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TEACHERS' APPLICATION OF BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION TECHNIQUES: A MEANS OF ENSURING EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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A B S T R A C T

Teachers' responsibilities are enormous for them to be able to maintain an effective classroom, conducive enough for learning. As a strategy for checking beviourial problems in the classroom, teachers require skills that they can subtly apply to ensure discipline. Teachers are trained not only to be qualified in their teaching subjects but also to build in the learners essential social and inter-relational skills that can help not only to increase pupils' academic output but also boost their self-confidence. This paper gives an insight into methods the teachers can use in the upbringing of the younger generation. A teacher can make or mar the future of the child if he does not use the requisite methods of discipline while instructing the pupils. Behaviour modification techniques are scientifically proven skills that teachers can adopt instead of the use of the cane as a means of punishment. The classroom is the meeting place for the teacher and the students who are from diverse backgrounds and exhibit a variety of characters. The techniques are aimed at cultivating in the learner desirable and socially approved behaviour. By carefully embracing different behaviour modification techniques, teachers are able to avert much disruptive behaviour in the class. Although there are many techniques, only a selected few are discussed in this paper. Knowledge gathered from the paper will assist teachers in maintaining an effective learning environment.

K E Y W O R D S

Application, behaviour modification techniques, classroom teachers', effective learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

One of the oldest professions ever known to mankind is teaching. The entire essence of teaching according to Fashiku(2017) involves sharing experiences between the teacher and the learner. Teaching has to do with the expression of an intention with the aim of bringing a desired change in the behaviour of the learner. Some authorities like Nnachi (2010) and Duyilemi and Duyilemi (2002) equally share's the view that teaching is as old as man. Teaching is a means by which parents and communities pass meaningful instructions to their younger generations.

In the school setting, the responsibility of passing the requisite values and knowledge to the child is rested on the classroom teacher. Teaching according to the NCE/DLS Course Book (1990) as cited in Amadioha (2010) is a complex act with a person or group of persons trying to influence the behaviour of another person or group of persons. The environment most ideal for this process to take place is the school as well as its classrooms which serve as host to the learner (otherwise called either Pupil or Student). The classroom is a microcosm of the larger society. This means that pupils coming to learn are from different backgrounds. Their abilities to adjust to the expectations of the society are also distinct from one another. It is this unique nature of the personalities that made Ngwoke and Mbaegu (2015) to describe the school as the meeting point between the teachers and the students.

A common definition of learning is that learning is a relatively permanent change in behaviour resulting from the interaction of the organism with the environment. To achieve the desired change in the conduct of the students, it beholds on the teacher according to Uchenna and Onete (2011) to be proactive and vast in carrying out his duties. Teachers face multiple challenges inside the classroom in their attempt to refine the child. Some of the challenges as stated by Abdallah and Usman (2017) and Adegoke (2011) include noise making, lying, aggressiveness, truancy, students who frequently manufacture excuses for not doing their class or homework's, stealing, in addition to those that are shy as well as extroverts and introverts. The classroom also accommodates some pupils that are hyperactive, bullies and some that are over anxious.

These different character traits notwithstanding, the teacher is the key person that is expected to transform the pupil to conform to the expectations of the society. This is where a teachers' experience in diversifying appropriate disciplinary methods instead of adopting only the conventional punishment of using the cane becomes relevant. A teacher who has proper understanding of behaviour modification techniques, will most likely be in better position to ensure effective classroom environment and therefore achieve the desired goals set out for learning. As teachers, there is need to realize that teaching is only effective when it points to the road of development (Vygosky in Maduekwe (2015). This paper centers on:

    i. The Classroom teacher
    ii. Effective learning environment
    iii. The meaning of behaviour modification
    iv. Some techniques of behaviour modification and their applicability for effective learning.

