

Impact of Positive Reinforcement Strategies on Classroom Behavior Management Using ABA

Bhawna Aggarwal*

Behavior Specialist, Cognifi, Faridabad, Haryana

sonia@cognifi.org

Abstract: Parents and guardians have a responsibility to ensure that their children get the best care possible while they are in the care of early childhood educators. Simultaneously, teachers' mental health and stress levels are affected since a third of the children in early childhood education programs come in with disruptive behaviours. The purpose of the research was to find out how the instructors' use of reinforcement techniques affected their students' grades. Students' self-esteem and ability to focus in class are both boosted by positive reinforcement. Teachers' attention is mostly focused on individual pupils, but the effect on poor performers and benchwarmers is substantial.

Keywords: Early childhood, Behavior, Primary Level, Reinforcement Strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers use both positive and negative reinforcement to encourage desirable behaviors in their pupils. For instance, some kids may not get recess until they accomplish all of their work, while others may get candy for tidying up. Toolboxes for positive reinforcement might differ. Students' behaviors and emotional intelligence may be supported via the use of four main kinds of positive reinforcers, which vary according to the context and the person. When kids acquire and practice social and emotional skills, it's called social and emotional learning (SEL). Our ability to make sound judgements, plan for the future, and deal with unpleasant emotions is a product of our social and emotional learning abilities. There are five main strengths of SEL. Skills in self-management, decision-making, social awareness, and interpersonal relationships are all part of this category. Students' social behaviors and self-regulation abilities are fostered and developed via the use of positive reinforcement, which also improves their academic achievement and classroom management. In order for pupils to become aware of how to govern their conduct in class, self-management and self-monitoring are crucial. For students' academic and social success both in and out of the classroom, positive reinforcement is essential for both teaching behaviours and our students. Consequently, encouraging good behaviour is one way to help kids become more self-aware and competent in social situations.

Educators employ tactics for managing student behaviour and fostering a healthy classroom

environment. These approaches are a component of the fundamental, all-encompassing PBS concepts. Either the whole class (by establishing norms and procedures) or individual students (by recognizing and rewarding good behaviour) may benefit from these strategies. Students are able to concentrate better and retain more information when these accommodations are in place. Few studies have examined the long-term effects of behavioural supports used in early childhood education on students' performance in school. Nevertheless, research has linked behavioural supports in primary schools—including those with preschool classes—to improved academic, behavioural, and social-emotional results for students in the long run. Reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction are two additional benefits seen in primary school teachers who use these tactics.

LITERATURE AND REVIEW

Using the Arksey and O'Malley scoping review methodology, Rafi, Aisha & Ansar, Ambreen & Sami, Muneeza. (2020) conducted the research from January 18, 2019, to February 18, 2019. In order to find the grey literature, a comprehensive search was conducted in Google Scholar, ERIC, PubMed, and the bibliographic databases. Using inclusion and exclusion criteria, the search was made more specific. Using the PRISMA flowchart, we sorted the studies that were part of the literature search. Using positive reinforcement as a tool to control disruptive student behaviour is the focus of the chosen research. Thanks (41%), comments (33%), and additional research on classroom management (25%), were the positive reinforcement tactics that were found. To make the intended behaviour more likely in the classroom, Skinner's operant learning principle might be used. In order to improve the desired behaviour in the classroom, evidence-based practice and policy may be informed by the outcomes of the review.

The research done by Mdletshe, Lindokuhle. (2024) had the primary focus of fostering a classroom culture founded on virtuous principles, lessening misbehavior during lessons, and promoting good behaviour through my teaching practice. Additionally, they planned to improve my overall teaching practice by reflecting on how this research will support my teacher-learning. Based on what we understand about sociocultural theory, which states that we learn knowledge from others who are more knowledgeable than us, we understood how crucial it is to reflect on my life to uncover what my experiences have been like that have shaped my beliefs about what is acceptable behaviour.

