

Exploring the Role of Punishment in Students' Motivation and Interest Towards Studies at the Elementary Level in Public and Private Schools

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Abstract

This research proposes to examine the effects of punishment on the perceived interest of students in studying at the elementary level in both public and private schools in District Sialkot. The sample consisted of 600 students, 300 of either sex and 300 of the other sex, who were administered a self-developed questionnaire. SPSS version 24 was used to analyse the data based on descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that public school students exhibited much more punishment than the students in the private schools ($M = 48.10$, $SD = 21.45$ vs. $M = 34.95$, $SD = 17.73$). The correlation analysis showed a significant negative correlation between punishment and academic interest in students in both sectors. However, the relationship was much stronger in the public schools ($r = -.53$, $p < .01$) and weaker in the private schools ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$). Further validation of significant sectoral differences was done with independent samples t -tests ($t = -8.022$, $df = 598$, $p = .000$) as punishment is significantly more common in public schools. These findings suggest that excessive punishment will reduce individual motivation and engagement, particularly in the government. The research concludes that positive and student-focused approaches to discipline should be implemented in schools instead of punitive approaches, and that schools need to be moved toward disciplinary methods that build intrinsic motivation, responsibility, and interest in long-term academic pursuits.

Keywords: Punishment, Perceived Interest, Motivation, Public Schools, Private Schools, Elementary Level.

Introduction

Education is one of the strongest means of developing the personality, behavior, and future of a person. In elementary school, students' interest in learning is the key factor in their academic gains, motivation, and future success (Wentzel, 2020). Learning involves several strategies that teachers and schools usually employ in order to control the behavior of students and to foster learning. Of these strategies, the most common ones have been reward and punishment, which have always been used historically. Much as positive reinforcement by rewards has been noted to enhance desirable behaviors, the aim of punishment is mainly to deter undesirable behaviors (Skinner, 1965). Nevertheless, the capability of punishment as a learning stimulus has been widely discussed, particularly in the case of young children at both state and nonstate schools.

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Punishment can be defined as any form of consequences meant to diminish or deter wrong conduct, and this can be in the form of verbal corrections and revocation of privileges, or can be formal and disciplinary (Bear, 2010). Punishment in schools has been greatly justified as a prerequisite to maintain discipline and order in the classroom. In the case of elementary-level students who are in the formative period of social and cognitive development, teachers often use punishment as an instrument to bring compliance and attention to studies. The question of how punishment affects the perceived interest of the students in study is, however, a controversial issue. Other researchers believe that it can temporarily suppress bad behavior but not develop intrinsic motivation in learning (Deci et al., 1999).

With respect to the Pakistani schools, disciplinary strategies in the public and private sectors vary. With the increased size of classes, limited resources, and administrative demands, as well as the pressures of the administration system, the public schools tend to be more dependent on the traditional punitive approaches to managing behavior (Khan, 2020). Conversely, in private schools, where the number of students in the classroom is smaller and the emphasis is closer on parental expectations, milder types of punishment should be used along with reinforcement techniques. It is worth knowing these contextual differences to assess whether punishment can add to or retard perceived interest in study among the students at the elementary level.

The connection between punishment and the learning interests of the students has a theoretical basis in various educational and psychological theories. Behaviorist approaches like those put forward by Skinner (1965) see punishment as a means of deterrence against bad behavior, but may not be effective in encouraging any long-term positive participation in learning. However, the opposite applies to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), where extrinsic control, equivalent to punishment, may negate intrinsic motivation, hence causing students to obey without any interest in the subject matter but due to their fear. Empirical studies have also continued to show the consequences of harsh or excessive punishment in the form of anxiety, lowered self-confidence, and avoidance of learning activities (Lewis et al., 2008). On the other hand, lenient and constructive punishment, such as corrective feedback or deprivation of privileges, can make the students aware of the outcomes of their behavior and focus on their academic duties again (Bear, 2010).

Cultural and social aspects are also concerned. In South Asian nations, such as Pakistan, the concept of discipline traditionally tends to promote punishment in schools as a disciplining method to promote obedience and respect (UNICEF, 2020). Nevertheless, we are now witnessing an emerging trend in the world to promote child rights and contemporary education practices to adopt positive discipline methods where educators are urged to avoid punitive methods and adopt supportive methods that promote intrinsic motivation and active involvement (Gershoff, 2017). This conflict between conservative norms and new tendencies causes the urgency of questioning whether students themselves perceive punishment and whether it really influences their desire to study or not.