i. The Classroom Teacher

Great students are results of great teachers. The students' achievement is influenced by many factors. The most influencer is an inspiring and informed teacher. What this statement stands for is to the effect that those who train the teachers must do their job holistically and support the newly trained ones to be proficient. The classroom teacher is so important and their place in society is indispensable. Teachers are builders of human beings especially the younger generations. A teacher serves not only in the teaching of school subjects; he is a model for the acquisition of behaviours and attitudes by the generations that passes through his training. Olukotun (2014) maintained that teachers are the first point of reform in the school curricula. His first concern is the educational progression of the child. He is accountable for the future achievements of the children under his mentorship. Painting a picture of the enormity of the teacher's job, Maduekwe (2015) emphasized that a bad politician, a corrupt officer, a perverted individual can harm only a limited ambit of people, but a bad teacher can spoil the wind of a child, thus destroy generation after generations. Again, citing Akande, Maduekwe (2015) went further to state that, society may consider the mistakes of the doctor

which has been buried in the mortuary; however that of the teacher affects the society. Teachers mould and educate children for future development of the society. Still explaining the importance of a teacher, Buseri (2010:65) quoting Henry Adams, stated that "the teacher affects eternity; for he himself can never tell where his influence stops".

Various scholars had helped define who is a teacher. Ekwueme and Igwe (2001:56) submits that a school teacher is a qualified person, professionally trained, certificated and well prepared to teach specific subjects or subjects in a school thereby helping students to acquire knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies as well as inculcating in them the values and attitudes thus equipping them to live and contribute to the development of their society. This means teachers are specifically prepared persons who are equipped by daint of their training to help society educate the younger generations.

Similarly, Ezekwesili (2007) qualifies teachers as a trained professional on a learning environment with a mandate of assisting or supporting pupils, students and learners acquire appropriate skills, abilities and competencies, mentally and physically to empower themselves as individuals to live a standard life as well as contribute to the overall development of the world around them.

The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) Handbook (FRN:2002:11) defined a teacher as a person who had undergone approved professional training in education at appropriate levels capable of imparting knowledge, attitudes and skills to the learner. While Paulley (2011:62) stated that a teacher is a professional man or woman who helps a learner through a purposeful activity to acquire skills, attitudes, ideas and knowledge that will create or influence desirable changes in the behaviour of the learner. The latter's definition emphasis that teaching has its own professional methodologies that are acquired in the process of training with the intent to prepare the teacher for the science or pedagogy of handling the learner. A teacher in the works of Mosher and Purpel as citied in Duyilemi and Duyilemi (2002) asserts that in the strictest generic sense is someone who deliberately tries to persuade another person so that he may change his thinking or behaviour in specific direction.

From the foregoing, it is clear that teaching is a serious business that requires both mental and physical alertness. Teachers are supposed to be the best brains and intellectually ready to spur the upcoming generation to be inquisitive to explore their environment and make it a better place than they met it.

Teaching has been generally referred to as the guidance of pupils through planned activities so that they may acquire the richest learning possible from their experiences (Van and Brittel as cited in Amadioha 2017). In the learning process, the teachers' guide the learner to learn through planned activities while the learner or student gets involved in active process of learning that goes on within him as he//she does the learning himself. It is worthy of note to stress that the 21st century teaching as explained by Jan (2017) had gone digital and teachers should learn to acclimatize because learning happens everywhere, at all times, on any topic and assisting any learning style.

ii. The Effective Learning Environment

Put simply, an effective learning environment stands for strategies or ways that teachers use or can create in other to obtain a positive, productive classroom experience. The term effective learning environment can equally pass for or be used for classroom management strategies according to Slavin (2009). Slavin, maintained that effective learning environment does not only stand for preventing and responding to misbehaviour but also, more importantly using class time well, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to interest and inquiry and permitting activities that engage students' minds and imaginations. For Slavin, a class with no behaviour problems can by no means be assumed to be well – managed class.

For a class to be described to be an effective learning environment, it must have activities that are well organized, with instructions properly planned and the physical classroom adequately conductive. It's a class that manages time well. Under such situation, both the pupils and teachers creates happiness from their

learning activities, such class can be termed as productive learning environment, and naturally there will be minimal disruptive activities as students are enjoying their learning experiences.

An effective learning environment is an atmosphere where discipline exists. Discipline is made manifest through methods used to prevent behaviour problems aimed at reducing their occurrences in the future. The main purpose for enhancing discipline in the classroom is to facilitate teaching and learning succeeds. Major (2019) lucidly elaborated some of the benefits of an organized classroom. The benefits among others include, stimulating creativity in learning; eliminating social prejudice among learners; helping learners to develop team spirit; tolerance, understanding of divergences and differences in student's behaviours.

