

# REINFORCEMENT AND PUNISHMENT UTILIZATION OF TEACHERS IN PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN DEBRE TABOR TOWN: THE CASE OF DEBRE TABOR PRESCHOOLS, SOUTH GONDER, ETHIOPIA

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**Abstract:** This study examined reinforcement and punishment utilization of teachers in Debre Tabor Town. Descriptive surveys were employed. A total of 10 teachers participated in the study by using simple random sampling and compressive sampling technique. A mixed approach that combined qualitative and quantitative methods was used in this study. Data were collected through a questionnaire (both open-ended and close-ended questionnaires) used. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis. The collected data were analyzed using table, frequency, and percentage. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The major findings were that the status of reinforcement application in preschool is appropriate and the majority of teachers used verbal reinforcement techniques frequently. In addition to this, they didn't use punishment techniques frequently in the teaching and learning process. The outcome of this study was to raise awareness for the community, parents, preschool teachers, and educational administrators about how to use tangible reward or reinforcement to increase students' performance and prepare training for teachers about punishment. And the school director should be providing training for teachers about the utilization of physical punishment and their role in the improvement of the ECCE program.

**Keywords:** Reinforcement; Punishment; Classroom management; Preschool

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is a term used by teachers to describe the process of ensuring that classroom lessons run smoothly despite disruptive behavior by students. It is also the prevention of disruptive behaviors. Classroom management helps teachers establish and maintain an appropriate environment for the achievement of teaching and learning goals [1]. Classroom management is the term we will use to highlight all of those positive behaviors and decisions teachers make to facilitate the learning process of their students. All those activities necessary to create and maintain an orderly learning environment, such as planning and preparation of material, decoration of the classroom, and certainly the establishment and enforcement of routines and rules [2]. Reinforcement means to strengthen and is used in any stimulus that strengthens or increases the probability of specific pones [2].

Globally, different scholars have shown the effectiveness of reinforcement in improving the quality of the students' learning. Various research findings have focused on the fact that teachers would be able to reinforce students appropriately in order to influence student's behavior and increase their achievement level [3]. Punishment had to be moderate and reasonable, whether for example involving detention or corporal punishment [3]. By sending the child to school, the parent was assumed to accept the authority of the school to administer punishment within the limit set by law (i.e., the common law). Appropriate providing of reinforcement by a teacher significantly improves students' learning behavior. This means that, to bring about behavior change in students' learning, the teacher will be employing an appropriate reinforcement mechanism. This shows that reinforcement is an appropriate use of reinforcement in the teaching and learning process. Reinforcement and punishment are two sides of a coin, but they are different from each other.

In Africa (South Africa), current research shows that cases of learner indiscipline are on the increase in South African schools, and in some cases, learners are alleged to have murdered others on school premises [4]. The learner indiscipline case reported in schools raised concerns about the safety of schools and classroom environments. South African educators suggested that alternative measures to corporal punishment were not very effective in curbing learner indiscipline in schools [5]. There are arguments for the use of corporal punishment, but with the thrust on protection of children's rights and the documented negative effects of corporal punishment [6]. There is increasing need for teachers to beware of effective alternative measures and embrace them [7]. In Ethiopia (West Wollega), classroom management practice in the demand for early childhood care and education has increased due to the growing recognition that programs can contribute to all aspects

of children's development, who are the future citizens of the country. A student's classroom behavior and performance are influenced by teachers and their application of reinforcement to increase students' good behavior and performance, according to the study by [8]. Therefore, in one way or another, appropriate conditions for the learning process to take place are conducive enough. Reinforcement in the classroom shall be used to keep students engaged and motivated to learn [9]. Teachers will use reinforcement often in order to maintain a positive learning environment and to promote appropriate classroom behavior. When teachers depend on hitting and yelling as methods of responding to children's misbehavior, children's well-being declines [10]. Punishment refers to adding something aversive in order to decrease a behavior, and it is a consequence that decreases a behavior that decreases the probability that a particular behavior will occur in the future. In fact, the more defiant they are, the less likely they are to empathize with others [11]. Therefore, this study focused on reinforcement and punishment utilization in preschool teachers.

