedagogy is perhaps at an optimum state when the specific contexts of the research areas are elaborated and the researchers use these elaborations as main elements of their comparative analysis. Even though this claim is related to pedagogy or young learning instead of adult learning, pedagogy and andragogy share the same aim of creating a supportive and helpful learning environment to encourage their full potential (Wang, Bryan, 2014). Accordingly, it is arguably valuable to follow the same comparative concept when studying different andragogical approaches across different cultures in a comparative manner. Accordingly, In this research, this is specifically tackled by comparing the usage of humor by adult educators in Egypt and the United States

### **Research Questions**

The research project methodology is designed to explore the following research question: What are the experiences of adult education practitioners with using humor in the US and Egypt?

Sub questions are as follows:

- 1- What are their experiences as adult learners?
- 2- What are their experiences using humor as adult educators?



3- What might help in making their experiences using humor as educators better?

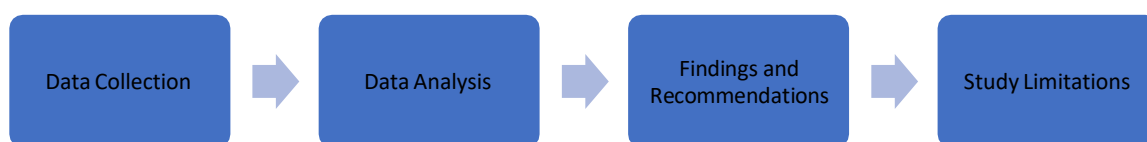
4- What are their recommendations about using humor for other practitioners?

### Research Design

The process followed in this research is represented in the following figure:

Figure 2

#### *Study Process*



This qualitative research was designed using an appreciative inquiry methodology. According to (Jennifer, et, al, 2010), Appreciative inquiry proposes that lasting change occurs as a result of focusing on where the area of study is headed rather than focusing on where it has faltered. Appreciative inquiry also encourages the development of a “vocabulary of hope to dramatically move the focus from the negative toward the positive”(Jennifer, et, al, 2010). Also appreciative inquiry relies on building the findings and recommendations only on the input of participants, (Richards, 2016) stated that it is called appreciative because it respects the views of all the members or participants of the organization or study. In this regard, the research method for this study is considered an appreciative inquiry because the perspectives

and views of participants will be used to establish the required knowledge about humor in adult education, which can furtherly be used to develop the field of human resources development.

It is also important to highlight how narrative storytelling can be used in an appreciative inquiry based research. Acad, 2010 explained that narrative storytelling in appreciative inquiry is useful as it creates a deeper understanding of the topic and its details. (Simmons, 2006) highlighted that appreciative inquiry takes storytelling from just the members of a community sharing stories informally, to these stories to be seen and heard publicly, and to build on their positives and opportunities development aspects. In this regard, my research study gives the space for participants to talk about their previous experiences and stories regarding humor in adult learning, and for their perspectives to be shared. This research also highlights participants' views about how to improve the usage of humor in adult education, and what might help them and other practitioners capitalize on the effects of using humor.

The research phases started with data collection, then data analysis, highlighting findings, recommendations and finally clarifying the study limitations. The details of each phase are as follows:

### ***Data Collection***

Data collection is the phase in which information is gathered. In this research this phase is fulfilled through recorded interviews with the participants, which is an approved procedure by IRB number 23-3845. This phase included reaching out to participants fitting the research criteria, developing interview questions and preparing the interview setting.

**Sample and Population.** This study used convenience sampling to reach out to participants who had adult education facilitation experiences either in Egypt or the United States. The study accordingly included participants from different adult education contexts.

This is to ensure taking into consideration and highlighting the experiences within different professional contexts, which will also help in pointing out any differences in the experiences due to the different atmospheres. Educational institutions, corporates, nonprofits and manufacturing institutions were the contexts where the participants had their adult education experiences. It was intentional to select the participants from these different contexts and for half of the participants to be from Egypt and the other half to be from the United States, as the researcher had the access, resources and language ability to reach out and communicate with participants from those two countries. The significance of this study raises awareness about the experiences across different cultures in a way that will be of help for adult education practitioners in the future.

The study looked for adult education practitioners above 18 years of age, working with adult learners for their professional development. Also either Arabic or English speakers and had their experiences in Egypt or The United States. Any participant that fit the criteria mentioned above was eligible for the study. The study did not include participants working in any other contexts than the mentioned above, as an example, practitioners that had their experiences in university classes or lectures were excluded. Also the study excluded any adult education practitioner under the age of 18 years.

***Description of Participant Sample.*** Six interviews were conducted for this research, three with adult education practitioners from Egypt and three with practitioners from The United States. Participants were selected according to the criteria of professionals with experiences in working on educational interventions with adult learners in work contexts. This research focused on three main work contexts that included: corporate office contexts; nonprofit contexts; and manufacturing contexts.

A brief description of each participant is also provided here:

- Participant Egypt 01, a male from Egypt, gave training in corporate settings for 8 years, worked with businesses in Egypt. Also he gave training to trainers for 10 years.
- Participant Egypt 02, a male from Egypt, is a trainer that worked with nonprofits in different cities around Egypt for the past 3 years, with different age groups and different training purposes. Also delivered training for trainers, college students and high-school students.
- Participant Egypt 03, a male from Egypt, is a production manager in a factory in Cairo, delivering training for team leaders and factory technicians for the past 5 years. Worked in military owned factories and in private factories too.
- Participant US01, a female from The US, works in human resources at a large educational business. Planned, developed and delivered training programs for employees for the past 15 years. Worked on technical and nontechnical educational interventions. As part of her role now, she works on providing helpful resources, such as articles and books, for her training team.
- Participant US02, a female from the US, is a Director of Education in a nonprofit foundation, Planned, developed and delivered training programs for the past 10 years. She was the director of a humor academy and studied the impact of healthy humor on human beings.
- Participant US03, a female from The US, is a manager in an organization that aims to create transformation at both the personal level and community level in three key areas that have the highest impact; food, transportation, and built environment. Participant US03 educated adults working in the organization on farming and producing organic vegetables and fruits, also gave training for

farming and production volunteers and tours for visitors of the organization farm.

**Interviews.** This study used semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of adult education practitioners with the usage of humor. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2015), semi-structured interviews use a prepared set of questions, yet these questions give each participant an open space to talk about the topic of the question, it also gives the interviewee the opportunity to ask followup questions if needed. It is also important to note that Egyptian participants were interviewed in Arabic, then the Arabic transcripts were translated to English by a professional translator from Egypt who graduated from the English Department of the Faculty of Linguistics, and works as a translator now. Meanwhile, participants from the United States were all interviewed in English.

The interviews' aim was to give the participants the opportunity, space and time to describe their experiences openly. For example, one interview question was "Talk to me about a time when you used humor and it worked." In this question, participants are asked to tell a story about an incident, yet they are not restricted to a specific amount of time or example. Even when participants did not have an answer ready and asked to take some time to think, they were given all the time they needed.

There were no restrictions regarding the way participants answered the questions in any way. Also participants were given the full freedom to reject answering any question if they wanted to. In specific situations, follow-up questions were asked to participants when needed. I also asked clarity questions when needed to make sure that participants' views were fully understood. Also paraphrasing participants' answers was one of the essential tools to ensure that I understood their views. According to Seidman, (2019), interviewers should repeat participants' responses back to them in their own words to check for accuracy and to

ensure that the interviewer has understood the interviewee's perspective. This was practiced during the interview by the researcher.

To be able to address the research question, sub questions were extracted from the main research question. Then each sub question was addressed by a certain sequence of questions, regarding their experiences as learners and as educators, participants for both sections of the interview were asked to provide successful and unsuccessful experiences that they had with humor. Regarding their needs for a better use of humor as adult education practitioners, participants were asked to provide any needs that they have in mind. Finally, participants were asked to provide any recommendations they have for other practitioners in order for their experiences with using humor to be more successful in the future. The detailed interview questions are included in the appendix of this study.

**Setting.** The research took place in different settings to accommodate researcher and participant preferences. The first setting was online interviews through Zoom, a virtual conference software, which was used with 5 participants. The second interview setting was one-to-one in the office of the participant, which was used with 1 participant. All the participants were either in the US or Egypt because the study focused on the experiences of participants in those two countries.

### ***Data Analysis***

According to Richards, (2016), data analysis is the phase when the data is gathered and analyzed to be able to identify themes and build a futuristic vision of what these themes indicate. In this study, the transcribed interviews are analyzed by the researcher and the advisor to work on the themes development. In this phase, ideas and thoughts mentioned by multiple participants are discovered, also nonconforming ideas and inputs shared by participants are necessarily appreciated and highlighted too.

The data analysis phase is preceded by the following two coding techniques, Open coding and axial coding. During open coding, data is broken down and classified by assigning codes to discover emerging themes. Glaser and Strauss (2017) explained that open coding is basically examining data, comparing ideas, encounters and views, then highlighting their properties and elements. Axial coding is the phase of connecting codes from different participants together, to build a wider understanding of the data. Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008) stated, "axial coding involves examining how categories relate to each other, including exploring causal conditions, strategies, consequences, and contextual conditions that surround them." (p. 122). When following open coding then axial coding, it gives a clear process to qualitative data analysis that ensures identifying patterns and themes that emerge from the data. In open coding, the researcher kept codes very close to the primary record, using participants words and phrases. This was specifically done by rephrasing participants' answers without any sort of analysis at this point. In later phases of analysis, these primary open codes were axial coded to develop the themes and sub-themes that explain the data within and across interviews. These emergent themes and sub-themes were confirmed in discussions with the chair of this thesis.

### ***Findings and Recommendations***

This is the phase that Richards, (2016) elaborated as the phase where the results of the analysis are shaped and the directions are made accordingly. This study went through this phase as the findings were developed based on the analysis and themes building of the interviews' transcription. This is followed by presenting the recommendations of the study building on the findings analysis. In this phase, a comparative approach is used when comparing the experiences of practitioners in Egypt and The United States. This is to ensure highlighting any mutual and different views in these two countries across the same educational contexts that the study explored.

### ***Study Limitations***

This phase focuses on the challenges faced regarding the research and how to overcome them. (Cooperrider, Stavros, and Whitney, 2008) Pointed out that this phase is intended to lead to an ongoing process of development and change. Accordingly, this study provided the study limitations and recommendations for future similar research to ensure better results in the future.

### **Method Limitations**

A main limitation in this appreciative inquiry study is that the results are not generalizable. As appreciative inquiry studies are context-specific, the results cannot be assumed to be applicable generally. Supporting this, Bushe, G. R. (2007) elaborated how appreciative inquiry research data only represents the context it appeared in, because each context is specific to its dynamics, culture, and history.

Also due to the sample size and demographic and geographic limitations, the results only represent the views of the participants and cannot be assumed to be the views of the whole community of adult education practitioners in Egypt or the United States. The results can only give an indication of what might be the experiences of some of the adult education practitioners in Egypt and the United States with humor.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Protection of human subjects was carefully considered in this study. An approved IRB was prepared for this study, with the number 23-3845. Beside this, the researcher did not perceive any risks in involvement as participants volunteered and their identities were protected. This is to make sure that participants are comfortable and encouraged to share their perceptions and views. Participants had the full freedom to stop their participation at any point, or to reject answering any of the interview questions.



This chapter started by introducing the theory behind the methodology followed in this study. The chapter then discussed the process in which appreciative inquiry was followed to develop this research. The study then ended by elaborating the limitations associated with the method and the procedures considered for the protection of human subjects. The next chapter will discuss in detail the data analysis phase, regarding the emerging codes and themes, and how results of different interviews were connected to learn more about the experiences of adult education practitioners using humor in Egypt and the United States.

## **Chapter 4: Analysis**

### **Introduction**

This study was driven by my intentions of developing a guide for adult education practitioners on how to use humor in their work. Exploring adult education practitioners' experiences with using humor stands on an understanding of pertinent literature and my own experience and the interviews conducted and analyzed for this study. The research question is: what are the experiences of adult education practitioners with using humor in the US and Egypt? Also the sub questions are as follows:

- 1- What are their experiences as adult learners?
- 2- What are their experiences using humor as adult educators?
- 3- What might help in making their experiences using humor as educators better?
- 4- What are their recommendations about using humor for other practitioners?

