

A Qualitative and Quantitative Examination of Using Positive Consequences in the Management of Student Behavior in Kenyan Schools

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Abstract The challenge of addressing students' behaviour problems in Kenya cannot be over emphasized. The present study investigated the effectiveness of positive reinforcement in the management of student behavior problems in public secondary schools in Kenya. Thorndike's Behavior Modification theory informed the study. Mixed methods paradigm that had both quantitative and qualitative approaches was adopted, together with concurrent triangulation design. The study population comprised 380 teachers from a total number of 40 schools that had 40 Heads of Guidance and Counseling (HOD), 40 Deputy Principals (DP) and 300 classroom teachers. A sample size of 28 Deputy Principals, 28 Heads of Guidance and Counseling and 196 teachers were involved. Reliability of the instruments was ascertained by conducting a pilot study in 9% of the population that didn't participate in the actual study. Face validity of the instruments was ensured by seeking expert judgment by university lecturers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics while the qualitative data was analyzed using thematic framework. The study findings revealed that positive reinforcement was effective in managing student behavior problems. The study findings may be a source of intervention to the school administration in the management of escalating student behavior problems. The study recommended training of teachers on better modes of students' behavior management.

Keywords Effectiveness, Exclusion, Student, Behavior Problems

1. Introduction

Student behavior problems are regularly found in schools and teachers find it difficult to maintain order; the school authority too cannot guarantee safety to students (McCarthy, Johnson, Oswald & Lock, 1992). Many researchers and educationists have attempted to identify the most suitable methods of maintaining discipline among students (Busienei, 2012). Corporal punishment against children has been supported by legal and religious doctrines which include beliefs based on Judeo Christian and other religions (Watson, 1985). However, various children's rights activists argue that corporal punishment is a violation of human rights standards (Archambault, 2009). Kopansky (2002) felt that corporal punishment is ineffective in managing student behavior problems and the formation of specific discipline plans may improve student behavior. Most countries in South Asia have legislation which protects children against physical assault.

In Africa, the South African government has ensured the prohibition of corporal punishment within the educational system, and a number of teachers have been trained on alternatives to corporal punishment (Soneson, 2005).

In Uganda, it was established that that corporal punishment was being unfairly administered and that lead to dissatisfaction and anger. These changes in policy have led to finding suitable ways of addressing behavior problems among students (Kiggundu, 2009). In addition, Damien (2012) in Uganda observed that stakeholders had ambivalent views on the use of corporal punishment in managing student behavior problems, not really behavioral theory used or sought after in our times. According to the theory, learning is determined by events that take place after a given behavior, and learning is gradual but not insightful. A response that is followed by a consequence that increases the probability of behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2010). The use of positive reinforcement effectively increases positive behavior (Alberto & Troutman, 2010; Brown, 2013). A consequence that increases probability that a behavior occur again (Myers, 2013). Caldarella (2011) in the Western United States reported that treatment school showed statistically significant improvement in teacher ratings of school climate,

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while the control school either remained the same or worsened. Statistically significant decreases were also evident in students' unexcused absences, tardiness, and office discipline referrals when compared to the control school. In another study, Bickford (2012) in America found that praise was found to be an effective in managing students' disruptive behaviour. Study finding reported that teachers believed their students gained from behaviour specific praise, and they intended to continue using it. Teachers reported that they enjoyed working on their own use of praise and that they would continue to use behaviour specific praise. Strategies for increasing positive behavior in challenging behavior in secondary school students was investigated by Brown (2013) in New Zealand and the participants were students, teachers, educational psychologists and school administration. The study findings established that the use of positive reinforcement approaches increased positive behavior among the students. Positive and clear communication between the teachers and the students was vivid, suggesting that teachers relied on student behavior management policy.

Agle (2014) revealed that an average student who showed problematic behaviour had received fewer praise notes from the teachers. Reupert and Woodcock (2011) conducted a study to identify Australian and Canadian pre-service teachers' use, confidence and success in various behaviour management strategies and to identify significance differences between the two cohorts. Study findings indicated that pre-service teachers used low level corrective measures like verbal body language instead of strategies that prevent student misbehavior. In another study, Rahimi and Karkami (2015) showed that the teachers were not authoritative and praised students for good behavior. Further, effectiveness in teaching, motivation and achievement in learning English were found to be related to discipline strategies. Teachers who used involvement and recognition measures in managing behavior problems were effective. Further findings established that teachers who used punitive strategies were ineffective in teaching, since these lowered student motivation and caused learning problems.