Locally, teachers collect content that matches the ability and experience of students and make all students participants [12]. A student's classroom behavior and performance are influenced by teachers and their application of reinforcement to increase students' good behavior and performance. Therefore, in one way or another, appropriate conditions for the learning process to take place are conducive enough. Various techniques for teaching state prevention and intervention in the classroom. Some of the used strategies are the strategies of intervention in terms of attitude, i.e., reward and punishment [13], indicated that the teacher's use of punishment and reward represents the situation power, the source of power that the teacher adopts in the relation with its pupils, along with personal power. Teachers are designed to include the general principle of classroom management in general and appropriate utilization of reinforcement techniques in particular. In this regard, teachers are supposed to reinforce their students to make the instructional process conducive and effective [14]. In fact, the more defiant they are and the less likely they are to empathize with others [14]. The more they activate the students for their performance and success. These shows the effective teachers should plan how and in what case to reinforce his/her students, to increase classroom interaction, and to make the teaching process effective.

There are various efforts that are made to implement classroom management in the Amhara region education bureau. Quality of students' learning is a burning issue today in Ethiopia, as well as in the Amhara Region, especially in South Gondar Debre Tabor Town in Higher and Semera Academy. To ensure quality education and improve the students' results, classroom management is the decisive factor. So the implementation of good classroom management is far short of being fully realized, and it does not practically improve the student academic performance. Therefore, one of the possible reasons could be problems with effective implementation of classroom management. However, there is a dearth of research on examining the reinforcement and punishment utilization in Ethiopia. Thus, this study aimed to evaluate reinforcement and punishment utilization.

## **2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

According to Morgan, [15]. reinforcement is an environmental process that makes it more likely that a response will be repeated [16]. Reinforcement is any process following behavior that makes it more likely that the behavior will be repeated itself. That means reinforcement is anything that is used to increase or strengthen the response to occur again at another time. Some of the roles of reinforcement in the teaching-learning process are stated as follows: the behavior of individuals by successive approximation to the desired behavior using selective reinforcement [17].

## **3 TYPES OF REINFORCEMENT AND PUNISHMENT**

### **3.1 Positive Reinforcement**

Positive reinforcement is anything that occurs after a behavior that increases the likelihood that the behavior will reoccur. Many teachers do not believe in positive reinforcement naturally occurring in everyone's daily lives, from infants to the oldest adults. A person who is kind to others is rewarded by kindness offered back to them. All of these "rewards" increase the chance that people will continue to choose these positive behaviors. That is positive reinforcement, an effective intervention. Use the following guidelines [15].

Reinforcement must be consistently delivered according to a planned reinforcement schedule; if it is not, the connection between the reinforcement and the behavior will not change. Reinforcement must be delivered immediately. Students should know when they can expect reinforcement. If you wait until the end of the day, reinforcement remaining in her set during the second period, the effect of reinforcement is reduced if not lost. If it is impossible to deliver reinforcement immediately, verbal reinforcement should be given, and the students should be told when he or she can expect to receive other reinforcement. In this way, the contingency between behavior and reinforcement will be strengthened or maintained Improvement [16].

Do not wait until the student's behavior is perfect to deliver reinforcement. You should recognize improvement and let the student know that you recognize the effort. Do not give reinforcement because you feel sorry for a student. If a student does not achieve the required criterion, delivering reinforcement will only teach the student that rewards are readily available

regardless of behavior and may even lead to an escalation of the behavior. Reinforcement must be contingent on behavior [18].