As noted in research carried out by Salubayba, Teodora & Navarro, Stephan Jade (2025), a school's atmosphere must be conducive to learning if it is to fulfil its role as a venue for students' overall development. But disruptive behaviours, which make learning more difficult, are on the rise. It is anticipated that instructors would address these behaviours since they are seen as facilitators of learning. This research used narrative inquiry to retell first-hand accounts from elementary school instructors on dealing with disruptive students. It looked into how instructors dealt with common disruptive behaviours in the classroom and the tales they talked about it.

As demonstrated in the review conducted by Khan, Shahzeb & Srivel, Varshaa & Wong, Michael (2025) Learning management systems (LMS) are a fundamental part of every course, getting students to engage with these systems is a major challenge. There are drawbacks with the traditional approach of using grades to incentivize student engagement. Gamification is the most recent approach to motivation and engagement to be adopted by many academic institutions, and we explored this approach as part of our work. During the autumn 2023 semester, we implemented a gamified rift lottery style incentive program to promote asynchronous student engagement with our LMS, Microsoft Teams, in a third-year undergraduate health sciences elective course. Engaged students are those who willingly interact with LMS-related activity.

According to the research finding of Letuma, Motsekiso Calvin (2025), positive reinforcement has a firm scientific basis— individuals are more likely to repeat a behaviour if it results in a satisfying experience, whether it is attention, money, or some sort of sensory experience. Praise is a motivational strategy used to facilitate inclusive classroom management and develop meaningful connections between teachers and students. The use of praise in secondary schools in South Africa has been minimally researched. This essay presented an inspirational lens to understand students' feelings when teachers deployed praise.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Various data gathering technologies were used during normal class time, after school and playtime to gather the data. Interviews were the first means of gathering information. A visual questionnaire was the second instrument used to gather data. Thirdly, an observation log was used to gather data. Data collection and analysis were carried out by means of these

instruments over the course of the investigation.

Data for the research was collected via interviews. In order to better understand how my pupils engage with me as a teacher, I conducted interviews with them. So that the researcher may review the data later, the interview was taped. The interview consisted of five free-form questions given to the students. Various forms of classroom-based positive reinforcement were the subject of the enquiries. The survey also enquired about the pupils' impressions of school and our interactions as teachers. The interviews took place during the lunch hour and after school. The interviews were coded thereafter in order to identify trends.

Participants

This study included six first graders from a rural primary school. The kids were in my first class during the 2020–2021 school year. One student's questionnaire was deleted from the data set because it was determined to not be valid. Farmers and agricultural labourers make up the majority of the school's student body. There were two hundred pupils enrolled in the 2019–2020 academic year. Using data collected from the India's Department of Education's website, Table 1 below displays the school's demographics.

Table 1. Enrollment by Ethnicity (CDE, 2018)

Ethnicity	Number of Students	%
Hispanic or Latino	180	90
Filipino	2	<1
White	16	8
Not Reported	2	<1

Because I wanted to answer a question about what works in my own classroom, I employed a handy sampling method. My first-grade class was the one that chose these youngsters to participate in the research. I started by asking a coworker to get student approval. My coworker started by giving my pupils an overview of the research. Parts of the research, like my own observation of my pupils, are commonplace in the classroom, as I told my students.

Additionally, students were made aware that some aspects of the research, such the interview and questionnaire, do not constitute standard classroom procedures. The deadline for students'

and their parents' or guardians' permission or assent forms was one week ago. Questions were asked either before students arrived at campus for the day or during the after-school program, which was held after school. There was a 10-minute time limit for each interview. Before the interview, I made it clear to the students that I am gathering this information to help me improve as a teacher, therefore I needed them to tell me how they really felt so that my research question could be answered. I opted not to provide a prize for the interview because I didn't want the kids to feel pressured to do well just so they could get it. Throughout the process, participants were reminded that they had the freedom to skip questions or stop participating in the student at any point. Three students consented to be interviewed as part of the research. Students who did not take part in the study were not questioned.

The survey was handed out over the period of many days while students were working in small groups. I separated the students who were going to take part in the survey and read it out loud to them. All the while, we let participants know that they may stop at any point or skip any question if they wanted to. Students who choose not to take part in the survey usually worked quietly alone or in small groups and did not fill out any surveys at all.

