

Impact of Verbal Praise on Teachers Motivation: Implications for Coping with 21st Century Challenges

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Abstract

This work investigated the impact of verbal praise on teachers' motivation. The study was conducted with 612 teachers in six public primary school in Owerri West Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. Teachers from the schools were assigned into treatment and control groups respectively. On the day of their experiment a Personal Orientation Questionnaire (POQ) was given to teachers as pretest. Teachers were asked to take up four topics in primary science which lasted for four weeks. At the end of each lesson, teachers in the experimental group were encouraged verbally by the head of their schools and the research assistants but those in control group were not encouraged. At the end, Actualization Motivation Questionnaire, (AMQ) was given to the teachers as post-test. The data collected were analyzed with mean scores, standard deviation and ANCOVA. It was found that verbal praise promoted teachers actualization and motivation more than those non-verbal praise. Again, verbal praise enhanced female teachers performance higher than the male teachers. Recommendations were made based on the findings that school heads and government should accompany teachers' school performance with public verbal praise.

Introduction

Self actualization means one getting to the highest level of seeing self accurately. To Agulanna and Nwachukwu (2009), Maslow described self actualized person as one who is making effective use of his talents and abilities. Teaching is the act of guiding, imparting knowledge, skills and values to students. There is need to know why teachers act as they do, why some teachers work hard at many different tasks and persist in the face of difficulty, and why psychologist like Maslow and McClelland are interested in motivation of human behaviour. They believed that every behaviour of the teacher in the classroom or entire school should be motivated.

Motivation is an internal state that energizes a person's behaviour, maintains it and directs it towards a goal so that a state of equilibrium is attained (Ormrod, 2008). Earlier

Asagwara (2000) viewed motivation as a psychological construct which cannot be seen or observed directly but which can be inferred from the individual's behaviour. Motivation is a need satisfying process. To motivate a person therefore, one should understand where the individual is on the hierarchy and focus on satisfying that level.

The need for teachers to be self actualized and motivated is paramount. Santrock (2006) states that self-actualized, motivated teacher organizes his presentation in a way that makes sense to pupils. Again, such a teacher works tirelessly in committees and gives in more time to teaching. It should be noted that, without teachers, the educational objectives as specified in the National Policy on education would not be realized (Okoro 1998).

Teacher motivation could be referred to as those factors that operate within the school system which if not made available to the teacher hinders performance, result to stress, discontent and frustration which at the end affects students quality output. This implies that teacher motivation include factors that cause, channel, sustain and influence teachers behaviour towards high job satisfaction (Oluchukwu, 2000).

In view of the foregoing, there is need to sensitize teachers towards developing high teaching strategies that will enhance the retention of materials taught. How then can the school heads enhance their teachers' performance? Can verbal praise break the jinx? It is in a bid to answer these questions that the present study was conceived.

Two research questions were raised for this study;

- (a) Do verbal praise and non verbal praise have same effects on teachers' motivation to perform in class?
- (b) Do verbal praise vary on how it affects teachers' performance by gender?

Two null hypotheses were raised thus;

- a. There is no significant difference between the effects of verbal praise and non verbal praise on motivating teachers' performance in class.
- b. There is no significant difference between the impact of verbal praise on motivating teachers performance based on gender.

Methods and procedure

Quasi-experimental design was used, specifically, the control group, pretest, post test types were used. All the teachers in Owerri-West public primary schools served as the population. The sample size consisted of 612 teachers drawn through cluster sampling technique (348 males and 264 females).

Two questionnaires titled Personal Orientation Questionnaire (POQ) and Actualization Motivation questionnaire were given to the teachers as pre and post-tests respectively. The questionnaires were based on four-point modified likert scale of High Degree motivation moderately motivated, slightly motivated and not motivated. The two questionnaires were face validated by lecturers in the department of Educational psychology and Measurement and Evaluation, with internal consistencies of 0.80 and 0.83 using Cronbach Alpha. Data collected were analyzed with mean scores, standard deviation and ANCOVA.

