

EFFECTS OF REINFORCEMENT ON ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE OF CHILDREN WITHIN AGES 4-7 YEARS IN ETCHE L.G.A. RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined the effects of reinforcement on attitude of gratitude among children of ages 4-7 years. Observational method was used to assess attitude of gratitude before and after treatment because of the potential inability of children aged 4-7 to provide responses to test questions. Two aims and two research questions guided the study. The population was made of 200 youngsters whose parents are members of the international recreation club at Shell Location Umuebulu I in Etche, Rivers State. Thirty-three children without attitude of gratitude were identified for the study and randomly placed into 2 groups. The observed group consists of 17 children who received treatment while the unobserved group of 16 were excluded from treatment. The method's validity was determined by comparing the level of agreement between the researchers at the same time. The approach's dependability was determined using Cohen Kappa's inter-observer agreement method. The effect of appreciation on the children was assessed before and after treatment, and compared with those in the unobserved group. The process consisted of three steps: introduction, consolidation, and termination. The results revealed a significant disparity in the level of consensus among observers between the group that was observed and the unobserved group. The findings demonstrated that the implementation of reinforcement had a significant impact on the treatment group. It was recommended that parents and teachers should be taught reinforcement tactics and should use them with children who lack a sense of appreciation.

Keywords: Appreciation, attitude of gratitude, children, observational method, reinforcement

Introduction

The change in expectations has resulted in a decrease in gratitude, which has been substituted with negative feelings such as anger, dissatisfaction, envy, and bitterness. Furthermore, there has been an increase in ethical deterioration, deteriorating health, and division throughout the people. The detrimental aspects have eclipsed the beneficial impacts that thankfulness may have on both families and communities (Passmore & Qadies, 2010). Gratitude is an essential element of moral value. Instilling an attitude of gratitude in youngsters is essential for fostering love, honesty, impartiality, and peaceful coexistence in our daily lives.

Expressing appreciation facilitates the development and maintenance of strong interpersonal relationships, enhancing feelings of respect, compassion, and the willingness to share. It also contributes to overall life satisfaction and fosters a more positive outlook towards others. It is essential to cultivate gratitude and encourage a simple way of living in children from an early stage. It is our duty as parents to express contentment and possess the capacity to acknowledge and appreciate others (Passmore & Qadies 2010).

Gratitude, as defined by the American Psychological Association (2021), is an emotion that mirrors appreciation. It is a sense of joy and thankfulness that arises in reaction to a pleasant event or a physical gift. According to Jans Beckan (2020), possessing a thankful disposition is strongly correlated with an individual's social, emotional, and psychological well-being. An attitude of gratitude promotes pleasant vibes, enhances moral values, reinforces unity, and supports holistic growth. Consistently teaching this habit at home is crucial for maintaining a level of well-being.

Sansone and Sansone (2020), provide a definition of thankfulness as the act of recognizing and returning the good occurrences, eventually leading to a feeling of gratitude. It symbolizes fondness, goodwill, understanding, commitment, and steadfastness. Furthermore, a study conducted by Gregg and Cheaver (2021) revealed a positive correlation between gratitude and advantageous results, including heightened levels of life contentment, forgiveness, and extraversion. Conversely, ingratitude is associated with adverse outcomes such as substance abuse, neuroticism, anxiety, and depression. This implies that gratitude, as a constituent of robust moral values, improves overall welfare, whereas a dearth of gratitude may lead to a deterioration in ethical norms.

Gratitude, often defined as the expression of thanks or appreciation, may be shown via several means, such as facial expressions, pleasant vibes, and the giving of presents or aid (Vicen, 2023). Thanksgiving is an officially recognized holiday in Canada, Saint-Louis, and Liberia, where it is commemorated as a day to show thanks. In Brazil and the Philippines, Thanksgiving is observed in an informal manner. In addition, Thanksgiving holidays are observed in Leiden, the Netherlands, as well as at Norfolk Island, an Australian territory. Harvest festivals in Germany, the United Kingdom, and Japan are also used as opportunities to show appreciation, promote national unity, patriotism, and a common sense of direction, thereby helping to achieve social goals and

objectives.

