

TEACHERS' FEEDBACK AND PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN'S CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION IN WEST DIVISION, EMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine feedback methods teachers used to enhance children's participation in preschools in West Division, Embu County. Using quasi-experimental design, 156 children and 12 teachers were sampled to take part. The 12 teachers responded to an open-ended questionnaire focusing on methods they used for feedback, while the preschool children were interviewed on the same. Observations of how they provided feedback were undertaken. This was done before teachers were trained on proper use of verbal, written and demonstrative feedback methods. After the training, the two researchers observed life lessons for a period of two months. It emerged that verbal feedback for praising children's performance raised children's motivation to lead to the highest score in their level of participation, while verbal feedback for criticism lowered children's self-image making their participation score low. Another major finding was that where teachers used written feedback in form of positive drawings like smiling faces and stars, children's participation score was relatively high. Teachers' demonstrations yielded low scoring on how children participated and this may have been due to their tendency to depend on the teacher. The study recommended that teachers may need to be regularly trained on proper usage of feedback as their competence to promote children's engagement in learning.

Key words

Feedback, participation, preschool child, preschool teacher

1. Introduction

As teachers in one of the primary schools in Embu County, Kenya, we often heard complaints among our fellow teachers on how that children were extremely reluctant to

speak up during classroom hours and were unwilling to participate adequately and effectively during class time making silence and fear reign in their life during learning process. It seemed rather difficult for teachers to ascertain whether children had understood or learnt anything when the majority of the children did not ask questions to seek clarification and respond immediately to questions posed by the teachers. Parents had expressed a concern in their meet the teachers' sessions expressing that their children were shy, fearful and lacked confidence making them wonder what was happening. Embu County quality assurance report (2009) indicates that there had been evidence of lack of children's volunteering to participate because of lack of individual personal responsibility.

Some teachers attributed this to large class sizes which are known to hamper communication often letting more lecturing occur which in turn it meant fewer participatory opportunities for children (Weaver & Qi, 2005). Eggen & Kauchak (2013) and Woolfolk (2013) highlight that it is a bigger problem when children would want to participate in class but do not feel comfortable or confident enough to do so because teachers show a very short wait time and do not wait for children to elaborate on the answers before making comments. This may have happened when teachers spoke quickly and did not allow for sufficient wait time and children may have perceived that their participation was unwanted (Barr, 2016). Thus, the study examined the effect of teachers' feedback on children's participation in the classroom. Children's level of participation was determined on the basis of different feedback methods teachers used.

2. Literature Review

According to Dances & Kamvounias (2005), classroom participation refers to the number of unsolicited responses from the child. This can come in forms like asking questions and making comments and is not controlled by time (Fassinger, 2000). Classroom participation can be viewed as an active engagement process which clearly demonstrates that children are present in the construction of knowledge (Berdine, 1986). Lyons, (2012) and Weaver and Qi (2005)

perceive that participation is a way to let children active in the educational process to enhance teaching and bring life to the classroom. Junn (1994) comments that participation makes children be more motivated to learn better, becoming critical thinkers with self-reported gains in character. Thus, the more children participate, the less memorization they do and the more they engage in higher levels of thinking like interpretations, analysis, synthesis and creating (Pennebaker, 2011; Barr, 2016). Dances & Kamvounias (2005) and Berdine (1986) commented that children who participate in classroom activities show improvement in their communications skills, group interaction and function better in the life of the society.

McCroskey (2001) and Hollander (2002) suggest that participation of children in class can be increased by addressing teachers' feedback to reduce their anxiety. They recommend that teachers could employ liberation methods like discussions, role playing and jig saws which stimulate children to talk with one another and with the teacher maximising in participation as a collective responsibility of the class rather than being just an individual concern. Thus, teacher's feedback based on the children's performance forms a key component of instruction system (Eggen & Kauchak, 2013).

