Improving students’ completion of homework through positive reinforcement to motivate the students to finish their homework

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Introduction

It is a fact that students' completion of homework had been a problem for students, parents and teachers. There are many reasons to make it as a problem. Firstly, students' after-school activities interfered with homework completion. Students are faced with the problem of balancing outside activities, homework, and personal choice activities. Too often, nonacademic activities become a priority, causing homework assignments to become a secondary and often neglected choice.

As a second documented cause, teachers failed to clarify directions and be certain that students understood the homework fully and accurately. Students, at times, incorrectly identified homework to be completed and/or accompanying directions. The problem arises wherein the educational system, in an attempt to reduce pressure on the student, only causes an increase by assigning work the student does not understand, or by neglecting to state a purpose for the homework. Lack of clarify and insufficient comprehension of the purpose and directions of homework were two causes of student failure or inability to complete a homework.

Students faced with an overabundance of homework on a given day, a third cause of homework non-completion, neglected to complete all homework is teachers assign homework based on their own need for curriculum coverage. Teacher directed attention to the quantity of homework assigned, and the point of diminishing returns. He noted that a variety of excuses,
avoidance behaviors, and possibly loss of interest in school and motivation for learning may result if an excessive amount of homework is continuously given. Adults function within an eight hour workday. Rosemond pointed out that the student, after a seven hour day in the classroom, must continue his/her workday at home with an additional two hours of homework. The student facing excessive amounts of homework is detrimental. They view it as a waste of time on both the part of the teacher and the student. Specifically, Some individual assignments may be too long to be completed in a practical time frame given numerous assignments.

Servings as a fourth cause for homework non-completion, some students had not assumed the responsibility for their own work. Teacher pointed out that the sense of responsibility must be instilled in a child at home and at an early age. If such responsibility is lacking, the effects of such neglect continues, and eventually extends to the classroom situation. In a sense. Middle school students, she felt, who had not developed the responsibility to study regularly at home or cultivated good study habits, experienced a difficult time with the middle school concept of different classes and different teachers.

As there are many reasons lead to the non-completion of homework, being a teacher, to motivate the students to finish their homework is important. It is because this will effect their learning outcome. A better way is to give them more positive reinforcement.
Aims of the Research

The aim of our research is to find out which kind of positive reinforcement is most useful to motivate the students to finish their homework. More simply, motivation can be defined as exciting the mind of the student to receive the instruction. Excitement, interest, and enthusiasm toward the reinforcer are the primary objectives in motivation.

In order to motivate students, teachers need to know both what is effective and why it is effective.

Motivation Theory

Student learning and memory are closely tied to motivation. Students will learn what they want to learn and will have great difficulty learning material that does not interest them. Motivation is a sum of complex forces influenced by experiences, situations, and environment.

The understanding of motivational theory centers on the work of psychologist. In the view of motivation is based on a hierarchy of needs, structured from lowest to highest: Basic Physiological Needs, Security and Safety, Social Affiliation, Esteem, and Self-Actualization. A lower-level need must be met before the needs above it can be met.
Physiological Needs

Unless students have adequately satisfied their biological needs for food, water, sleep and temperature regulation, it is unlikely that they will become interested in the reinforcer.

Security and Safety

College students must feel safe from both physical and psychological harm or intimidation before they can focus their attentions on the homework. Anxious or alienated students are unlikely to develop in a classroom. When instructors resort to screaming, threatening, and ridiculing, students often respond by either withdrawing into themselves or lashing out with vengeance. Students need to be challenged without being intimidated or tricked.

Many college students suffer from the fear of school. It usually stems from a person's unpleasant past experience with school. Students may fear being called on and not knowing the "right" answer and being embarrassed in front of peers, being ridiculed by a professor or classmates. The fear stems from the inability to perform at the same level or pace as the rest of the class, taking tests, and a host of other situations.