The importance of cultivating a mentality of gratitude cannot be overstated. Teaching children to appreciate things at home is important because it helps them build strong moral values that support positive change. A researcher recalled how her grandfather imparted valuable moral lessons to her and her siblings by highlighting the need of gratitude. He often gave more peanuts to the little ones who expressed gratitude during their visits, underlining that demonstrating thanksgiving signifies contentment with one's current possessions and has the potential to lead to acquiring more.

Cultivating a mindset of gratitude forms the basis for experiencing joy. In order to achieve pleasure in their current situation, individuals might develop a feeling of gratitude for all aspects of life and redirect their attention from perceived deficiencies (Panio, 2022). It is essential to cultivate gratitude in young people in order to promote their enjoyment, contentment, and empathy towards others. Individuals have considerable reverence for what they value, ensuring its protection and being willing to make compromises for it. Efficiently expressing gratitude reduces feelings of jealousy, despair, and anxiety, while also diminishing negative energy and enhancing mental resilience and a positive outlook.

According to Wood (2010), expressing gratitude has several advantages that improve a person's overall state of well-being. Portocannero Conzaler (2020) asserts that gratitude is a robust indicator of overall well-being and other fundamental aspects of life. A heart that is thankful welcomes individuals unconditionally and yields more advantages than disadvantages. In a study conducted by Nawa and Yamagishall (2021), it was observed that among the 84 participating students, those in the experimental group, who were instructed to compile a list of four things they were grateful for and reflect on various aspects of their daily lives for a period of two weeks, exhibited a noteworthy improvement in their academic motivation.

Iodice Malocy and Schutte (2021) conducted a study on gratitude letter writing and discovered that participants in the first group, who expressed gratitude for their blessings, exhibited enhanced academic performance, elevated mood, improved coping strategies, and better physical health in comparison to participants in the second and third groups. The second group highlighted the particular challenges they encounter on a day-to-day basis, while the third group deliberated on subjects that were objective and impartial. Incorporating gratitude as a key component of ethical principles is essential for maintaining a lifestyle of well-being. It is essential to provide this knowledge to children at an early age inside the household to ensure their progressive learning and development. Expressing thanks for something of great value implies recognising and valuing oneself. Regardless of the magnitude of the activity, it is essential to cultivate gratitude in our daily life (Pascoe, 2021).

In the context of the European Control Conference 2018, "reinforcement" is defined as any element that enhances the probability of a certain behaviour taking place. According to General Psychology (2021), reinforcement is a key component of operant conditioning that uses consequences to either increase or decrease the likelihood of a certain behaviour. According to

Cherry (2023), operant conditioning, developed by B.F. Skinner, is based on Thorndike's Law of Effect, which states that the consequences of behaviour influence its likelihood of being repeated. Reinforced behaviour is strengthened, whereas penalised behaviour is reduced.

Reinforcement may be categorized as positive or negative. Positive reinforcement involves adding a positive consequence to reinforce a conduct, whereas negative reinforcement involves removing a negative consequence to enhance a habit (Kendra, 2023). When a youngster is rewarded or commended for cleaning filthy dishes, they are more likely to repeat that activity in the future when necessary. There are main and secondary reinforcers. Primary reinforcers are inherently reinforcing stimuli that do not need learning. Primary reinforcers include essential biological needs such as nourishment, rest, protection, sexual activity, physical contact, and gratification. In contrast, secondary reinforcers lack intrinsic value and only possess reinforcing properties when associated with a primary reinforcement. For example, praise linked to attention, tokens, or money can serve as secondary reinforcement, acquiring value when utilized (General Psychology 2021).

Khattak and Ahmad (2018) said that reinforcement is subjective. At times, it acts as a stimulant that reinforces conduct for one person but not for another. Positive reinforcement plays a substantial role in shaping our everyday life and personality, whilst negative reinforcement contributes to the development of avoidance actions. Both negative and positive reinforcement may help children learn gratitude and enhance their ethical principles.