The data was gathered by interviewing six adult education practitioners, 3 in Egypt, 3 in the United States who matched the criteria of the research regarding their experiences, and contexts of adult education practices. Resulting themes and related sub themes are discussed in detail in this chapter. Also all nonconforming data that does not fit neatly into patterns is highlighted. Conclusions connect the emerging data to the research questions.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the interviews is the source of data of the analysis process. Using open coding, I worked on the coding of each interview and on identifying codes and insights. Then using axial coding, I developed connections between different interviews, to be able to identify repetitive codes and build themes. I discussed my major themes and sub-themes with fellow researchers, and specifically my thesis chair. The coding aimed to study how participants answered the main research questions, enabling me to outline how participants lived their experiences with humor in adult education. My interpretation of the

data is from an insider-outsider stand point. As an adult education practitioner myself for the past nine years, I have an insider understanding of adult education experiences in both Egypt and the United States. However, I approached the data analysis with an awareness of my personal biases or views. I attempted to ensure that I did not mistake assumptions for understanding by asking participants clarification questions in the interviews. For example, when participant Egypt01 said, “ unsuccessful humor for me means that someone had a bad experience because of my usage of humor. They took a negative aspect to it” I asked this question, “So for you humor did not work means that someone got offended or had a bad experience.” I asked him this question to make sure I understood his perspective properly, so that anytime I refer to this finding, I am sure and aware that it is exactly what the participant meant to say.

Also to further protect from bias when analyzing the data, I utilized direct quotes from participants when introducing or discussing any emerging overarching themes or sub-themes. Quoting participants ensures that themes and sub-themes are built based on participants' shared perceptions, ideas and experiences without relying on any of my personal biases or views. However, having an experience within the researched context helped in interpreting the collected data and identifying emerging themes.

The data collection process tried to highlight several aspects in the interviews, which later helped shape the main themes in data analysis. These aspects are as follows:

- 1- xperiences with Humor as Learners.
- 2- Experiences with Humor as Educators.
- 3- Adult education practitioners need for a better usage of humor in the future.
- 4- Adult education practitioner recommendations for a better usage of humor in the future.
- 5- Nonconforming Data.

## 6- Comparative Analysis of Egypt and the United States.

Table 1

*Data Themes and Subthemes*

No.	Research Area	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Experiences with humor as a learner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amount of usage matters</li> <li>- Offensive humor negatively impacts</li> <li>- Affective humor positively impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amount of usage matters:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) under usage of humor has negative impacts</li> <li>B) balanced usage of humor is positive</li> <li>C) Overuse of humor has negative impacts</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2	Experiences with humor as an educator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Successful usage of humor</li> <li>- Unsuccessful usage of humor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Successful usage of humor:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) Simplifies and facilitates learning</li> <li>B) Increases engagement and comfort</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3	Adult education practitioners needs for a better usage of humor in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge resources</li> <li>- Comic banks</li> </ul>	No emerging sub-themes
4	Adult education practitioner recommendations for a better usage of humor in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know your audience</li> <li>- Don't use any risky humor</li> <li>- Balance and use it with any audience</li> </ul>	No emerging sub-themes

		- Creative confidence	
5	Nonconforming data	- Educator's reputation  - Learning environment energy  - Leaving an impression with educators	No emerging sub-themes
6	Comparative Analysis: Differences in Egyptian and United States Participant Responses	No emerging sub-themes	No emerging sub-themes

Under each main research area, came the analysis of participants' inputs regarding that area. Accordingly, repeated and similar sharings were highlighted. Then, themes and sub-themes were built accordingly. Also unique answers and opinions were highlighted and mentioned, to make sure that the analysis took into consideration all the transcribed data.

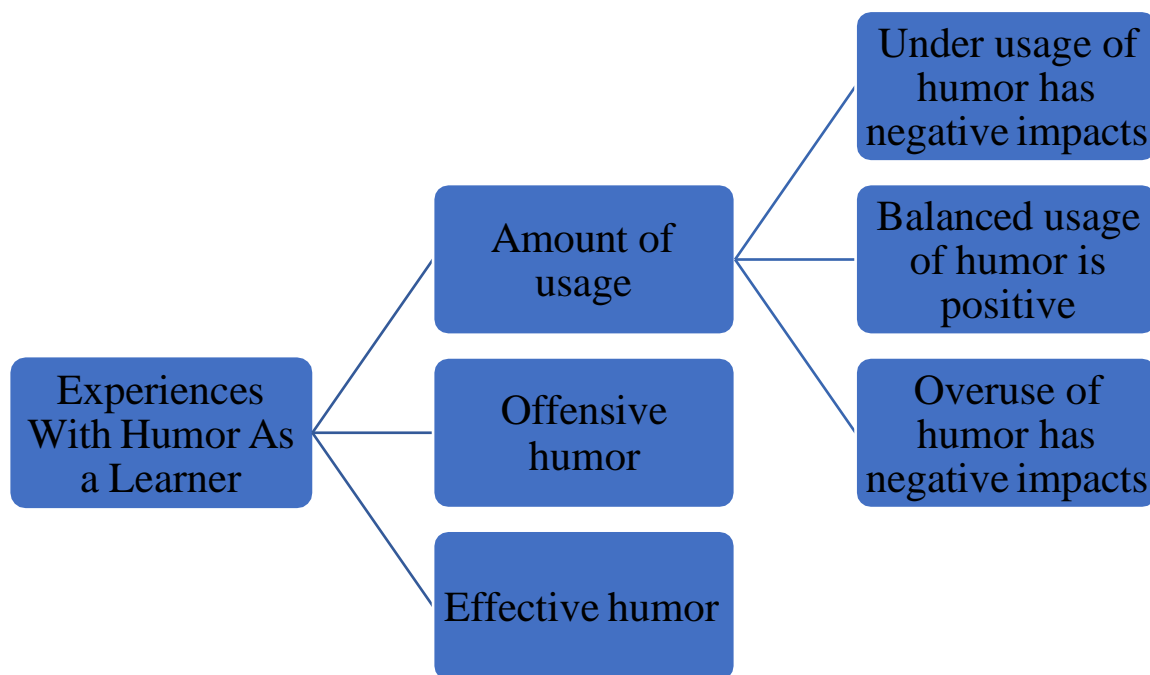
The analysis started by looking at each interview separately, while analyzing the primary record and “open coding” that had little interpretations. Then, connections were built between data from all the interviews, to find repeated inputs. For example, the word “risk” was used by multiple participants to describe the usage of humor by adult education practitioners. Also the word “overuse” appeared through different interviews when discussing the imbalance that might happen when using humor in adult education. A handful of other sub-themes and similarities will be highlighted when going through each theme. The coding process also took into consideration comparing the data collected from Egypt and The United States, to highlight if there were differences in the experiences between the two countries.

Also the differences between industries and contexts where the adult education experiences happened were taken into account.

### ☉☉ Experiences with Humor as Learners

Figure 3

*Experiences With humor As a Learner*

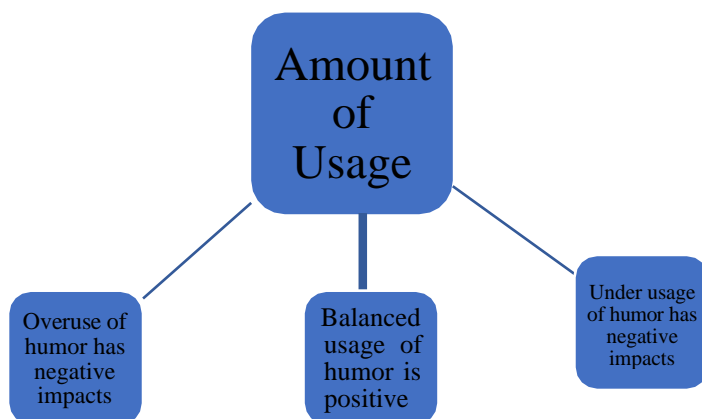


Experience with humor as a learner refers to the experiences of the interviewed participants with humor in adult education as learners who attended an educational activity. This is to understand how they, from an adult learner perspective, perceive the usage of humor by their educators. Participants were asked about their positive experiences with humor as learners and their negative experiences too.

#### ***Impact of The Amount of Usage of Humor***

Participants described their experiences as learners regarding the amount in which humor was used. The findings regarding the amount of usage of humor came under three main sub-themes:

Figure 4

*Amount of Usage Theme and Subthemes*

**Under Usage of Humor Has Negative Impacts.** When participants were asked the question: Talk to me about a time when the educator used humor and it worked, participants used words such as “dry”, “Boring” and “monotonic” to describe adult learning experiences they encountered in which the educator did not use humor, or where humor was underused. The data also suggested that such lack of usage of humor led to building a negative impression about the whole learning experience. When discussing his experience as an adult learner, participant Egypt02, “ the session itself was dry and boring, to the extent of hating the whole experience. Similarly, when recalling a time when he hated the learning experience, participant Egypt01 said “I can recall a time when this led to me hating the whole learning experience. There was one time in a very boring course, it was a month ago, she was very monotonic and did not rely on humor at all, ” In both cases, participants explained how the lack of usage of humor affected their learning experience. Not using humor enough also led to them “hating” the learning experience as a whole. This highlights, from the perspective

of these participants in this study, how humor is an essential tool that can affect how adult learners perceive the learning experience generally. Specifically, the lack of usage of humor might build a negative impression within learners regarding their learning experiences.

**Balanced Usage of Humor is Positive.** Participants appreciated the use of humor even if it was not necessarily funny. For example, participant Egypt03 said, “it is okay if a joke did not work, if the joke was not funny, it is not a problem, at least they tried. As long as it is not offensive or to make fun of someone.” Similarly, participant US02 stated, “I would never hold it against somebody for telling humor that didn't land, it is actually a good thing that they tried.” In these instances, even bad jokes are appreciated, or in essence, the attempt itself of humor use was appreciated even if the joke was not funny. Yet the participant Egypt03 quote above suggests there are boundaries for using humor. When humor is offensive or makes fun of someone, it potentially can be damaging and be harmful. So clearly, from the perspective of this participant, there are healthy boundaries around when someone uses humor and there are lines one should not cross. This is because crossing these lines leads to negative impacts, instead of the positive outcomes of using humor in adult education.

**Overuse of Humor Has Negative Impacts.** Looking at the extreme case of spectrum of the amount in which humor was used, multiple participants elaborated that overusing humor distracts them as learners. For example, participant Egypt02 said, “ I remember one time when the trainer stressed on using humor all the time even in the visuals, which was too much for me, it distracted me instead of helping me to learn.” The participant's quote suggests that using too many humorous elements did not help them to learn, and it did the opposite by interrupting his learning experience. Also it was highlighted that if the educator focused on making a joke work more than keeping up with the main topic if it did not work, this disturbed their learning experience. For example, when describing some educators'



behavior towards using humor, participant US01 shared, “If they've been taught or told that they need to interject humor, they get sidetracked from the main purpose of this educational activity.” Again, this illustrates that humor should serve as a tool that helps learners during their learning experience. Accordingly, the usage of humor should be considered in regards to giving the audience a positive learning experience that helps them reach their learning goals as adult learners.

### ***Impact of Offensive Humor***

Participants all agreed that it is critically important for them as learners not to be attacked or offended, it was also highlighted that even if the humor is offensive to someone else, it still leaves a negative impression in all learners about the educator. Participant Egypt01, when discussing a situation in which the educator used a misogynistic joke, “It was wrong and very out of place.” It is clear that even though the offensive joke the educator said was not about the participant, yet he had a negative impression about the situation. Also it was mentioned that learners feel more comfortable when humor is about situations and not about them as people. Participant Egypt02, when telling a story when the educator offended another learner, “you don’t put the center of humor on a person, maybe an act or a situation but not a person.” This indicates that it is important not to joke about learners by any means. It also shows that learners are more comfortable when humor and jokes are about situations, but not about them directly. The two mentioned examples above clarify that from the perspective of the participants, jokes should not address people directly. Also, participants think that despite being offended by the educator or if the educator offended other learners, this gives a negative idea about the educator, and it also leads to learners being uncomfortable in the learning environment.

