



## Efficacy of Reinforcement as an Alternative to Corporal Punishment in Controlling Student Behaviour in Schools in Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

Disruptive student behavior is of concern to schools, teachers, students and the society at large as it adversely affects education. Teachers in Kenya resorted to handling this behaviour through non corporal punishment methods, as recommended by the government. Use of corporal punishment was banned in schools in the year 2001. The Basic Education Act, 2013 spells out that pupils should not be subjected to degrading or inhuman treatment in any manner, whether psychological or physical. Despite the fact that alternative methods were used in dealing with unruly student behavior, the tendencies to such behaviour persists. The purpose of this study was to investigate the efficacy of reinforcement as an alternative method to corporal punishment in controlling unruly student behaviour in schools. Questionnaires, Interview schedules and document analysis

guides were used to collect data from teachers, Heads of Departments of Guidance and Counseling and Deputy Principals. Findings established that reinforcement was significant in controlling unruly student behaviour, although some teachers did not think so. The study recommends the need to create awareness among teachers about the use of non-corporal methods in controlling student behaviour. The implementation of the recommendations are envisioned to lead to the realization of the 4<sup>th</sup> sustainable development goal which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. The study concludes that reinforcement plays a key role in controlling student behaviour.

**Keywords:** Efficacy, Reinforcement, Controlling, Student Behavior.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Maintaining discipline among learners in the 21st century is the most challenging work in the teaching career (Yaghambe, 2013; Semali and Vumilia, 2016). The handling of students needs care and safety, and discipline assumes different forms in schools (Nakpodia, 2012). Numerous schools encounter unruly students' behavior like violation of rules and destruction of property (Osher, Bear, Sprague and Doyle, 2010). Despite the fact that teachers use alternative methods to corporal punishment, they maintain that they are less powerful compared to corporal punishment (Busienei, 2012).

In the United States, corporal punishment was outlawed in 30 states, though still used extensively in 20 states (Batul, 2011). The first European nation to outlaw corporal punishment was Sweden (Durrant, 1996). The United Nations stresses the need for legal reforms to create awareness about the hazards of corporal punishment use and enhance other non violent methods (UNICEF, 2001). In Africa, corporal punishment was banned in Egypt (Wasef, 2011). South Africa too adopted numerous steps of prohibiting corporal punishment (Soneson, 2005). In Kenya, corporal punishment was banned in 2001 by the introduction of the Children Act of 2001 (Government of Kenya, 2001) and the rights of children were enshrined in the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which shields them from all forms of punishment (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The Ministry of Education requires teachers to use non corporal measures to tackle indiscipline issues in institutions (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2005). Consequently,

teachers in Kenya have invented distinctive ways of managing student behaviour in the form of reinforcement, exclusion, manual punishment and guidance and counseling (Agesa, 2015; Ndembu, 2013). In Bondo Sub County, student behaviour problems persist (Bondo Sub county Office, 2015) as teachers try to control student behaviour through non corporal methods. The objective of this research was to interrogate the efficacy of reinforcement as an alternative to corporal punishment in schools in Kenya.

## 2.0 METHODOLOGY

Mixed methods approach with concurrent triangulation design was used in the current study. Target population comprised of 40 deputy principals, 40 Heads of Guidance and counseling and 351 teachers. Stratified random sampling technique was used to identify schools and their proportions. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) Sample Determination Table was used to obtain a sample size of 28 heads of guidance and counseling, 28 deputy principals and 196 teachers. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document guides were used to collect data. Validity of the instruments was ascertained by seeking the judgment of experts in the department of psychology while piloting of the research instruments was undertaken in 9% of the total population that did not participate in the study. Quantitative data was analyzed using correlational analysis and descriptive statistics while qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## 3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Reinforcement

