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**Abstract**

Two preliminary studies were conducted to identify (1) the contents of an ideal research and statistics reference book, and (2) the suitability of using humor cartoons in writing a research book. The results indicate that a majority of the respondents strongly agreed that humor should be used, and not suppressed, in academic writing. Hence, a book entitled *Research Methods and Statistics* was written. It contains five volumes with a total of 58 chapters and 1760 pages. Altogether, there are 143 humor cartoons spread throughout it. Published by McGraw-Hill Education (Malaysia).
Chua Yan Piaw

**The effects of humor cartoons in a series of bestselling academic books**

**Abstract:** Two preliminary studies were conducted to identify (1) the contents of an ideal research and statistics reference book, and (2) the suitability of using humor cartoons in writing a research book. The results indicate that a majority of the respondents strongly agreed that humor should be used, and not suppressed, in academic writing. Hence, a book entitled *Research Methods and Statistics* was written. It contains five volumes with a total of 58 chapters and 1760 pages. Altogether, there are 143 humor cartoons spread throughout it. Published by McGraw-Hill Education (Malaysia), the five volumes were its top ten bestselling titles for 2007 to 2011. A follow-up e-mail survey and an experimental study on the values of the humor cartoons in the book were conducted. The majority of the readers (n = 379) opined that the cartoons had a positive impact on their reading and had made learning more meaningful. Results of the experimental study indicate that humor cartoons in the book had significantly increased reading comprehension and reading motivation of the participants. The findings suggest that if humor is used in the right place, it will be an effective strategy to enhance reading, counteract and balance the highly academic pattern of writing, provide a way to bridge the gap between the reader and author, as well as help to increase the marketability of an academic book.

**Keywords:** humor, cartoons, reading comprehension, motivation, academic book

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1 **Humor effect and academic writing**

The effects of humor on learning have been documented in diverse disciplines, including biology, communication studies, English, geology, literature, manage-


Bionote

Chua Yan Piaw is a professor in the Institute of Educational Leadership, University of Malaya. He is also working as a research statistician at the Unit for the Enhancement of Academic Performance at the same university. His book series entitled “Research Methods and Statistics” (5 books with 60 chapters), are the McGraw-Hill’s Top-10 Bestselling Titles in Malaysia.