### *Impact of Effective Humor*

All participants shared different insights on how successful use of humor had positive impacts on them as learners. The word “comfortable” was used multiple times to address how humor created a comfortable learning experience for them. When describing a positive learning experience with humor, Participant Egypt02 stated, “I feel that I learnt in an easier and more comfortable way.” Also it was mentioned that humor actually enhanced their learning and helped them memorize the content better. Participant US01 stated that “whether it's personal humor or related stories that are shared during a learning, I tend to remember the material better.” The participant here clearly states that she memorized the taught material better when the educator used jokes and humor successfully. Participants perceive successful usage of humor as a helpful tool for them in learning and understanding the content more.

It was also mentioned that successful use of humor makes the learner “enjoy” the experience, even if the technical content turned out to be not that appealing. Or even if the learner had a negative impression about the educator before the learning experience. Participant Egypt01, when describing how his negative impression about the educator changed after the session, said:

I attended a coaching program with him for 3 months, I found him to be very likable and used humor very nicely during the course, while on a personal level I find him to be very boring and uncomfortable for me, I see that he developed a sense of humor as a trainer but not as a person.

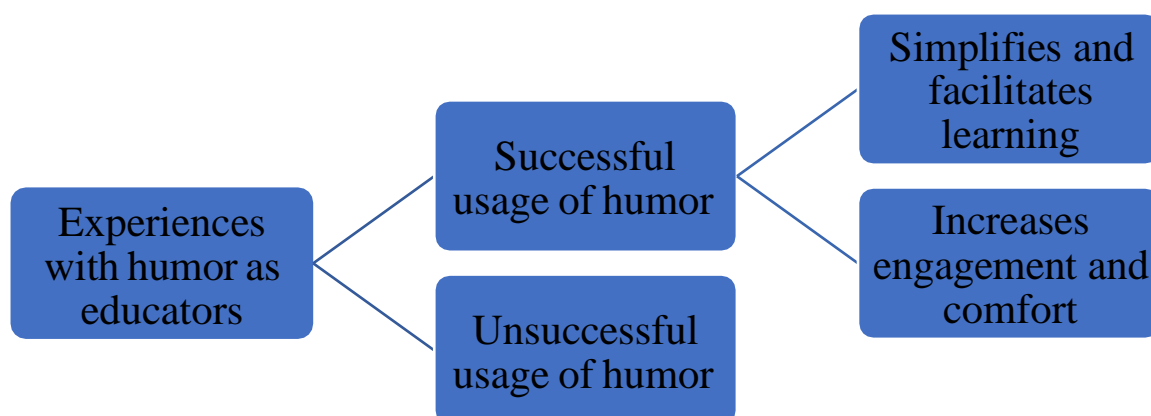
In this situation, the participant elaborated how even a negative impression about the educator changed after they used humor successfully in the learning context. Also the participant had a positive impression about the learning experience and the educator, regardless of his opinion that the educator might not be as humorous outside of the learning setting. From the participants point of view, when humor is used successfully, it led to

enjoying the learning and having a comfortable learning experience, even if the content is not appealing , or they already had low expectations about the educators. Participants' impression about the learning activity was promising and positive when humor was used successfully.

### **Experiences with Humor as Educators**

Figure 5

*Experiences as Educators Themes And Subthemes*

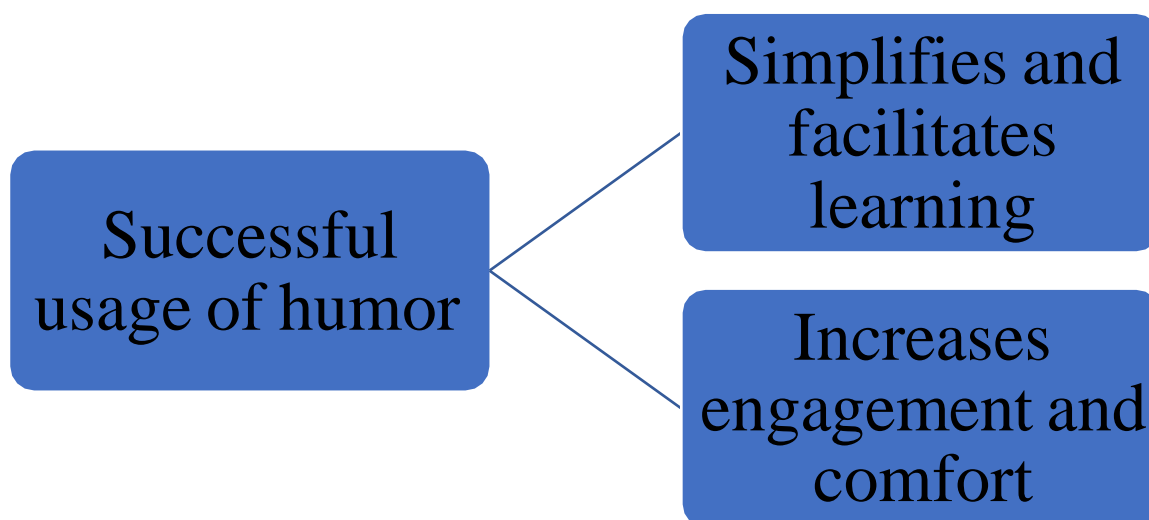


Another area of inquiry in this study was the experience of humor as educators, which refers to the experiences of the interviewed participants with humor in adult education as educators who worked on an educational activity. This is to understand how they, from an adult educator perspective, experience and perceive the usage of humor and its impact on them and the learners. Participants were asked about both their positive and negative experiences with humor as educators.

### ***Successful Usage of Humor***

Figure 6

*Successful Usage of Humor*



Participants' inputs about using humor positively and successfully as educators emerged under three main perceptions:

**Simplifies and Facilitates Learning.** 5 out of 6 participants referred to humor as a tool that helps simplify the learning when using relatable stories that are within the context of the learning or in a similar context by using an example that the learner already understands to elaborate new information. For example, two participants, one from Egypt and one from the US, mentioned stories about how they simulate the processes they are explaining to the learners by using more simple and fun examples from life. Participant Egypt03 said "I used to give them a lot of examples from their favorite sports, which was usually football! Using these simulations were really helpful. It helped them understand and we also shared some jokes about football teams."

When the participant used examples from contexts that the learners already knew, it helped the learners understand the learning topic better. Participant Egypt03 also indicated in the mentioned quote that talking about a topic that the learners are interested in opened a space for them to bond and share some jokes about it. This clarifies how participants see the

impact of using the relevant examples and metaphors in adult education, and that it assists their learning. Relatable examples open a space to share something common and create a bond between adult learners and educators.

**Increases Engagement and Comfort.** Several responses from different participants showed that successful use of humor increased the level of engagement and comfort with their learners. Participants also shared how they believe that this positive impact affects the whole learning experience longer term. Participant US02, reflecting on an incident when she got positive feedback about the session being engaging and loved, “if they loved the learning, they're going to apply the learning. And once they apply the learning, they're gonna own that learning and it's gonna change who they are and how they deal with things in the future.” In this example, participant US02 explained a sequence that she sees of how using humor helps adult learners to be more engaged and to love the learning experience as a whole, then how this leads to them understanding the learning, then to using it in the future, all because of how the learning experience was engaging for them through the educator’s usage of humor.

Four out of six participants also highlighted that successful usage of humor breaks boundaries and borders between them and the learners, changing impressions that learners had about them as educators. Participant Egypt02, when telling a story when the learners underestimated him due to him being younger than them, mentioned that humor “was the channel that gave me a psychological edge that then allowed me to talk to them and them to listen, so then I was able to show them that I am experienced in what I am talking about.” As a facilitator, this participant recognized that he managed to deal with the negative impression that learners had before the learning experience, by using humor. The participant also explained how using humor gained him a psychological edge that made learners more open and receptive, then he was able to prove his quality of knowledge building on that psychological edge.

One participant mentioned that when humor was used with their employees, it helped them to go through tough situations, that included them being reported and facing deductions, yet when the evaluation and learning included humorous aspects, employees received it positively. So in this instance, the use of humor was a tool used when trying to provide constructive feedback in the workplace.

Four participants also highlighted how humor and laughter can be an indicators that learners are engaged and actively listening, especially in more formal and educator-centered settings. For example, participant US02 said, “if they're laughing, again, they're listening.” The participant here clearly connects between adult learners laughing and that it is a sign that they are listening and processing what the educator is saying.

### ***Unsuccessful Usage of Humor***

All participants shared inputs about their unsuccessful encounters with using humor as adult educators. However, all participants agreed that if people did not laugh, this is not considered unsuccessful. Negative usage of humor was referred to as when participants get offended, uncomfortable, distracted or hurt.

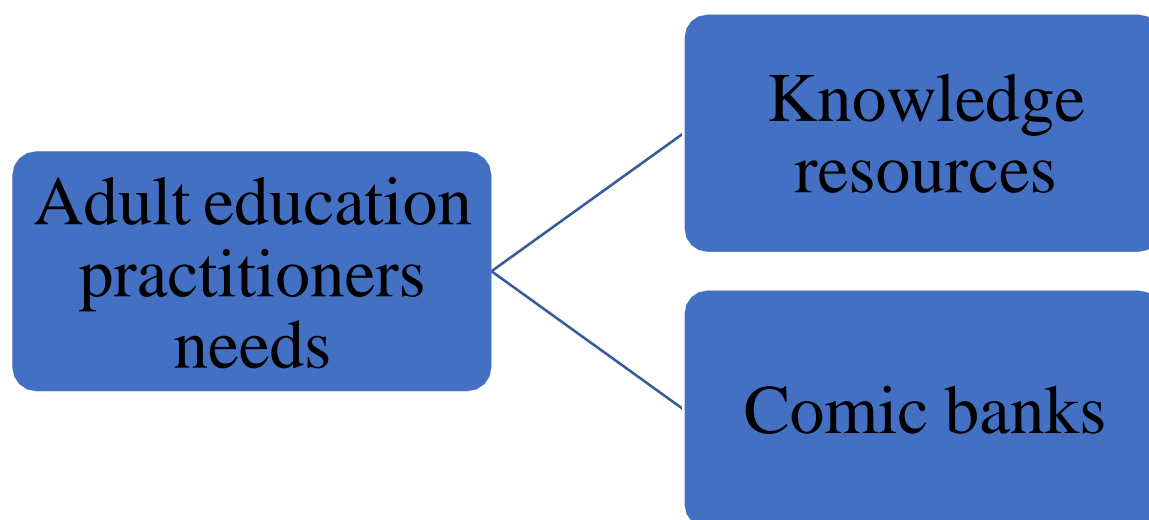
Three participants mentioned that when a joke is risking to be offensive or hurtful to anyone, even if it is not, it opens the door to any of the other learners to say a comment that will actually make it offensive or hurtful to other learners. Participant Egypt01 told a story when he said a comment about a specific brand during a session, then he said that “one of the audience asked another one “didn't you have one of their products.” It was wrong of me that I said something that might offend someone, I also risked that someone from the audience might build comments on the joke I said and these comments might offend others.” The participant’s quote mentioned gives an example of how a joke can lead to putting a learner in an uncomfortable situation by offending them or putting them under the spotlight. The participant also mentioned how using a risky joke, even if it did not affect any learner

directly, might lead to other learners saying something that might be hurtful to any of the audience. The lesson here is to stay away from harmful comments that might offend. In the next section, we will explore adult practitioner needs for the better use of humor.

### **Adult Education Practitioner Needs For a Better Usage of Humor in The Future.**

Figure 7

*Practitioners' Needs*



When participants were asked about what would make their usage of humor in their work better, the needs they mentioned were divided under two main categories, knowledge resources and comic banks. First, knowledge resources will be discussed.