A number of effective studies have been conducted using reinforcement strategies. A research done by Artis and Brandon (2012) examined a nursing training curriculum designed to tackle the decreasing number of nurses. The study investigated the preferences of nurses on the characteristics of their management. The response from younger nurses revealed a need for a boss who would cultivate, appreciate, and motivate them. This implies that using positive reinforcement would enhance the younger nurses' ability to retain information and skills.

Khattak and Ahmad (2018) performed a study that included students from a public school, aged between 9 and 11 years. The hypothesis posited that students who were provided with positive reinforcement would get elevated scores while recalling nonsense syllables during a free recall examination. The results suggested that the students in the experimental group performed better on the test, giving more support for the hypothesis, compared to those in the control group. A research by Jones and Jeong (2010) surveyed nurses to investigate their interpersonal interactions. Research demonstrated that nurses were more likely to share information with their colleagues when they got favourable comments for their work. All the nurses in this case were trained in the most up-to-date information techniques, leading to enhanced care for both themselves and their patients. The available literature lacks sufficient empirical study on the attitude of thanks.

The researchers found that reinforcement is a very effective therapy strategy that has been effectively used to tackle behavioural problems. Additionally, they hold the belief that it is

appropriate for cultivating a feeling of appreciation among youngsters in Etche L.G.A, Rivers State. This research was therefore formulated with this comprehension in consideration.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalent moral decay in contemporary society necessitates a reevaluation of values. It is a well-known fact that children nowadays accept presents without expressing gratitude towards the donor. This situation underscores the need for a comprehensive reorientation. It is crucial to instill gratitude, which is the core aspect of moral values, in youngsters so that they may develop and cultivate strong moral principles. The challenge addressed in this research is whether reinforcement, as a method for modifying behaviour, may effectively be used to enhance children's attitude of thankfulness, similar to its successful application in resolving other behaviour issues. Based on this premise, the researchers choose to examine the impact of reinforcement on the attitude of appreciation among youngsters in Etche L.G.A in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The primary objective of the research is to examine the impact of reinforcement on the attitude of appreciation in children aged 4 to 7 years in Etche L.G.A, Rivers State.

1. The research seeks to specifically examine the impact of reinforcement on the attitude of appreciation in children within the observed group. This will be assessed by comparing the observer(s) agreement on attitude of gratitude before and after the treatment.
2. The objective is to assess the impact of reinforcement on the appreciation attitude of children in both the observed and unobserved groups. This will be done by comparing the agreement between observers at the same moment while evaluating the outcomes.

Research Questions

1. What are the effects of reinforcement on the attitude of gratitude of the children in the observed group when compared by the degree of agreement between the observers at same instance?
2. What is the effect of reinforcement on the attitude of gratitude of the children in the observed and unobserved group when their outcomes are compared by the degree of agreement between the observers at same instance after treatment?

The study is qualitative in nature, it utilized the observational study design, specifically,, specifically,, specifically,, specifically, the disguised participant observational design was used. This design allows the researcher to pretend to be members of the group they are observing while they conceal their true identity as researchers. This method is most suitable for a qualitative work because it is less prone to reactivity and the presence of the researcher does not affect the behaviour of the participants (Prince, Jhangiani, Chiang, Leighton& Cuttler, 2017).

Participants in this study include children within ages 4 - 7 whose parents are members of the Recreation Club International at Shell Location Umuebulu II Etche L.G.A Rivers State. Thirty-

three children who lacked attitude of gratitude were identified among the population of 200 by inter observer method for the study. The observational method was used considering the fact that children within ages 4 -7 years may not be able to respond to test items.

The researchers distributed water and chocolates at the end of the recreational activities to all the children, 33 of them within ages 4 – 7 years who did not say thank you or expressed gratitude were identified by the researchers as they observed the children at same instance and were purposefully sampled and used for the study.