The past studies have given inconsistent evidence regarding punishment in education. Research carried out in various cultural setups has revealed that punishment may have short-term effects in making people comply, but in most cases it fails to make people have long-term interest in learning (Lewis et al., 2008). Certain of these findings indicate that persistent punitive actions can even ruin teacher-student relationships, reduce the self-esteem of students, and heighten opposition to academic assignments (Simonsen et al., 2008). Conversely, by being administered in a just, regular, and proportionate manner, punishment can ensure discipline in the classrooms and thus indirectly provide a better learning environment.

In light of these debates, it is necessary to empirically examine the influence of punishment on the perceived interest of the students towards study, especially within the context of a developing economy such as Pakistan, where both the public and the private schools vary in terms of their disciplinary culture. The knowledge of how discipline puts students at the elementary level into or out of motivation will enable the educator, policymakers, and parents to develop a more effective and humane approach to discipline.

Hence, the research paper aims at investigating the effectiveness of punishment in shaping the perceived interest of elementary students in learning in the public and private schools of Tehsil Gujrat. The results will be used to determine whether punishment is a useful academic motivation factor or if it lowers the motivation aspect of the students, and the results will be applicable to enhance the teaching approaches and discipline policies in schools.

Statement of the Problem

In elementary school, most schools use punishment as a form of discipline and classroom control. Although punishment can be effective at short-term curbing of misbehavior, its impact on student motivation and interest in studies in the long term is unclear. Too much or too severe punishment may lead to the development of fear, anxiety, and loss of interest in the learning process. Still, well-founded and equitable disciplinary action may result in responsibility and concentration. The level, kind, and degree of punishment practices may also vary between public and private schools and thus may have different effects on student academic interest and motivation. Although it is true that the creation of positive study attitudes is essential in early learning, there has been very little research done to investigate the effects of punishment on students' perceived interest and motivation, especially in the setting of public and private elementary schools. This paper aims to address this gap by examining how punishment affects the levels of motivation and interest students have towards learning at elementary school.

Research Objectives

Objectives of the study were to:

1. Determine the practices of punishment at the elementary level within the private sector.
2. Determine the role of punishment practices among the students' perceived interest towards studying at the elementary level in both the public and the private sector.
3. Determine the difference in the role of punishment between perceived interest in study among students at the elementary level in the public and private sectors.

Research Questions

The questions of the study were as follows:

1. What is the perception of the mean score of punishment practices in the elementary level in the public and private sector schools?
2. How can punishment practices affect students' perceived interest in studying in public and private sector schools?
3. Does the mean score of perceived level of punishment practices differ statistically between the public and the private sector schools with respect to the interest of students in the study at the elementary level?

Review of Literature

Punishment is not a new concept in schools, where it is used as a strategy in classroom management and correction of behavior. It is primarily described as the use of an unpleasant stimulus or the elimination of a positive reinforcer to decrease the unwanted conduct. Even though education practitioners think that punishment can result in immediate compliance, researchers warn that it might have adverse consequences on the long-term motivation, self-esteem, and interest in studies among students (Lewis et al., 2005). It is essential to know the essence of punishment at the elementary level because it is in this stage that children develop the basis of their academic attitudes and behavior.

Punishment was highlighted by behaviorist theories, especially that of Skinner (1965), as one of the ways of molding behavior. Nevertheless, reinforcement was found more useful than punishment to promote learning. Subsequent research showed that punishment can reduce unwanted behavior instead of abolishing it (McDaniel et al., 2021). Cognitively, the Self-Determination Theory of Deci and Ryan (2000) indicates that external restraints, such as punishment, lower intrinsic motivation to comply and fear instead of interest and engagement. Therefore, since punitive measures can tame students within the short run, they can equally strain their curiosity and their innate motivation to learn.

Empirical studies have almost always shown that punitive approaches may hurt the academic motivation of students. Benabou and Tirole (2003) argue that extrinsic controls like punishment destroy self-regulation among students, which they are unlikely to do voluntarily in academic activities. Corporal punishment that was commonly used in Nigerian schools had the result of making students fearful of teachers and shying away from classroom activities. Likewise, Lewis et al. (2005) also discovered that students who had experienced frequent punishment had an unfavorable view of school, and they were also less motivated to study. These results underscore the contradictory aspect of punishment- although it is intended to correct the bad behavior, it can reduce interest in learning.

One of the main aspects that maintains student engagement and performance is interest in studies. Studies indicate that the punitive settings are likely to deter academic interest. Cameron and Pierce (2002) reasoned that aversive disciplinary measures lower the readiness of students to take initiative in learning because they start associating academic work with the fear of being punished. This was supported by a study by Ali et al. (2014) of the elementary schools in Nigeria, which confirmed that harsh punishment decreased the classroom engagement of the students and their confidence, which resulted in disengagement. Conversely, classrooms that had less reliance on punishment and greater reliance on positive reinforcement depicted greater rates of student interest.