Guner (2012) in Turkey found that the use of rewards was effective in managing student behavior among children with special needs. Recognizing and rewarding desirable student behaviors was found to be effective in lowering undesirable behaviors. However, the teachers in the study used limited rewards such as Ching (2012) in the Philippines, found that when penalties were used for undesirable behavior even though school policy associated rewards and penalty system with positive discipline. The use of sanctions and rewards proved effective if based on school principals. Reward that was carefully offered encouraged students to compare their own performance with to their peers. Study revealed that the mostly used reward types were certificates, trophy, medals, additional points, credits and gifts. Dasaradhi, Ramakrishna and Rayappa (2016) established that classroom organization requires the teachers to create a motivational climate. This is done by motivating students to do their best and to gain

excitement from what they are involved in. Two factors which are important in creating such a motivational climate are value and effort. Students get motivated when they see the worth of the work that they are doing and the work others do. Teachers should encourage effort through specific praise by telling the students specifically what they're doing that is good and worthwhile. In a study by Ajibola and Hamadi (2014) disciplinary measures in Nigerian Senior Secondary Schools established that disciplinary measures undertaken was determined by causes and kinds of disciplinary problems. It was believed that rewards were useful in the management of student behavior problems.

In addition, Bechuke and Debela (2012) in South African schools revealed that misconduct among learners resulted from the use of rewards and specific rules. That the urge to behave well comes from within an individual, is self-initiating and is not related to extrinsic reward or praise. It was argued that rewards destroy the inherent intrinsic motivation of the student by reducing the exchange of the reward to manipulative, demoralizing and dysfunctional exchange that reduces the interest of the student in learning good behaviors. Damien (2012) revealed that alternative corrective measures included exclusion, sending the culprit to the head teacher's office, rewarding students' good behavior, written public apology and giving more homework. These findings also indicated that principles of education require that rewards should not be used quite often and should also be applied conveniently. In another study, Semali and Vumilia (2016) in Tanzania revealed that teachers faced challenges in using rewards and sanctions in the management of student behavior problems. Ndembu (2013) in Kenya suggested were involvement of parents in student discipline, guidance and counseling, strengthening of prefects' body, improving of relationship between teachers and students, rewarding positive behaviors and addressing the grievances of the students effectively.

The government of Kenya banned the use of corporal as a result of the Children Act, 2001 (Government of Kenya, 2001). This was passed in order to protect children from violence and inhuman treatment (Government of Kenya, 2010). Teachers were required to practice measures opposed to corporal punishment that would curb behaviors.; some of the discipline strategies used in schools are manual punishment, guidance and counseling, exclusion and positive reinforcement (Agesa, 2015; Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2005; Ndembu, 2013). Since the ban, behavior student behavior problems still persist (Kindiki, 2015). Therefore, the present study determined the effectiveness of positive reinforcement in managing student behavior problems.

2. Methodology

The current study employed concurrent triangulation model in which both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Target population for the current study consisted

of 300 teachers, 40 deputy principals and 40 heads of guidance and counseling in public secondary schools in Bondo Subcounty of Kenya. Stratified random sampling technique was used to identify the schools and participants. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used in the study to determine a sample size of 28 deputy principals, 28 heads of guidance and counseling and 196 teachers. Questionnaires were used to collect data from teachers (McLeod, 2014). Deputy Principals and heads of Guidance and Counseling were participated in an in-depth interview. To ensure validity, the researcher developed the instruments with the help of expert judgment of two supervisors in the department of Psychology and Educational Foundations of Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology. Show us you questionnaire Piloting of the research instruments was done in 9% of the total population that were not part of the study population. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation. The questionnaires were sorted, coded and analyzed by means of Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 22. Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed using Thematic Analysis, which followed the principles of thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006).