Whenever possible, pair any reinforcement with social reinforcement. If your reinforcement plan is letting students participate in preferred activities, make sure to give some sort of social reinforcement, such as telling the student, "You really did an excellent job today." Reinforcement should be age appropriate; expecting a high school student to change his behavior by rewarding him with stickers is less likely to be effective and insulting to the students [16].

### **3.2 Negative Reinforcement**

Negative reinforcement is a punishment of the application of aversive stimuli in order to enhance a behavior being repeated. Negative reinforcement is the removal of aversive stimuli in order to increase the probability of behavior being repeated. For example, reinforce students for using class time to do math work appropriately by removing five story problems from the math homework. Negatively reinforce appropriate behavior by removing the undesirable stimuli of a longer homework assignment [19].

Negative reinforcement can be very effective, especially to create an environment that feels safe to a student. It is often more naturally occurring than, for example, tangible reinforcement. As with the other reinforcement categories, it is important to pair negative with social reinforcement [19]. Teachers monitor learner progress so that negative reinforcement can be faded to promote generalization, formation, and maintenance of skill [19].

### **3.3 Utilization of Reinforcement Techniques**

To strengthen in learning and teaching, we use reinforcement techniques to provide students with feedback on the acceptability of their performance. The specific techniques used to reinforce behavior or learning may vary with relation to what the instructor finds most effective. Be aware of the effects each technique can have on fast learners [19].

All of the successful teachers surveyed and interviewed reinforced the necessity of reinforcing their expectation rules with rewards and punishments. Frequent use of verbal approval is the most common reward mentioned. A surprising number of successful teachers also mention their regular use of concrete reinforcement and privileges to motivate student effort. All of the teachers, however, stress the need to respond immediately to disruptive student behavior with unpleasant negative consequences [20].

### **3.4 Type of Utilizing Reinforcement Techniques**

#### **3.4.1 Using verbal reward**

Reward is the type of reinforcement most commonly used by teachers. Until very recently, it was assumed that reward would have reinforcing effects on students' academic performance; more recent research, however, indicates that reward may be helpful, natural, or detrimental depending on the kind of reward it is and the context in which it is delivered [21]. Reward can enhance learning if it is contingent, specific, sincere, and credible. Teachers whose students are most active are sparing rather than effective in praising correct answers. When students are praised for their present progress relative to past performance, greater achievement gains result when they are raised relative to the performance of their class.

#### **3.4.2 Tangible reward**

Tangible rewards are frequently offered to people as an inducement to engage in a behavior in which they might not otherwise engage. Tangible rewards will tend to be experienced as controlling, and as a result, they will tend to decrease intrinsic motivation. The meta-analysis tested the hypothesis that overall, tangible rewards would decrease intrinsic motivation [21]. In order for tangible rewards to be experienced as controlling, however, people will need to be engaged in the behavior for the rewards to expect that the behavior would lead to the rewards. Tangible rewards are given unexpectedly to the people after they finish a task [22].

The rewards are less likely to be experienced as the reason for doing the task. The meta-analysis tested the hypothesis that unexpected tangible rewards will not undermine intrinsic motivation; whereas expanded tangible rewards would [23]. Tangible rewards are rewards of things like treats, toys, or money. Be sure to combine social praise with this type of reward, as you start rewarding time, tangible rewards, such as edible toys, school-related items [23].

#### **3.4.3 Activity rewards**

Activity reinstatements are very effective and positive for students, allowing students to participate in printed activities (such as games, computer time, etc.). It is very powerful, especially if a part of the reinforcement is being allowed to choose a class to meet with whom to participate in the activity. They also provide social reinforcement from the partner, such as free time being the leader of an activity going on a field trip [20].

### **3.5 Definition of Punishment**

Punishment is contagious; according to Bandura and Walters, those watching others being punished have attempted to punish another person in another situation. According to several Iranian studies on punishment, the society not only respects

punishment but also considers it necessary in certain situations [24]. The most commonly used form of corporal punishment includes spanking, slapping, shoving a child roughly, and hitting with certain objects [24].