There is a tendency for types of disciplinary strategies, such as punishment, to be different between public and private schools. Studies indicate that the intensity of private schooling is more inclined to rely on the less severe punishment because of the higher parental involvement, whilst the Accountability levels require public schools to resort to punitive measures more often, especially in developing countries. Punishments in the public school were more severe than those in the private school, and this had a negative impact on the attitudes that these students have towards their studies. Corporal punishment in state schools turned students off academic interest and formed a negative view of school. These differences emphasize the necessity to investigate the place of punishment within both types of schools (Saeed & Mahmood, 2002).

The shortcomings of punishment have prompted teachers to endorse alternative methods of discipline that encourage interest and motivation as opposed to fear. Many schools across the world

have implemented positive behavioral interventions and support systems (PBIS) that have concentrated on positive reinforcement, counseling, and skill development rather than punishment (Sugai & Horner, 2006). The studies indicate that those schools that have implemented such strategies have been recording higher student motivation and academic involvement than those that have used mainly punishment (Bear, 2010). Such findings imply that punishment is still common in most learning settings, yet it may not serve the purpose of inculcating genuine interest in studies.

Research Methodology

This research employed a quantitative and descriptive survey in exploring the significance of reward and punishment in the perceived interest students have in studies at the elementary level in both the public and the private schools within a particular district in Sialkot (District Sialkot). The target population was all elementary school students of both sectors, and the accessible population involved 20 public and 20 private schools. Due to the fact that it was impossible to study the whole population, a three-stage stratified random sampling method was used to guarantee representativeness (Creswell et al., 2017). The 40 schools (20 public and 20 private) were randomly selected in the first stage; further, in the second stage, it was subdivided into male and female strata (10 schools in each group); and finally, in the third stage, a sample of 600 students was selected (300 males and 300 females with equal representation between the two groups). Such an approach was regarded as suitable because it increases the generalizability and enables the Collection of standardized and measurable data on the perceptions and experiences of students (Fraenkel et al., 2006).

Instrumentation

The researcher designed the questionnaire, and it contained the role of punishment in order to influence the interest of students in studying at the elementary level. The questionnaire was composed of 15 questions on the practices of punishment that are common in schools and were rated on a five-point Likert scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree). The questionnaire was made in Urdu and English to make it comprehensible and straightforward. Experts checked content and face validity, and it was necessary to make changes in the language and wording of the items (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012). Additional validation was established by means of Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and Content Validity Index (CVI), and the punishment instrument had a CVI of 0.88, which is a high level of validity (Lynn, 2011). To guarantee reliability, consistency of items and logical continuity were kept (Nunan, 1999; Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun, 2012). The researcher himself conducted the questionnaires to the students to provide accuracy and standardization in data Collection.

Data Analysis

Data were collected, tabulated, and analyzed with SPSS version 24. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the effectiveness of punishment in the perceived interest of students in elementary level studies in both public and private schools. The degree of punishment practices was as viewed by both male and female students in the two sectors, based on the use of descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation. Independent sample t-tests were used to test significant differences in perceptions among male and female students and also between students of public and private schools. Such analyses offered a clue on the magnitude to which punishment practices affect the interest of students in studies in various types of schools and gender groups.

Table 1: The perceived mean score of reward practices at elementary level in public and Private sectors

Punishment	N statistics	Mean statistics	Std.
Public	300	48.10	21.45
Private	300	34.95	17.73

There was significant difference in the perceived mean score of punishment practices between public schools ($M = 48.10$, $SD = 21.45$) and private schools ($M = 34.95$, $SD = 17.73$) as illustrated in Table 1. This shows that the students in the public sector schools complained of punishment practices more than the students in the private sector schools. The large difference in the mean scores leads to the assumption that punishment can be a more widespread practice conducted in the public sector at the elementary level.

Table 2: Correlation between Punishment Practices and Students' Perceived Interest toward Study in the Public Sector (N = 300)

Variables	r	p
Total Perceived Interest	—	—
Punishment Practices (Public)	-.53**	.000

Table 2 shows the correlation between practices of punishment and interest of students to study in the public sector. According to the results, there is a large negative correlation ($r = -.53$, $p = .000$). This implies that the more the punishment practices deemed are, the less the interest shown by students in their studies. The value of the correlation implies a moderate to strong negative relationship between the two variables. These findings suggest that overdependence on punishment can deter the motivation and interest of students in their learning life in school in the government.