A good and effective learning environment enables the teacher to teach effectively, gives room for pupils to interact and participate actively in class and above all, is germanely significant for classroom discipline such an atmosphere facilities student's achievement of the desired changes in behaviour which is the target of all learning. According to Unachukwu&Osunka (2016) enforcement of discipline in school usually aims at making the school environment conductive for learning and helps to allow for the steady self-growth of each person. They warned that in correcting young people, teachers should be guided by the sense of trust and respect for them. The uncomfortable situation however in most Nigerian schools is that, there is a pervasive atmosphere in which children are not involved in the setting of rules that govern their conducts. A Tug – of – War sort of situation is prevalent in which teacher's efforts are directed at enforcing discipline while children are expending energies to get out of control (Isangedighi, 2007). It is for these reasons that behaviour modification for the management of academic stress and anxieties among students is imperative and should be used in order for them to increase academic achievements without phobias exerting their force on the students adversely.

iii. The meaning of behaviour modification

The word behaviour is commonly used by all in society. Behaviour means any activity that can be observed, measured and recorded. Okorie (2012) asserted that behaviour is the result of the action between environment and the child is growing self. It includes all these aspects of human activities which we can observe. This definition does not exclude behaviours that are not observable hence behaviour also involves personal experiences which can only be studied by asking individuals to express their feelings and thought as part of behaviour. Behaviours are general beliefs that are socially acquired or learned. This means that most of the behaviour people exhibit was not hereditary but rather developed in life through socialization (National Open University of Nigeria (N.D))

Behaviour modification as used in this context is the application of psychological principles of learning to enable us humans systematically alleviate disruptive behaviours and enhance functionality in the class, homes or in a clinical settings (Ekennia, 1994). Through the use of the psychological principles of learning, the person can be conditioned to do right and suppress the undesired behaviour by the application of pain and pleasure principle. Isangedighi (2007) confirms that behaviour modification techniques give credibility to interventions as means of correcting students' misconducts.

The http://www.merriam-webster.com (N.D), asserts that behaviour modification is the psychotherapy concerned with the treatment of observable behaviours through either desensitization or aversive therapy. These therapies could help to substitute or fathom desirable responses for undesirable ones such as phobias or obsessions. Again, when behaviours that are deleterious to learning are modified, the propensity to achieve greater is almost automatically activated and changes notices in the students' achievement, this is in addition to better emotional adjustment (Maliki, 2006).

Beyond enhancing significant academic learning outcomes, behaviour modification techniques once adequately applied in the classroom help students develop a better psychosocial well-being. A good understanding and use of the techniques creates and maintains interpersonal relationships among students which help to boost their positive image. When students are seen to be well behaved, the image of the school from which they graduate is better promoted (Unachukwu and Nwosu) (2015). Furthermore, the techniques help individuals change their behaviour in order to solve problems confronting them. For examples when

properly applied, behaviour modification assists underachievers to overcome fear, examination anxiety and promotes academic performances.

The teachers' ability to assists students adjust positively transcend their symptoms of inattentiveness in class, poor academic performances and being problematic at school; it could extend to their private individual lives as well. A child with challenges of social adjustment could experience poor relationships with his peers and siblings. Such an unhealthy life style could predict failure to obey constituted authorities at adulthood, create difficulties resulting into poor parental bonding in family setting, thereby escalating his unsettled life style beyond the school walls.

Maladaptive behaviours can be learned and unlearned in the same way as adaptive behaviours, thus behaviours modification can be achieved via systematic and gradual introduction of changes into the stimulating environment. Osakinle and Falani(2011) had pointedly explained that techniques such as counter conditioning, stimulation of role-play and reinforcement can serve as aid to the teacher to modify unwanted behaviours that are deleterious to the achievement of learning goals.