	Indicator	SA	A	UD	D	SD
1	Reinforcement increases a feeling of belonging in the learners.	(42%)	(16%)	(11.5%)	(33%)	(14%)
2	Reinforcement inspires learners not to repeat unacceptable behaviour.	(45%)	(38%)	(10%)	(3.66%)	(3%)
3	Reinforcement has made it possible for learners to prevail over behavioural and social problems	(40%)	(38%)	(16%)	(04%)	(2.1%)
4	Reinforcement makes learners have positive inclination towards school.	(65%)	(28%)	(7%)	(0%)	(0%)

Table 1 shows that respondents who believed reinforcement enhanced a sense of belonging in the students were 42% (Strongly Agree) and 16% (Agree) while those who believed it did not were 33% (Strongly Disagree) 14% (Disagree). The findings suggest that most respondents believed that reinforcement enhanced a sense of belonging in the students. Conversely, Brown (2013) in New Zealand argues that the use of reinforcement approaches effectively increased positive behaviour among the students. However, Reupert and Woodcock (2011) in their study in Australia maintain that corrective strategies used by teachers are of low level and are not effective in barring student misbehaviour.

Although some respondents believed alternative corrective measures do not enhance a sense of belonging, qualitative findings indicate that positive reinforcement has effect on student behaviour. Students who were reinforced behaved well, were more confident and closely related with their teachers. They developed a sense of belonging, which made them behave appropriately, as was noted:

*‘Reinforcement is instrumental and should be sustained since it brings learners to the teachers’ [DP 16].*

One Head of Department similarly remarked:

*‘The learners get motivated and develop a sense of belonging that changes their behaviour’ [HOD 1].*

The expressions of DP 16 and HOD1 suggest that reinforcement plays a role in controlling learner behaviour. Dasaradhi, Ramakrishna and Rayappa (2016) in India assert that teachers need to sustain learners’ interest and Dodge (2011) in America equally maintains that there is need to appreciate learners for showing acceptable behaviour.

Additional findings from the minor occurrence book established that if learners’ name did not appear in the list of noise makers, he or she was rewarded, and the learner reciprocated by sustaining good conduct. This indicates that positive reinforcement enables learners to maintain desirable conduct. Similarly, Brown (2013) in his study in America postulates that teachers depend on reinforcement

approaches that perpetuate student positive behaviour.

More quantitative findings confirm that reinforcement encourages students not to repeat undesirable behaviour. This was confirmed by majority 83% (Strongly Agree 45%; Agree 38%) of the respondents. These findings show that reinforcement has positive influence on student behaviour and encourages them to sustain desirable behaviour. The findings are similar to Reinke, Stormont, Herman and King (2014) study in America which suggests that raising the use of reinforcement upgrades the outcome of students, especially those who are vulnerable to undesirable behaviour. Additional qualitative findings suggested that praise was appropriate in controlling the behaviour of learners as depicted in the following excerpt:

*'A learner who is praised for behaving well sustains desirable behaviour and is likely to improve in academic performance too'* [DP10].

The statement from DP 10 seems to imply that praise makes learners gain acceptable behaviour and also makes their academic performance better. Rahimi and Karkami (2015) in Iran also agree that recognition has positive effect on the behaviour of the learner, just as Maphosa (2011) in South Africa conversely maintains that major forms of indiscipline require retribution. One other respondent who was interviewed said that praise positively changes the behaviour of a learner, as seen in the following excerpt:

*'Learners who are praised for behaving acceptably sustain good behaviour'* [DP 6].

The views of DP 6 indicate that praise has positive effect and encourages the learner to

sustain good conduct. Bickford (2012) study in America concurs that praise is important in controlling student behaviour. Mohrbutter (2011) in USA argues that teachers should acquire professional development for managing student behaviour appropriately. Another interviewee believes that praise, however light it may be, has positive influence on learner behavior as shown in the narrative:

*'Students who often misbehave can be praised for any slight positive change they make. This leads to positive behaviour change in the learners'* (HOD 4).

The sentiments of HOD 4 imply that reinforcement impacts positively on the learners and those teachers ought to recognize positive change in learners and to reward them. Rahimi and Karkami (2015) in Iran too believe involvement and recognition are beneficial strategies of discipline. However, Dodge (2011) in America maintains that school administrators are not ready to face rising challenges of learning needs.

