Empirical Application of Behavioural Modification Techniques to Classroom Control in Business Education.

Abstract

Teens and adolescents are cumbered with a lot of emotional, social and behavioural problems affecting their attitude to studies. Many teachers are confronted with the application of the theories they have learnt during their training into real-life situations. Thus, they resulted into the use of the conventional method of negative reinforcement in dealing with students' misbehaviours. This paper therefore provides a pragmatic guide on the use of positive reinforcement through behaviour modification techniques to classroom management with a focus on business education courses. Techniques like shaping, modelling, etc are mentioned. The theory, process and relevance to teaching-learning situations are presented as a more acceptable therapeutic intervention to the use of punishment and castigation. Organising conferences and seminars for teachers, as well as publications on behavioural modification technique by the ministry of education are strongly recommended.

Introduction

Every individual is born with the capacity to develop potentials to the best advantage of him and society, work productively and creatively, and be free from psychological disabilities. The child becomes a victim or victor of his heredity and environment. The environment is supposed to work as an agent of socialization - the home, school, church/mosque and the society in order to make or mar the child (Castle, 1995). However, beginning from the first few days of his life, this infant may meet with difficulties resulting from his relationship with his parents. Hence according to Achebe (1998), people are born princes until their parents turn them to "frogs". Soon, he begins primary school if natural traits are not properly managed; the teacher gradually transforms this "frog" into "scape goat". At school, the child is expected to be attentive to learn, relate well with every member of the school community and excel in the primary purpose of the educational institution. This 'scape goat' gets into the junior secondary school and gets associated with some "peers of like passion"; he develops 'wings' and teacher now addresses them as "birds of the same feathers". The child now grows in his aberrant behaviour and maladjusted attitude, by and by, while in school may perform well in business studies and a few other related subjects, hence by

placement he is in business education class.

Business education is that aspect of training that prepares the individual for job placement and advancement in the business society, enabling him to be an educated consumer or producer of economics goods and services. Aina (1986) defined business education as an arm of vocational education which prepares the youth for future membership and participation in the life of the society for its maintenance, growth and development. The subjects in business education at the senior level include financial accounts, commerce, typewriting, shorthand, office practice and business method. Business education attracts students' patronage because of their strong desire to work as bankers, accountants, administrators, managers as well as computer analysts. Other career options opened to them include insurance, marketing, secretariat science etc in government establishments, public and private companies.

Moreover, today the business education classes usually have an average of 50% of the students' population. The reasons may not be far from the fact that most schools have fewer hands in pure sciences, poor laboratory facilities and equipments or none at all. Many business education departments are without any in-built laboratory that should serve as studio, store and library for all business materials like typewriters, ribbon, tapes, and business periodicals, yet the subjects are being taught. Schools find it easier having Business courses than pure sciences since they could hedge out typewriting and get along with others. Also, business education bridges the gap between pure sciences and arts. Students therefore that cannot offer science subjects joyfully find themselves in the commercial classes. A random sample of four secondary schools (SS 2) taken, showed that an average of 52% of students go for commercial subjects.

Table 1: Percentage of commercial students from selected schools.

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School no	Total Population of the Class	Pure Science Students	Commercial Students	Social Science & Arts Students	% of Commercial to Total
1	168	38	72	58	47.8
2	152	31	81	40	53.3
3	859	245	456	160	53
4	385	62	20	103	57

Source: personal contact, 2006.

1. Olalomi comprehensive college, Offa, Kwara State.
2. Ajasse-ipo comprehensive college, Ajase-ipo, Kwara State.
3. Ilorin Grammar school, Ilorin, Kwara State.
4. Government Girls Secondary School, Minna, Niger State.

Table 1 confirms that students population in the business education classes are usually large, thus, the need for the purposeful application of behavioural modification techniques in the teaching of business education classes for effectiveness and efficiency on the part of the tutor as well as facilitating learning for students.