Teacher immediacy can help motivate students by meeting their need for security and safety. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy provides communication professors with the opportunity to model the behavior they want their students to exhibit during a speech. It also narrows the distance between the instructor and the student.
Social Affiliation

To avoid feeling isolated or alone, students must develop reciprocal relationships, and they must be able to identify themselves as members of a larger group. Many college students join sororities and fraternities in order to acquire social affiliation. This sense of caring and belonging is often threatened in classrooms where students are forced to compete against each other. We all need to feel that we belong and we need to give and receive affection. Every human needs human contact.

Some people claim that liking for teacher and classmates affect the instructional climate of the classroom and student motivation to achieve learning goals. Therefore, college instructors should create a classroom in which of activities, students learn competition, cooperation, and empathy. They are recognized as part of a group. In our culture, social recognition is recognized as a dominant source of motivation.

Self - Esteem

A sense of personal esteem is developed through countless experiences with significant others whose actions and reactions teach us who we are and whether we are worthwhile and valued human beings. College teachers can make their students feel valued by appreciating and acknowledging their contributions to the classroom experience. During class discussions, teachers can praise a student's comment or question. Teachers who are successful in producing students learning gains tend to have higher expectations and personally acknowledge the contributions of students.

Teachers should engage in confidence-building strategies in order to motivate students and build self-esteem. Many times students may not have experienced success as children in school or adults in their work or social life. As a result, some may feel inadequate and unequipped to
learn and compete, imagining that the others are more capable than they. If college teachers instill in their students the belief that if they try to do something they will succeed, the effect on performance will be dramatic.

Classrooms are public settings, so that failure often means not only personal disappointment but public embarrassment before the peer group. Therefore, teachers should create college classrooms in which fear of failure, test anxiety, and concern about avoiding ambiguity and risk are minimized. Success is a major factor in motivating students.

**Self-Actualization**

Self-actualization as an intrinsic drive to meet full potential. Armed with a sense of curiosity and creativity and a belief in our own worth, each of us is inextricably involved in a lifelong process of striving to reach and understand all that exists in our world of experience. Teachers can capitalize on this need in order to facilitate learning and retention.

Therefore, if we can find out the most useful reinforcer, we can encourage the students to finish their homework. It will help them to consolidate their learning.

Lastly, it is an interesting study to find out the correlation and difference between three kinds of schools. It can show us whether the normal students, mentally handicapped students and hearing impaired students have the common interest on the reinforcer or not.
Methodology

Details of the adopted methods for collecting data and so organizing as information for analysis are listed in the following parts.

1. Choose of samples

In view of this research project included three special educational needs schools, each of them was chosen with one class of students as the samples for studying effects by different motivating methods. All the studying samples were students in secondary level while each class was arranged with less than ten students in normal class teaching. Reasons for making these constraints are to limit the range of knowledge area and number of sampling throughout the research project.

2. Types of Reinforcement

Based on the belief of possible way to increase learning motivation of students is contributed by positive encourage, some kinds of reinforcement have been introduced throughout different schedules of reinforcement which are printed in the following parts of the research project. The chosen types of reinforcement are candies, bookmark, food stamps, verbal reward and funny signets, all of them are positive reinforcement to students so to ensure application of different schedules worked out their effects for motivating students in doing homework.

3. Schedules of Reinforcement

Four schedules of reinforcement have been applied in obtaining records of homework
completion by students, they are namely as Schedule A, Schedule B, Schedule C and Schedule D respectively. These schedules were found from the theory of Schedule of Reinforcement by Skinner’s theory. All of them are found working effectively in increasing outcomes, however, each of them has different extent of motivating effect to students. Details of the schedules are described as follows.

**Schedule A: Fixed-interval schedule**

The first method used for motivating students in completing their homework is ‘fixed-interval schedule’, in this method, the period of time has been fixed while reinforcer would occur at such pre-defined and fixed period but not depend on the frequency of good action by students.