The identified 33 children without attitude of gratitude were randomly placed into two groups:- the observed (treatment group) and unobserved (control) groups. The validation of the method was ascertained by comparing the degree of agreement between the researchers at same instance.

The reliability of the method was established by using the Cohen Kappa's inter-observer agreement method. Two streams of data from the same scene recorded by different observers are compared by the two observers and an agreement was established to form the basis for interpreting results.

Treatment Procedure

The researchers obtained permission from the recreation club management to talk to parents to carry out the research with their children and also make use of two rooms in the club complex.

The treatment process comprised three distinct phases:

- **Phase 1:** Pre-treatment: Following the identification of children lacking an attitude of gratitude through observational methods, a total of 33 individuals were pinpointed. These children were then divided into two groups: the observed group, consisting of 17 children designated as the treatment group, and the unobserved group, comprising 16 children assigned to the control group.
- **Phase 2:** Treatment: Subsequently, the researcher conducted weekly group counselling sessions lasting 45 minutes each, over a span of 4 weeks. During these sessions, the treatment strategies were implemented exclusively with the observed group, while the unobserved group received no specific intervention. The children were educated on the importance of expressing gratitude when receiving gifts or favours, with verbal reinforcement and tangible rewards provided to those who demonstrated this behaviour.
- **Phase 3:** Post Treatment: Following the conclusion of the 4-week treatment period, a 2-week hiatus was observed before reconvening for recreational activities. During this phase, participants in the observed group were distinguished by red tags on their T-shirts, while those in the unobserved group wore white tags, facilitating easy identification and comparison. At the conclusion of the recreational activities, pencils were distributed to all participants, and an observer agreement was adopted simultaneously to assess the

effectiveness of the treatment. The outcomes of both the pre-treatment and post-treatment phases served as reference points to address the research inquiries and formulate recommendations.

Treatment Stages for the Observed Group:

Treatment period ran for 4 weeks and 1 session per week, each session lasted for 45 minutes.

Stages of treatment were divided into the following stages:

Stage (1):	Introduction:	Week 1	—	One (1) Session
Stage (2):	Consolidation:	Week 2-3	—	Two (2)
Stage (3):	Termination:	Week 4	—	One (1)

Interpretation of Results

The results are presented in response to the research questions:

Research Question (1)

What is the effect of reinforcement on the attitude of gratitude of children in the observed group based on the outcome of researcher’s observation at same instance before and after treatment?

Before treatment the researchers observed that the 17 children in the observed group did not express gratitude as they were shared water and chocolates at the end of the recreational activities. The treatment involved teaching children the need for gratitude whenever favour is shown. Biscuits and drinks were given to the children as they expressed gratitude at the end of recreational activities within the treatment period. The researchers observed keenly at same instance that 11 out of the 17 children expressed gratitude by saying thank you to the researchers while six of them hugged and smiled at the researchers. The researchers also observed that the children expressed joy and hugged themselves at the end of the recreational activities. One can simply say that the children developed team spirit and attitude of gratitude at the end of treatment period. The outcome showed that reinforcement was very effective in enhancing attitude of gratitude among the children in the observed group.

Research Question (2)

What is the effect of reinforcement on the level of appreciation shown by children in both the observed (treatment) and unobserved (control) groups, when their outcomes are compared based on the researchers' observations at the same time?

Following the four-week treatment period, all the youngsters from both the observed and unobserved groups were gathered for a weekend of leisure activities. The individuals in the unobserved group were dressed in blue athletic attire, whilst the participants in the observed group continued to wear their customary white sports outfits.

After the leisure activities concluded, the researchers noticed that only five (5) children in the unobserved group showed thankfulness when they received their refreshments, but all the youngsters in the treated group expressed gratitude. This demonstrates that the treatment modality was very successful in enhancing the attitude of thankfulness among individuals in the observed group, but the majority of individuals in the unobserved group did not exhibit any behaviour change due to their lack of exposure to the therapy. The five children who showed attitude of gratitude in the unobserved (control) group must have done so due to interaction effect (interaction of participants from both groups)..