According to Kulhavy (1985) and Pennebaker (2011), feedback provides information relevant to learning and thus filling the gap between what is understood and what is aimed to be understood. This makes it be relevant to both the teacher and child in the learning process. The teacher takes charge of the goal to be achieved, while the child is initiated to be a player in the achievement planned for (Burnette & Mandel, 2010). This is why Nadler (1979) and Raimes (1983) argue that feedback raises children's level of motivation and engagement in the classroom tasks, making them responsible of their learning

Kepner, (1991) and Hadzic (2016) suggest different ways by which teachers' feedback can be delivered: written feedback, like writing comments on children's work books and oral feedback, like making oral comments on children's responses and demonstration which may involve assisting a child hold a pencil correctly. These approaches may depend on the characteristics of the children and their teacher in terms of when and how to select an appropriate one to use (Eggen and Kauchak, 2013; Brophy, 1981).

Oral or verbal feedback can take the form of praises or criticisms (Hadzic, 2016). Raimes (1983) and Burnette & Mandel (2010) argued that praising what a child does well improves his/her participation in class more than any kind of correction administered. Pattiasina, Saryono, Maryaeni & Mudjianto (2017) and Airasian (1997) point out that children who receive praise feedback in their classroom participation develop a positive attitude towards involvement in class and become receptive to suggestions and even seek advice on how to improve their engagement. It becomes then important for teachers to create a supportive classroom environment in which children are confident to freely express their ideas and feelings (Hattie & Timperley, 1998; Pennebaker, 2011).

Written teacher feedback, though difficult and time consuming provides children with information that motivates them through both positive and corrective reinforcements (Leng, 2014; Hedzic, 2016). Also, written feedbacks have been regarded as being more preferable to children in that they are reviewable and stimulate children to find and identify their mistakes especially where teachers provide guidance on how to interpret them ((Kluger & DeNisi, 1998; Leng, 2014; Ziv,1984)

3 Material and Methods

The researchers used a quasi-experimental design to access 12 teachers and their 156 children to determine how their feedback methods influenced how children participated in their learning process. The twelve teachers were randomly selected from the five public and seven private schools of which each school had two classes and the since each school had two preschool classes, that is baby and upper, the upper classes were purposively selected as the children could communicate with ease. This translated to having a sample of twelve doing in class. These 12 teachers were then trained on effective use of verbal, written and demonstrative teachers who taught these 156 children.

A questionnaire focusing on how teachers provided feedback to their children was administered. Children's views on how they wished to be provided with feedback were

obtained through informal interviews. The two researchers observed on how they provided their feedback to children in life classroom situations for a period of two weeks. A training of the 12 teachers on how to effect verbal, written and demonstrative feedback methods was done in one day. Thorough observations were carried out for two months to establish how well they were effecting verbal, written and demonstrative feedback methods.

The level of children's participation in class was assessed through use of an observation schedule having scores ranging from 0 to 5 for different engagements. The parameters observed included levels of discussion, groups work involvements, demonstrations, frequency of asking and answering questions. Also, children's books were accessed for teachers' written comments as a way of providing feedback. Each observation and documentary analysis of the books was undertaken by two observers who shared their results to counter check for validity and reliability.

The collected data was edited to ensure consistency and accuracy of the responses obtained from each of the instruments. Using content analysis, the various methods used by the teachers were identified from all the instruments. Relevant details of the various methods were taken note of as the frequencies and percentages were calculated. The level of children's participation was obtained by calculating the mean scores for the different teachers using specific feedback methods.

4. Findings and Discussion

Feedback methods shown on Table 4.1 were derived from live lessons' observations after the intervention and children's informal interviews. For each of the twelve teachers, the most predominant feedback method was noted.

Table 4.1 Teachers' feedback methods

Type of feedback	No.of teachers	%	No of children
Verbal	10	83.4	120 (76%)

Written	1	8.3	18 (12%)
Demonstration	1	8.3	18 (12%)
Total	12	100.0	156 100

Table 4.1 displays that the feedback methods teachers used were verbal, written and demonstrative. According to Kepner (1991) these methods tend to collaborate in ascertaining that learning outcomes have been achieved. This is further confirmed by Hadzic (2016) and Burnette& Mandel (2010) who stated that some kinds of classroom participation render themselves better to written feedback, like writing comments on children’s work books, while other children may need oral feedback and still some classroom participation may be enhanced by demonstration like helping a child hold a pencil properly.

