

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF CHILDREN'S HABIT FORMATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

The study investigated teachers' perception of children's habit formation in primary schools. The study was guided by four research questions. Questionnaire was designed to elicit information from the respondents. The findings of the study revealed that, primary school teachers are aware of some prevalent forms of good and bad habits amongst the pupils: such habits in behaviour as loyalty, obedience, sympathy, helpfulness, etc stubbornness, dishonesty, truancy, etc. It was found also that some factors influence (the habit formation in children, which include: family, school, economic, technological, emotional state and environmental factors. Based on the findings, conclusion was made that the child's behaviour is determined by social influence. Recommendations were also made based on the findings such as (i) Every teacher in the primary school should have the knowledge of child psychology for early detection and handling of children's problems at such a tender stage of development, (ii) Adults (parents, teachers and care-givers) should live exemplary lives for children to emulate by living and maintaining good habits, etc.

Introduction

The National Policy on Education (FRN, 1998) defined education as education given in institution for children aged 6 - 11 plus. The provision of 'plus' in the definition according to Chukwu (2001) makes allowance for children who may start school at age 6 but have cause to stay beyond age 11 either because they repeated class(es) or inability of their parents to pay fees or provide school materials.

Children according to Mgbodile and Iwuh (2000) are the little human beings aged from 10 to 11 years who are found in our families. Therefore, children are younger members of our families. These children have certain characteristics by which we know them. They are active members of our families, full of energy and full of play.

Children by nature are very interesting little human beings. They are innocent in their behaviour and straightforward in their thinking. Their hearts are filled with love for everyone. "Theirs is a universal world with no artificial boundaries" Mgbodile and Iwuh (2000). This is to show that children are indeed little models of human beings on the planet earth as God created. It is the responsibility of parents, teachers and significant others in the society to help them grow in a most positive and pleasant manner. There should be a maximum consciousness on the part of parents and teachers that children imitate what adults do. They consider adults' behaviour as worthy of emulation because they have absolute trust and confidence in adults. The kind of behaviours or habit they see in adults will determine to a large extent their own behaviours or habits.

A habit has been defined by Thorn (1937) in Olaitan and Akpan (2003) as the tools by which an individual achieves health, happiness and efficiency. That, the conservation of time, strength, and material resources the individual observed depends upon habit. Habits influence on individual ability to make and retain friends, and to fit into community little with ease and satisfaction, Olaitan and Iwuh (2003). Habit also influences an individual's resourcefulness in getting on with one's self in peace and contentment, most especially when the habits an individual has acquired fail to meet the demands of his/her environment, there is a failure on his/her part because the individual's behavior or habit may not be acceptable in the group he/she belongs.

In habit formation whether good or bad, it is worthy of notice that, a child is not or never born with either. The formation of habits starts from infancy and some are learnt at a later life. Habits are like attitudes formation. Habits include all acquired methods of thinking and acting by an individual, and this can bring about negative attitude upon an individual. Take for instance when the individual formed the habit of not placing confidence in his/her capabilities or doubting his/her abilities. In this case such individuals often make statements such as "I can't do it, it is too difficult for me to do it". In this case, according to Olaitan and Akpan (2003) such people or individuals' thinking habit has made them developed low esteem. The more frequently a particular act or thought is repeated, the more likely it will occur again under the same existing conditions.

For example, a child who is given some sweets or biscuits by his mother any time he cries will form the habit of crying in order to get whatever he wants. So also, a pupil in the school who wants attention from the teacher would cry so as for the teacher to come closer and attend to him. If he knows that his teacher is such

that pays attention. Also, a good habit such as toilet can be formed for example in children or babies at the early stage by mothers by providing them with pity any time they are pressed or want to empty their bowel.

Studies have confirmed that children who are taught early the proper places for elimination of wastes may not be messy at later life. Likewise a child who started to suck his fingers and was not corrected may continue to suck fingers up to adult stage or throughout his/her life. So also, a child who was taught to brush his mouth every morning will carry the same practice to adulthood. Therefore, the repetition of a particular activity encourages formation of the desired habit, Olaitan and Akpan (2003).

Habits, which are associated with character or behaviour are of great importance, for example, aggressiveness, truthfulness, honesty, human sympathy, friendliness, and so, and these can be taught. Habits are formed as a result of imitation or copy a model. If a model or significant other in the society possess undesirable behaviour, children can copy their behaviour and it may result into a bad habit for example, smoking and oilier social vices, but where the models or significant result into a good habit formation. These clearly show that some factors related to family, school, environment, society, culture, economic and technology influences the development of habits among the children whether good or bad. Erikson (1950) in his psychological personality may believe that the child's behaviour is determined by societal influence.