Only pupils who actively participated had their observational data recorded. I kept an open-ended observational diary detailing the participants' reactions to behavior-specific praise for four weeks. No data was obtained from students who voluntarily did not engage in the research. I differentiated my usual practice of observing students from the research practice, even though it is a regular activity in the classroom.

Data Analysis

There were several steps to the data analysis process. For the next three years, the observational data will be kept on a secure computer. We have collected the surveys and will keep them in a secure cabinet. A password-protected computer stored the taped interviews. Data transcription was the first step. The next step was to read the data several times in order to understand it. The data was then classified according to predetermined topics, such as self-awareness, praise-related actions, behaviors, and state of being.

FINDINGS

This research was conducted to find out how my classroom uses behaviors specific praise, which is a positive reinforcement that has worked for me in managing student behaviors.

The research was also looking to investigate how the students thought and felt about these strategies when they were taught. In this final section, we will look at the results of the structured interviews, questionnaires and observational data. The four topics presented in the research were students' emotional state, praise-related activities, students' self-awareness, and students' behaviors. We will explain and examine each topic using data points:

Students' State of Being

The students' emotional states were the primary focus of the analysis of their feedback on behavior-specific praise. The data revealed a state of being as students discussed their experiences with their teachers in interviews and surveys. The investigation revealed three distinct mental states. Students reported a range of emotions in response to behavior-specific praise, including happiness/niceness, good, alright, and sad. The frequency with which specific words, like "happy" and "fun," appear will also be examined. These results provide evidence that kids go through a wide range of emotions in relation to behavior-specific praise in the classroom. In any case, it's worth mentioning that certain states of being are seen more often than others. The accounts given by the students indicate that there is more than one emotion associated with appreciation for certain actions.

When students reported feeling pleasant or cheerful, the results showed that they were experiencing these emotions. One kid even went so far as to say he "felt happy" when I asked him how he felt after receiving compliments. After discussing an incident in which their instructor showed kindness towards them, pupils reported feeling happy and pleasant. According to the research, pupils like it when their teachers use positive language, including behavior-specific praise, while addressing them.

During the research, students have reported feeling well. For every instance when students mentioned feeling happy in the interview or questionnaire, we utilized it as a theme. The researcher also noted that although the pupils were learning, they seemed to be enjoying themselves. Feeling good in class meant that students were happy and engaged, whether it meant they were quietly working on a project or chatting with a fellow student. All pupils reported feeling good about school and about it when their instructor complimented them in class. It is clear from this research that pupils feel good about school and appreciate it when their instructor compliments them. When a student has a positive contact with their instructor, such as via the use of behaviors specific praise, this "good" state of being happens in the classroom.

Feeling alright was also identified as a state of being in the research. According to the survey results, most people felt OK. Several areas of reaction made use of it. Two out of five children said they are OK when asked about the things their instructor says to them. Three out of five pupils gave the response "I feel okay" when their instructor speaks to them. Out of the five pupils who were asked, two said that their teacher's remarks made them feel okay. One kid out of five said that their teacher's behaviors make them feel good. Due to the lack of supplementary questions, we do not know why these pupils felt the way they did. Based on the results of the survey, it seems that we need additional information about the students' emotional states in order to comprehend them fully. Furthermore, the data reveals that not all student-teacher interactions are pleasant or leave students feeling happy. Interactions between instructors and students may not always elicit positive emotions, but they also do not always elicit negative ones. On occasion, there are interactions between teachers and students that help the pupils feel comfortable. There is data to show that just because behavior-specific praise is happening in the classroom, it doesn't guarantee it making students happy. It would be helpful to collect additional information to fully understand why the children were just feeling comfortable about their contacts with their instructor, since behavior-specific praise may also lead to other states of being.