Behaviours modification is anessential tool to improve the students' quality of life, and in many cases that could mean simply exploring a relationship issue or one's self-perception. Using psychologically appropriate measures to modify behaviour is recommended to avoid the steeling effect of corporal punishment on a child whose cause and source of undesired behaviour has yet to be ascertained. Owuamanam, Ajidahunand Owuamanam(2012) corroborates that behaviour modification techniques help to improve self-concept, which is key in helping the student face academic and social challenges squarely without the accompanying anxieties that leads to underachievement. In the light of the above and to better expose the classroom teacher, a few of these techniques are considered here.

Applicable Behaviour Modification Techniquesin the classroom.

There are several strategies teachers could use while teachingto achieve the desired change in the behaviour of the learner. These methods when tactically applied will yield positive results in the learning environment.

i.   Systematic Desensitization

A teacher can use systemic desensitization technique to secure the confidence of his pupils or students who are scared or has phobia (fear) for subjects like mathematics or physics. The method was first introduced by Joseph Wolpe (1958) as a way to enable pupils to overcome particular psychological problems especially anxiety. According to Sternberg (2004), systematic desensitization enables the teacher or therapist to teach the student a set of relaxation methods to help him/her combat a problem, such as phobia or fear that normally results in anxiety and avoidance of such learning situations. The process is termed systematic because it requires the teacher to engage in a step-by-step arrangement of helping the learner to undo the feared situation. This hierarchical procedure is essential to create a conducive environment devoid of anxieties.

The teacher who apply systematic desensitization technique will for example, explain their lesson or topics from the simplest or easiest steps to the most complex stage. By so doing, all students in the class are being carried along. Unachukwu and Nwasor(2015) maintained that students who are afraid of Mathematics could be admitted into an Additional mathematics class and the concepts they are able to understand therein could boost their morale to study mathematics.

Systematic desensitization involves engaging in a response that is incompatible with the initial unwanted response. Essuman, Nwaogu and Nwachukwu (1990) had explained that for teachers to be proficient in the use of this technique, he must teach the pupil the need to relax by taking breathing exercises to make the body muscles comfortable. Furthermore, the students will require identifying and organizing certain stimuli which may provoke anxiety especially with less-feared objects or situations. For example, a teacher can present pictures of pleasant scenes of people enjoying a car ride before presenting a fatal accident scene to his medical students who are scared of bloody scenes. This gradual representation will enable the student

build confidence in himself to face the reality in class after mastery of the various stages in hierarchical order.

Systematic desensitization could equally be useful to teachers in helping shy students to quietly learn to face large crowds on stage after various sections of rehearsals or practicing. Desensitization can help in unlearning such behaviours and therefore assist one adjust emotionally to the realities of his environment. In JosephWolpe's view, desensitization can help an individual with a feared-response to inhibit such response by substituting an activity which is typically inhibited here, this anxiety and response frequently substituted here are relaxation and calmness.

ii. Proximity control.

Teachers are expected to be vigilant and highly observant while in the classroom teaching. Proximity control means the ability of a teacher to identify a disruptive behaviour and moving close to such a scene to ensure that orderliness is restored. It is a non-verbal approach which is important to the classroom teacher since it can help to check students that are disruptive whenlessons are ongoing. Once the teacher moves close, the student with the disruptive behaviour, would tend to adjust his behaviour. Bernstein, Clarke-Stewart, Roy, Srull and Wickens (1994) asserted that the closer an object are to one another, the more likely they are to be perceived as belonging together. Proximity control can help to eliminate a bad behaviour or help infuse confidence in students who are lacking confidence for the completion of a task. Areas where proximity control could be effectively applied in the classroom setting includes teachers helping to check noise-making, cheating during examinations, when students are fighting or sleeping while a lesson is in progress, when students exhibit undue hyper activeness that are injurious during outdoor games, etc. For purposes of clarity invite a noise-maker to come and sit near the teacher's table in the front-roll of the class. By just sitting close to the teacher, the student will adjust his behaviour to avoid a more severe disciplinary action from the teacher.

iii. Praise

Praise is an effective way to encourage children to engage in the desired behaviour as it focuses on a child's efforts rather than on what is actually accomplished. When teachers give genuine praise that is specific, spontaneous and well desired, it encourages effective learning in the primary school. Citing various authorities, Henderlong and Lepper (2002) enumerated the behavioural advantages of praise to the growing child. They include, routinely enhancing intrinsic motivation; praise tends to be positively correlated with self-perceptions of ability among children in schools; it enhances feeling of praise and exceptions for success in the future; praise increases children's desire to engage in the praised task; praise enables students to spend more time on tasks presented to them.