Evidence of bad and good habits abounds in our society and schools particularly in our primary schools. In the primary schools, bad habits such as thumb sucking, eating and throwing things anyhow, sleeping in class, noise making, stealing, lateness to school, verbal abuse, fighting and so on are common. Also, children exhibit good or acceptable habits such as sharing, sympathy, helping others, co-operation and so on. The older children in secondary schools try to hide their bad habits, but the younger ones in primary schools seem not to know the effects of their behaviours on others so they display theirs. So the most important question here is that, are teachers in our primary schools aware of these behaviours of their pupils? If they are aware, what measures have the teachers taken to control bad habits and also enhance or promote acceptable or good habit among the pupils?

Against this background therefore, this study sought to investigate teachers' perception of children's habit formation in primary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study is to ascertain teacher's perception of children's habit formation in primary schools. Specifically, the study aimed at;

- 1) Identifying forms of good and bad habits that are prevalent in primary schools.
- 2) Identifying those factors that influence the development of good or bad habits among children.
- 3) Proffering solutions to the problems of bad habits among primary school pupils.
- 4) Devising means to enhance acceptable habits in primary school pupils.

Significance of the Study

The result of the study will provide information on teachers' perception of children's habit in primary schools, the information will sensitive the parents, teachers, government, school authorities and the general public and set them thinking on what measures to adopt for curbing bad habits and encourage good habits in children.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided the study:

- 1) What forms of good habits are prevalent in primary schools?
- 2) What forms of bad habits are prevalent in primary schools?
- 3) What are the prevalent factors (that influence the development of habits amongst primary school pupils)?
- 4) What could be done to check bad habits among primary school pupils?

Methods

The study employed survey design. This is because survey is a study in which the subjects are observed in their natural setting (Nwana, 1982). The study was conducted in Katsina-Ala township area of Benue State. The population comprised all the 380 public primary school teachers in the area of study. A sample of 100 teachers was used for the study through simple and accidental sampling techniques. The procedure was that the researcher

met with teachers in one of their union meetings and administered 100 questionnaires randomly amongst them as they were waiting for the meeting. 40-item questionnaire were used to collect the data. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point likert-type scale and a cut-off point of 2.50. Strongly Agree (SA) 4-points, Agree (A) 3-points, Disagree (D) 2-points and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1-point.

Two lecturers from measurement and evaluation and one from psychology content validated the instrument. Some items were dropped and others added. A trial-testing was carried out on the Instrument in another area other than the place of study on 30 teachers. Data collected was analysed using Cronbach Alpha and a coefficient of internal consistency of 0.87 was established.

100 copies of questionnaires were distributed to the respondents by the researcher. They were duly completed and returned. Means were used to analyse the data. A mean-rating of 2.50 above indicated positive or acceptance of items while mean-rating below 2.50 indicates negative or rejection.

Results

Research Question 1: What forms of good habits are prevalent in primary schools? The mean response on forms of good habits summarized in Table 1.

S/No,	Item	Mean Response	Remarks
1.	Honesty	2.85	Agree
2.	Quietness	2.90	Agree
3.	Greeting	3.81	Strongly Agree
4.	Generosity	3.78	Strongly Agree
5.	Friendliness	3.24	Strongly Agree
6.	Helpfulness	3.59	Strongly Agree
7.	Orderliness	2.90	Agree
8.	Carefulness	2.81	Agree
9.	Laughter	2.62	Agree
10.	Loyalty	3.63	Strongly Agree
11.	Obedience	3.41	Strongly Agree
12.	Sympathy	3.11	Strongly Agree
.	Grand Mean (x)	3.19	Strongly Agree

Table 1 shows that, items i-12 are forms of good habits that are prevalent in primary schools. The respondents all agreed with the items as forms of good habits, which me exhibited by pupils in the primary school. The mean (x) scores are all above the cutoff point scale of 2.50.

Research Question 2: What forms of bad habits are prevalent in primary schools?

S/No.	Item	Mean Response	Remarks
13.	Thumb Sucking	2.82	Agree
14.	"Nail biting	2.85	Agree
15.	Dirtyness	3.41	Strongly Agree
16.	Sleeping in the class	3.59	Strongly Agree
17.	Crying	2.80	Agree
18.	Fighting	3.81	Strongly Agree
19,	Noise making	3.63	Strongly Agree
20.	Lateness	3.11	Strongly Agree
21.	Stubbornness	2.85	Agree
22.	Inattentiveness	3.78	Strongly Agree
23.	Dishonesty	2.63	Agree

24.	Quarrelling	3.11	Strongly Agree
25.	Truancy	2.90	Agree
26.	Littering of papers	3.79	Strongly Agree
27.	Bully	3.12	Strongly Agree
	Grand Mean (x)	3.21	Strongly Agree

Table 2 shows that, the respondents all agreed with the items as forms of prevalent bad habits in primary schools. The mean scores are above the cut off scale of 2.50, which has the highest mean score, and dishonesty has the lowest mean score (3.81 and 2.63 respectively).