Discussion

The first finding suggests that before including reinforcement as a therapy component, the 33 children who participated in leisure activities displayed a deficiency in gratitude. After using reinforcement as a method to modify behaviour, the young individuals expressed gratitude.

The second study reveals that the youngsters in the observed group, who were given therapy, exhibited thankfulness, but the unobserved group, who did not get treatment, did not. More precisely, of the children in the group that was watched, those who were exposed to the treatment plan showed thankfulness. In contrast, just 5 children from the unobserved or control group did not exhibit thanks. This study illustrates that reinforcement had a positive effect on the attitude of young individuals when comparing the group that received reinforcement to the group that did not get any observation.

The results of this study align with the findings of Khattak and Ahmad (2018), who used reinforcement approaches to improve students' ability to recall nonsensical syllabi. The young individuals took part in a free recall examination, and the results showed that those who were given positive reinforcement got higher marks compared to those in the unobserved group. This clearly illustrates the significant effectiveness of reinforcement.

The results were consistent with the research conducted by Jones and Jeong (2010), which used reinforcement techniques to foster interpersonal connections among nurses. The study included a survey that investigated the interpersonal dynamics among nurses. The results indicated that nurses shown a readiness to share information with their colleagues, since they got favourable feedback for their efforts.

Moreover, the study is consistent with the conclusions drawn by Artis and Keith (2012), who used reinforcement tactics to tackle the decreasing number of nurses enrolling in a nursing training programme. The study performed a survey to ascertain the preferred qualities that nurses want in their supervisors. The input from newly recruited nursing staff supported the need for an administrator who would encourage and motivate them. These findings indicate that using positive reinforcement might be effective in retaining nurses.

This study offers further proof of the effectiveness of reinforcement as a counselling approach in facilitating changes in behaviour, in line with other studies. Reinforcement may be used to tackle several behavioural problems, such as ineffective study habits, interpersonal connection struggles, management obstacles, and cultivating a more grateful mindset. Not expressing gratitude is akin to nurturing feelings of envy, resentment, dissatisfaction, greed, anxiety, and sorrow, all of which hinder the development of positive ethical values. Reward tactics are methods that increase activities that encourage the expression of gratitude via positive rewards, while decreasing acts that do not create a thankful mentality through negative reinforcement.

Implications for Value Reorientation

This research has significant implications for the value orientation in society. Value orientation plays a crucial role in maintaining individual stability, ensuring predictable and consistent behaviour, and building strong relationships among people, thereby promoting cohesion.

Values orientation refers to the principles that guide judgements on morality and ethics, distinguishing between right and evil, and determining the relative importance of different values. Thus the study has implication for value orientation because it involves making trade-offs between values to shape and influence decisions made by individuals and groups. Moreover, understanding individuals' value orientation will provide guidance to planners, administrators, policy-makers, and law enforcement agents in carrying out their responsibilities and executing the programme.

Conclusion

The study's findings led to the following conclusions: Reinforcement emerges as a potent tool for cultivating an attitude of gratitude among children in Etche, Rivers State. This conclusion is substantiated by the researchers' observations when comparing the pre- and post-treatment levels of gratitude among participants in the observed group. Furthermore, upon comparing the gratitude levels of participants in the observed group with those in the unobserved group, it became evident to the researchers that individuals in the observed group demonstrated gratitude, whereas many participants in the unobserved group did not. This underscores the effectiveness of reinforcement strategies in fostering a positive attitude of gratitude.

Recommendations:

Drawing from the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Counsellors working with children should acquire a thorough understanding of reinforcement strategies to effectively enhance children's attitudes of gratitude.

2. Parents, educators, and caregivers should prioritize the implementation of reinforcement strategies to address attitude-related challenges in children, as these strategies have been proven to be effective in fostering gratitude. Thus reinforcement techniques should be integrated into various settings, including homes, schools, and other spheres of life, to promote the development of gratitude among children.

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