

Psychological Management of Inappropriate Classroom Behaviour of Pupils

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Abstract

For many years now, the management of students by their teachers for effective teaching and learning has been an uphill task. It has posed great challenges and worries to educational administrators and society at large. Teachers must resort to various ways to get the pupils positioned properly for effective learning. Different means and methods have been adopted to achieve the goals and objectives of educational planning and administration. There are various types of punishments which have long been in existence but have had limited success. In this paper, some behavioural principles of classical and operant conditioning as well as observational learning have been discussed as strategies to elicit, start or increase appropriate behaviours. Also, different ways to stop unwanted behaviours have been discussed. It is therefore recommended that teachers should study the problems of their pupils individually and apply appropriate behaviour modification strategies.

Keywords: Psychological, Management, Inappropriate, Classroom, Behaviour.

I. Introduction

Over the years, teachers have faced the problem of getting students disciplined and facing their studies seriously. Teachers often have resorted to the use of cane, shouting and rebuking to enforce discipline among students and to get them to study. Hence the adage, "Spare the rod and spoil the child". The use of cane and rebukes has yielded only limited positive results. It is very doubtful that if the rod is spared the child will not study. There is no doubt the fact that students exhibit such inappropriate behaviours as bullying, fighting in class, noise making, dirty habit of not sweeping the classroom and laziness associated with poor study habit, not doing classroom assignments and homework. Teachers prefer to encourage and instil in pupils in the values of self-efficiency, empathy, co-operation, generosity and self-control without the use of corporal punishment.

Effective management of student behaviour is a critical component of effective teaching and learning. It helps to improve pupils' school achievement and reduces loss of valuable instructional time. Thus, teachers should help students to maximize achievement by creating conducive classroom atmosphere that is friendly, cheerful, business-like and work-oriented. Obviously, very little knowledge can be achieved where pupils are without discipline. Classroom teachers have statutory duty to manage their class well so that an atmosphere that is conducive to learning will exist. How the classroom functions depend on the teacher in a big way. This is why, to the writer's understanding, the National Board of Education insists that nobody should teach without being trained as a teacher. In a frequently cited quote Watson (1925: 104) wrote:

"Give me a dozen healthy infants ... and I will guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist. I might select - doctor, lawyer, Artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar man and thief..."

The above statement, as would be expected, drew the anger of many scholars. Although it should be understood with a grain of salt, however, it helps one to understand the indispensable roles of a classroom teacher in moulding the character and knowledge of his pupils.

The purpose of this paper is to examine briefly some ways a classroom teacher can effectively "administer" his class so that proper learning can take place. Specifically, the behavioural principles of classical and operant conditioning as well as observational learning will be discussed as strategies to start or increase appropriate behaviours as well as stopping unwanted classroom behaviours.

II. Forms and Negative Results of Punishment

In deed punishment has been known to have the following negative results:

Corporal Punishment: Giving physical punishment to a school child could result in hatred of the teacher by the child, as well as lying, vandalizing of school property, truancy, avoidance and inattention to school work. These aforementioned behaviours are undesirable and hinder good academic attainment.

Suspension and Expulsion: Since most school children who commit grievous offences in the school are usually those with academic problems, sending them away will increase their academic problems, if they decide to continue with their schooling. Most of them who refuse to come back to school will probably engage in nefarious activities.

Oral and Psychological Punishment: Punishment such as embarrassing remarks, public "dressing down", jeering etc., lowers the students self esteem and self concept and very often other students' perception of the unruly or maladjusted students go down,

Strategies for Starting Behaviour

There are different strategies that can be used for starting a behaviour. Some of such strategies are discussed as follows:

(a) Shaping

Shaping is the judicious use of selective reinforcement to bring about desired change in the behaviour of the child. The procedure involves successive approximation to the desired behaviour. According to Kazdin (2010), shaping refers to the teaching of new skills or behaviour by reinforcing the learner to approach the desired final behaviour. As the approximate response tends to occur more frequently when a particular desired response is reinforced or a step towards the desired response is reinforced as a result, the less desired response is extinguished. Wood (2014) reported how shaping was used successfully to get a boy who suffered from cataracts to wear glasses. If the boy did not wear the glasses he would go blind. At first, the boy refused to wear the glasses and at the mere mention of the glasses, threw temper tantrums. The glasses were left in his room and if he was to touch them, he was given a candy. So he began to carry them around and eventually he started to wear them. He was rewarded for each step he made until he learnt to wear the glasses. Therefore shaping involves building each simple part of the total behaviour step by step, until the final behaviour has been learnt (Ross, 2014).

