The Effectiveness of Behaviourist's Token Economy System on Teaching English as a Second Language at Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur

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Abstract: **Teachers in Saudi school had implemented and allocated their time to apply Token Economy System in teaching-learning process. This approach has been significant in modifying students' behaviour, affecting students' achievements and encouraging motivation of the learners. Thus, this paper discusses a study on students' and teachers' perceptions on Token Economy System and the ways of the implementation in Saudi School. The study was conducted in Saudi School, which consist of students from 6 to 13 years old. It is hoped that this paper would benefit teachers in the long run on a better implementation of Token Economy System and design a specific yet effective teaching and learning strategy using Token Economy System.**

Keywords: **Token Economy System, Behaviourist Model, Students' Perception, Teachers' Perception.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the last several decades, Token Economy System has been extensively researched and widely applied in a variety of settings. Teachers and school administrators have applied these systems in general education, special education, and even in community-based settings. For the reason that of the variety of Token Economy System and the ease at which teachers can implement them, token economies are widely used across the nation. A token is an object or symbol that is exchanged for goods or service. A Token economy is a system of individual reinforcement of behaviours targeted icons that are managed and shared later for backup reinforces.

The Behaviourist's Token Economy System was introduced into the Saudi School as one of the approaches in learning and teaching and also in classroom management. It is known that students need reinforcement in encouraging them to sustain their interest in learning as well as to enhance their academic performance. Though it is widely acceptable to be effective to all learners in general, however, Token Economy System is more practical and applicable to young learners. It is designed to enable students to emit a certain specified behaviour and thus resulting an outcome as a direct result.

Research Objectives:

The main objective of this study is to analyze the implementation of Token Economy System in Saudi School, Kuala Lumpur. Among the objectives of the study are:

i. To explain and justify the implementation of Token Economy System in Saudi School.

ii. To identify the reasons of Token Economy System implementation in teaching and learning process.

iii. To evaluate and investigate students' perception towards Token Economy System in Saudi School

Research Questions:

Based on the objectives of the study, several research questions were identified as listed below:

i.   Why teachers in Saudi School implemented Token Economy System in teaching?

ii. How Token Economy System is implemented in Saudi School?

iii. What are the perceptions of the teachers on Token Economy System at their school?

iv. What are the perceptions of the students on Token Economy System at their school?

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Forms of Reward Systems:

The core principle in Token Economy System lies in its form of rewards system. This system plays an integral role in helping to modify, intervene or increase certain specific behaviours. Though token economies are often set up to reduce behaviours, they can take on many different designs. "A token economy is an intervention that includes contingencies in which tokens or points are given, following the emission of targeted behaviours. Tokens can then be redeemed for reinforcing objects or activities at a later point in time" (K. Zlomke & L. Zlomke, 2003).

Zlomke & Zlomke (2003) also found that negative behaviours were reduced when students earned points for displaying positive behaviour and then exchanged these points for a reward. In another example, appropriate and inappropriate behaviours were broken into levels, and students were moved up or down along a continuum based on the appropriateness of their behaviours. These points are form of rewards play important role in helping to modify and disrupt negative or undesired behaviour and assist in increasing and encouraging the desired behaviours.

Other researchers viewed the use of a token economy as a low-cost, high impact strategy for reducing disruptive behaviour during unstructured times (Wheatley,West,Charlton, Sanders, Smith, & Taylor, 2009). This further suggests its effectiveness in helping teachers in their teaching to motivate and encourage students to participate in learning. Token economies, regardless of their form, can be an effective means for motivating students by providing them with positive reinforcement (Boniecki & Moore, 2003; Cameron et al., 2005; Reitman, Murphy, Hupp & O'Callaghan 2004; Zlomke & Zlomke, 2003).

The established research supports that token economies are effective in increasing appropriate behaviours, thus enabling a classroom environment where learning can occur (Reitmann et al., 2004). This is evident in any classroom which implements Token Economy System as there are several behaviours which are deemed appropriate, that is, complementing the process of learning. Thus, behaviour modification, which is the essential element in Token Economy System, can take part of learning strategy in executing teaching-learning process.

Though some researchers view that Token Economy System is more effective among students of primary level, there are few researchers who are of the opposite point of view. As stated by Boniecki (2003), using tokens in exchange for extra credit was an effective way to promote active participation with a large class of undergraduate students.

Perceptions of Rewards:

Perhaps one of the most significant factors in the use of rewards is how they are perceived by teachers and students. Despite the effectiveness of a token economy system, some teachers are reluctant to use them in their classroom due to the amount of time spent on implementation, cost of the rewards, and the frequent monitoring of behaviours (Reitmann et al., 2004).

One of the issues which shrouds in using Token Economy System is it is time consuming. Conyers et al. (2004) suggested future research to investigate ways to create token economies systems that are less time consuming. This is one of the barriers which halt teachers to fully utilize Token Economy System as it could take a long time to prepare and execute it consistently.