Research Question 3: What are the prevalent factors that influence the development of habits amongst primary school

S/No.	Factors	Mean Response	Remarks
28.	Family	3.81	Strongly Agree
29.	School	2.70	Agree
30.	Environmental	3.56	Strongly Agree
31.	Societal	3.71	Strongly Agree
32.	Cultural	2.87	Agree
33.	Economic	3.11	Strongly Agree
34.	Technological	3.69	Strongly Agree
35.	Emotional state of an individual	3.64	Strongly Agree
	Grand Mean (x)	3.39	Strongly Agree

Table 3 shows that, the respondents all agreed with the above factors that influence the development of habit formation amongst the primary school pupils. Family factor is the highest while school factor is the lowest (Mean 3.81 and 2.70 respectively).

Research Questions 4: What could be done to check bad habits among primary school pupils?

S/No.	Solution	Mean Response	Remarks
36.	Parents, care-givers and teachers should guide children on the formation of stable characters right from early years.	3.75	Strongly Agree
37.	Adults should live an exemplary life for younger children to emulate by living and maintaining good habits.	3.81	Strongly Agree
38.	Every teacher should have the knowledge of child psychology for effective handling of children at tender age.	3.76	Strongly Agree
39.	There is need for guidance and counseling services in primary schools.	3.56	Strongly Agree
40.	Children should be made to understand the reason for expected behaviour.	3.05	Strongly Agree
	Grand Mean (x)	3.59	Strongly Agree

Table 4 shows Hint, (he respondents agreed with the items on solutions (o bad habits development in children. The means are above the cut-off point of 2.50. The respondents strongly agreed with the proposed measures.

Discussion

The study investigated the perception of teachers on prevalent habits amongst primary school pupils. Table ! is based on research question 1, which sets out to find some prevalent forms of .good habit amongst primary school pupils shows tint, primary school teachers are aware of some prevalent forms of good habit exhibited by the children. The teachers all agreed with the 12 items which are different forms of good behavioural habits, honesty, quietness., greetings, generosity, friendliness, helpfulness, carefulness, laughter, loyalty, obedience and sympathy. Based on the findings, it is concluded that teachers in primary schools are aware that primary school pupils/children exhibits some forms of good habits, \\high needed encouragement from the adults (parents and teachers).

Table 2. which is based on research question 2 shows that, primary school pupils exhibit some bad habits such as thumb sucking, nail biting, dirtiness, crying, sleeping in the class, fighting, noise making, lateness, stubbornness, dishonesty, inattentiveness, quarrelling, truancy, littering of papers and bullying. Based on the grand mean of 3.39, it is concluded that teachers are fully aware of the bad habits behaviours amongst (he pupils.

Table 3 is based on research question 1. Which sought to find out the prevalent factors that influence the development of habits amongst primary school pupils shows that, the prevalent factors responsible for habits formation or development include: family factors, school factor, environmental factor, cultural factor, economic factor, technological and emotional stale factors.

The findings of this studs' agreed will what Olaitan and A. Akpan (2U03) have said concerning habits formation. Thai in habit formation, whether good or bad, a child is not or never born with either. This is to say that, habits are learned from the environment, which includes: (he family, school, society, and personal experience.

Based on the findings, it is concluded that, a child is neither born with good habit nor bad habit; it is environment that determines an individual's habits. The environment or societal factors include: the family, school, peer-group, movies, needs, economy and technological influences. The conclusion of this finding agrees with Erikson (I9SO) who finds that. the child's behaviour is determined by societal influence.

On solution to bad habits amoungst the primary school pupils as shown in Table 4, the respondents all agreed that adults (parents, teachers and care-givers) should give proper guide and care to children and should live exemplary lives for children to emulate; and (here is need for teachers to know about child psychology lo enable them handle children's behavioural problems in school. Also, guidance and counseling services arc lo be established in primary schools to help the children; and lo guide the children to know or understand the reasons for the expected behaviours.

Based on these findings, it is concluded that, children's habits will change for good lo a greater extent, and the societv will be better a place for living.

Recommendations

This study has investigated teachers' perception of children's habits formation in primary schools. Based on its findings, it is recommended that:

- 1) Every teacher in primary school should have the knowledge of child psychology for early detection and handling of children's problems at such a tender stage of development.
- 2) Rewards should follow any behaviour exhibited by children whether positive or negative, and should be made to understand reason for the behaviour expected.
- 3) Adults (parents, teachers and care-givers) hold the key to a child's future behaviours as their own behaviour exerts tremendous influence on their children. Therefore, adults should live exemplary lives for children to emulate by living and maintaining good habits.
- 4) Guidance and counseling services should be offered to children right from primary school level.
- 5) There is need for adults to monitor children's play both at home and in school to avoid "bad" games that may lead to bad behaviour later in life.

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