#### ***Knowledge Resources***

Three participants, two from Egypt and one from the United States, mentioned that having enough resources that discuss the usage of humor in adult education would be helpful for them. All participants said the resources they had did not tackle humor in adult education specifically. However, resources were mentioned that discussed humor either in

general or in other disciplines. Participants adapted available resources for use in adult education. Participant US01 said, “We have over a thousand books in our resource collection for professional development. We have quite a few related to presentations, which would be similar to teaching. I don't think I can think of anybody who's tackled the humor part. That is part of the reason I was thrilled to have the opportunity to share.” The participant clearly pointed out how it is a challenge to find resources that directly discusses the usage of humor in adult education. She also explained that this was one of her motives to participate in this research, to talk about the topic of humor in adult education that suffers from a lack of resources. Clearly, from the perspective of this participant, there is an opportunity for books on humor that could be used and valued in adult education.

### ***Comic Banks***

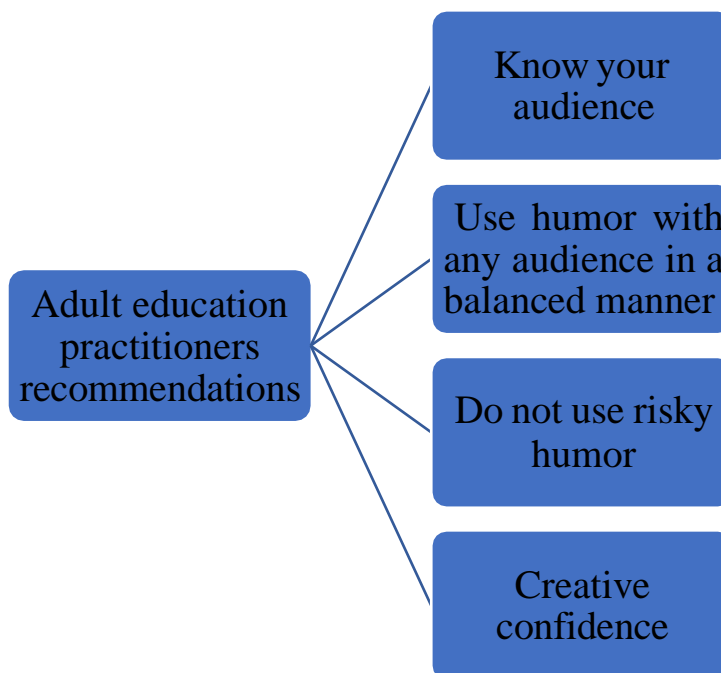
Two participants, from Egypt and the US, who work with nonprofits, highlighted that visual comics are a helpful aid and a great humorous element they use. They and another participant said it would be helpful to have a comics bank, an online source that has a lot of comics stored, that they can rely on when looking for supporting humorous visuals. Participant Egypt02 specifically highlighted that “if there is an online bank of comics useful for each generation that would help. Kahoot has GIFs but it is all western and some are not even funny. If we have something that is more Egyptian that would be great!”. Culturally appropriate materials and content for supporting humor integration would make humor easier, more accessible and more effective when developing adult education content. Again, this participant sees an opportunity and gap in culturally appropriate humor.



## Adult Education Practitioner Recommendations For a Better Usage of Humor in The Future.

Figure 8

### *Practitioners' Recommendations*



When participants were asked about their recommendations for other adult education practitioners regarding the usage of humor, a set of themes emerged: know your audience; do not use risky humor; balance; and creative confidence.

### ***Know your audience***

All participants highlighted that it is important for the humor to be relevant to the audience. For this to happen, you need to know your audience. Regarding meeting new learner's for the first time as an educator, Participant Egypt03 said:

It is pretty easy for the educator to gather some information about their learners. From the registration phase it can be done, we can simply ask them to specify some information, where they are from, their hobbies. I used to know everything about my

technicians, where they from, their previous experiences, what sports they like to watch. I used to rely on these things a lot when planning the content.

The participant here suggests that adult educators should put efforts in gathering information about their learners, to be able to use relatable examples and humorous aspects that they relate to and understand. This is important to link knowledge to adult learners with topics that they already understand.

Under the same idea of the humor being relevant to the audience, five participants mentioned that age and culture differences should be taken into consideration when planning and using humor. In essence, participant Egypt01 said,

I research a lot about what people relate to. If I use jokes from old movies with a young audience they won't relate to it. I don't rely on my own perception, but the perception of my audience. If they can't relate to it then what is the point, even stories that I share need to be relatable and understandable for the audience.

The participant here pointed out that relating the used humor to the audience and to make it understandable and relatable for them is more important than to relate to it as an educator.

The participant's quote also mentioned that if a joke is too outdated for the audience, it won't make them laugh. To prevent failing with using humor, the participant also mentioned that he puts a lot of effort into studying what would be funny and relatable for the audience, in order for the jokes to lead to a positive impact on their learning experience. In this sense, the recommendation is to be responsive to one's audience and that requires advanced planning in adult learning contexts.

### ***Use Humor with Any Audience in a Balanced Manner***

All Participants agreed that humor can be applicable and successful with any audience, regardless of age, culture or any other differences. The humor must match the audience. For example, participant Egypt03, "Humor needs to be used regardless of the

industry and context. The amount of humor you use will be different from one situation to the other, yet it must be used to an extent.” In a similar manner, participant Egypt02 stated:

Humor is always useful, never think that there is an audience that you can't use humor with at all. I worked with a lot of types of audiences and I am saying this based on experience. You just need to be conscious about the differences and choose the right humor. So you don't offend anyone and they understand and laugh about it. So have this balance and always use it.

This suggests that despite the context and atmosphere in which the educational activity is happening, humor should be used. participants' quotes also elaborated that the amount of jokes will be different from one learning experience to another, yet adult educators should use humor to a suitable extent. It is also important to state that across all the data from all the interviews, it was not mentioned once that there is a specific type of audience that humor should not be used with. One participant elaborated more about their experience working with the military, and how even such a strict and serious context had a way better learning experience when humor was used successfully.

However, it was mentioned by all participants too, that humor should only be used within an extent that does not disturb learning, or affects the seriousness of the learning or the learner's perspective of the educator. Participant Egypt02 used the phrase “assertive yet funny” to describe the impression they always wish to leave on learners. The participant here indicates that it is essential to establish a balance by adult educators between using humor and being serious, in order for humor to be beneficial to the learning instead of playing a negative role in the learning experience. Also participant US03 said that when an adult education practitioner senses that they overused humor “You just move on and you don't crack as many jokes anymore.” In this quote, the participant elaborates how adult educators should react when they sense that humor started to play a negative role by distracting

learner's, by moving on with the content, as self-regulation is needed in such situations. This highlights how from the participant perspective, it is important to always focus on and prioritize the learning and not the jokes.

***Don't use any risky humor***

All participants agreed that it is okay if a joke did not make the learners laugh, and that humor is actually unsuccessful if it offended or hurt any learner. Accordingly, all participants agreed that adult education practitioners should not use humorous content that might have a negative impact on any learner, or that the joke is offensive to anyone. Also it was recommended not to risk by using humor that might open a space for learners to comment in a way that might hurt other learners.

All of these risky uses of humor were suggested to be prevented by all the participants. Participant US03 highlighted that even with an on spot situation that happens during the experience that might seem funny, we need to be careful and make sure that the person in the situation is fine with it before we take it humorously. She specifically stated that "whoever is talking, maybe before laughing, really think about how that person would feel." This participant stressed the importance of position-taking with the audience prior to using humor, and also suggested trying to predict how the humor will land with audience members. Also participant Egypt01 shared a strategy that he uses in that sense "I normally rely on facial reactions to get the audience buy in, if they are engaged and laughing I can go on and say the joke, I rely on their reactions, the buy-in is very important." This participant explains how he makes sure that the learners he is talking to are receiving the joke positively by noticing their facial expressions, before moving on with the joke. This is to make sure that learners are comfortable and accepting the jokes he is using with them.

### *Creative Confidence*

One of the most repetitive and eye opening themes that evolved from the interviews, was the idea that humor requires risk taking, and that it is okay if sometimes people did not laugh. Five participants mentioned that mastering using humor in adult education is a learning journey that requires courage and practice. Participant Egypt01 referred to it as “creative confidence.” He also elaborated:

A lot of people feel scared to experiment, I would say that confidence affects a lot of aspects, it affects your willing to try, your fear from not succeeding with the humor or that people won't laugh, creative confidence is about being fine with trying and not succeeding, if I used a meme in a slide and I did not get the reaction I expected it is okay and I try something else. If I feel that something is risky, actually no not risky, but if it might or might not make them laugh, it is okay I can try it and experiment.

Participant US02 related to how in other situations, people have the freedom and space to try and fail sometimes, and that the same should be done with educators' usage of humor:

Nobody sits at a pediatrician or daycare or any place where you see one year olds learning to walk and yells at the kids who fall. Never, in fact it's adorable and we love it. We expect them to fall. So using improvisation means using failure as an opportunity to develop, a lot of times if you're failing, it means you're trying something new that's good.

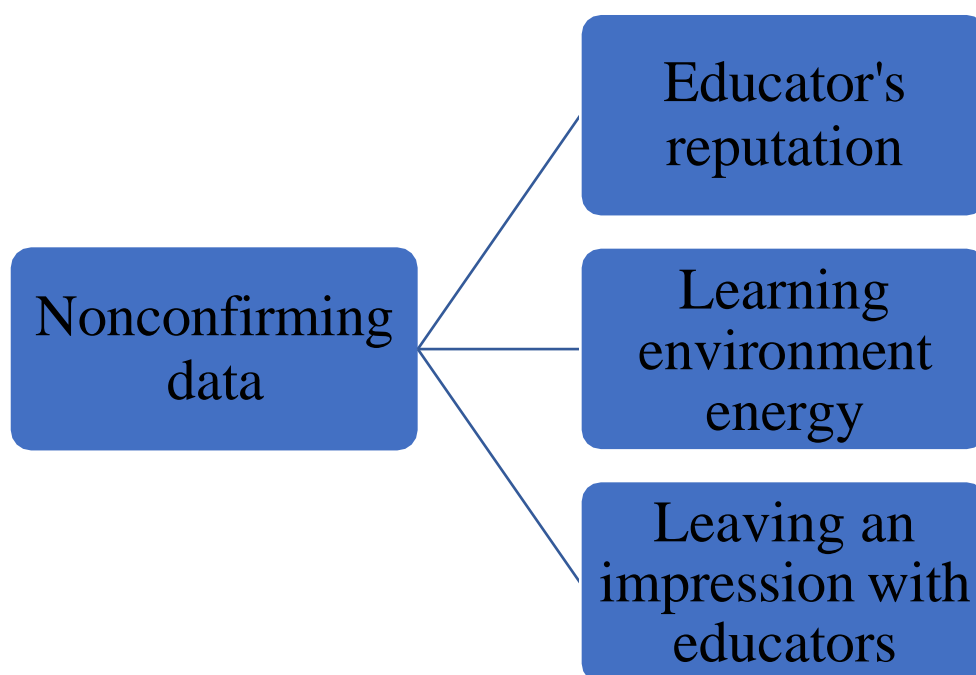
Participant US02 in this quote gives an example of how kids are always given the space to learn how to walk, and that it is never perceived as a negative when they fall. The participant then connected between this and the experience of improvising while using humor, and that adult educators should perceive using humor as a learning journey, in which they will fail sometimes which should not be perceived negatively. This indicates how participants see

taking the risk of using humor as an experience that has a margin for failure sometimes, and that it should be normalized and praised when educators try to use humor, because even if they fail, they learn.

### **Nonconforming Data**

Figure 9

#### *Nonconforming Data*



Beside these common themes, some participants shared ideas and thoughts that were not mentioned by others, however it is important to highlight them too. These nonconforming data themes include: an educator's reputation; learning environment energy, and leaving an impression with educators.

#### ***Educator's Reputation***

Participant Egypt01 highlighted that it is important for an educator to have a reputation regarding their knowledge and experience, rather than having a reputation of being humorous:

Usually we hear about a trainer that is respectful, knowledgeable. But rarely do you hear about someone to be funny. But definitely I would prefer to know that the trainer is funny during the session, because I think it puts a lot of high expectations on the trainer if you come up with the idea that they are funny.

This elaborates how participant Egypt01 prioritizes adult educators to be known for their knowledge in their fields of experience, instead of being known for being good with using humor, he elaborated that having a reputation of being humorous can lead to learners having over expectations of how humor will be used in the learning experience even before it starts. Such a point of view was only shared by this participant.