Treatment Phase

Teachers were grouped into verbal Praise Group and Non-verbal praise group. On the

day of treatment, POQ was given as pretest. These teachers were given prepared lessons plans on topics from their regular scheme of work on primary science and they taught for four weeks. In the treatment group, the trained research assistants and Head of the school encouraged these teachers verbally with “that’s good of you” “you have the talent”, you are a wonderful teacher”, “you know the subject”. These followed every teaching until the end of the experiment. Teachers in control group though teaching with same lesson plans were not encouraged verbally. At the end of the experiment, teachers were given AMQ as post-test.

Table I:

Mean (x) and standard Deviation (sd) of teachers motivation due to the effects of verbal praise and Non-verbal praise (Research Questions 1&2)

		Experimental Group		
		VPG	NPG	General
Male	X	60.02	43.59	51.81
	sd	10.43	10.35	10.41
	n	173	175	348
Female	X	67.53	44.60	56.06
	sd	11.06	10.22	10.64
	n	134	130	264
Gender	X	63.77	44.10	53.93
	sd	10.75	10.28	10.53
	n	307	305	612

From table I, results showed that teachers who were given verbal praise obtained a mean score of 63.77 while their colleagues who did not receive verbal praise obtained the mean score of 44.10. Again by gender, male teachers who received verbal praise obtained a mean score of 60.02 while female teachers who were given verbal praise got a mean score of 67.53.

Table 2: Summary of Ancova for teachers’ motivational performance due to verbal praise and Gender.

Sources of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean	Fcal	Fcrit
Covariate (pretest)	848.99	1	848.99	14.63	
Main effects	4201.93	2	2100.98	36.19	
Treatment	2693.87	1	2693.87	46.39	3.83
Gender	675.94	1	675.92	11.63	3.83
2-way interaction treatment x gender	127.74	1	127.74	2.20	3.83
Explained	9990.93	3	3330.31	57.35	
Residual	35306.55	608	58.06		
Total	45297.48	611	74.13		

An observation of the results in table 2 showed that the calculated values of F for treatment (46.39) is greater than the value of critical F at 0.05 level of significance (3.83). Therefore, the two null hypotheses were rejected. Specifically, the effects of verbal praise and Non-verbal praise on teachers’ motivational performance by mean scores differed. Again, the

difference between the impact of verbal praise on motivating teachers performance by gender differed significantly while the combined effect of gender and treatment (verbal praise) was not significant.

From the calculations, verbal praise enhanced teachers motivation with $X = 63.77$ than Non-verbal praise with $X = 44.10$. This could be that teachers were responsive because verbal praise was administered in a class setting before the Head of the school, pupils and others which served as a boost to their esteem. Lepper and Henslerlong (2002) believed that verbal praise is beneficial to motivation when it encourages performance attributed to controllable causes. They continued by saying that verbal praise promotes autonomy and enhances competence without an over reliance on social companions.

The verbal praise enhanced the female teachers motivation which agreed with the findings of Unachukwu (2007) who carried out a research on students which showed significantly high achievement motivation on verbal praised than no-verbal praised students.

The following recommendations were made; -government should follow-up teachers performance with public verbal praise. Again, head-teachers and other head's should always verbally praise their teachers for efficient performance. When a teacher is set on the right track, students and pupils will enjoy teaching and learning.

Implications for coping with 21st century challenges.

Facilities in the school and the number of pupils in the classroom and the leadership style are designed to bring out the desired educational goals. When a teacher is not motivated, it results to absenteeism thereby causing stress to the system. Reinforcement which is a spice of learning is vital for today learners, therefore a lowly motivated teacher will not know how to reinforce and reinitialize the interest of pupils in the class.

A motivated teacher goes extra-mile for his pupils, to bring outside events into the classroom for the pupils to be updated. The reverse is the case when a teacher is not motivated, he loiters and loses interest in the job.

In-service programs, workshops and seminars are needed by teachers. Teachers should be seen as skilled workers that help in achieving educational goals and therefore should be motivated.

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