3. Results and Discussion

To explore the effectiveness of positive reinforcement in the management of student behavior problems, the researcher employed a Likert scale with five options: strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD) to establish the views of respondents. Table 1.1 was used to represent the descriptive statistics.

According to Table 1.1, majority of the respondents, 81.15% (Strongly Agree 48.69%; Agree 32.46%) of respondents agreed that positive reinforcement was effective in managing student behavior problems while only 10.47% (Disagree 3.66%; Strongly Disagree 6.81%) felt that it did not. Brown (2013) concurs that the use of positive reinforcement approaches effectively increases positive behavior among the students. According to the study findings, the respondents who believed that positive reinforcement enhanced a sense of belonging in the students were less 41.89% (Strongly Agree 15.71%; Agree 26.18%) than those who felt that it did not 45.59% (Disagree 32.98%; Strongly Disagree 13.61%). In contrast, Bickford (2012) argues that teachers believe their students gain from positive reinforcement like praise, and they intend to continue using it.

Table 1.1. Descriptive Statistics on Positive Reinforcement

Indicator	SA	A	U	D	SD
Positive reinforcement is effective in managing student behavior problems in school.	93(48.69%)	62(32.46%)	16(8.38%)	7(3.66%)	13(6.81%)
Positive reinforcement enhances a sense of belonging in the students.	30(15.71%)	50(26.18%)	22(11.52%)	63(32.98%)	26(13.61%)
Positive reinforcement has reduced tension and strikes in school.	112(58.64%)	41(21.47%)	27(14.14%)	6(3.14%)	5(2.62%)
Positive reinforcement motivates students not to repeat undesirable behaviour	86(45.03%)	72(37.70%)	20(10.47%)	7(3.66%)	6(3.14%)
Positive reinforcement develops rapport between the teacher and students.	120(62.83%)	60(31.41%)	2(1.05%)	5(2.62%)	4(2.09%)
Positive reinforcement makes students more free and open to teachers.	28(14.66%)	34(17.80%)	42(21.99%)	33(17.28%)	54(28.27%)
Positive reinforcement makes students develop positive attitude towards school.	124(64.92%)	53(27.75%)	14(7.33%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Positive reinforcement makes students feel accepted by their teachers.	117(61.26%)	72(37.69%)	2(1.05%)	0(0.00%)	0(0.00%)
Positive reinforcement has helped students overcome social and behavioural problems.	77(40.31%)	72(37.70%)	31(16.23%)	7(3.66%)	4(2.09%)
Positive reinforcement contribute amicable relationship among students.	57(29.84%)	58(30.37%)	30(15.71%)	21(10.99%)	25(13.09%)

Findings from the present study established that positive reinforcement had reduced tension and strikes in school, as was reported by majority; 80.11% (Strongly Agree 58.64%; Agree 21.47%) of the respondents. Even though 14.14% of the respondents did not want to commit, only 5.76% (Disagree 3.14%; strongly disagree 2.62%) argued it didn't. Agle (2014) concurs that positive reinforcement is effective in managing student behavior problems. Further study findings established that positive reinforcement motivated students not to repeat undesirable behavior. This was confirmed by more than three quarters 82.73% (Strongly Agree 58.64%; Agree 21.47%). Less than a tenth 6.8% (disagree 3.66%; strongly 3.14%) of the respondents believed it does not do so. However, 10.47% of the respondents were undecided. Reinke, Stormont, Herman & King (2014) in a study in America agreed that positive reinforcement improved student behavior, especially those who were prone to behavior problems. However, Ching (2012) in Philippines argues that rewards do not play a big role in promoting positive behavior.

Almost all 94.24% (Strongly Agree 62.83%; Agree 31.41%) respondents agreed that positive reinforcement developed rapport between the teacher and students. The finding is consistent with Ajibola & Hamadi (2014) study agrees that the use of rewards is desirable, right and so important that it cannot be ignored. The present study findings established that positive reinforcement makes students develop positive attitudes towards school. This was confirmed by 92.67% (Strongly Agree 64.92%; Agree 27.75%) of respondents. Caldarella (2011) agrees that positive reinforcement leads to significant decrease in student tardiness and unexcused absence. Additional study findings revealed that almost all 98.95% (Strongly Agree 61.26%; Agree 37.69%) respondents believed that positive reinforcement made students feel accepted by their teachers. None of the respondents felt that it did not. The present study finding is similar to Ndembu (2013) who agrees that the use of rewards on disciplined students is very effective. On the contrary, Ching (2012) in the Philippines argues that rewards and sanctions become effective only if based on principles.