Findings from document guides revealed that student leaders who performed their duty efficiently were rewarded. This encouraged them to sustain the virtue of hard work and good behaviour, an indication that reinforcement sustains good behaviour. Guner (2012) study in Turkey agrees that rewards are effective in managing behaviour. On the contrary, Reinke, Stormont, Herman and King (2014) in America agree that rewards improve learner behaviour, although they are more effective on learners who are prone to misconduct.

Further quantitative findings confirmed that positive reinforcement helps students overcome behavioural and social problems. This was reported by majority 78% (Strongly Agree 40%; Agree 38%) of the respondents. Learners who were reinforced for good conduct behaved well. Rhodes (2014) in America also agrees that praising students helps in controlling their behaviour. Similarly, Dhaliwal (2013) in India agrees that teachers handle unwanted behaviour by motivating and encouraging students through establishing a personal relationship with learners who have challenging behaviour. On the contrary, Ajibola and Hamadi (2014) in Nigeria argue that the disciplinary measures to be undertaken are determined by causes and kinds of disciplinary problems.

One interviewee remarked that a learner who is recognized for good conduct positively influences others, and that material rewards cause good behaviour as depicted in the following remarks:

*‘A student who upholds desirable behaviour is awarded in public so that others can see and behave well too’* [HOD 14].

The sentiments of HOD 14 indicate students who are rewarded publicly are emulated by their colleagues. Additional information from document analysis guides reveal that material rewards are useful in sustaining desirable relationship in the learners. Dodge (2011) study in America also believes that learners need to be rewarded by being given material rewards. The findings are similar to Foncha, Kepe and Abongdia (2014) study in South Africa that praising of good students during public gathering in school promotes student discipline. However, Bechuke and Debela (2012) in South Africa argue the behaviour of

an individual doesn't depend on external stimulus.

Quantitative findings affirm that majority of respondents 93% (Strongly Agree 65%; Agree 28%) believe that reinforcement makes students acquire positive inclination towards school. Qualitative findings from interviews also show that reinforcement makes learners develop positive inclination towards school as was expressed by one respondent:

*‘Learners who are reinforced have positive attitude towards school and would want to be associated with their school’* [HOD10].

The sentiments of HOD 10 suggest that learners who are reinforced have positive attitude towards school and would want to be associated with their school. Consequently, reinforcement is useful in changing the attitude of learners. Students who are positively inclined to their school are likely to develop desirable behaviour since they would want to uphold the standards of their institution. Reinke, Stormont and Herman (2014) in USA also believe that reinforcement boosts desirable student behaviour. However, Moyo, Khewu and Bayaga (2014) study in South Africa recommends that demerits should be used well to control student behaviour.

A correlation analysis of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis that reinforcement was not effective in controlling student behaviour. Table 2 shows results

*Table 2: Correlation Analysis between Positive Reinforcement and Students Behaviour*

Correlations	Positive reinforcement	Student behaviours
Pearson Correlation	1	.411**
Positive Reinforcement Sig.(2tailed)		.000
N	191	191
Pearson Correlation	.411*	1
Student Behaviors Sig.( 2 tailed)	.000	
N	191	191

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

Table 2 shows a positive relationship between reinforcement and management of student behaviour. A Pearson's correlation coefficient of  $r=0.411$  was realized, showing that reinforcement is beneficial in controlling student behaviour. The findings agree with Roache and Ramon (2011) study in Australia that management strategies like reward make students accountable for their own behaviour and their peers too. Likewise, Ching (2012) study in Philippines concurs that sanctions and rewards are useful if applied according to the principles of the school. Contrarily, Reupert and Woodcock (2011) study in America argues that some teachers do not

have confidence in certain strategies of behaviour management.

## 5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study findings established that reinforcement plays a key role in controlling student behaviour, although some teachers believe otherwise.

Therefore, the study recommends the urgent need to create awareness about the importance of alternative methods like reinforcement in controlling student behaviour.

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