From Table 4.1, 83.4% (n=10) of the teachers used verbal method of feedback. Written and demonstration methods were used by one teacher in each case. Teachers used verbal feedback when children asked questions or gave responses to the teachers’ questions. Similarly, from children’s interviews, 76% (n=120) of children indicated verbal method of feedback as the one mostly used by their teachers. Talking with pupils is usually the best as Pattiasina,*et al* (2017) put it because one can have a conversation unlike the written form which is based on their reading ability, a feature likely not to be well developed among preschool children. Katayama (2007) supports use of verbal or oral feedback arguing that it has a significant effect on the development of children’s perception of classroom participation at a very critical stage in their lives. From the observations, it was noted that verbal feedback included both oral praise and criticism.

The preschool teachers were asked to indicate how they use praise as a form of feedback to children and this was also observed (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 When teachers use praise as a form of feedback

When to use praise	No.of teachers	%
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When learners asked questions or answered questions correctly	2	16.7
When there is a correct response or action	3	25.0
When the learner has performed an activity correctly	4	33.3
When there is an improved performance in a task or on general behaviour	3	25.0
Total	12	100.0

Table 4.2 seems to show that praise feedback is about good performance in terms of what is expected. From Table 4.2, 33% (n=4) of the teachers indicated that they use praise when the child has performed a task correctly, while 25% (n=3) of teachers responded that they used praise when there was a correct response or action and when there was an improved performance in a written exercise or on a general behaviour. This agrees with Raimes (1983) who argues that praising what a child does well improves his/her participation in class more than any correction given to him/her. This may be due to the fact that a praise is an approval or recognition of an existing potential in the child to achieve the set goal for learning. Through praise feedback, a child is being made to feel that the learning process is on the course and that the child is key in what goes on. This was particularly displayed by children's smiles, laughter and giggling when praises were directed to them personally. These were external displays of feeling good, key ingredient of high self-esteem, confidence and motivation among children (Woolfolk, 2013). However, those who received criticisms looked low, anxious and not excited of the tasks they were undertaking. This was a matter of concern as there was no task that was observed and lacked an aspect to be praised if teachers were a little more observant and creative.

Table 4. 3 has children's ways by which they wished their teachers use to praise them.

Table 4.3 Ways children would like to be praised

Ways to be praised	No.of children	%
Through pleasant words like <i>excellent, very good, good, well done, nice work</i>	66	42.2
Through written comments	20	13.0
In the presence of many people	35	22.4
Through gifts and presents	35	22.4

From Table 4.3, 43.2% (n=66) of the children indicated that they liked to be praised through pleasant words like *excellent, very good* and *good*, while 22.4% (n=35) indicated that they would like to be praised *in the presence of many people* and through *gifts* and *presents*. In presence of many people meant that they wanted the nice comments witnessed by others as a communal approval of their good work. Like one child indicated that he likes being danced for by other children as a way to show he/she is on the right track of what is expected of him/her. The 13% (n=20) of children who talked about written comments had in mind drawings put on their faces or in their books to symbolise their good work. This took format of *smiling faces* and *stars*. This finding tends to agree with Raimes (1983) and Airasian (1997) who believed that children who receive praise feedback in their classroom participation through words like *excellent, very good* and *good*, develop a positive attitude towards participation in class and become receptive to suggestions which improve on their level of performance

The mention of gifts and presents on Table 4.3 by 22.4% (n=35) of the children is interesting in that they even pointed out the type of these gifts (toys, picture books, cadies and sweets). These are items they identify with in terms of day to day experiences. To a child, a gift or present is an outward expression of what the teacher regards the child to be. It is a mark of recognition in terms of how well the child has performed. However, from observations, teachers did not use this.

Preschool children were also asked to indicate what they do to win teachers' praise and their responses are shown on Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 What children do to win teachers praise

How to win teachers praise	No.of children	%
Completion of given tasks	70	45
Good grades for summative assessment	39	25
Coming to school tidy and smart	29	19
Doing the right thing at the right time	18	11
Total	156	100.0

Table 4.4 tends to display that children are familiar with targets which teachers set in terms of how learning takes place. Their responses as on Table 4 are about their performance, which is the main way of measuring whether learning has taken place or not. From Table 4.4, 45% (n=70) of the children indicated that they can win teachers praise through doing well in set targets. To the children, feedbacks are teacher based as they approved correct responses and good behaviour in the classroom in different ways according to their own discretion.