Hoffman et al, (2009) examined the use of rewards through an elementary teacher's perspective. When surveyed on their use of rewards, the majority of teachers were in favour of using rewards to motivate students. Teachers who used rewards

for behaviour management also tended to use rewards for academic achievement, with the highest frequencies of rewards being verbal or written praise and prizes. Other types of rewards included class privileges, homework passes, extra credit, and verbal or written praise to parents (Hoffman et al, 2009).

In learning, that is the process of teaching and learning, it is crucial to look into the how students and teachers perceive and recognize the use of Token Economy System. More research is needed around the implementation of reward systems and the student and teacher perceptions of using rewards to reduce behaviours and increase academic achievement (Akin-Little & Little, 2004; Cameron et al., 2005; Davis, et al., 2006; Hoffman et al., 2009) As stated by Hoffman et al., 2009, there is a critical need for more studies to explore teacher perceptions of reward use in schools and the potential effects of rewards on intrinsic motivation to learn

3. DEFINITION, PURPOSE AND IMPLEMENTATION OF TOKEN ECONOMY SYSTEM

Definition:

Token Economy System is an individual reinforcement of target behaviours in which tokens are administered and exchanged later for backup reinforcers. To be successful, a person must be reinforced for increasing or decreasing existing behaviour as well as successive approximations of the behaviours we wish to establish.

Purpose:

The primary goal of a token economy is to increase desirable behaviour and decrease undesirable behaviour. Often token economies are used in institutional settings (such as schools) to manage the behaviour of individuals. However, the larger goal of token economies is to teach appropriate behaviour and social skills that can be used in one's natural environment. Regular education institutions such as schools and college often use token economies. Token economies can be used individually or in groups.

Implementation:

The Token Economy System is a way to reward positive behaviour. The system is set up by the teacher and tends to work better when used with the entire class. The teacher provides a token (play money, coin, card, etc.) when a student is caught with good behaviour. A student can receive a token for completing homework, for raising her hand, for walking in the hallway, or for any variety of good choices. The token can then be used to purchase a reward later in the day or at the end of the week.

A teacher will have prizes available that a student can purchase. There may be a set time of the week that the store will be open for students to redeem their tokens. The prizes may be pencils, small toys, extra time on the computer, or anything reasonable a teacher can provide.

This system is a positive way to encourage all students to make good choices. It rewards the good students while motivating students with more challenging behaviour to make positive choices. Since one reward will not be reinforcing to all students, this system provides a variety of rewards that can change over time.

However, the token economy system takes commitment from the teacher to make it work. If the teacher is inconsistent in using the tokens, it will not be effective. Teachers have to constantly be on the lookout for positive behaviour and prepared to reward with a token. The system can be a time commitment in getting it set up for the students.

4. FOUNDATIONS OF TOKEN ECONOMY SYSTEM

Behaviourist Model:

Behavioural models of learning and instruction have their origins in the classical conditioning experiments of Pavlov (1927), the work of Thorndike on reward learning, and the studies of Watson and Rayner who applied Pavlovian principles to the psychological disorders of human beings. In the past behaviour learning theory, systematically applied in school setting has been greatly influenced by Skinner's Science and Human Behaviour (1953).

Behaviourism is based on the idea that environment that causes a person to act in a particular manner. It emphasizes on experiences, especially reinforcement and punishment as determinants of learning and behaviour.

The basis of Token Economy System has its roots in Behaviourist Model, which has to be implemented in specific and appropriate ways to achieve a desirable outcome, which in this case, a desired behaviour. It is a system for delivering positive reinforcement to children for engaging in desired behaviours or completing tasks. Target behaviours are set and tokens are delivered by the teacher when children display the target behaviours. The tokens are exchanged for back-up reinforcers at a designated time.

The proposed ways of implementing Token Economy System are (1) pick target behaviours that are incompatible with negative behaviours, (2) include a variety of reinforcers, (3) set up a schedule for delivering reinforcement, (4) be consistent with all students and in all subjects/classrooms, (5) be excited and enthusiastic, (6) include visuals and plan for differentiation, (7) make sure your 'costs' for reinforcers can be achieved, (8) pair tokens with praise, (9) take data, (10) have a plan for fading, (11) pick tokens that are age appropriate.

However, there are precautions in implementing the Token Economy System as well which are (1) don't let the students go "bankrupt" with no opportunity to earn more reinforces, (2) always remember to follow through with reinforcers, (3) avoid lofty goals or too many behaviours to modify at one time (4) don't make the cost of buying reinforcers unattainable, that is, make it cost effective (5) stay away from using the same system all year, (6) make it simple and not too complicated.