(b) Continuous Reinforcement

Continuous reinforcement (candy, a pat on the back, a smile or praise) is applied any time the behaviour occurs. Thus, continuous reinforcement is given to the pupil each time he gives the correct answer in the class. Continuous reinforcement is a useful approach for establishing new behaviour. For example, it can be applied to a child who is attending primary school for the first time so as to plant in the child the joy of going to school. It is advisable to reinforce the child each time he starts to go to school until he becomes used to going to school before the reinforcement is gradually withdrawn. It is also a good strategy to employ to spur lazy students to work hard. Each time the student shows signs of hard works he is reinforced. Of course, continuous reinforcement should be replaced with other forms of reinforcement like praise etc, when the expected behaviour has been established.

(c) Imitation and Modelling

Many behaviours are learnt or increased through observational learning or modelling. Ormord (2008) gave us some good examples of some skills we learn from observation. Improvement of academic skills such as reading and writing could be achieved through modelling. Students may learn to do arithmetic or essay through observing how their teachers and peers do these things. Aggressive behaviours are usually initiated to a high degree when children observe violence or aggressive models, (Godstein, Arnold & Ortiz, 2001). Teachers who exhibit harsh or aggressive interactions in class inadvertently present themselves as negative models to their students. Hence teachers should know that their students copy and practice not only what they say but also what they do.

Various aspects of moral behaviour are apparently influenced by modelling. Children are likely to imitate behaviours such as generosity, cooperation, empathy, self-control and resistance to

temptation if they observe such behaviours modelled by peers, teachers or parents. Students are likely to improve their physical skills such as athletic skills, dancing or manual skills when specific techniques for doing so are shown to them (Anderson & Bushman, 2001). Modelling is used to teach a variety of activities in school such as dancing, crafts, and sports. Teachers serve as models for vast range of behaviours like pronouncing vocabulary words. Models that are of the same age as the students are particularly effective and imitated.

Teachers should bear in mind that if class members observe a student breaking a class rule and gets away with it, they may learn that undesirable consequences do not always follow rule breaking. The class may be less inhibited in future about breaking the rule. If the teacher deals with the student who breaks the rule, especially a class leader, the idea of breaking rule may be inhibited for other students (Woodfolk, 2008).

Later in this paper the proper and effective application of punishment is discussed. Teachers should take care not to model inappropriate behaviours for the children with whom they interact. They should model characteristics such as open-mindedness, empathy and concern for physical fitness. Good teachers expose their students to many models. Adult models, especially old boys and girls of the school could with the permission of the relevant authority be invited to the class as resource people. Classroom teachers should ensure that students believe in their ability to accomplish school tasks. Self-efficacy is an essential part of learning that affects the individual's belief that it is possible to engage and complete a task. This may explain the reason why equally intelligent students may differ widely in their confidence about performing academic tasks successfully.

III. Strategies for increasing Desirable Behaviour

The following strategies represent some of the most used techniques to increase appropriate behaviours and to reduce or eliminate maladaptive behaviours in children.

(a) Praise and Ignoring

This is a common and powerful reinforcer when it is properly used. To ignore implies refusal to take note of or reject a behaviour that is manifested. Praise after behaviour indicates that the behaviour is acceptable. On the other hand, ignoring behaviour means that the behaviour is unacceptable. Ikpeazu (2005) advised that for effective use of praise and ignorance in classroom management and control, the teacher should be alerted to detect desirable and undesirable behaviours. For instance, instead of reprimanding John for misbehaviour in class the teacher should ignore him but praise Ibe sitting next to John, for being attentive in the class. Obviously, some students make noise or misbehave in class in order to attract attention to themselves, but when they are ignored, they will realize their folly and try to change.

(b) Premack Principle

Premack principle states that the most liked and frequently performed activity can be used to boost the performance of the least pleasing activity. Hence, behaviours of high frequency may be used as reinforcers for those of low frequency. For instance, a teacher can tell his student: as soon as you solve the mathematics problem, you can go out for your break. Premack principle is often called grandmother's technique. This is because often one hears grandmother telling her grandson; go and fetch a bundle of firewood and after, you go and play football.