The problem

The school is responsible for the making of a total child, that is, the development of the child's cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain. All children have potentials for being well behaved; nevertheless, some developed some specific behavioural problems along the way, which if not checked at the appropriate time, could create serious problems not only for himself but also for other members of his class and the society. Some studies (Galloway, Ball, Bloomfield and Seyd, 1982) have reported several cases of indiscipline in schools, such as disobedience, insubordination to the teachers and bully. Though many of these most difficult behaviours, if dealt with early, may become controlled, but if neglected may lead to a wild, impulsive uncontrollable behaviour that may require institutionalization. In some families, instead of the children being taught normal socially accepted behaviour, the entire family learns the abnormal behaviours from the kids in the process of trying to accommodate them. (Huitt, 1994)

Many teachers find class control difficult not because they are not professionals but for their inability to make theory - practice, transferring teaching practice or on-the-field experience into real life situation

(Stone, 1994) in Ijaiya (1998). Teachers are faced with students from diverse home background with various social adjustment, culture, needs, expectations and behavioural dispositions. Easily teachers often trod the path of excessive conventional method of discipline-corporal punishment. In view of the prevailing circumstances, latest campaign against corporal punishment in schools by the Nigeria government, reactions by some parents, students general involvement in occultism and such likes combined together become threat to teachers' and class control. Many teachers resort to verbal abuse, railings, exchange of blows to pipe down the ego of the adolescent, and in some cases ending up reinforcing the same behaviour which they intended to correct, albeit unwittingly. [Fontana, 1981].

In this paper, an attempt is made to provide an empirical and purposeful guide for teachers in business education towards effective use of some behavioural modification techniques that employs positive reinforcement and motivation for class control. It is hoped that this will assist teachers and students in the teaching-learning process. Teachers will be encouraged to give their best while students will enjoy business education courses to the fullest benefit.

The Theory of Behaviour Modification Techniques.

The idea of behaviour modification is based on Skinner's operant conditioning theory which posited that if a response or behaviour is rewarded or reinforced, there is every tendency for it to be repeated or reinforced [Skinner, 1979]. Poteet (1983) defined behaviour modification as a systematic application of the principle of learning theories to the maladaptive behaviour patterns in children. It is aimed at modifying a problem behaviour already identified rather than some general personality problem. Behaviour modification assumes that observable and measurable behaviour are good targets for change. Since all behaviour is learned thus it can be unlearned. All behaviour follows a set of consistent rules. Behaviour modification techniques never fail. All behaviour is maintained, changed or shaped by the consequences

of that behaviour. Although there are certain limitations, such as temperamental or emotional influences, but most children function more effectively under the right set of consequences. Reinforcers are consequences that strengthen behaviour while punishments are consequences that weaken behaviour; these students' behaviours can be managed and charged by the consequences of classroom behaviour. Class Control can be developed in varying degrees of approach depending upon the activity for which they are designed. Basically, control consists of a comparison between an actual situation and planned situation. [Huitt, 1994]. Good behaviour hardly gets reward or at most given a lukewarm commendation because it is usually taken for granted. On the other hand, common maladaptive behaviour in secondary schools include truancy, noise making by interruption of lessons, lateness to class, failure to do assignment or even test, not paying attention during lessons, bad dressing, rudeness and aggression, truancy, drug abuse, occultism and the likes receives attention. There are different approaches to tackling these problems by each teacher and each school. Some yell at students, ask them to kneel down or stand up, send out of class, cut grasses, suspension for serious offences such as aggression and expulsion for damning cases like drug abuse and occultism. Some students who reluctantly attend classes are happy being sent out of class, some of these disrupt classes and amuse the students making them heroes rather than being corrected. In a negative reinforcement model, instead of working to earn a positive consequence, the child works to distant himself from an aversive consequence. The child's goal is to get rid of something that is unpleasant rather than to earn something that is desirable.

Negative reinforcement is often used in the classroom to manage problem behaviours. Teachers inadvertently pay attention to a child who may not be complying and withdraw their attention contingent on the child compliance. The next time a similar situation occurs, the child again will not comply until confronted with the aversive consequence, winning the teacher's attention. Negative reinforcement is

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often seductive and coercive for teachers. It works in the short-run but in the long run is likely to strengthen rather than weaken the undesirable behaviour.