### ***Learning Environment Energy***

Participant Egypt02 related how it is more risky to use humor with young learners than adult learners, because young learners might have a misunderstanding of the learning environment energy if you used too much humor with them. This might lead to them disrespecting the relationship boundaries between them and their educators by joking too much, or by being disrespectful by any way or another to their peers or educators. It might also lead to them getting distracted than the main topic or knowledge discussed. However, according to participant Egypt02, it is less risky with adult learners:

With young learners, a learner might joke too much with you because you told a joke. To use a slang language with you for example. If someone crossed the barriers because they did not understand the energy, I state it clearly that this is not the environment for this, this is a friendly environment but disrespect won't be tolerated. All of these things happened to me with younger age learners. Adults understand the energy better and they also attended intentionally so they don't tend to distract the learning too much. Adult learners have clear motives so they like when the

environment is fun but they don't take it to an out of control context. I never recall an incident with adult learners where this happened.

The participant here highlights how adult learners are less expected to be distracted from the learning when humor is used, this is because they have clear learning needs that they are trying to gain. This highlights how there is a minimum risk of distracting adult learners when using humor properly.

### ***Leaving an Impression with Educators***

Participant US02 came up with a unique perspective based on an experience she had. Which is that a learner's positive reaction to humorous gestures by educators leaves a better impression about them with their educators. This is because laughing at their jokes means that they understand their way of communication properly, and that they are actually paying full attention, especially when the jokes are not very obvious or direct. She specifically said about her experience as a learner "At the end of the semester, the professor came to me and said I would like you to be a teacher assistant for my class for the next two semesters. I picked you because you did well in my class. And you laughed at my jokes." She then elaborated "if you don't understand my sense of humor, you probably won't understand what I'm talking about." The participant elaborated how her reaction to the educator's jokes by laughing led to building a positive impression about her attention and communication on the educator, which resulted in the educator perceiving a positive interaction and understanding with the learner. This shows how this learner's acceptance to the jokes affected her experience in a positive way.

### **Comparative Analysis: Differences in Egyptian and United States Participants Responses**

Looking at the experiences of adult education practitioners in Egypt and the United State, participants from the two different countries shared similar views regarding most of the



questions in the interview protocol. Looking at the themes and subthemes discussed in this chapter, it is clear that participants from the two countries shared similar perspectives in multiple encounters. However, there were some differences in the participants' views in some areas.

A perspective that was shared by participants in Egypt, was that there are topics in Egypt that are critical and should be used for humor. Participant Egypt01 said that “In Egypt, religion and politics are not topics to joke about”.

Also it was highlighted by participant Egypt03 that employees working in manufacturing and fulfillment industries in Egypt lack the organizational knowledge and professional skills. they might perceive the usage of humor the wrong way if not balanced with assertiveness all the time. He stated that:

Those who worked in systems before, they understand that they are responsible for their work. Regardless if you joke or not they understand that they have a job to finish. If this was always the case, I would not use the very strict and serious face I use. And I will use humor way more.

These are examples of cultural characteristics that participants from Egypt said they needed to take into account when planning to use humor with adult learners, whether regarding not to use humor about religion and political views, or regarding the lack of professionalism in specific industries that leads to humor being misunderstood in some cases. Those two cultural aspects were shared by participants from Egypt, yet participants from the US did not mention similar views. Accordingly, it is suggested for future studies to try to specifically ask participants from the United States about these specific issues, to discover whether or not they have different or similar views than what was shared by participants from Egypt in this study.

Also, Participant Egypt02 clarified how his experience with nonprofits work in Egypt involves working with more socially conservative communities, “more conservative communities are easier to get offended.” He also elaborated, “you should not joke about yourself too much in conservative communities, as it will affect their perception about you negatively.” However, Participant US02, also worked with nonprofits but in The US, said that “There's something to like, if you're gonna go so bad, if you're gonna allow them to laugh at you instead of with you, there's an acceptable level of laughing at you that you're like, I'm going for it.” This difference between participants’ experiences in Egypt and the United States, suggests that with further research, adult education activities within nonprofits in Egypt and the United States may have differences regarding the amount of humor to be used and whether or not to put the educator as the center of the joke.

### **Synthesis and Conclusion**

The chapter started with an elaboration of the process followed in this research, participants' details and the strategy of connecting their insights to the research questions. The themes of the analysis are covered.

The first explored area is the experiences of the participants as adult learners. Participants shared their thoughts about their perception of how different amounts of used humor affected their experiences. Whether humor made learners laugh or not, if it was used in a reasonable amount and that it did not offend or hurt, it was reported to have a positive impact on learners. However, when humor was under used, the learning experiences were boring and dry. Also when humor was over used, it distracted learners from the main objective of the educational activity. Also it appeared that humor left a negative impression when the humor was either offensive or hurtful to anyone. Humor reportedly could make learners feel uncomfortable. Such discomfort could be triggered by the educator’s humor during the learning intervention. When humor was used successfully, it led to enhancing

learning, improving memory of the content and making participants comfortable and motivated to learn.

As educators, when they used humor successfully, participants reported that it helped their educators understand the learnt topic better and it increased learners' engagement and comfort. Participants also highlighted that humor should be used with any type of audience, differently to match the needs of each type of learners and each atmosphere. Participants agreed that there are effective ways to use humor with all audiences. Participants agreed it is important to move on and move forward with the learning if a joke did not make the learners laugh. Some also mentioned that it is fine to laugh at yourself with learners if a joke did not land well. It appeared that, specifically in nonprofits educational settings, Egypt may be more conservative than the United States. Accordingly participants from Egypt and the US shared different thoughts and ideas about how humor should be used in such settings. While nonprofit related training in Egypt required the educator not to joke about themselves and to be extremely careful of not leaving a bad impression with learners by using humor more than needed, experiences with a nonprofit in the US offered more flexibility for the use of humor in the learning experience.

Interviewed practitioners agreed on two main points that would benefit adult educators in the use of humor. Having a comics online bank that has culturally appropriate comics suitable for Egypt and the US Also, having more resources that discusses the usage of humor in adult education specifically would be beneficial.

Recommendations for other practitioners effective use of humor included knowing your audience, avoiding risky humor, which is humor that might offend or hurt anyone, and using humor in a balanced manner to support achieving the positive results of humor on learners, while keeping control of the learning environment and not distracting learners. The strongest recommendation was to understand that using humor requires courage. Testing

humor with learners and accepting that effective use of humor is a continuous learning journey that will include failing sometimes and succeeding in others.

In the next chapter, connections between these findings and the literature will be elaborated, to provide a developmental perspective of how humor usage can be improved with adult learners. Also the faced limitations will be discussed, beside providing recommendations for future research studies aiming to explore the usage of humor with adult learners.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

This study is an effort to explore and understand the experiences of adult education practitioners with the usage of humor in Egypt and the United State, in order to establish a background knowledge to inform developing methodologies for using humor in adult learning contexts.

The main research question for this study was: What are the experiences of adult education practitioners with using humor in the US and Egypt? Also the sub questions were as follows:

- 1- What are their experiences as adult learners?
- 2- What are their experiences using humor as adult educators?
- 3- What might help in making their experiences using humor as educators better?
- 4- What are their recommendations about using humor for other practitioners?

Data were analyzed for themes and sub-themes. Findings suggest implications for practices, highlight limitations and recommendations for future studies.

### **Overview of Key Findings**

After the completion of the data collection and analysis, themes regarding the experiences of participants with humor as adult learners and educators emerged. Also, needs and recommendations of these adult learners were clarified. The findings take into consideration similarities and differences between the experiences in Egypt and the United States.

### ***Humor Enhances and Supports Learning***

The referenced literature in this research elaborated how humor plays a positive role in creating successful adult learning experiences by creating comfortable learning environments (Brandt, 2003) and by increasing learner's motivation (Boverie et al., 1994). Also according to the qualitative study conducted by Vanderheiden, (2021), humor has

positive impacts on the learning environment and learning outcomes. Looking at the participants' views in this study, all participants supported the above mentioned ideas. When referring to learning in an environment where the educator used humor, participant Egypt02 said, "I feel that I learned in an easier and more comfortable way." Also supporting the positive impact of humor on the learning outcomes, participant US01 stated, "whether it's personal humor or related stories that are shared during learning, I tend to remember the material better." Participant US02 also shared a perspective that supports both positive impacts suggested by Vanderheiden, (2021) of humor in adult learning, as she elaborated:

If they laugh they will love the learning, and if they love the learning, they're going to apply the learning. And once they apply the learning, they're going to own that learning and it's going to change who they are and how they deal with things in the future.

Both the literature and participants' perspectives support the idea of humor creating successful learning experiences for adult learners, by creating a motivating and comfortable learning environment, then by positively impacting adult learners' learning outcomes. Accordingly, it is suitable to suggest that using humor successfully and making adult learners laugh leads to creating a better learning experience for them, and to improving their learning achievements. Building on this established research and exploratory research in this study, adult education practitioners should perceive humor as a tool that can be used to develop their adult education activities.

### ***Humor Supports Knowles Assumptions of Andragogy.***

An emerging idea from this study participants, is how humor supports satisfying the Adult Learning Theory assumptions, this is elaborated as follows:

**Adult Learners Bring Their Experiences to The Learning.** According to Knowles (1977), adult learners bring their previous experiences and knowledge to the learning

environment. However, they need to be motivated and encouraged to share these experiences. In consonance with this, multiple participants shared how humor helped them to be more engaged and open during their adult learning experiences. Participant Egypt01 said, “In the spectrum of an educator that I enjoyed and was very funny to me, I was always more receptive to listening to a person like that, I had more willingness to engage and interact.” Similarly, when referring to the impact of humor on her as an adult learner, participant US02 stated, “I engaged in activities that I feel are giving me joy because I do enjoy learning.” In both situations mentioned here, participants related to how humor played a role in encouraging them to interact and engage in the learning, in a way that will allow them to share their experiences, which will benefit the whole learning experience. Looking at the cited literature and participants’ views it is reasonable to suggest that adult education practitioners might benefit from using humor as a stimulator for adult learners to share their prior knowledge and experiences, in a way that will create an interactive learning experience and enrich the whole adult learning activity.

**Adult learners Have Specific Learning Needs.** Another tenet of Knowles (1977) work, is that adult learners come to the learning context with specific learning needs. Accordingly, not satisfying these learning needs might lead to adult learners having a negative impression about the learning experience. Nevertheless, in this study, three participants elaborated how humor helped them have a positive learning experience, even if the content turned out to be not appealing for them. When referring to a specific positive experience as an adult learner, Participant Egypt02 told this story:

The trainer was shockingly humorous. Or it was shocking for me because it was the first time for me to know that in these professional and serious settings, people can still use humor and make the session dynamic. She actually used a specific joke in her intro that I still use till today. Regardless of the fact that even after this camp I still did

not like HR and thought it was not my area, however I still remember the trainer till today. And I loved the experience as a whole. This was literally the eye opener for me about the importance of humor regardless of how serious the setting is, and how impactful it can be even if the content is not that appealing for the audience.

In this encounter, the participant went through a learning experience in which he found that the content did not attract him or meet his expectations in terms of what views he had about the field of human resources. However, it is clear how humor had a positive impact on the participant quoted experience even if he did not find the content to be satisfying to his learning needs. Connecting Knowles's assumption with the participants' views, it can be recommended that educators use humor with adult learners. Using humor with adult learners might prevent the negative impact of having a negative impression about the whole learning experience if their learning needs are not fulfilled.

### ***Humor Helps Adult Learners When Dealing With Stressful Situations***

Thomas and Al Makati (1997) highlighted that humor is a way to prevent the negative impact of feedback on professionals. Also Boverie et al. (1994) elaborated that humor can change the approach of people on experiences they encounter from being negative and problematic to challenges that they are motivated and encouraged to solve. This study's participants supported these ideas. When telling a story about how she created a system for employees when something goes wrong, participant US02 said, "We're going to have punishment, sunglasses, you know what you did so go put on the sunglasses. You know you have to wear sunglasses now." She then elaborated, "Anytime you can just take something and change it a little bit, it's probably going to be amusing." In a similar manner, when dealing with his technicians' learning gaps, participant Egypt03 stated:

An example is that one time I wrote each mistake that he made on a sheet of paper, then I challenged the technician to try to throw each in the garbage can, and each



paper that he scores, I won't take action with him regarding it. The technician did not manage to get any of them in the basket, and we both laughed about it, he then sat down and attended the whole session. Then he actually got a deduction, yet he was laughing because he did not get any of the papers in the basket! At the same time after this when they improve their performance I had to praise that. Which made the equation balanced.