(c) Time-out Technique

Time-out, according to Osborne (2010) is removing an individual for a short while from a reinforcing situation in order to eliminate or decrease undesirable behaviour. The effective use of time-out requires that there should be available neutral areas which the individual does not find reinforcing or enjoyable to which the student can be sent briefly. The place where the student is sent should lack reinforcement. Also, the students' behaviour while on time-out should be monitored. As soon as the student behaves well, he should be set free. Time-out has proved to be useful in the management of high frequent disruptive, aggressive and self-defeating behaviours that appear to be cued and reinforced by the actions of other students. As a part of time-out, some teachers often send the child to the back of the class to sit there alone.

IV. Strategies for Stopping Inappropriate Behaviours

There are many techniques that can be adopted to stop the inappropriate behaviour of pupils in classroom situations. The most used are discussed below.

(a) Over-correction

According to Nwankwo (2013), over-correction is a form of imposition on an offending student during which he is expected to correct his undesirable behaviour. Over-correction allows the individual to set a situation right and thus makes amends for damages caused (Essumen, Nwaogu & Nwachukwu, 1990). Using this strategy the student is made to put right what he has done by his behaviour. In addition, he has to be made to serve extra related punishment for the same misbehaviour. For instance, if a student fails to sweep the classroom, he will be required to sweep the same classroom for a week. It is not over-correction if the offending student is asked to go to the football field to cut-grass, for cutting grass is not related behaviour to class sweeping. Over-correction has limited application to problems of behaviour. It is applicable to misbehaviours such as not cleaning the classroom, not doing classroom assignment, homework, or fighting in class. For instance, students who fight in class can be required not only to apologize to the class teacher but be made to apologize to the whole class.

(b) Effective Punishment

Many psychologists do not recommend punishment as a veritable instrument for the control of student's misbehaviour (Shirk, 2015). However, if punishment is to be given at all, its undesirable effects should be minimized as much as possible so that the desired intention is achieved. In order to use punishment effectively several caveats are suggested.

- i. The punishment should be given as soon as the wrongdoing is committed. The student should know the reason why he is punished, in order to prevent doing what gave room for the punishment. If the child is punished long after the misbehaviour, he may not know exactly the reason for the punishment (Craighead, 2017).
- ii. The punishment should fit the misbehaviour. Small misdeeds should attract small punishments, and serious ones should attract heavy punishment. If a little punishment follows a serious misdeed the punishment will not have the desired deterrent effect on the student. If a heavy punishment follows a small misdeed, the child will be angry with the punisher (i.e. teacher) and think that the punisher has interior motive for punishing others than for what he has done.
- iii. It is often good to let the child know why he is being punished. The teacher should explain to the child what he should have done well and be ready to give him positive reinforcement to encourage any attempts the students make in the right direction. Reprimanding a student for fighting with classmates should be accompanied by praising the student for sharing with other children and following rules when playing games with peers.

(c) Extinction

Many inappropriate behaviours by school pupils in the classroom are maintained or reinforced by the attention of the teacher. Some teachers in an attempt to get the misbehaving child to order, inadvertently help to increase or maintain the misbehaviour. Some teachers fail to realize that the attention to the child like scolding, frowning or shouting helps to keep the child misbehaving. However extinction will occur when the teacher's attention is withdrawn. That is, when the child realizes that his inattentive behaviour is no longer attracting attention, he will stop. Thus, extinction of inappropriate behaviour has occurred. Extinction is the cessation of inappropriate behaviour. Nwachukwu (2026) applied extinction technique to control thumb-sucking in a classroom. Extinction is effective in the treatment of maladaptive behaviours such as excessive crying children, tantrums and noise making. Extinction is effective only if the teacher has correctly identified the reinforcing stimulus to be withheld. Difficulties and failures in the use of extinction can be minimized by careful and reliable observation of the problem situation with an eye towards identifying all possible reinforcers contingent upon undesirable behaviours (Nwamuo & Ekwe, 2005).

V. Conclusion

Managing student behaviour remains challenging in Nigeria's education system. Psychologists have introduced various strategies for initiating, increasing, and curbing specific behaviours, as discussed.

VI. Recommendation

- i. Teachers are advised to analyse individual student problems and apply appropriate behaviour modification techniques.
- ii. Teachers should administer punishments to students according to gravity of offence.

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