Many of the same variables that affect positive reinforcement-immediacy, frequency and consistency also affect negative reinforcement. (Favell, 1977), Clark and Elliot (1988) in Mather and Goldstein (2001) found that negative reinforcement was rated by teachers as the most frequently used classroom intervention. They are not corrective because they do not provide students concerned with alternative correct form of behaviour. A more suitable alternative to all these punitive measures is behaviour modification focus on positive reinforcement. The appropriate application of positive reinforcement has repeatedly been demonstrated to increase both on-task behaviour and work completion. White (1975) in Mather and Goldstein (2001) postulated that when a desired behaviour is exhibited, teachers frequently respond with a consequence that is likely to increase the reoccurrence of that behaviour. This therefore confirms the empirical application of positive reinforcement to establish a demonstrated behaviour.

Empirical Modification Techniques in Business Education Class.

Behaviour modification techniques suggest that methods can be developed for defining, observing, and measuring behaviour, as well as designing effective interventions. It does not believe in talking alone but engages several action-oriented methods to accomplish behavioural changes. It is suitable for developing new behaviour, strengthening new behaviour and maintaining an established behaviour. Bear (1990) reputed in Mather and Goldstein (2001) that behavioural modification technique may focus on prevention, correction and hence behavioural control, or treatment. To manage through these modification techniques, He further suggested this multiple process (i) The problem must be defined, usually by count or description; (ii) design a way to change the behaviour; (iii) identify an effective reinforcer and (iv) that consequences of behaviour are directly related to the events that either come immediately, before or after .

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In selecting reinforcements, Bushell, (1973) in Grossman (2004) stated that some consequences that teachers provide for children are just noise and irrelevant, they neither strengthen nor weaken the behaviour. Many teachers believe that placing stars on a chart as a reward or providing a prize, work for all children. Some children are motivated by these while others are not. Some of them may find it exciting one day and loose interest quickly the next day. Therefore, the fact that certain consequences follow a child's behaviour may either strengthen or weaken the chances for that behaviour to reoccur should make teachers evaluate whether chosen consequences are positively reinforcing or simply noise. Reinforcers take on different values for different individuals.

A business educator must develop a hierarchy of the behaviours that would like to see the child exhibit. For instance, in response to out-of seat behaviour, multiple levels of reinforcement must be initiated, a reinforcer is provided for sitting and another for solving his class work in Financial Accounts while sitting. Therefore, in using behaviour modification techniques to enhance students' interests in business education the following guidelines were postulated by Rhode, Jenson and Reavis (1992) in Mather and Goldstein (2001) on practical classroom management. IFEED-AV rules.

I- Immediately. It must be prompt. Delay defeats effectiveness.
F- Frequently reinforce a student learning a new behaviour to become established.
E- Enthusiasm in delivery of the reinforcer. Modulation in the congratulatory voice.
E- Eye contact suggests that a student is special and has the teacher's undivided attention.
D- Describe the appropriate behaviour being reinforced, highlight and emphasize it.
A- Anticipation by building excitement and expectation of earning a reinforcer, to motivate.
V- Variety is the spice of life, to avoid boredom it is necessary to change reinforcers.

Target behaviours are those behaviours which are specifically defined, labelled and made object of observation, recording and reinforced. Poteet (1973) suggested that labelling of target behaviours requires careful and objective observation of the particular student. Measuring the particular aberrant behaviour before acting on it in order to determine the frequency of such behaviour, used as evidence to justify teachers' action and also reveal a pattern of behaviour that might offer explanation for the problem.

Measuring can be done by teachers making a piece of paper-slash marks each time a student exhibits a particular maladaptive behaviour and counting the frequencies afterward, unknown to the students. A graph could be plotted or a histogram constructed. This is referred to in psychology as "base-line data" to determine whether the target behaviour is worth the concern.

Fontana (1977) stated four other steps after labelling.

❖ Listing the target behaviours in a specific manner;
❖ list the abnormal behaviour against the target behaviour which is exactly opposite;
❖ Analyse ways the target behaviour has been reinforced in the past and withdraw them;
❖ Teacher to start a systematic reinforcement of the correct behaviour.

Measure the correct behaviour after some time at the end of the process of behaviour modification.