Sadness was the final motif identified for state of being. Students used this topic when they wanted to convey how unhappy they were. Although it was captured a few times during data processing, this code was not as often detected in the data as the others. Two pupils said that they were depressed in the survey. In one case, the student was describing the teacher's words; in the other, the student was describing the teacher's deeds. Additionally, one kid shared her feelings of sadness during the interview, which were later replaced with joy when her instructor had a conversation with her. The use of behavior-specific praise in the classroom, for example, may have a positive effect on students even when they are feeling down.

Students in the study expressed their emotions in class by repeating a series of phrases. Good and enjoyable were the most common words. The word "good" was used by the students to express how they felt. When asked about the impact of positive reinforcement from their instructor, several pupils cited increased self-esteem. Using behavior-specific praise in the classroom seems to be well-received by pupils. Feeling good was their reaction to classroom behavior-specific praise. During the interview process, two kids also used the word "fun" twice. Using it, we were able to deduce the pupils' attitudes towards education. "School is fun because you get to go to playtime and hang out with your friends," one youngster put it. The

comments make it seem like there were a lot of elements related to state of being.

Importantly, the research found that students' states of being were essential. According to the data, a teacher's words have a significant impact on a student's school mood. Additionally, it seems to demonstrate that a teacher's choice of words may influence a student's emotional state, for better or worse. A wide range of emotions may be evoked in the classroom via behavior-specific praise. An encounter a student has with their instructor might leave them feeling good, happy, or at least okay. And there's evidence to imply that one's state of being is not static but rather subject to change. In various contexts, a student's emotions might range from mild to extreme. Numerous elements, including the student's emotional state, might impact their state of being. Various emotions may be evoked in the classroom when teachers utilize behavior-specific praise, which might impact students' mental health.

Activities Associated with Praise

The investigation also revealed a second theme: things that are connected to praise. Classroom activities may be defined as student-led pursuits of knowledge. In the classroom, there were certain things that were linked to receiving praise. Manners, arithmetic, reading, and writing were the tasks linked with praise.

During a student interview, classroom manners were linked to positive reinforcement. Someone in the class said that their instructor had complimented him. He was questioned by the interviewer if the instructor had complimented him in the previous 30 days. As for the interview question, he said that his instructor had thanked him in class. This has to do with decorum as the pupil mistook the teacher's expression of gratitude for praise of his efforts. The learner mistook this exchange for the instructor giving him compliments on his performance.

There was also a correlation between praise and a number of academic fields. A student said that his math's instructor had complimented him while they were working on a problem. This exchange occurred after the instructor complimented the student on his whiteboard work. The instructor made the observation that students report feeling better after receiving positive feedback on their reading and writing. All things considered, it seems that kids like it when their teachers compliment them in class, and it might even boost their mood while they're learning.

The fact that students' experiences with behavior-specific praise were common demonstrated this. The classroom is filled with praise all day long. There were many parts of the lesson that

were linked to praise, but not all. According to these results, the instructor has to include praise into their lessons across a variety of subjects. Regardless of the topic matter or context, students report enjoying it when their teachers compliment them, even if it's only a simple "thank you" in class.

Self-Awareness

The importance of self-awareness was another topic that emerged from students' experiences with behavior-specific praise. The concept of self-awareness was included in every data type. Students' levels of self-awareness were recorded whenever they were observed or when they indicated whether they knew something or not. The two main points that surfaced were uncertainty and attentiveness. These ideas demonstrated how behavior-specific praise might help students pay more attention in class and become more self-aware in their interactions with others.

The concept of mindfulness was introduced as a way for students to be aware of, or at least cognizant of themselves in relation to, their interactions with one another in class. Results showed that although some pupils paid close attention, others did not. When the instructor saw that the pupils were paying attention in class or were about to describe anything that had occurred, it was coded. For instance, it was seen that several students showed increased interest in their coursework after interactions of praise with the instructor. This provides additional evidence that pupils who received praise were more invested in their classroom work. Additionally, it heightens pupils' awareness of their surroundings and interactions.