5. RATIONALE OF STUDY

Many previous studies conducted on Token Economy System have shown evidences on its effectiveness. This paper is significant as it will be able to assist teachers in implementing better Token Economy System in classroom. The findings will be valuable in providing insights of what are aspects in Token Economy System to be refined and thus help teachers to implement it with better effect. This study will also able to help teachers and curriculum designers to devise effective Token Economy System as part of teaching and learning strategy.

6. AIM, METHOD AND SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

The aims of the study are to investigate reasons on the implementation of Token Economy System in teaching by teachers in Saudi School, how the teachers implemented the system in teaching and learning, and also teachers' and students' perception on Token Economy System.

Creswell (1998) demonstrated the qualitative method as the best design for an explorative research. The goal of this qualitative research is to interpret of the phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

In investigating the grounds of why and how the teachers implement Token Economy System, the researchers used interview as research method. For the interview, few questions were asked to the teachers selected for the session, and the responds were recorded via audio recording and written form.

To elicit teachers' perceptions on Token Economy System, interview was used to collect the data. This is to ensure the validation of the findings as both methods provide crucial evident and at the same time the findings complement one another. On acquiring the students' perceptions, observation was used to gather the information.

In order to gather valid data and analysis, the respondents of the research were chosen among the academic staff and students of the schools. The academic staff selected from the Saudi Schools was the Principal, the Students' counsellor, and English teachers. The students were selected from Primary School level.

7. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section provides a detailed results and findings for the interviews and questionnaire administered during the session with teachers from Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur. As mentioned previously, there are two methods which were applied in answering the research questions; questionnaire and interview, and the researchers were able to collect the data from the questionnaire and also recorded the interviews successfully.

Interview:

Interview is primarily used to answer the research questions and measure the perceptions of teachers in Saudi Schools on the effectiveness of Token Economy System in teaching and learning process. Students were also interviewed in order to elicit the responses on their perceptions towards Token Implementation System.

Interview 1 The Principal of Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur:

Interview with the principal of Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur, offered several insights on Token Economy System implementation in the education setting of the schools. The working of the system, first implemented in 2011, is to increase students' academic achievement, modify students' behaviour, encourage students' participation, motivate students, and enforce discipline. In Saudi Schools, the Token Economy System is implemented through 'Trophy of Excellence' program. This program is a culmination of efforts and initiatives of the teacher in creating a positive learning environment. The academic staff have attended various professional courses in order to help them apply the system effectively in their teaching.

The response given from the respondent, clearly answers the first research question *"Why teachers in Saudi School implemented Token Economy System in teaching?"* It is clear that the underlying rationales behind the implementation of Token Economy System are *"to increase students' academic achievement, modify students' behaviour, encourage students' participation, motivate students, and enforce discipline"*.

Interview 2, Students' Counsellor of Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur:

Second respondent the students' counsellor of the schools is the person responsible in designing the system to be implemented effectively in the schools. During the interview, she mentioned that there were several difficulties during the planning process of the implementation. Some of the frequently asked questions by the teachers were 'How to reward the students?' and 'How the students are entitled for the reward?' After several discussions and changes, the teachers and staff have acquired a greater understanding of the objectives of the system and also how to effectively apply it in teaching and learning activities. This also involved a crucial aspect in the system which is to control the process of rewarding the students with the token.

The token in Saudi Schools is a card inscribed with the name of the student, the class and the teacher's signature. Different teachers of different subjects will get cards of different colours. This is to distinguish which teacher rewards the token to the students, changed every semester, which is accommodating the standard set by the program. Female students are required to collect ten cards while male students are required to collect six. The rationale behind the difference in terms of amount of cards to be collected is to encourage and motivate male students to participate more in learning. Those students who managed to collect the cards will be rewarded with the 'Trophy of Excellence' during a special recognition day in which parents will be invited to the ceremony. Apart from the students who will be certified with trophy, the parents will be receiving a special present from the schools as a form to recognize and appreciate their effort.

Students who did not manage to collect the required number of cards for the particular semester will strive to achieve in another semester. This is due to the intrinsic motivation, the will to succeed and to achieve better results for themselves.

The interview with the second respondent, Asma Alhout, leads to answering the second research question *"How Token Economy System is implemented in Saudi School?"* The responses give a clear indication of how the system is implemented and executed in teaching and learning process specifically in Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur.

Third Respondent: English Teacher of Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur:

An English teacher of the Saudi Schools, who teach students in primary level, explains how the Token Economy System affects the teaching and learning process. She believes that Token Economy System greatly helps teachers in conducting the lesson, motivates students in their learning, and initiates healthy competitions amongst students. She emphasizes that the system assists in her classroom management, where she is able to handle students who are low achievers, less participative, and some who are disruptive of their classmates. The Token Economy System, she believes, has a direct effect towards students' academic achievement where the students are motivated intrinsically and extrinsically to learn in order to achieve their own goals for success. Also, she pointed out that the system offers tangible rewards as a source of

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motivation in learning, which is an effective element in teaching and learning. However, she also pointed out that the system is not cost effective, time consuming, needs proper preparation and careful execution in order to avoid biasness.