### **3.5.1 Utilization of punishment techniques**

#### **3.5.1.1 Verbal punishment**

Verbal punishment is the action of scolding a child to eliminate the undesirable behavior of a child. This type of behavior enforcement does not affect a child's emotion; on the other hand, it refers to the action of scolding a child to eliminate the undesirable behavior of a child. Research conducted in different countries reveals the severity of harm that can be inflicted on children when their behavior is modified by physical means.

#### **3.5.1.2 Physical punishment**

Corporal punishment is "the use of physical force intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort for discipline, correction, and control, changing behavior or in the belief of educating or bringing up the child [23]. Physical punishment can be increasingly psychologically damaging by leading to low self-esteem, sadness, shame, depression, and more, including humiliation or degrading treatment and treats, which can be equally or more harmful to the child"[25].

## **3.6 Theoretical Framework**

The operant conditioning theory, sometimes referred to as instrumental conditioning, is a method of learning that occurs through rewards and punishments for behavior. Pavlov paired a dog and a bell in order to study how stimulus affects behavior. He concluded that through operant conditioning, an association is made between a behavior and a consequence and that behavior. As a behaviorist, Skinner believed that internal thought and motivations could not be used to explain behavior. The term operant refers to any active behavior that operates upon the environment to generate consequence. In other words, Skinner's theory explained how we acquire the range of learned behaviors we exhibit each and every day [16].

## **3.7 Application of Reinforcement and Punishment as Function of Teaching Experience**

According to [25]. In order to verify whether punishing students immediately after their wrong behavior is different depending on the teacher's teaching experience, there are significant differences among the members of teaching staff, depending on their experience. Beginning teachers are more permissive as to the application of punishment as soon as pupils have an undesirable behavior as compared to the experienced teaching staff.

## **4 METHODS**

### **4.1 Research Design and Approach**

The researcher employed both a descriptive survey design and case-study research design using a mixed approach, that is, both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The mixed approaches were used to capture in-depth and wider data and information for a critical analysis and understanding of existing reinforcement and punishment utilizations of teachers to their children. A descriptive survey design was used to arrive at a conclusive finding by collecting large data within a short period of time and collecting data and generalizing it to the entire population under study.

### **4.2 Participants**

Participants were preschool teachers and school directors. The total population of 10 preschool teachers and two directors. From these two preschools, there are 4 teachers from Semera Academy and 6 from Higher Preschool. And there are 14 preschools in Debre Tabor Town; from this we select two preschools. A purposive sampling technique used to select teachers from both preschools and simple random sampling techniques used to select two preschools from the total of 14 preschools.

### **4.3 Data Collection Tools**

The researchers used a questionnaire to collect data from teachers regarding the reinforcement and punishment utilization. The questionnaires had three parts. The first part of the questionnaire was intended to gather background information. The second part of the questionnaire aimed to investigate the status of reinforcement and punishment application in the selected preschools. The set of questions, which were put in a 5-point Likert scale from level 5 (always) to level 1 (not at all) were prepared. The third part concerned the type of reinforcement and punishment technique used by teachers most frequent in the class. In addition, the researchers designed an interview guide and conducted in-depth interviews with the school directors. The interview had two parts: the interviewees' personal characteristics and items related to the forms of reinforcement and punishment. In addition to this, the researchers used direct observation to collect data from preschool children's behavior, and the transactions between the teachers and children.

#### 4.4 Data Collection Procedures

The data-gathering process was conducted from September 1 to December 10, 2023. The first stage of the data collection procedure was to obtain permission from the respective department head of Early Childhood Care and education at Debre Tabor University. Then, a questionnaire was administered to all participants after the researchers explained the purpose of the study, and gave instructions on how it should be filled out. In-depth interviews were conducted with directors. The observation was carried out without the teachers and students knowing that the observation was being carried out.