The research also discovered uncertainty. Students' inability to recall specific classroom events or situations was a sign of uncertainty. During one interview, a pupil couldn't remember an instance when their instructor was kind, behaved appropriately, or made a mistake. Just one student out of the whole sample failed to remember this. This shows that students are generally able to be self-aware in their learning and relationships, but that they do sometimes struggle to recall specific classroom events. More research and training are required with behavior specific praise since this information shows it does not always reach all kids.

Concerning behavior-specific praise, students' experiences with self-awareness were instructive. An awareness of the lesson was felt by a few pupils. They were able to recall and recall specific occasions of praise. Many of my classmates were unable to.

It seems that there is a need for more clear instruction on behavior-specific praise. Students' ability to recall particular instances of praise suggests that it may be having the desired effect. Pupils who were unsure or could not recall an example of praise indicate the need for additional or more clear efforts to ensure that behavior-specific praise reaches all pupils.

Behaviors

Finally, student behaviors emerged as a common thread in the data pertaining to students' experiences with behavior-specific praise. While investigating the efficacy of behavior-specific praise, a number of patterns about student conduct in the classroom surfaced. The research revealed both on-task and off-task behaviors. The behaviors demonstrated a connection between on-task conduct and praise tailored to that conduct.

When either the kids themselves or the instructor saws that they were paying attention, the teacher took note. When asked about a moment when they did something well in class, two students shared their experience throughout the interview process. According to one kid, the class was instructed to sit on the carpet one day just as he was becoming comfortable there. Someone else in the class related an anecdote about when they were all standing on the carpet and repeating the spelling words. A further student recounted a polite visit to the carpet where he addressed two classmates who were engaging in inappropriate behaviors, such as arm wrestling. Positive reinforcement was also associated with several occurrences of pupils remaining on task throughout the observations. It seems from these data that students are cognizant of both their own and others' learning processes occurring in the classroom. Students are more invested in what they're doing, the people they're interacting with, or the materials they're using when they're praised, therefore it stands to reason that praise encourages them to stay on track in the classroom. This in no way proves that pupils were more focused after receiving behavior-specific praise. Still, when kids stayed on task, they got compliments.

Additionally, this research demonstrated that praise that is conditional on a behavior may elicit a broad range of feelings and conditions. In general, behaviors specific praise has the potential to impact a wide range of classroom elements, from students' emotional well-being to actual classroom behaviors.

The data was examined to find out which positive reinforcement approach is utilized most often by the instructors and in what sequence. Similarly, the ways in which instructors use these tactics for positive reinforcement and the kids' responses to each approach were documented.

Table 2. Teachers' employment of positive reinforcement tactics, the frequency of such strategies, and the students' behaviors as a result of teachers' practice

Positive Reinforcement Strategy	Frequency Ranking (Number of Occurrences)	Teacher's Practice	Student's Behavior
Verbal Praise	1	It was observed that on getting the right answer to the question or finishing reading a paragraph from the book, the teacher appreciates in words like "shabash," "good," "very good."	Student who gets appreciation becomes more motivated, raises her hand more frequently, and seems more confident than before. On the other hand, students who don't get a chance and appreciation gradually cease to raise hand.
Written Praise	2	Teacher returns the homework notebooks. On some notebooks, there is written praise like "Excellent," "Good," "Very Good," "Star," "Neat" etc. These words are directionless except "Neat." Teacher doesn't discuss why some students have got these remarks and not others.	Only high achievers open their notebooks and look for remarks. They share their praise with their fellows. Rest of the students collect their notebooks and keep them back in their bags. They look less motivated and uninterested.

Nominating Student as Group Leader	3	Teacher nominates a student to discipline, invigilate, or supervise the other fellows.	Nominated student assumes a role of leadership and enjoys the command over other fellows.
Nominating as Teacher Assistant	4	Teacher repeatedly nominates only a few students to assist in cleaning the blackboard or collecting and carrying notebooks.	Students take this opportunity as a big reward. A greater number of students show interest in performing these tasks. Students who are given the opportunity feel pride, and vice versa.
Clapping	5	Clapping is offered by the teacher as a special reward. When the teacher consciously asks a difficult question or announces top student in a classroom test. Less frequently, it was observed that the whole class claps for maintaining discipline.	It is considered a special incentive by students. Students getting applause feel happy and confident. It also motivates other high achievers. Students on the back seat look more active and enjoy clapping for them on good discipline.