Further study findings confirmed that positive

reinforcement helped students overcome social and behavioral problems. This was reported by 78.01% (Strongly Agree 40.31%; Agree 37.70%) of the study respondents. Similarly, Inkoom (2013) agrees that writing good comments about well-behaved students in the terminal report motivates students and also improves their behavior. More than half 60.21% (Strongly Agree 29.84%; Agree 30.37%) of the respondents established that positive reinforcement contributed to amicable relationships among students. Ajibola and Hamadi (2014) concur that group rewards make pupils sociocentric. Statistical evidence from the present study established that majority (81.15%) of the respondents agreed that positive reinforcement was effective. Positive reinforcement was also thought to have reduced tension and strikes in schools by most (80.11%) respondents, just as almost all of them (94.24%) also agreed that it developed rapport between the teacher and students. Additional study findings also indicated that majority (98.95%) of the respondents agreed that positive reinforcement made students feel accepted by their teachers. Reupert and Woodcock (2011) agree that positive reinforcement in the form of reward is successful in managing student behavior problems. Caldarella (2011) concurs that positive reinforcement is useful in reducing students' unexcused absences and tardiness. However, Semali and Vumilia (2016) argue that schools experience challenges in managing student behavior using reward and punishment.

Table 1.2 shows there was a positive relationship between positive reinforcement and management of student behavior problems. From the results, a Pearson's correlation coefficient of $r=0.411$ was obtained. This shows that positive reinforcement is effective in managing student behavior problems. This study finding replicated that of with Roache, Joel, Lewis and Ramon (2011) in Australia. who agree that inclusive management strategies like reward make students responsible for their peer's behaviors and their own behavior. Similarly, Ching (2012) in Philippines' agreed that rewards and sanctions were effective if based on school principles. Kemunto, Nderitu and Nderitu in Kenya (2014) also agree that positive reinforcement is necessary since it encourages students to develop positive behavior support.

Table 1.2. Correlation Analysis between Positive Reinforcement and Students Behavior

		Correlations	
		Positive reinforcement	Students behavior problems
Positive reinforcement	Pearson Correlation	1	.411**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	191	191
Students behavior problems	Pearson Correlation	.411**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	191	191

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Additional findings on qualitative data from interviews revealed to the present study that positive reinforcement influenced student behavior. Various themes emerged, and these included motivation of learners, enhanced modification of behavior, imitation of peers and inadequacy of positive reinforcement in managing student behavior problems. Motivation is concerned with why people behave in a particular way (Rathus, 2012). Learners who were reinforced sustained acceptable behavior. For this reason, they gained confidence and closely related with their teachers. They developed a sense of belonging, and this made them behave appropriately. Three respondents who were interviewed remarked:

Positive reinforcement is very effective and should be continuous. It brings students closer to the teachers and gives them confidence [DP 16]

Positive reinforcement makes students feel motivated and they develop a sense of belonging that makes them change their behavior [HOD 1]

Positive reinforcement works by motivating students [DP 13]

The sentiments of the participants above implied that positive reinforcement motivated the students. Dasaradhi, Ramakrishna and Rayappa (2016) in India agree that a teacher needs to encourage students to do their best and have excitement about what they're learning. This, they say, comes about when teachers use specific praise by telling the students specifically what they're doing that is good and worthwhile. Alhassan (2013) also agrees that rewards are useful in behavior change since they encouraged the learners in continuing to do something. However, Bechuke and Debella (2012) argue that the desire to behave well is an inner drive that originates from within the individual and is not related to the need for extrinsic reward or praise.