A participant also talked about a more challenging situation, when they expressed:

Even the toughest industry ever, which is the military, I used to work in the military for 2 years, and let me tell you that even though it is the least percentage of using humor among all industries, yet it was the most impactful. Within the high levels of stress that were there, and tough living conditions, humor that I used with my team had a huge impact on their mental and emotional wellbeing.

The three mentioned stories discussed how humor helped adult learners and professionals to deal with stressful and somehow threatening situations, either in an office atmosphere, a factory or even the military. Looking at participants' perspectives with respect to the literature, it is clear that both support the claim that humor helps dealing with stressful situations, especially when addressing adult learners' learning gaps or lack of required attitude, skill or knowledge.

Accordingly, adult education practitioners are advised to rely on humor when communicating with adult learners regarding learning challenges or insufficient knowledge, as it might decrease the stress and switch the learner's perspective from negative and destructive, to positive, productive and spirit lifting.

### ***Offensive And Hurtful Humor Negative Effect***

According to Brandt's (2003), hurtful or offensive use of humor can lead to fear and stress within learners. Brandt's (2003) also elaborated that when an educator makes any

attendee the center of a joke, it builds fear and discomfort with the rest of the learners, because they expect to be triggered by the educator in the upcoming encounters with humor during the learning activity. Addressing a similar idea, participant Egypt02 explained, “you don’t put the center of humor on a person, maybe an act or a situation but not a person.” Also participant Egypt01 referred to a situation when he had a negative impression even if the joke was not on him, “It was wrong and very out of place.” The literature and participant’s views agreed that it is essential not to make any learner the center of a joke, instead it is important for humor to always be about situations and shared experiences. It is also found that adult learners build negative impressions about learning experiences, even if the offensive humor was targeting other learners. Based on this, adult education practitioners might be able to create more comfortable and successful learning environments by preventing using humor that might risk offending or hurting any human being, in order for them to stave off the negative consequences of offensive and hurtful humor among all adult learners.

### ***Creative Confidence, Risk Taking, And Growth Mindset***

Using Humor includes the risk of not being well received by the audience, which can basically mean that adult learners do not laugh. According to Wilkins and Eisenbraun (2018), unsuccessful humor can negatively affect the speaker's perceived credibility and likability. In addition, if the audience did not react to the humor, it can negatively impact the speaker's motivation and self confidence, and lead to self-doubt (Meyer, 2018).

However, looking at the positive impact of successful humor mentioned in this research cited literature and participants’ views, using humor is a risk worth taking as long as it won’t offend or hurt any adult learner. All Participants of this research mentioned that it is beneficial to take the risk and use humor. Participant Egypt01 referred to the concept of creative confidence, which refers to the confidence and courage required when being innovative and creative. The participant explained how it is important to have the courage

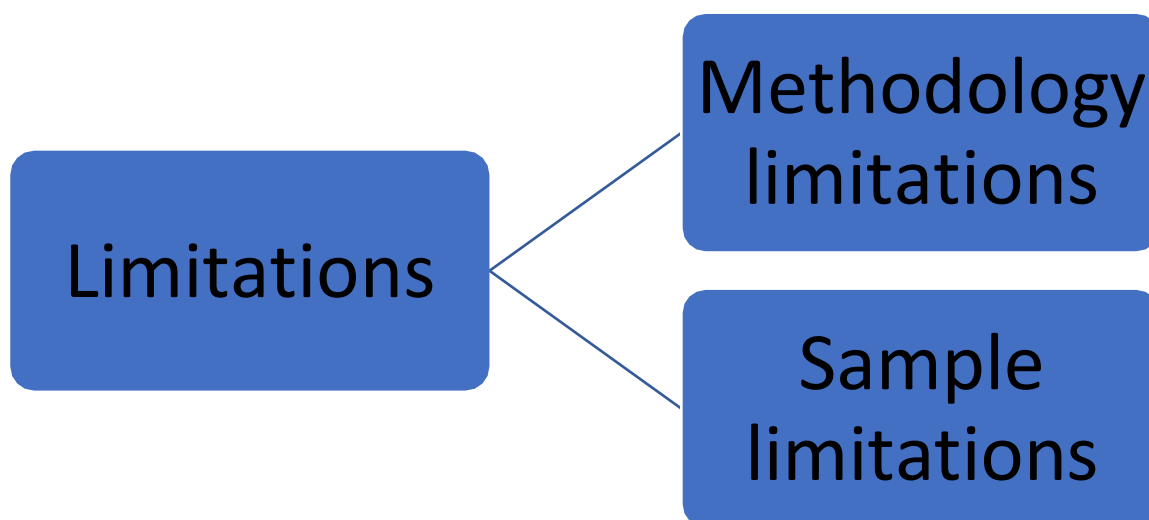
and take risks when using humor. Also participant US01 stated that it is important for educators to start using humor earlier in their careers, to be able to learn from their experiences and failures. Similarly, participant US02 said that improvisation and trying are the only ways to develop and improve with using humor as an adult educator, she also elaborated that it is important to give adult educators the space to fail and learn. This also connects to the idea of a growth mindset. According to Dweck, (2008), people with a growth mindset perceive challenges and failures as chances for improvement, and they display more dedication and triumph over obstacles and problems.

Looking at the literature regarding humor and risk taking, also the literature regarding growth mindset, then connecting literature with participant's perceptions, it is suitable to build a connection between the ideas of using humor, taking risks, having confidence and adopting a growth mindset. Humor is a creativity risk that requires courage and confidence, yet it is beneficial to give adult educators the space to take the risk and use humor, in order for them to be able to improve and develop their usage of humor. This is while maintaining a growth mindset that builds development and improvement on challenges and failed attempts. Accordingly, adult education practitioners are advised to perceive the risk of using humor, as long as it is not offensive or might hurt any learner, to be a risk worth taking. Also it might be good for them to adopt a growing mindset when looking at using humor in adult education, in order for them to learn from unsuccessful encounters, and capitalize on successful experiences with using humor with adult learners.

**Limitations:**

Figure 10

*Study Limitations*



Limitations of the study lied under two main areas. The first area is methodology, which refers to limitations related to the method and procedures of the research. The second area is regarding the sample of the study.

### ***Methodology***

A limitation due to time and physical location constraints of the researcher, is that it was not applicable for the researcher to observe the specific learning context of the experiences that the participants mentioned, and the contexts were only described through the sharings of the participants. Future researchers are advised to take the next step of observing and studying the learning contexts in addition to relying on participants' descriptions of them.

Regarding the methodology too, a limitation that the study faced is related to the interview questions asking about specific examples to be mentioned by the participants. In some incidents, it was challenging for participants to remember specific situations to tell right away, accordingly, it took them sometime to remember incidents and share them.

Accordingly it is recommended for future studies to share such questions with participants before the interviews, in order for them to recall relatable stories prior to the interview.

### ***Sample***

Another limitation is that the study was able to interview three participants from each country, classified as one participant from each adult learning context covered. Taking this into consideration, it was not applicable for the results to be generalized, and participants' different views between Egypt and the United States can not indicate clear or definite differences. However, participants' views can highlight interesting ideas and areas that might be more discovered and studied in the future, to be able to provide more clear and definite similarities and differences. This will also strengthen the context specific insights shared by participants from each context.

Beside this, the researcher was able to compare between the experiences of adult education practitioners in Egypt and the United States only. Future studies might work on wider samples that will open the space for comparing the experiences of adult educators in more than two countries.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

The study's main aim is to benefit the field of human resources development. Accordingly, it is important to provide recommendations for future research aiming to study the usage of humor with adult learners, to benefit the field of adult education and human resources

#### ***Observing Learning Environments If Possible***

It was mentioned earlier that I was not able to personally observe learning environments in which participants had their experiences. Looking for areas of development, it would be suggested for future researchers to personally observe the learning environments if possible. This is in order for them to get a more accurate and precise description of the studied adult learning contexts, as observations foster a better understanding of the circumstances where the experiences took place

#### ***Sharing Interview Questions with Participants***

It would also be suggested for future researchers to share interview questions with participants prior to the interviews. This is to help participants to recall and prepare specific examples and stories to share, instead of asking them on spot to bring up specific examples, stories and encounters from their past experiences, either as learners or educators.

### ***Increasing Sample Size From Each Country***

To be able to identify more patterns from within each studied culture, it is essential to increase the sample size in future studies, to be able to get multiple views from the same culture and adult learning context. This will provide space for more thematic analysis and more precise themes and subthemes to emerge. Patterns and trends could be identified and understood with a larger sample size. Accordingly, having a larger sample from each country will give space for more views to be discovered, and for the shared perspectives to be supported by more participants.

### ***Including More Countries in The Study***

Due to my physical location and connections, I was able to study the experiences of participants of two countries only. However, Future researchers might consider including more countries and cultures in the study, to be able to explore and discover patterns and themes across multiple countries from different continents too, if possible. Including more cultures will also open the space for cross-comparison, as findings from each country will be compared with findings from every other country the study covered.

### ***Expanding in Nonconforming Data of This Study***

It would be recommended for future studies to expand and invest more time in exploring the areas of the three non-conforming data themes that emerged in this study. Accordingly, as the first nonconforming data of this study, it is recommended to expand more in studying how educator's reputation within learners might affect how they perceive this adult education practitioner. Also, it is advised to invest more time and efforts in researching

how adult learners understand learning environment energy, and how they deal with maintaining the energy, not getting distracted and keeping a suitable interaction and relationships with their adult educators. Regarding how educators perceive and react to learners' reactions to their humor, it is an area that might be explored in more depth, and studying this might highlight how learners motivate educators when they laugh at their humor.

It would also be recommended if future studies can expand more by including more participants from each adult learning context in each country, which will enrich context specific insights, because this study interviewed only one participant from each context in each country. This means that the study only included one participant from a manufacturing related context, one from a corporate office context and one from a nonprofit context in each country. This led to context related perspectives from each country to be provided by only one participant. Accordingly, interviewing more than one participant from each context in each country will lead to context specific views to be more supported and weighed.

## **Conclusion**

Humor is a commonly used tool by adult educators. Yet there are not enough resources or methodologies that describe how to use humor beneficially with adult learners. I started this study as a base for me and other adult education scholars in the future to build on and develop a methodology regarding using humor in adult learning. The study explores the views and previous experiences of adult education practitioners in Egypt and the United states, with respect to the available literature regarding adult learning theory, humor in adult education, and humor across different cultures.

By connecting findings from literature with participants' perspectives and experiences, the study discovered how humor plays a role in shaping the learning environment for adult learners, and has an impact on the learning outcomes too. The study

also discovered that using humor, when not offensive, with adult learners motivates them to share their ideas and views. It was also highlighted that offending any learner or any human being in general with humor leads to negative consequences on learners, by increasing stress and fear within learners. Humor is a risk worth taking, with any audience. Literature cited in this study and the participants pointed out how taking the risk of using jokes, while adopting a growth mindset, leads to educators developing and improving their usage of humor in their work.

Working on this study highlighted perspectives and ideas that were not visible for me previously, regarding how learners receive humor positively, even if the joke is not funny. Also that offensive humor can leave a negative impression on all learners if a joke was offensive or hurtful to any human being, not only the offended individuals. Beside this, the concept of creative confidence was new to me, and how using humor should be perceived as a learning journey instead of being born with talent.

The field of adult education and human resources development might benefit from these findings when developing and delivering learning experiences for workforce adult learners. Also when working on a methodology that helps practitioners benefit from humor as a tool that enriches learning experiences and long term results, in a way that was artistically elaborated by one of the study participants:

If they laugh they will love the learning, and if they loved the learning, they're going to apply the learning. And once they apply the learning, they're going to own that learning and it's going to change who they are and how they deal with things in the future.