The potential power of praise in behaviour modification is said to reducing classroom behaviour problems and encourages student to learn. It can be a technically successful tool for influencing a variety of classroom behaviours; such as from abiding by classroom rules and engaging in positive peer relations as well as paying attention to teachers' instructions and academic developments.

iv. Shaping

Shaping is a teaching technique that was first established by B.F. Skinner. It is a method through which teachers can help to create new behaviours among their pupils and students. In the use of shaping, the experience of the teacher counts. By definition, shaping is a means of offering condition for behaviour that is unlikely to be generated spontaneously. It works through a series of successive approximations (Sternberg, 2004:233). In other words, it takes a systematic step by step form of series of successive results to get to the expected desired goal or behaviour. For example, the teacher can encourage a child that is in the lower primary classes through "praise" or "clapping" for him while learning to write in the learning process. The pupil must first learn to handling the pencil, the child will begin to construct rough strokes; the child may then graduate to writing circles and later use the same strokes gradually to form the alphabet "A". There is a need to understand that these response in learning must be strengthened by the teachers and parents at home through constant reinforcement and practice. In those good old days, teachers will tell their pupils to write a

particular letter in their arithmetic's exercise books "fifty (50)" times or more in the process of practice. Those teachers were indeed "shaping" them. How many teachers at the lower primary schools in recent times does that today?

v.   The Premark principle

Every human being has certain preferred activities that they could be identified with on a daily basis. A psychologist named David Premark (1965), carefully studied the preferences of children and intimated teachers and parents to observe children in their classes and at home by pairing various responses that pupils could be interested to participate in. The activities of the students can be placed on a hierarchical order and the most preferred behaviour can then be used to stimulate interest in the lesser preferred behaviour or activity. For instance, a student might have great passion for colours and drawings but may not be serious with learning mathematics. The teacher can ensure the child suspend drawing pictures in the class until he completes his mathematical assignment. Now, because the child appreciates to continue with his drawing, he might quickly decide to complete his mathematics task again; a teacher might craftily keep a child in the class with instructions to complete copying his notes before allowing him to go out for the school break to play with his mates. The child's interest in going to play with his classmates or friends which is the preferred behaviour will serve as a stimulant to complete his copying of the notes. In this way, a teacher is offering activities high on the student's preference hierarchies to reinforce performance of activities lower on the hierarchy (Bernstern et al., 1994). In the same way, a mother can make a child to wash dishes in the kitchen before watching his/her favourite cartoon on the television.

vi.   Ear Shooting

Teachers who are skillful can use their ingenuity to change the character of any child. A notorious late comer, a truant, a bully can all become responsible due to the ability of the teacher's craftiness. Ear shooting is a deliberate discussion method between two teachers or elders in the presence of a student that requires correction. The two teachers can be discussing about the student without allowing the student to know they are aware he/she is eavesdropping on them or paying rapt attention to their conversation. They would pretend as if he or she does not comprehend their gist or gossip. The dialogue among the two teachers might take this order: the class teacher can say "Tarimobowei (students' name) has since being surprising me, he is the first to get to the class right from last week". The other teacher can respond by saying "are you sure, the same Tarimobowei that use to come late every day is this punctual. We bless God". On hearing this conversation, the student is energized to impress his teacher by "being punctual to school" the next morning. This strategy has proven to be very effective as the child considers the teachers remarks as socially commendable and endeavours to impress him by actually starting to be responsible.

Conclusions

Understanding and applying behaviour modification techniques is another way of improving the relationship- between teachers and their pupils. The use of the cane as the major correction tool can be discouraged in order to sustain healthier classroom efficiency. Teachers can apply these techniques depending on the circumstances and situation of the class. Helping children to understand the natural consequences of their actions is critical to improve their behaviour for improved learning in class. Above all, the teacher must express a positive attitude towards his/her work and lead by example, knowing that they are a reflection of what the growing child should be.

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