Positive reinforcement was considered instrumental in effecting modification of student behavior. Students who were rewarded for good conduct sustained acceptable behavior. Respondents found praise to be effective in modifying student behavior. Rewarding a mischievous learner for any slight positive change contributed to positive change in behavior. Following are narrations from three respondents:

There's a student that I have been praising for behaving appropriately. He keeps on promising that he will not be mentioned at the assembly for undesirable behavior. For a whole year now he hasn't been mentioned at the assembly. He has also improved in academic performance [HOD 16]

A student who has been repeatedly involved in misbehavior can be rewarded for any slight positive change. This has contributed to positive behavior change in most of my students [HOD 17]

Excerpts from respondents above show that positive reinforcement contributes to positive behaviour change among the learners. Praise, specifically, proved to be a very powerful tool for behavior change. The research findings too

show that teachers should be very keen in noticing any slight behavior change that would warrant for reinforcement. Similarly, Rahimi and Karkami (2015) agree that recognition and involvement are effective discipline strategies for use in the schools. Guner (2012) concurred that positive reinforcement approaches effectively increase positive behaviour among the students. Similarly Bickford (2012) noted that praise is an effective means of reducing students' disruptive behaviour and teachers believe their students gain from positive reinforcement like praise. Agle (2014) also agrees that an average student who shows problematic behaviour were seldom praised by the teachers. However, Ching (2012) argues that there are quite a number of students who don't realize that there's a system of rewards and penalties in their schools.

In the context of the current study, students who were rewarded for desirable behavior were imitated by their fellow students. The fact that one was recognized amongst so many students was a source of positive influence to other students. The use of material rewards like shirts, books and clapping motivated them in the presence of other students and caused them to envy such recognition. Respondents remarked:

The most disciplined student is awarded publicly so that others can emulate and uphold good behaviour [HOD 14]

If you reward with material things, other students may also want to imitate the one that has been rewarded [DP 16]

Study findings from above participants show that positive reinforcement causes behaviour change among students when done publicly. Foncha, Kepe & Abongdia (2014) study agree that praising of well-behaved students during school gathering promotes student discipline. Ching' (2012) concurs that rewards that are carefully offered encourage students to compare their own performance with that of their peers. However, Ajibola & Hamadi (2014) argues that group rewards make pupils sociocentric as opposed to individual rewards that make learners egocentric.

Even though positive reinforcement was found to be effective in managing student behavior problems, other findings revealed that it did not contribute fully in managing behavior problems due to its inadequacy. Positive reinforcement did not work in all situations where positive behavior change was required. For instance, a respondent believed that the use of material rewards lacked sustainability and that rewards were likely to diminish. Moreover, it is difficult to maintain uniformity in terms of material rewards used for reinforcement. Other students became complacent after being rewarded. Some respondents recounted:

The effectiveness of positive reinforcement depends on the way it's used. If you reward with material things, what happens when it is not there? [HOD 14]

Positive reinforcement works, but not in all situations. Some students who are reinforced become complacent [HOD 3]

Positive reinforcement only becomes useful when used reasonably. Some people overdo it since reward is not commensurate to student behavior. [HOD 2].

The excerpts from respondents above imply that positive reinforcement is inadequate in managing student behavior problems. Learners are likely to develop complacency, unless positive reinforcement is applied reasonably. In that case, the intended purpose of sustaining desirable behavior may not be met. The study finding is similar to Ching (2012) who agrees that moderate levels of extrinsic motivation are better than high level motivation, and that rewards do not play a big role in promoting positive behavior. Bechuke and Debela (2012) in South Africa concur that an individual's behavior, whether disciplined or undisciplined, is not caused by an external visible stimulus, punished or rewarded but by what a person wants most at a given time. Anayo (2014) in Kenya also agreed that rewards made students not to be self-driven, but only driven to behave well because of the reward they would get. On the contrary, Reupert and Woodcock (2011) argue that the use of rewards in managing student behavior problems is successful and teachers are confident in its use.

4. Conclusions

The current study findings revealed that there was a positive association between positive reinforcement and management of student behavior problems. From the quantitative findings, it was revealed that positive reinforcement had reduced tension and strikes in school. Additional findings established that positive reinforcement created rapport between students and teachers and also helped students overcome social and behavioral problems. Qualitative findings indicated that positive reinforcement contributed to motivation of learners, modification of behavior and the imitation of peers. However, it was established that positive reinforcement may not work in all situation. There is therefore need for teachers to examine and evaluate the use of positive reinforcement since this may contribute positively to student behavior change.

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