## **Appendix A-Participation Email**

Hello!

My name is Mohamed Serry. I am a graduate student at JMU in the M.S.Ed. Adult Education and Human Resource Development Program. I am conducting research for my master's thesis. The purpose of my research is to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of adult education practitioners in Egypt and the United States with using humor in their work. If you are an adult education practitioner, then you are eligible to participate in this study. This study is approved with the IRB number: 23-3845

If you meet the criteria and wish to participate in this research, your participation will consist of a semi-structured interview, which will last from 45 to 60 minutes. So, in total, participation in this study will require approximately 1 hour of your time. If you are a participant from Egypt, the interview will take place in MQR, Cairo Governorate 11865, Egypt. If you prefer to meet online then it will be through Zoom. If you are a participant from the US, the interview will take place in Holland Yates Hall, on JMU's campus. Nevertheless, if you find Zoom more convenient, it will be taken into consideration.

You will be interviewed regarding your experience with using humor as an adult education practitioner. The interview will be audio recorded even if it will be conducted in-person or through Zoom for transcription purposes. If you do not want to be audio recorded, I will take notes using pen and paper instead. The interview will be using the language of your choice from either English or Arabic.

All the data I gather from the interviewing process and notes will be kept confidential and only I will be able to identify your information. If at any time you wish to stop participating in the study, you can do so immediately upon request.

Your participation will help me explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of using humor in adult education in Egypt and the US, and it will help enrich the HRD literature.

There are no perceived risks to you from this study.

Please kindly read this email thoroughly and reach out back to me with your decision. If you confirm to participate in this study, I will provide you with a consent form which you should sign and send it back to me. Your prompt response is greatly appreciated!  
I have IRB approval from JMU, and my protocol number is 23-3845.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me for more information:  
Serryma@dukes.jmu.edu

Thank you very much!

Kind regards,  
Mohamed Serry.

## **Appendix B-Participation Consent Form**

Consent to Participate in Research Identification of Investigators & Purpose of Study.

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Mohamed Serry from James Madison University. The purpose of this study is to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of adult education practitioners in Egypt and the United States with using humor in their work. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of her master's thesis. The study is approved with the IRB number:

### **Research Procedures**

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of a semi-structured interview, which will last from 45 to 60 minutes. If you are a participant from Egypt, the interview will take place in MQR, Cairo Governorate 11865, Egypt. If you prefer to meet online then it will be through Zoom. If you are a participant from the US, the interview will take place in Holland Yates Hall, on JMU's campus. Nevertheless, if you find Zoom more convenient, it will be taken into consideration.

You will be interviewed regarding your experience with using humor as an adult education practitioner. The interview will be audio recorded even if it will be conducted in-person or through Zoom for transcription purposes. If you do not want to be audio recorded, I will take notes using pen and paper instead. The interview will be using the language of your choice from either English or Arabic.

### **Time Required**

Participation in this study will require approximately 1 hour of your time. The interview will take no longer than 45 to 60 minutes.

### **Risks**

The investigator does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

### **Benefits**

Potential benefits from participation in this study include helping to inform the field of human resource development regarding the experiences of using humor in adult education in Egypt and the United States. There are no direct benefits to the participant, however, the interviews might be an opportunity to reflect on your experiences with the usage of humor.

### **Incentives**

You will not receive any compensation for participation in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The results of this research will be presented to the researcher's research committee and may be published in academic journals and presented in conferences. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. When the results of this research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches up individual respondents with their answers including audio recordings will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

### **Participation & Withdrawal**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

### **Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study, or after its completion or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Researcher's name: Mohamed Serry

Department: Learning, Technology and Leadership Education

James Madison University

Email address: Serryma@dukes.jmu.edu

Phone number: +1-540-236-1535

Advisor's name: Dr. Edward Brantmeier

Department: Learning, Technology and Leadership Education

James Madison University

Email address: brantmej@jmu.edu

Phone number: 540-568-4846

Questions about Your Rights as a Research Subject

Dr. Lindsey Harvell-Bowman

Chair, Institutional Review Board

James Madison University

(540) 568-2611

harve2la@jmu.edu

### **Giving of Consent**

I have read this consent form and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have been given satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

I give consent to be interviewed. \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

I give consent to be audio recorded during my interview. \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

I give consent for the researcher to take notes during my interview. \_\_\_\_\_ (initials)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Printed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher (Signed)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

This study has been approved by the IRB, protocol 23-3845

### **Appendix C-Interview Questions**

A) Atmosphere easing questions:

- How was your day so far?

B) Questions regarding their experiences as learners

- Talk to me about a time when the educator used humor and it worked?

- How did it feel for you?
  
- Talk to me about a time when the educator used humor and it didn't work
- How did it feel for you
  
- Have you been in a situation as a learner where humor was used by the educator and you felt attacked or offended?

C) Experiences as educators

- Talk to me about a time when you used humor and it worked
- How did it feel for you?
- How did it feel for the learners?
  
- Talk to me about a time when you used humor and it didn't work
- How did it feel for you?
- How did it feel for the learners?
  
- Have you been in a situation as an educator where you used humor and you felt that you offended any of the learners?

D) Questions regarding their recommendations

- Were their situations where you thought humor would have contributed positively in the instruction process?
- What will you as an adult education practitioner think you need to have in order to be able to better integrate humor in your instruction?
- What are your suggestions for adult education practitioners that will help them use humor successfully in their instruction?

## Appendix D-Table 1

Table 1

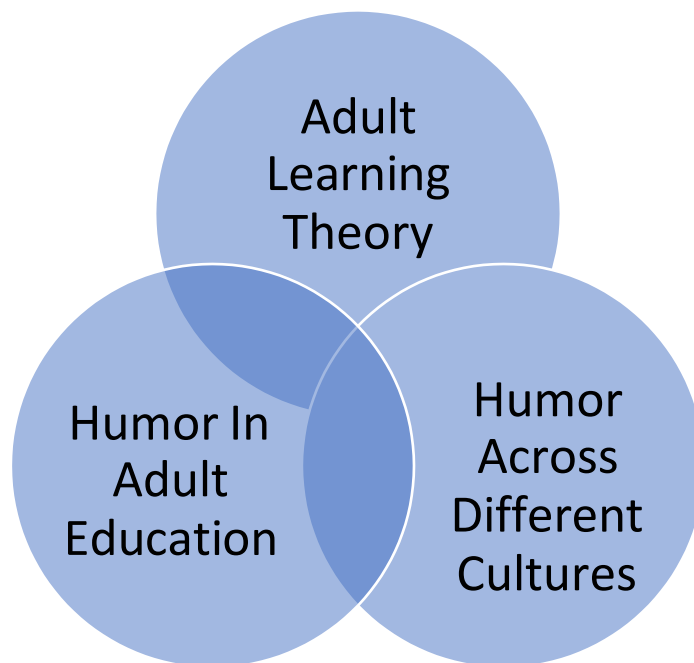
### *Data Themes and Subthemes*

No.	Research Area	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Experiences with humor as a learner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amount of usage matters</li> <li>- Offensive humor negatively impacts</li> <li>- Affective humor positively impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Amount of usage matters:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D) under usage of humor has negative impacts</li> <li>E) balanced usage of humor is positive</li> <li>F) Overuse of humor has negative impacts</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2	Experiences with humor as an educator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Successful usage of humor</li> <li>- Unsuccessful usage of humor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Successful usage of humor:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A) Simplifies and facilitates learning</li> <li>B) Increases engagement and comfort</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3	Adult education practitioners needs for a better usage of humor in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Knowledge resources</li> <li>- Comic banks</li> </ul>	No emerging sub-themes
4	Adult education practitioner recommendations for a better usage of humor in the future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Know your audience</li> <li>- Don't use any risky humor</li> <li>- Balance and use it with any audience</li> </ul>	No emerging sub-themes

		- Creative confidence	
5	Nonconforming data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Educator's reputation</li>   <li>- Learning environment energy</li>   <li>- Leaving an impression with educators</li> </ul>	No emerging sub-themes
6	Comparative Analysis: Differences in Egyptian and United States Participant Responses	No emerging sub-themes	No emerging sub-themes