CONCLUSIONS

Finding out how my students have interacted with behavior-based praise in my class was the driving force for my research. It is still not apparent how successful behavior-specific praise is as a positive management method in the classroom; however, the findings do show that it may be employed. How to maximize the effectiveness of this strategy/technique in the classroom requires more investigation.

References

1. Rafi, Aisha & Ansar, Ambreen & Sami, Muneeza. (2020). The Implication of Positive Reinforcement Strategy in dealing with Disruptive Behaviour in the Classroom: A Scoping Review. *Journal of Rawalpindi Medical College*. 24. 173-179. 10.37939/jrmc.v24i2.1190.
2. Mdletshe, Lindokuhle. (2024). Cultivating Positive Learner Behaviour in My Teaching: A Secondary School Teacher'S Self Study. 10.13140/RG.2.2.19748.18567.
3. Salubayba, Teodora & Navarro, Stephan Jade. (2025). Private School Teachers' Stories in Dealing with Disruptive Behavior in the Classroom. 10.13140/RG.2.2.33712.06400.
4. Khan, Shahzeb & Srivel, Varshaa & Wong, Michael. (2025). Enhancing Engagement in a Learning Management System through a Raffle Ticket System. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry*. 13. 10.20343/teachlearninqu.13.27.
5. Letuma, Motsekiso Calvin. (2025). Managing the Classroom with Heart: Role of Teacher Praise in Building Attachment among Progressed Learners in Underprivileged Secondary Schools. *Educational Process International Journal*. 15. 10.22521/edupij.2025.15.101.
6. Algozzine, B., Barrett, S., Eber, L., George, H., Horner, R., Lewis, T., Putnam, B., Swain-Bradway, J., McIntosh, K., & Sugai, G. (2014). School-wide PBIS tiered fidelity inventory. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. www.pbis.org
7. Anderson, K. P., Ritter, G. W., & Zamarro, G. (2019). Understanding a vicious cycle: The relationship between student discipline and student academic outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, 48, 251–262. <http://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X19848720>
8. Bradley, R., Doolittle, J., & Bartolotta, R. (2008). Building on the data and adding to the discussion: The experiences and outcomes of students with emotional disturbance. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 17(1), 4–23. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10864-007-9058-6>
9. Bruhn, A. L., Lane, K. L., & Hirsch, S. E. (2014). A review of tier 2 interventions conducted within multitiered models of behavioral prevention. *Journal of Emotional*

and Behavioral Disorders, 22(3), 171–189.

10. Conley, K., Kittelman, A., Massar, M., & McIntosh, K. (2018). What are patterns and predictors of CICO participation in U.S. schools? OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. <https://www.pbis.org/evaluation/evaluation-briefs/patternspredictors-of-cico>
11. Cook, B. G., & Odom, S. L. (2013). Evidence-based practices and implementation science in special education. *Exceptional Children*, 79(2), 135–144.
12. Gage, N. A., Grasley-Boy, N., Peshak George, H., Childs, K., & Kincaid, D. (2018). A quasi-experimental design analysis of the effects of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports on discipline in Florida. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 21(1), 50–61. <http://doi.org/1098300718768208>
13. Gage, N. A., Lee, A., Grasley-Boy, N., & Peshak George, H. (2018). The impact of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports on school suspensions: A statewide quasi-experimental analysis. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, 20(4), 217–226. <http://doi.org/1098300718768204>
14. Gage, N. A., Whitford, D. K., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). A review of school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports as a framework for reducing disciplinary exclusions. *The Journal of Special Education*, 52(3), 142–151. <http://doi.org/0022466918767847>
15. Gage, N. A., Whitford, D. K., Katsiyannis, A., Adams, S., & Jasper, A. (2019). National analysis of the disciplinary exclusion of black students with and without disabilities. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28, 1754–1764. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-019-01407-7>