



Rewards-Based Positive Reinforcement: Improving the Test-Taking Behaviors of Grade 7 Learners

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ABSTRACT :

Test-taking behavior significantly influences learners' academic performance. This study explored the effectiveness of a Rewards-Based Positive Reinforcement Strategy in improving the test-taking behaviors of Grade 7 learners at Dr. Luis E. Baraquia National High School during School Year 2025-2026. The study employed a qualitative action research design involving five purposively selected learners who demonstrated poor test-taking habits and obtained below-nearly-proficient scores in the E-RUNT assessment.

Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, learner reflections, and the teacher-researcher's observation journal. The intervention was implemented over two academic quarters using a structured rewards system consisting of verbal recognition, certificates, school supplies, stickers, and small incentives for demonstrating desirable test-taking behaviors. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings revealed three major themes before the intervention: poor study habits and lack of preparedness, low confidence and test anxiety, and impulsive test completion behaviors. During implementation, learners showed increased motivation, engagement, and persistence. After implementation, learners demonstrated improved confidence, focus, self-regulation, and effective test-taking strategies. Learners reported that rewards initially motivated them to improve, but over time they developed intrinsic motivation and positive academic habits. The findings support Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory and Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, suggesting that positive reinforcement contributes to sustained behavioral improvement.

The study concludes that rewards-based positive reinforcement is an effective classroom intervention for enhancing learners' test-taking behaviors, confidence, and academic engagement.

Keywords: Positive Reinforcement, Rewards System, Test-Taking Behavior, Learner Motivation, Self-Efficacy, Grade 7 Learners

1. Introduction

Assessment is an essential component of the teaching-learning process because it provides evidence of learners' understanding, skills, and academic progress. However, academic achievement is influenced not only by content knowledge but also by the behavior's learners demonstrate during examinations. Effective test-taking behaviors such as carefully reading directions, managing time wisely, reviewing responses, and maintaining concentration often contribute to improved performance.

Despite having adequate knowledge of the lessons, some learners fail to demonstrate their learning due to ineffective test-taking habits. Teachers commonly observe learners who rush through examinations, disregard instructions, leave items unanswered, or submit papers without reviewing their work. Such behaviors prevent learners from achieving their full academic potential.

Among the Grade 7 Sampaguita learners of Dr. Luis E. Baraquia National High School, several students consistently completed examinations earlier than their classmates and obtained low test scores. Classroom observations revealed that many of these learners lacked confidence, experienced anxiety during examinations, and demonstrated limited test preparation behaviors.

One strategy that has shown promise in promoting desirable behaviors is positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement refers to providing rewards, recognition, or incentives following desired behavior to increase the likelihood of its recurrence. According to Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory, behaviors followed by positive consequences are more likely to be repeated. Likewise, Bandura emphasized that positive experiences and recognition contribute to increased self-efficacy and learner confidence.

Recognizing the need to improve test-taking habits among learners, the researcher implemented a Rewards-Based Positive Reinforcement Strategy to determine its effectiveness in promoting positive test-taking behaviors and improving learners' academic engagement.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory, which explains that behavior can be strengthened through reinforcement. When learners receive positive consequences after demonstrating desirable behaviors, those behaviors become more likely to occur in the future.

The study was likewise guided by Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. Bandura posited that individuals' beliefs regarding their abilities influence their actions, persistence, and performance. Positive feedback, successful experiences, and recognition help learners build confidence in their capacity to accomplish academic tasks.

Through rewards and recognition, learners may develop stronger motivation, improved confidence, and more productive test-taking behaviors.

3. Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the test-taking behaviors of learners before, during, and after the implementation of the rewards-based positive reinforcement strategy?
2. What were the experiences of the learners and the teacher-researcher during the intervention?
3. How did rewards-based positive reinforcement influence learners' test-taking behaviors?
4. What educational implications can be drawn from the findings?

4. Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative action research design. Action research was deemed appropriate because it allowed the teacher-researcher to investigate a classroom concern, implement an intervention, and evaluate its effectiveness in improving learner behavior.

Participants

The participants were five Grade 7 Sampaguita learners purposively selected based on the following criteria:

- Below-nearly-proficient performance in the E-RUNT assessment
- Consistent demonstration of poor test-taking behaviors
- Frequent early submission of test papers
- Need for academic and behavioral intervention

Initial observations indicated that the participants commonly displayed low confidence, poor preparation habits, test anxiety, and limited concentration during assessments.

Intervention

The intervention involved a Rewards-Based Positive Reinforcement Strategy implemented over two academic quarters.

Learners received rewards for demonstrating desirable testing behaviors, including:

- Reading directions carefully
- Managing time appropriately
- Reviewing answers before submission
- Completing all test items
- Demonstrating focus and effort during examinations
- Showing improvement from previous assessments

Rewards included:

- Stickers
- Certificates of recognition
- School supplies
- Snacks
- Verbal praise and public recognition

The rewards emphasized effort, improvement, and responsible behavior rather than test scores alone.

Data Gathering Methods

The following sources of data were utilized:

- Semi-structured interviews
- Classroom observations
- Teacher observation journal
- Learner reflections
- Assessment records

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes from interview responses, observations, and reflection data.

5. Results and Discussion

Test-Taking Behaviors Before and After the Intervention

Table 1. Changes in Learners' Test-Taking Behaviors

Behavior	Before Intervention	After Intervention
Reading instructions carefully	Rarely observed	Frequently observed
Reviewing answers	Seldom practiced	Consistently practiced
Time management	Frequently rushed	Appropriate use of allotted time
Confidence during tests	Low	High
Test anxiety	Evident	Reduced
Concentration	Inconsistent	Improved
Completion of all items	Sometimes incomplete	Majority completed all items
Motivation	Low	High

The results suggest substantial improvements in learners' testing behaviors following the intervention.

Theme 1: Poor Study Habits and Lack of Test Preparedness

Before the intervention, learners commonly admitted that they studied only when reminded by teachers or parents. Some participants revealed that they frequently answered tests without preparing adequately.

One learner shared:

"I usually answered quickly because I wanted to finish first even if I was not sure of my answers."

Another participant stated:

"Sometimes I forgot to review because I thought I already understood the lesson."

These findings suggest that poor preparation habits contributed to weak assessment performance and ineffective test-taking behaviors.

Theme 2: Motivation Through Rewards

During implementation, learners reported increased motivation to perform well during examinations.

One participant explained:

"I wanted to receive a reward, so I started reading the questions carefully and checking my answers."

Another learner remarked:

"The rewards made me excited to study because my efforts were recognized."

The provision of incentives encouraged learners to become more engaged and deliberate during assessments. Classroom observations confirmed higher levels of concentration, participation, and persistence among participants.

These findings support Skinner's assertion that positive reinforcement strengthens desirable behavior through repeated positive experiences.

Theme 3: Development of Confidence and Self-Efficacy

As learners consistently received recognition for their efforts, their confidence gradually improved.

One participant stated:

"I am not afraid of tests anymore because I prepare more and believe that I can answer correctly."

Another learner shared:

"Even when there is no reward, I still review because I want better scores."

These statements indicate the development of intrinsic motivation. While rewards initially served as external motivators, learners eventually internalized positive behaviors and demonstrated increased self-confidence.

This finding supports Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory, which emphasizes that successful experiences strengthen learners' beliefs in their own capabilities.

Individual Learner Transformations

Participant A

Initially, Participant A completed examinations within half of the allotted time and frequently submitted incomplete responses. Following the intervention, the learner consistently utilized available testing time and demonstrated improved answer review practices.

Participant B

Participant B exhibited visible signs of anxiety before assessments. After receiving reinforcement and recognition, the learner became more relaxed, attentive, and willing to engage in test preparation activities.