The preschool teachers were asked to indicate when they use written comments as a form of feedback to children and their responses are shown on Table 4.5

Table 4.5 Writing as a form of feedback

Written feedback	No.of teachers	%
After summative assessments on report books	3	25

At completion of written tasks	7	58
To a well done demonstration	2	17
Total	12	100.0

From Table 4.5, 58% (n=7) of the teachers use written feedback for a well completed task. One can assume that written feedback motivates the child every time he or she sees it. This agrees with Hattie& Timperley (1998) and Pennebaker (2011) who stated that written teacher feedback which means providing children with information about a task has a higher effect compared to verbal praise or criticism, reward or punishment. One teacher expressed this very clearly when she responded that she draws a *smiling face* or a *star* in the child’s work book and/either on child’s palm or face. For instance, as children’s work books were accessed it was clearly noted that children led the researchers to note every positive written remark and where there was a corrective remark they would tend to hide it. For instance, there was one child whose number workbook had ticks all through and several *smiling faces* and *stars*. She even counted the number of *smiling faces* and *stars* in her book This finding supports Leng (2014) who stated that written feedback response has been emphasized as being more preferable to children and Reed (1985) who indicated that for teachers to be able to communicate feedback message in the most appropriate way, they should use written feedback for comments that children need to be able to save and look at later. This study is a further support of Leng (2014) who stressed the importance of written feedback by stating that as a teacher’s response, it has the potential of influencing students’ level of engagement in classroom participation.

Table 4.6 shows how children displayed their level of participation as teachers rendered different feedbacks.

Table 4.6 Teachers’ Methods of feedback and level of children’s participation

Before intervention			After the intervention	
Type of feedback	No of teachers	Score for level of participation	No of Teachers	Score for Level of participation

Praise	2	2	9 (75%)	4
Verbal Criticism	6	1	1 (17%)	1
Written	3	2	1	2
Demonstration	1	1	1	1

From table 4.6, 75% (n=9) of the teachers used praise verbal feedback and participation was at its highest with mean score of 4. This shows that children demonstrated excellent involvement to on-going class discussions, group tasks and peer tutoring in class work. On the other hand, 17% (n=1) of the teachers used verbal criticism as a form of feedback and during this time, participation was at its lowest with a score of 1 showing that children only participated when called upon and tried to respond but did not offer much. Also during this time, children demonstrated very infrequent involvement in peer tutoring. The findings also showed that one of teachers used written feedback and participation score was 2, showing that children here demonstrated sporadic involvement, they offered straight forward information with difficulty and did not offer much during discussion and peer tutoring but contributed to a moderate degree when called upon. For the one teacher who predominantly used demonstration, children's level of participation was at a score of 1. This low level of participation can be explained by the fact that children continued to depend on the teacher and did not seem enthusiastic even to answer and ask questions

What is on Table 4.6 is that children's level of participation of after the intervention was higher than that of the before intervention. This demonstrates that after teachers were trained on use of feedback they used more verbal praise than criticism. As Raimes (1983) and Junn (1994) put it that praising whatever a child does well improves his/her participation more than any other amount of correction of what that child does incorrectly. Also, Airasian (1997) highlights that children who receive praise feedback in their classroom, develop a positive attitude towards participation in class and become receptive to suggestions and even seek advice on how to improve their responsibility towards learning. On the other hand, before training teachers seemed to have used more of verbal criticism than written feedback and the children were dull and not excited of what was going on.

5. Recommendations

What emerges from the findings is that the participation of the child to enhance learning highly depends on the teacher's competence in the use of feedback. It is the teacher's responsibility to employ that form of feedback which ascertains children's maximum engagement in learning. It demands that the teacher plans teaching by making positive feedback be integrated into the control and management of the learning process as it is integral to the outcomes. Training of teachers on how to effect feedback effectively becomes vital and a matter of concern as it empowers them in effecting a pedagogical competence. Further research may be undertaken on how teachers can better be equipped to embrace use of positive and corrective feedback

6. Conclusions

The feedback given by a teacher during a lesson is a message of how well or not well the child is part of the learning process. Effective feedback is a pedagogical skill that determines how well the teacher facilitates children's learning process. The teacher becomes a key player who has to manage and control how well the children can be involved by how he/she provides feedback. This makes feedback be a setting expectancy strategy for both the teacher and the child.

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