#### 4.5 Data Analysis Techniques

The quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics (standard deviation and mean value) and the data obtained from in-depth interviews and observations were analyzed through qualitative analysis using word description and narration thematically.

### 5 RESULTS

#### 5.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The researcher distributed 10 questionnaires teachers from the whole target population of the study, No incomplete responses were found in the returned questionnaires. Teachers utilize reinforcement and punishment techniques at the time of the teaching-learning process. The knowledge was captured through a questionnaire for teachers.

**Table 1** Demographic Characteristics of Teacher Respondent

Variable	Sex			Level of education				Teaching Experience			
	Male	Female	T	Certificate	Diploma	Degree	T	1-3 years	4-7	above 7	T
	1	9	10	6	2	2	10	4	5	1	10
%	10	90	100	60	20	20	100	40	50	10	100

The above table 1 indicated that 1 (10%) of respondents were male and 9 (90%) of respondents were female. This indicates that almost all participants are females. As to the educational level of the respondent, from the total, 6 (60%) of the respondents were certificate holders, 2 (20%) of the respondents were diploma holders, and 2 (20%) of the respondents were degree holders. So that more than half or almost all of the respondents were certified.

As to the teaching experience of respondents, from the total, 4 (40%) of respondents had 1-3 years, and 6 (60%) of respondents had 4-7 years, and 1 (10%) of respondents had above 7. This indicates that the majority of respondents have experience of 1-3 years.

**Table 2** Utilization of Verbal Reinforcement

No	Item	Always		Often		Same times		None	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Clever	8	80	2	20	-	-	-	-
2	Excellent	10	100	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Very good	8	80	1	10	1	10	-	-
4	Good	7	70	2	20	1	10	-	-
5	Continue	7	70	2	20	1	10	-	-

As indicated, in table 2 shows that, teachers utilize all kinds of verbal reinforcement to different extents; however, among them, excellent (10/10), clever (80%), very good (80%), and continue (70%) are reported to be used always. Almost all teachers are always excellent.

**Table 3** Utilization of Activity Reinforcement

No	Item	Always		Often		sometimes		None	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	clap your hand	8	80	2	20	-	-	-	-
2	Play many time based on children interest	7	70	3	30	-	-	-	-

The above table 3 indicated that, teachers utilize activity reinforcement to different extents; however, among them, clapping your hands (80%) and (70%) playing money time based on children's interests are reported to be always. The teachers use activity reinforcement. The teachers are involved in allowing students to take part in their preferred activities if they behave appropriately.

**Table 4** Utilization of Tangible Reinforcement

No	Item	Yes		No	
		N	%	N	%
1	Pencils	8	80	2	20
2	exercise book	6	60	4	40
3	Pen	2	20	8	80
4	Book	-	-	10	100
5	small toys	-	-	10	100
6	Candy, chocolate	4	40	6	60

The above table 4 shows that teachers utilize some kind of tangible reinforcement to different extents. However, among them are pencils (80%), pens (20%), and candy and chocolate (40%). This indicates that the majority of teachers in the classroom did not use tangible reinforcement frequently in one month.

**Table 5** Utilization of Verbal and Facial Punishment

No	Item	Always		often		same times		None	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Insulting	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	100
2	Bad sign			-	-	-	-	10	100
3	Change your face		-	-	-	2	20	8	80

The above table 5 indicated that, most teachers used verbal punishment to different extents; however, among them, change your face 2 (20%) reported to be used sometimes. This indicates that the majority of teachers do not use verbal punishment in the classroom; however, Teachers use the punishment the student takes part in inappropriate behavior; this is especially effective for managing the problems.

**Table 6** Utilization of Physical Punishment

No	Item	Always		Often		some times		None	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Kicking	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	100
2	Smacking	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	100
3	Pinching	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	100
4	knell down	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	100

The above table 6 shows that, teachers utilize some kind of physical punishment to different extents among them, and teachers do not use physical punishment inside the classroom. Replace physical punishment most of the time with advice and manage the behavior of children.