Participant C

The learner initially showed little interest in academic tasks but gradually developed enthusiasm for learning and assessment activities as a result of the intervention.

These transformation stories demonstrate how positive reinforcement influenced not only test-taking behavior but also overall academic attitudes.

6. Conceptual Model of Change

The findings suggest the following process:

Rewards-Based Positive Reinforcement

↓
Increased Motivation and Engagement
↓
Improved Study Habits and Test Preparation
↓
Enhanced Confidence and Self-Efficacy
↓
Positive Test-Taking Behaviors
↓
Improved Academic Performance

The model illustrates how rewards influenced learners' motivation, which subsequently strengthened preparation habits, confidence, behavior, and performance.

7. Educational Implications

The findings have several important implications for classroom practice.

First, positive reinforcement can serve as a low-cost and practical intervention for learners who exhibit poor assessment behaviors. Recognition systems may help increase learner engagement and encourage desirable habits.

Second, rewards should recognize effort, improvement, and persistence rather than focusing exclusively on high achievement. This approach promotes inclusivity and supports learners with varying academic abilities.

Third, teachers should gradually transition learners from external rewards to internal forms of motivation by emphasizing personal growth, responsibility, and self-improvement.

Finally, schools may consider incorporating structured recognition systems as part of their learner support programs to foster positive academic behaviors.

8. Conclusion

The study revealed that Grade 7 learners initially demonstrated poor test-taking behaviors characterized by inadequate preparation, low confidence, rushing through examinations, and test anxiety.

The implementation of a Rewards-Based Positive Reinforcement Strategy significantly improved learner motivation, focus, test preparedness, confidence, and self-regulation. Learners became more responsible, developed effective testing habits, and gradually displayed intrinsic motivation toward academic tasks.

The findings confirm that positive reinforcement is an effective strategy for promoting desirable test-taking behaviors and enhancing learner engagement. Through consistent recognition of effort and improvement, learners can develop habits that contribute to long-term academic success.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Integrate Positive Reinforcement into Daily Classroom Practice

Teachers are encouraged to make positive reinforcement a regular part of classroom instruction rather than limiting it to assessment periods. Recognizing learners' effort, perseverance, participation, and positive behavior through verbal praise, recognition, or simple incentives can help create a supportive and motivating learning environment.

2. Gradually Develop Learners' Intrinsic Motivation

While tangible rewards can effectively encourage positive behavior in the beginning, teachers should gradually shift the focus toward recognizing learners' effort, improvement, and personal achievements. Encouraging self-reflection and celebrating individual progress can help learners become motivated by their own success rather than by rewards alone.

3. Promote a Supportive Classroom Culture

Teachers are encouraged to provide opportunities for peer recognition and collaborative celebrations of success. Activities such as appreciation boards, group acknowledgments, and team incentives can strengthen positive relationships among learners and foster a classroom environment where everyone feels encouraged to do their best.

4. Encourage Learner Reflection and Goal Setting

Learners should be given regular opportunities to reflect on their learning experiences, identify their strengths, recognize areas for improvement, and set realistic academic goals. Reflection activities such as journals, self-assessment checklists, and goal-setting exercises can strengthen learners' sense of responsibility and ownership of their learning.

5. Provide Professional Development for Teachers

School administrators are encouraged to provide training, seminars, and Learning Action Cell (LAC) sessions on the effective use of positive reinforcement strategies. Equipping teachers with practical classroom management techniques will enable them to implement reward systems fairly, consistently, and effectively while addressing the diverse needs of learners.

6. Conduct Further Studies

Future researchers may replicate this study using a larger sample size, different grade levels, or other learning areas to determine the effectiveness of the Rewards-Based Positive Reinforcement Strategy in various educational settings. Additional studies may also explore the long-term effects of positive reinforcement on learners' motivation, self-regulation, and academic achievement.

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