The response obtained from the interview with Aiesha Y. Khudayer Al Aqeede, English teacher in Saudi Schools, give a clear answer which can be related to the third research question *"What are the perceptions of the teachers on Token Economy System at their school?"* She believes that Token Economy System helps teachers in *conducting the lesson, motivates students in their learning, and initiates healthy competitions amongst students.* She also emphasizes that the system *assists in her classroom management, helping students who are low achievers, less participative, and those who misbehave.*

Interview with Students of Saudi Schools in Kuala Lumpur:

Student A:

The student feels really happy with the Token Economy System, which is the card, but only if she received it. She feels that she deserves it, and she feels more confident whenever she is rewarded. In order to get the card, she will try to complete all the homework and assignments given by the teacher. Often she turns to her parents to help her with the homework. This is to help her in achieving her target to get the cards. In classroom, she behaves herself and rarely chats with her friends if the teacher is around. She often tries to answer all questions posed by her teacher although she did not know the answer. The reason of this is because she knew that the teacher appreciates her effort and sometimes even that is rewarded. However, she also feels sad whenever she was not rewarded as she understands that in order for one to get the card, they have to be intelligent, and not just merely memorizing the lesson.

Student B:

Student B explains that his family monitors his progress in terms of number of cards he gets. His father promises that he will get him an I-Pad if he wins the 'Trophy of Excellence'. He often meets the counsellor and conveys his message of wanting to get the token as he wanted the I-Pad. His father usually monitors his achievement, asking the teachers on class room participation and helping to improve his study. Eventually, he started to get cards from his teacher for his effort and progress shown. He felt like dancing when he received the 'Trophy of Excellence' and it was the best moment for him to extent the invitation card to his parents. Ever since then, he works tirelessly, doing revision whenever necessary, and discussing topics with his friends in his pursuit to maintain his achievement and success.

Student C:

He always tries to participate in classroom whenever possible. At home, he competes with his sister and at school; he competes with his classmates for the coveted 'Trophy of Excellence'. Every day, he will discuss about the number of tokens or cards obtained with his friends. The teachers always remind them to work hard to achieve more in academic. His father advised him to always seek for the teachers help whenever there are questions or topics which are difficult to understand.

Interview responses with three students from Saudi Schools answered research question four "What are the perceptions of the students on Token Economy System at their school?" their behaviour is changed to be more positive, they participate in classroom because they are motivated by the goals, thus bring them to achieve good and high performance. It also changes their behaviour, where they tend to be more determined and hard-working. Interestingly, the Token Economy System also has an impact on the parents as they tend to be more involved in their children's academic progress and also their well-being as students.

8.   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Findings:

This research is an attempt to investigate the implementation of Token Economy System in Saudi Schools. The use of rewards system in classrooms has become a popular approach for motivating and controlling students' behaviour especially to the younger ones. This practice is commonly used by teachers although it has been debated among

individuals in the field of education. The debate has moved beyond the question of whether rewards result in positive or negative effects.

From the findings, it is clearly stated that teachers in Saudi schools are aware with the importance of implementing the rewards systems in promoting a better teaching and learning process among the students. The usage of token economy has been found as one of the most effective methods in behaviour management as well as to improve students' motivation in learning. It is a very crucial aspect in teaching and learning as the academic staff are responsible to develop and conduct lessons which enable the students to fully utilize their potential intrinsically in order to succeed. The Saudi schools administrators and teachers also believe that their students' academic performance improved due to the success of implementing and applying the token economy system in their schools.

Besides, the schools administrators and teachers have involved parents as the collaborations in this program and it is often prove very effective and successful. Parents accept and support this program openly and they have shown great interest and being very supportive with the schools especially in providing the best education towards their children.

Recommendations:

This case study shows glaring evidence which validates that Token Economy System, if implemented effectively, could be a catalyst in not just modifying behaviour, but also in improving students' academic performance.

As for teachers and educators, it is recommended that they inculcate rewards system or Token Economy System in their teachings. The method/system has proven to be effective as means of motivation and drive for students, especially for primary level students. However, it is important for teachers to carefully utilize Token Economy System as if it is implemented erroneously , it could lead to discouragement of the students, impaired students' willingness to participate and should the reward giving process is not monitored or controlled, it could lead to the reward being void; worth nothing for the students.

As for Malaysian education context in general, the Ministry and schools could apply and adapt the Token Economy System to be used as one of the approaches in teaching and learning, especially for primary schools. The approach, though need meticulous execution, offers a lot more in terms of the betterment of education quality in Malaysia and also offer a better learning environment for the students.

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