**Table 7** Utilization of Other Type of Punishment Techniques

No	Item	Always		often		same times		None	
		No	%	No	%	No	%		
1	Isolating from group	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	100
2	Time out	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	100
3	Give extra work	-	-	-	-	4	40	6	60

As indicated, the above table 7 shows that teachers do not utilize all kinds of other types of punishment to different extents; however, among them, giving extra work (40%) is reported not to be used. This indicates that the teachers did not use other types of punishment frequently in the classroom.

Teachers should use reinforcement often in order to maintain a positive learning environment and to promote appropriate classroom behaviors. Keeping behavior under control and reinforcement in the classroom should be used to keep students engaged and motivated to learn. Punishment should be used in the classroom to decrease behaviors. When students made a mistake, teachers gave punishments; the benefit was that the student would not repeat the mistake again. The teachers should not give punishments that hurt. Teachers should use reinforcement and punishment that students actively enjoy being present and learning in the classroom. Uses of positive reinforcement lead to heightened enthusiasm in students and even teachers. The teacher uses punishment in an appropriate manner; the students could instill good behavior. But punishment gone wrong is the type done out of wickedness.

**5.2 Discussions**

The purpose of the study was to assess teacher’s utilizations of reinforcement and punishment in preschool children in South Gondar, Ethiopia. The analysis of the data showed that, majority of teachers used verbal reinforcement to different extents. The activity of tangible reinforcement increases children’s intrinsic motivation in the teaching and learning process

in the classroom. The finding of [21], who stated that verbal reward would have effects on students' academic performance. And the status of reinforcement in preschool is good. The finding of this study confirmed the literature [20], stating that activity reinforcement is very effective and positive for students. The status of tangible reinforcement in preschool is not enough. This implies that the majority of teachers do not use tangible reinforcement at the time of the teaching and learning process.

Verbal punishment eliminates the undesirable behavior of a child, but in the current study, the majority of teachers did not use verbal punishment. The status of physical punishment is poor. This implies that most of the teachers could not use physical punishment, among them pinching and kneeling at the time of the teaching and learning process inside the classroom, and totally teachers could not use corporal punishments, [26]. The findings of the study indicated that, the majority of teachers do not use verbal punishment at the time of the teaching and learning process. The majority of teachers did not use verbal punishment most frequently in the classroom at the time of the teaching and learning process. The majority of teachers did not use physical punishment at the time of the teaching and learning process. There is abundant evidence that corporal punishment is associated with increased aggression in students

Verbal approval is the most common reward method and successful teachers also mention their regular use of concrete reinforcement and privilege to motivate students' efforts [20]. The findings of the study supports that verbal reinforcement is most frequently used by teachers to improve students' effort. Students would be more successful if they were given the chance to earn small tangibles every day [20]. The findings of the study also support that, the majority of teachers give pencil, candy, and chocolate types of tangible reinforcement for the desired behavior but not every day.

### 5.3 Study Limitations and Implications for Future Research

There are some limitations to this study. Only two preschools and ten teachers participated in this study; it was not feasible to evaluate all of the schools. Additionally, only a relatively small sample of teachers and principals of schools were included in the study. As a result, one major weakness of the study may be the difficulty of generalizing its conclusions.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

Every child should grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. As inferred from the result of the study, the status of reinforcement in preschool is good, verbal reinforcement and activity reinforcement are good, and the status of tangible reinforcement in preschool is poor. This implies that the majority of teachers in the classroom used reinforcement and punishment appropriately. The majority of teachers used verbal and activity reinforcement techniques most frequently at the time of the teaching and learning process inside the classroom; however, most of the teachers used tangible reinforcement but did not use it every day. The majority of teachers did not use verbal punishment techniques frequently in the classroom at the time of the teaching and learning process.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data supporting this result is available from the corresponding author at a reasonable request.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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