Students were checked by teachers with completed homework on every period of two teaching lessons. Successful students would be rewarded with reinforcer (different types of reinforcement as mentioned in former section) if they have done their homework on time, such records were counted to make up the table listed in Section 5.

**Schedule B: Variable-interval schedule**

The second method is ‘variable-interval schedule’ in which reinforcer would be distributed to students in variable period of time, the period of time would be changed from time to time but not fixed.

Students were checked with completed homework by teachers in variable time interval, sometimes every period of lesson, sometimes every three period of lesson which was decided by teachers and students did not know when it would happened. When they were checked with completed homework done, they would be rewarded with reinforcer.
Schedule C: Fixed-ratio schedule

The third method is ‘fixed-ratio schedule’ which was implemented in counting the frequency of expected action then reinforcer would be given when fulfilling the requirement which was not depended on period of time.

Students would be distributed with reinforcer when they have completed a fixed number of homework, here every two-times of completed homework was set as the frequency of expected action.

Schedule D: Variable-ratio schedule

The four method has been adopted is ‘variable-ratio schedule’, throughout this method the frequency of expected action for reinforcer was not fixed but changed from time to time so rewards were unpredictable.

By this method, students were given with reinforcer when they have completed the number of homework which was decided by teachers and changed every time while students did not know what this number was.

4. ABCD-ABCD Model

Cycle 1: ABCD schedules

For the first cycle, model A-B-C-D have been adopted in collecting data of completed homework by students. Each schedule, (schedule A, B, C and D as mentioned in former section), lasted for two weeks and then another schedule was followed one by one until all four schedules have been carried out. Therefore, 8 weeks teaching period was needed for cycle 1.

Before starting the research work, students were explained clearly with expectation to them that finishing homework were their responsibilities and handing them on time would be the task they should pay effort.

During each schedule, rewards would be gained by them whenever they were
checked with completed homework by teachers while the checking time might not be the same every time which was decided by teachers. Meanwhile the students would be encouraged with rewards, their results of completing homework would be recorded for studying the effectiveness of different schedules of motivating techniques in the form of percentage of completed homework.

In turn, schedule A (fixed-interval schedule: students were checked by teachers with completed homework on every period of two teaching lessons.), then schedule B (variable-interval schedule: students were checked with completed homework by teachers in variable time interval, sometimes every period of lesson, sometimes every three period of lesson which was decided by teachers and students did not know when it would happened.), schedule C (fixed-ratio schedule: students would be distributed with reinforcer when they have completed a fixed number of homework, here every two-times of completed homework was set as the frequency of expected action.) until schedule D (variable-ration schedule: students were given with reinforcer when they have completed the number of homework which was decided by teachers and changed every time while students did not know what this number was. would be implemented so to complete the first cycle within 8 weeks of school teaching period.)

**Cycle 2: ABCD schedules**

In order to obtain significant results, another cycle (cycle 2) which was the same as cycle 1, that is four schedules method with schedule A, B, C and then D as a whole cycle was then carried out. All the settings in each schedule such as time interval, number of checking and other parameters were the same as in cycle 1 so to have standards in comparing results of the two cycles which were in the same pattern of implementation details.
CONCLUSION

It is commonly believed that all kinds of reinforcement are mainly to stimulate student motivation to learn. We realize that the reinforcer is the external matter to encourage the students pay more attention on the homework and maybe for them to understand it is their duties to finish their homework. The ultimate goal is teaching the students realize the external reinforcer is not important if they have implanted the duties in their mind, as it is the internal life. By the way, the reinforcer is not necessary to be given to the students.

In a nutshell, we understand at this moment, our students are still paying attention to the concrete reinforcer and just take it as the external gift. It is successful if the goal is making the student ready to gain reinforcer. However, it can show us the way that the concrete and possible way to gain reinforcer is effective method to push them finished homework. Besides if the student can implant the duty into the mind, those reinforcer as not necessary. Anyway, it can advice the teachers in these three types of school setting can use the homework checklists to gain the student attention to finish the homework.
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