Table 2: **A sample of a Behaviour Modification table;**

	Target Behaviour	Maladaptive Behaviour	Normal Teachers' Response	Behaviour Modification Techniques
1	Doing the take home assignment	Avoiding classwork and not doing the take home assignment	Tell him to stand up, rebuke and send him out of the class,	Performance Contract and Schedules
2	Concentration and participation in class without disturbance	Lacks concentration during lessons and pinching others.	Insult him, send him out or kneel down throughout the lesson or get him isolated.	Shaping and modelling
3	Dressing neatly and decently.	Dressing shabbily to classroom	Disgrace him publicly and ask him to get out of the class	Modelling and differential treatment.
4	Punctuality to class	Late coming to class	Give punishment or send him back to where he is coming.	Modelling and token economy
5	Asking sensible question orderly and waiting to be called before answering	Interrupts lesson by asking funny questions and not waiting to be called before answering.	Shout him down and others increase their laughter. Verbal rebuke or ask him to stay out of the class if not ready to learn.	Differential attention and Token economy

Explaining some behavioural modification techniques in table 2.

Modelling: is a very appropriate modification technique that can be used for business students. Through modelling, observation, and then imitations, children develop new behaviours. Modelling is a powerful tool, often underutilised by teachers. When teachers are cheerful, enthusiastic, hardworking, properly dressed, punctual to school and prompt in marking assignment, such attitudes are contagious, their

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students will exhibit such traits as well. In addition, a teacher can use some good students in the class as models for others and himself a model. Finally, when managing a disruptive behaviour, it is important to focus on tasks and behaviours rather than on approval. **Shaping:** is the moulding of simple behaviour into more complex behaviour through series of approximation of the desired behaviour. ("Watson, 1973) in Grossmann (2004) said it is waiting for the appropriate target behaviour or something close to that behaviour before reinforcing such behaviour by verbal praise or some other means. **Schedules:** defines and identifies the amount of work required and the time that must elapse between reinforcers. It can be continuous (every time), fixed or variable interval schedules. In classroom settings, fixed ratio interval schedules are better. It is also good as follow-up in maintaining a well-learned behaviour. **Differential Attention:** applies when ignoring is used as negative consequence for exhibiting the undesirable behaviour, and immediate attention is used as a positive consequence for exhibiting the competing desirable behaviour. **Performance Contract:** can be operationally defined as a negotiated agreement between two parties. The teacher and the students at discussional level of the maladjusted behaviour, the right attitude expected and the compensation for compliance which is mainly privileges. If the student fails the contractual terms, he forfeits his reward but the contract can be renewed. **Token Economy:** are materials or social reinforcers that follow immediately after good behaviour. Material reinforcers provide the child with something tangible while Social reinforcers are more versatile but should be specific if material reinforcers are used, a kind word from the teachers should always be a companion. When choosing target behaviour, it is preferable to focus on behaviours to be increased rather than on those to be decreased. Token economy is not to be used as bribe. Reinforcement could be treat or privilege; for instance, "Honours roll" i.e. the heroes list for students of excellence prepared and displayed on the school's notice board every session for motivation, comments on the report sheets, end

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of term gifts, etc. This method is a good reinforcer for the totality of educational objectives - cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains if well disbursed.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

➔ Organising seminars and conferences for teachers as refreshers and renewal courses regularly to update their knowledge in handling disciplinary issues with scholars. Attendance of such seminars should be made a prerequisite for promotion of staff members.

➔ Production of periodicals or news bulletin in form of subsidized leaflets and pamphlets by the Ministry of Education on practical issues of concern like behavioural modifications techniques should be looked into urgently. In addition, circulation of journals should not be limited to higher institutions but be extended to principals of schools, libraries, etc where these knowledge are needed.

➔ Aids to modelling (story-telling, audio-visual filmstrips/tapes, role-playing, field trips) should be encouraged, emphasised and sustained.

➔ Business education should be taught using self-fulfilling prediction in addressing students' right from Senior Secondary one in order to improve their self-concept.

CONCLUSION

The school is responsible for the total development of a child. Business education classes usually take more than 50% of the school population because it bridges the gap between pure sciences and arts. The problem of classroom management is becoming increasingly difficult these days. Students demonstrate a lot of maladaptive behaviour that affect them and others negatively. The use of negative reinforcement and punishment has not yielded enough influence and justification. It is perceived that the use of behavioural modification techniques such as modelling, schedules etc will yield better and lasting results. Certain recommendations like organising regular seminars and

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conferences on vital issues like this will be of assistance. Also, as circulation of journals focused on this issue accessed by principals, staff and libraries.

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