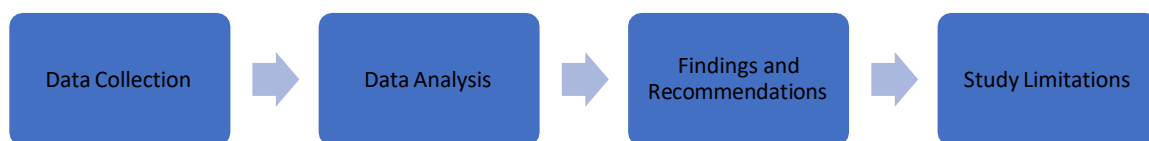
**Appendix E-Figure 1**

Figure 1

*Conceptual Framework- Adult Learning and Humor across cultures*

**Appendix F-Figure 2**  
Figure 2

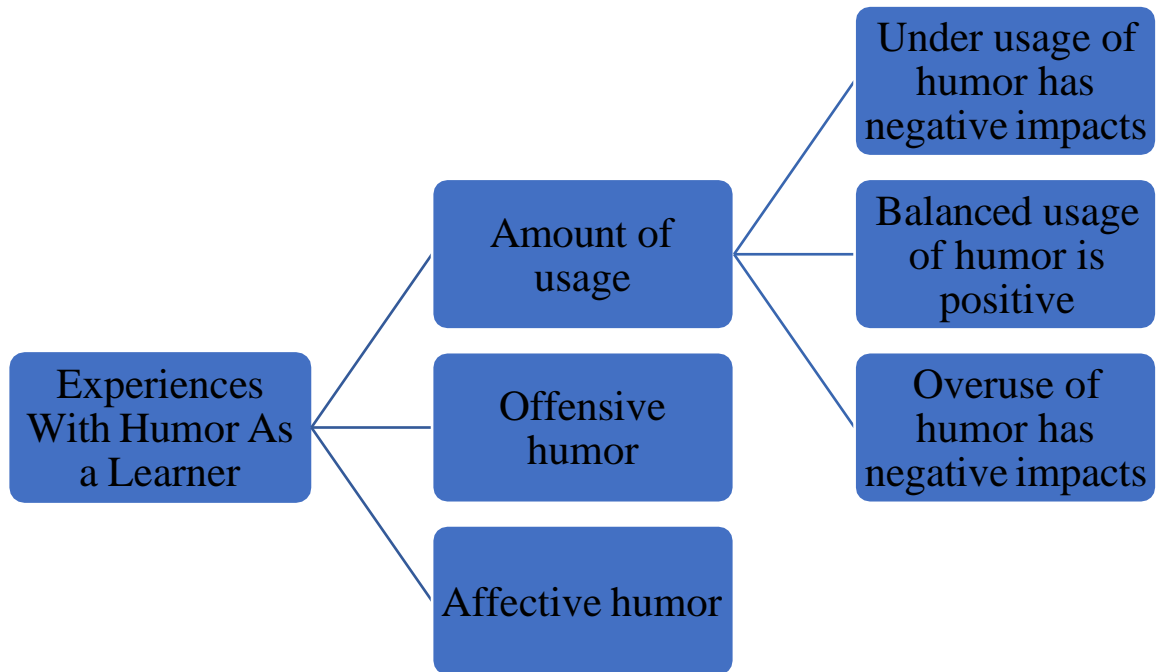
*Study Process*





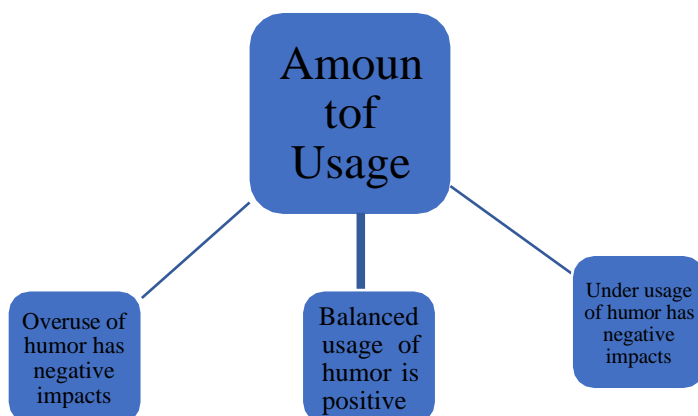
**Appendix G-Figure 3**

Figure 3

*Experiences With humor As a Learner*

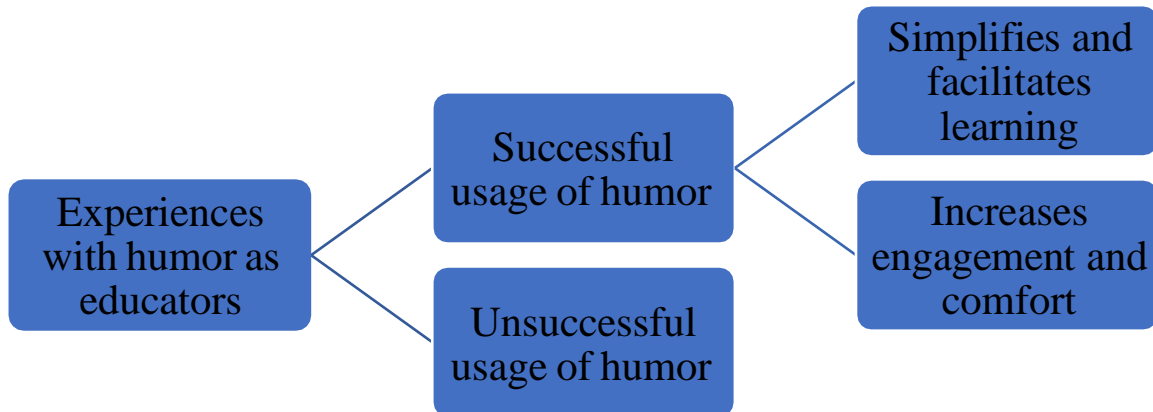
**Appendix H-Figure 4**

Figure 4

*Amount of Usage Theme and Subthemes*

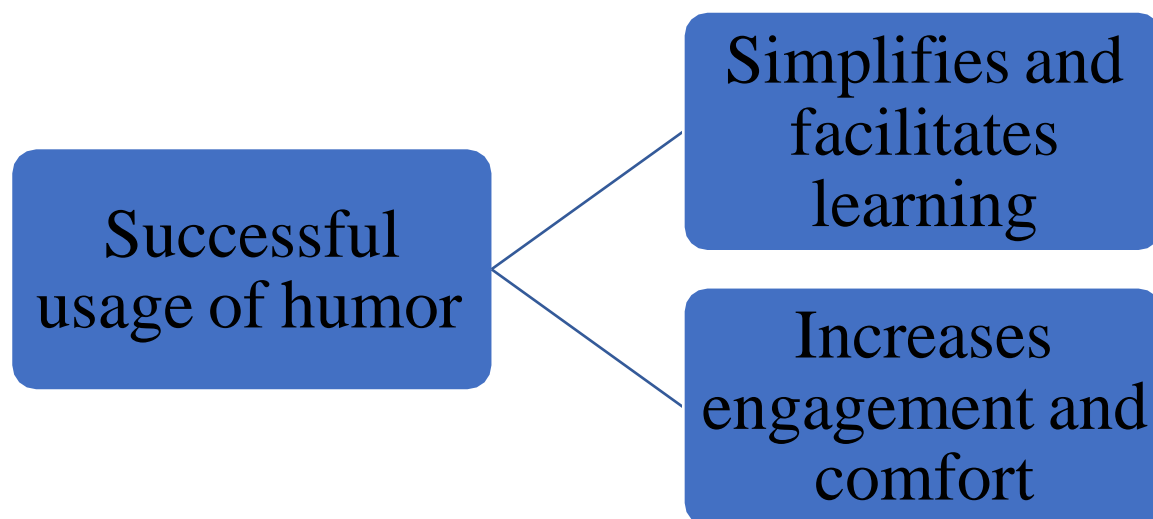
**Appendix I-Figure 5**

Figure 5

*Experiences as Educators Themes And Subthemes*

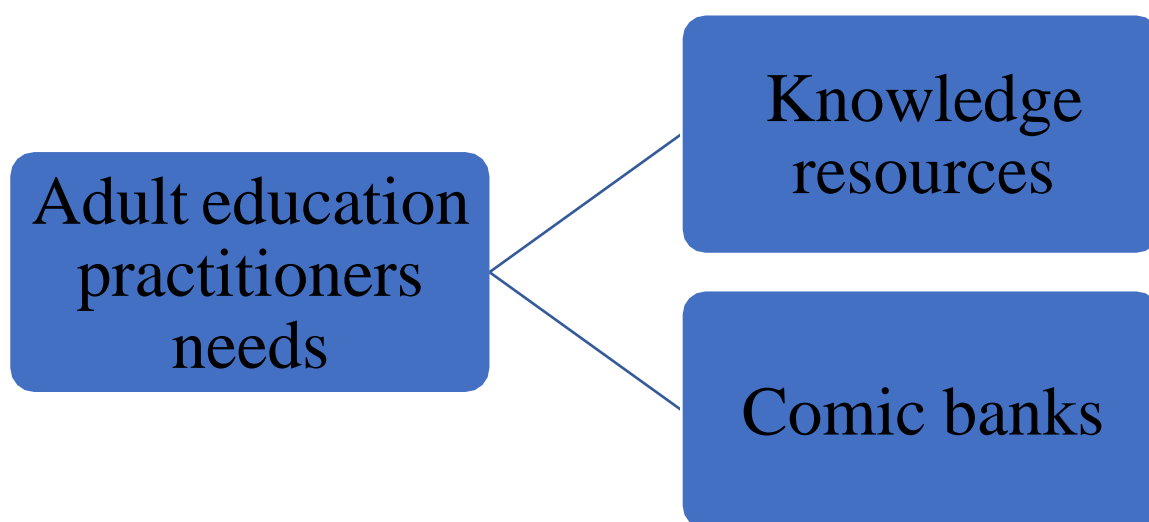
**Appendix J-Figure 6**

Figure 6

*Successful Usage of Humor*

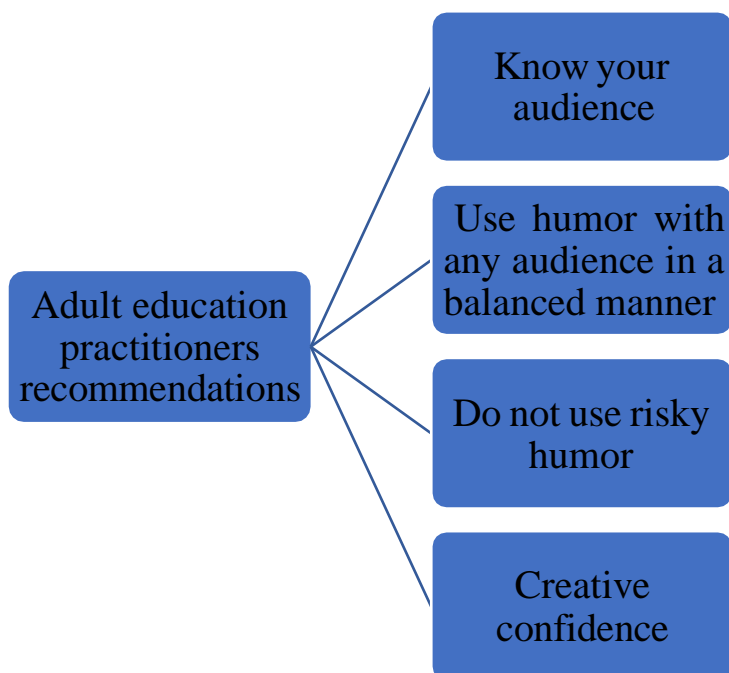
**Appendix K-Figure 7**

Figure 7

*Practitioners' Needs*

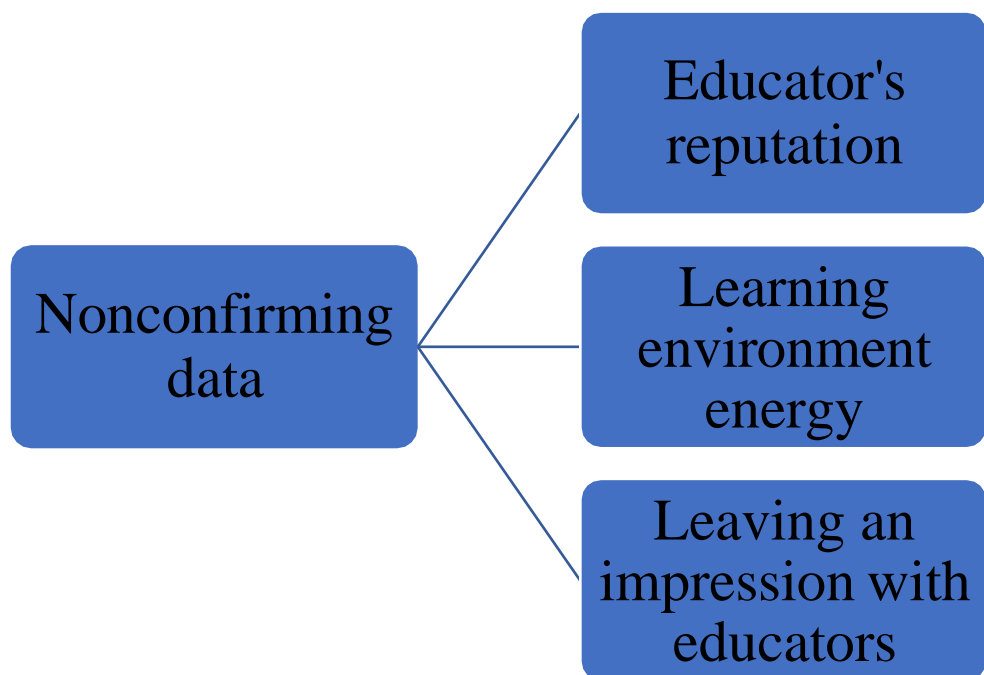
**Appendix L-Figure 8**

Figure 8

*Practitioners' Recommendations*

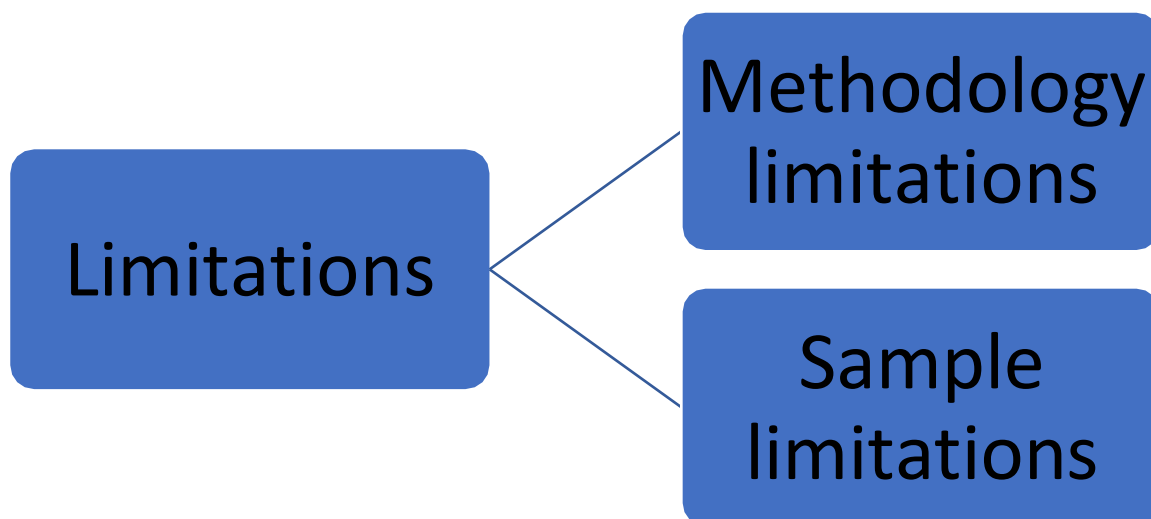
**Appendix M-Figure 9**

Figure 9

*Nonconforming Data*

**Appendix N-Figure 10**

Figure 10

*Study Limitations*



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