

TEACHING PUPILS WHO HAVE BEHAVIOUR DISORDERS IN A NORMAL CLASSROOM SETTING

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Abstract

Children behaviour problems have become a crucial issue of discussion for some time now. This is because children pose series of problems to their parents, teachers and the society. Within the school system, teachers are confronted with the tasks of how to discipline, as well as, present instructions to these children along with the normal pupils in the class, for better learning outcomes. Considering the fact that the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) Scheme now gives educational access to several children of school going age, it follows therefore, that there will be an increase in the manifestation of multifarious behaviour problems of pupils. This paper highlights the strategies that could be adopted by primary school teachers in the teaching-learning process towards ensuring better classroom adjustment and academic achievement of pupils with behaviour disorder within the group of normal children.

Introduction

Behaviour disorders are one of the most common forms of psychopathology among children and adolescents. It is probably one of the most frequently cited reasons for referral to mental health services. According to WHO (2001), an estimated 10 to 20 percent of children worldwide have one or more mental or behavioural problems. Many disorders commonly found among adults including depression dyslexia and autism as well as attention deficit/hyperactivity can begin during childhood. Giving treatment to these problems requires a continuum of care over time, linking settings such as families, schools, hospitals and out patient facilities.

Behaviour disorders has been taken to refer to a condition in which behavioural or emotional responses of an individual in school are so different from his or her generally accepted, age appropriate, ethnic or cultural norms such that his performance in social relationships, academic attainment, personal care and adjustment and classroom behaviour are marred (Akpan, 2003). Sarason and Sarason in Nnachi (2003) describe behaviour problem as a psychological term that explains the inability of the individual to cope with or adjust to his social or psychological environment. This can otherwise be referred to as an abnormal behaviour. A normal behaviour, however may be considered as that behaviour which is accepted within a given social context. Thus, the age, sex and social standard are often considered in setting a

standard of behaviour. Writing on behaviour problems of school children, Amalaha (1979) identified two broad categories of disorders namely conduct and personality problems. According to him, conduct disorders refer to children problems that cause suffering to others around them such problems include disobedience, fighting, destructiveness, temper tantrums, uncooperativeness, irresponsibility, laziness in school, impertinence, stealing, bullying disrespect for elders, noise making while personality problems are those disorders that directly affect the individual child, these are social withdrawal, shyness, anxiety, poor self-concept, truancy, lethargy, hopelessness, etc.

A number of causative factors have been identified by various scholars for behaviour disorders. Njumago (2003), highlights the influence of childhood training, interpersonal relationship, parental expectation and misguidance, lack of parental monitoring, maternal employment/child care, peer influence and pressure, lack of recreational activities, defective discipline, parent as role model, poverty, family and society values as variables responsible for child behaviour problems.

Behaviour problems can occur in children of all ages. Many of the young children who suffer from conduct disorder do improve over the years; yet, there are some who develop a hostile, aggressive attitude towards people and objects around them.

The Child Within The Classroom

In the classroom setting, the child can manifest disruptive problems that stem from frustration. The inability to do what he likes can lead to anger since pupils are required to behave in particular way such as intellectual exercises, he may resist it to some degree because of natural inclination to avoid work. This condition allows tension to build up until he is forced to react negatively. Some other children can get into mischief because they are biased with class work and might probably not think of what else to do. Whatever may be the situation, it is obvious that no teacher can claim not to have pupils with disruptive behaviour problems (Nwadinigwe, 2000). The child also is more likely to develop disorder if he has a difficult temperament, has learning and reading difficulties. These automatically make it difficult for him to understand and take part in lessons. He can feel stupid being in class thereby resorting to misbehaving and disturbing others. Some pupils steal within the school and or lie without any sign of remorse or guilt when they are found out. This type of behaviour puts a huge strain not only on the family of such children, but even the teachers as well. This however, has devastating consequences on pupils' social relationships and many of them, if not all, do not do well at school and because they cause one trouble or the other, they may be asked to withdraw.

Even, a well-adjusted child can sometimes have headache, have little desire for food, experience nightmare, engage in nervous habits, suffer some jealousy, anxiety or health problems. When conditions like these arise among pupils that are even exceptionally fortunate or even disruptive responses to such condition can affect pupils' works and social relationships may be hampered, teachers have to interfere to render some helps. Thus, teachers are expected to provide an atmosphere that would limit the incidence of maladjustment.

Referring children that have behaviour disorders to professionals that can provide psychotherapy has always been seen as a way of helping such children overcome the problems. Omoluwabi (2003) notes that the process of managing childhood behaviour disorder is compounded because young children find it difficult to communicate effectively with therapist, do not have sufficient knowledge of psychotherapy and could neither ask for it nor be favourably disposed to it and their cognitive immaturity make it increasingly difficult to benefit from such therapy. Hence, teachers who are not therapists sometimes serve as sympathetic listener as many of their pupils confide in them (Biehler, 1979).

Blair, Simpson and Jones (1975) remark that disruptive problems of children make classroom management difficult for teachers. It hinders effective classroom discipline, disrupts class activities and creates an uncondusive social climate. Yet, teachers should be able to recognize the characteristics that are important in assisting each child to learn more effectively regardless of disruptive activities the pupils might engage in. Okubanjo and Lawal (2000) report that many newly employed teachers are confronted with a wide variety of behaviour problems, that many of them have had cause to leave the profession because of their inability to effectively handle the situations.

Need For Instructional Strategies For Pupils With Behaviour Disorder

In the school system, children are taught in groups. As a matter of fact, a teacher is typically responsible for several children which also include children with behaviour disorders. Thus, by virtue of the psychological make-up of these children, they are more likely to cause problems to the teacher, receive little attention, be rejected by peers and perform poorly academically, and eventually drop out of school. The conventional method by which teachers teach children is to instruct them by some means and provide feedback regarding response correctness which may not take care of the interest of pupils with disorders. Although research indicating how to present academic materials are limited; emphasis need to be placed on how to teach children within a group by taking care of their needs and aspirations because individual pupils would need individual instruction to reach mastery (LeBlanc & Ruggles, 1982; Elliott, Kratochwill, Cook & Travers, 2000).

With the new Universal Basic Education Programme (UBE) in primary school system, all children of school going-age are expected to be in school. This expectation is tied to the enrolment of normal and behaviour disorder children and the fact that their age level does not give room for effective assessment of childhood psychopathology, both groups would have to be taught together in the regular class. The issue of how to teach pupils with behaviour disorders meaningfully among with normal children therefore need to be addressed.

The National Policy on Education (FGN, 2004) specifies the moulding of character and development of sound attitude in the child as one of the goals of primary education. To make this achievable, therefore, there is need for teachers to help children with behaviour disorders develop wholesome attitude towards themselves, have interest in learning, be academically responding and co-operate with other pupils in the class.

Bijou (1976) indicates that all children should be taught with individualized procedures. That is, giving attention to individualized goals, materials, instructions, and feedback should be prepared for each child. This may seem difficult, especially, for beginning teachers, but with time strategies can be mapped out to suit the peculiar needs of the pupils. Etzel and LeBlanc (1976) strongly recommend reinforcement for academic responding and attending to children with learning difficulties for enhancing the learning process. There is tendency for teachers to over-instruct by talking too much with little consideration for what and how it is said. This may not augur well with hyperactive pupils and children who naturally have short attention span. According to Slavin (1987), when quality instruction occurs in the classroom, the information presented makes sense to pupils, becomes interesting and is easy to remember and apply when the need arises. Teachers also have the tendency to generalize that pupils have all understood what they have taught without paying attention to the different cognitive levels of their pupils. Children who have difficulty in learning according to LeBlanc and Ruggles (1982), need an optimal learning environment which reduces the occurrence of problems, thus, the teacher is expected to create an environment where pupils would feel wanted and develop a sense of self-worth. The need to provide and adopt special strategies in teaching these children therefore becomes imperative. The Strategies are:

Identifying Pupils with Behaviour Disorder

It is important for teachers to identify pupils that have behaviour problems within the classroom. This can be done by the teacher through careful observation of the child in the class, and the playground and other related environment which could give insight into the dynamics that influence the child's behaviours (Onyeonu, 2003). Other techniques that can be used to

identify such category other of children include interview and the use of psychological test among others. It is important to state that teachers can not apply these techniques in diagnosing behaviour problems because they are not trained in the systematic processes involved in they use. Since there is dearth of counsellors in primary schools, teachers would have to use observation technique that is within there power. Teachers need to embark on this identification at the beginning of an academic session in other to facilitate better seating arrangement, since 60 percent of classroom time is spent in seat work (Elliott, Kratochwill, Cook & Travers, 2000). This is done by carefully observing the pupils at the beginning of the session and arranging their sitting positions for teaching effectiveness. An organized classroom learning environment would have to be ensured because a large portion of a child's day in the school is spent within the classroom, hence, its environment should be made to provide good opportunities and experiences.

Understanding Pupils' Communication Level

The teacher should be able to assess his pupils' ability to communicate and understand that pupils differ in this regard. Thus, his understanding would help him to adjust to the needs of his pupils and take care of the interest of pupils with behavioural problem. The teacher needs to be mindful of his utterances in the class as regards deviant children by avoiding the use of derogatory names that could impede pupils' interest in learning.

Using a Variety of Instructional Materials

The presence of pupils with behaviour problems in a class pre-supposes a wide use of variety of instructional materials that could be displayed for effective teaching and pupils understanding. Children, generally have short attention span, therefore they need attractive materials that would keep them concentrated and sustained their interests when teaching is going on, particularly for disordered children.

Group Work

Pupils who have behaviour disorders often have poor social relationship which usually leads to rejection. Adeniyi (2002), remarks that social acceptance or rejection contributes immensely to learners willingness to stay in or out of school. To encourage such pupils to attend school regularly, group participation in activities is highly desirable because it brings high degree of social interaction. Pupils can share ideas and feelings through such activities. Wentzel (1999) notes that such interactions and collaborative problem-solving can quicken the development of high order thinking and some intellectual skills. To achieve this, the teacher would have to monitor the pupils carefully so that normal pupils within the class would not hijack or

dominate the activity thereby debarring them from benefiting from such programme.

Reinforcement

Furthermore, some aggressive pupils act as they do, because they want attention from their teachers. When pupils do not receive attention when they are being good but only get such when they are behaving badly, over a considerable time, they learn that attention would only come when they break rule. Thus, they are likely to prefer their teachers' annoyance or critical attention to being ignored. Rather than punishing them and having less time to do desirable things, teachers should learn to reward good behaviour and withhold reinforcement for inappropriate behaviour. Adelake (2003), notes that operant conditioning can be used to stop an undesirable behaviour, if such behaviour is not followed by pleasant consequence; and will eventually extinct.

Motivation

Pupils with behaviour disorder needs reassurance that they could succeed academically. The teacher should demonstrate confidence in the pupils' ability and help them set goals that can be realistically achieved. They should also be helped to participate actively in classroom learning by asking them questions, giving them varieties of class work and take home assignments, allowing them to demonstrate what they have achieved in previous lessons. As an educator, the teacher should serve as model for his pupils who are behaviourally disturbed. Children naturally, tend to model adults around them and because teachers exert great influence on pupils learning, they often look up to their teachers for modelling. It has been found that pupils model not only desirable behaviour but also undesirable ones exhibited by their teachers. Teachers who come to school late or irregularly are more likely to have pupils that are irregular and not punctual in class (Njumogu, 2002). Teachers actions must therefore be positive, consistent, mature and controlled.

Setting Objectives for Pupils Understanding

Learning objectives are meant to be achieved with pupils' co-operation and participation. Pupils should be helped to understand teachers' expectations concerning each lesson, including hyperactive children. The objectives for each activity should be made clear to them and the help that would be given in helping them achieve such objectives should be known to them. This will motivate the pupils to settle down to work. However, pupils with behaviour disorders should not be expected to have immediate success, but with time,

they will learn to work appropriately. Teachers can help them further by seeking input from the pupils on their strengths, weaknesses and goals.

Group Discussion

In group interaction or discussion, the pupil should be assisted to feel as if he/she has something worthwhile to contribute to the discussion. The teacher can do this by pointing at him, modelling his/her head in approval of what the child is about to say and acknowledging the contributions of the pupil. Challenges in pupils' participation in group exercises should be gradually increased while providing regular positive reinforcement. As the pupil gain confidence and his level of comfort rises, he could be encouraged to be a group spokes-person.

Participation in Reading

One of the most important skills pupils should be equipped with is reading. It has been identified as the most important language skill for academic performance (Adamson, 1993). Successful reading performance is a strong predictor of children's academic achievement in the second language from primary to post secondary levels. To help children acquire basic literary skills however, adequate provision should be made for various reading engagement such as reading silently, orally and reading to answer questions. In reading sessions, pupils should be encouraged to read in turns so that behaviour disordered pupils would have the opportunity to read to the entire class. Reading can also be done in groups. The children will gradually see reading engagement as a pleasurable activity. Through this approach, positive relationship can be enhanced and increased by giving awards to deserving pupils when they read appropriately.

Conclusion

The primary school system occupies strategic position in the Nigerian Education System, as a result of being the bedrock of other levels of education. Thus, it requires serious attention for all round development of the Nigerian child (Okubanjo, 2005). There should be a veering from cause and management of behaviour disorder which have hitherto been overflogged, to techniques of teaching academic tasks to both normal children and pupils with behaviour disorder to forestall problems of poor academic performance, maladjustment, drop-out syndrome and so on.

Teachers should help to check their pupils behaviour problems by emphasising moral instructions regularly in the class. This will go a long way in the development of desirable behaviour (attitude and values) at this level of education. This paper therefore, recommends that primary school teachers should be given seminars and allowed to attend workshops on the changing

roles of teachers in the contemporary times. Many of them do not know the symptoms of disorder and how to manage such, yet they have pupils with disorders under them.

It is high-time, government appoints professional guidance counsellors in primary school to handle pupils problems and guide school personnel appropriately in areas of intervention for at-risks pupils. Counsellors should be adequately equipped for the task by showing understanding of the pupils problems and finding techniques of solving them.

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