Table 3: Correlation between Punishment Practices and Students' Perceived Interest toward Study in the Private Sector (N = 300)

Variables	r	P
Total Perceived Interest	—	—
Punishment Practices (Private)	-.47**	.001

The message presented in Table 3 reveals the relationship between the practices of punishment and the perceived interest of students to study in the private sector. The findings indicate that there is a considerable negative relationship ($r = -.47$, $p = .001$). This points out that the more a given punishment practice, the less the academic interest of the students. The negative correlation, although a bit less strong than in the public sector is still indicative of a significant drop in motivation in case of a focus on punitive measures. Such results indicate that even in the private schools, punishment could serve as a hindrance towards the development of interest in learning among students.

Table 4: Difference in the mean score of perceived level of punishment practices in students' interest towards study at elementary level between public and private sector

Punishment instrument	Sector	N	Mean Statistics	Std.	t	df	P value
Punishment practices	Public	300	48.10	21.45	-8.022	598	.000
	Private	300	34.95	17.73			

The differences between perceived practices of punishment in the public and the private sector elementary schools are presented in Table 4. The score of the public sector ($M = 48.10$, $SD = 21.45$) was higher when compared with the private sector ($M = 34.95$, $SD = 17.73$). This difference was statistically significant, as was confirmed by the independent samples t-test ($t = -8.022$, $df = 598$, $p = .000$). These results show that students in the state school tend to believe that the punishment practice is higher than in the private schools. This implies that there are sectoral variations in classroom management, whereby the private schools do not depend much on punitive measures.

Findings

The results showed a significant disparity in the prevalence and the effects of punishment practices in public and private schools. Results indicated that students in public schools ($M = 48.10$, $SD = 21.45$) were punished more than the others in private schools ($M = 34.95$, $SD = 17.73$). Correlation analysis also indicated that punishment had a negative relationship with the perceived interest of students in studies in both sectors. A significant negative correlation ($r = -.53$, $p < .01$) existed between more punishment and lower motivation and academic interest among students in public schools, in contrast to a weak but significant negative correlation ($r = -.47$, $p < .01$) in the case of private schools. The independent samples t-test ($t = -8.022$, $df = 598$, $p = .000$) proved that the difference between public and private schools was significant and that punishment is more common in the public sector. In general, the results indicate that punishment is not only prevalent in public schools but also consistently lowers engagement and motivation levels of students in both sectors.

Discussion

The results of the current research point out that the overuse of punishment is correlated with a negative attitude of students towards studies, particularly in the context of public schools, where these practices were more widespread. This is in line with the sentiments of Skinner (1974), who contended that punishment can only suppress undesirable behavior, albeit temporarily, but does not result in intrinsic motivation and long-term interest. In the same way, the self-determination theory of Ryan and Ryan (2000) highlights that when students have their own control strategy, such as punishments, they will lack autonomy and interest in the learning process. The study conducted by Gregory et al. (2011) also confirms the fact that disciplinary methods are usually punitive and do not result in better student performance, but in disengagement, anxiety, and resentment. Conversely, the supportive and encouraging practices are identified to be more effective in developing motivation and positive attitude of students towards learning (Wentzel, 2002). Hence, this research indicates that the implementation of punitive actions can be minimized and the use of more constructive approaches, especially in schools of the general population, may

improve the interest of students in their academic activities as well as their general learning experience.

Conclusion

The findings show that excessive use of punishment demotivates students and their learning interest, and is also common in state schools where punishment is more prevalent. These findings are in line with the behaviorist view of Skinner, who believes that punishment will only suppress undesired behavior, but it will not create intrinsic motivation. Similarly, according to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the external controls, such as punishment, negatively affect the autonomy and intrinsic interest; hence, the students follow the external controls because of fear rather than because of interest. The greater level of punishment in the public schools was the result of structural causes, like large classes, paucity of resources, and inflexible administrative methods, which predisposed teachers to punitive action. Finally, the paper concludes that chronic punishment is harmful to the attitudes and engagement of the students, and the practice needs to be replaced by supportive and positive discipline practices that promote intrinsic motivation, responsibility, and future academic achievement.

Recommendations

The use of punitive disciplinary measures, especially in the public sector, should be slowly eliminated as it has been proven to lower the interest of students in studies. Instead, educators ought to embrace positive options, which do not compromise motivational aspects in case of misbehavior. Reward-based, encouragement, and praise methods are to be highly preferred over punishment to develop intrinsic motivations and interest in learning. Such a change can encourage a more welcoming and encouraging classroom atmosphere. Teachers should be provided with practical non-punitive approaches to discipline through professional development programs, like restorative practices and cooperative learning strategies, to deal with the challenges of the classroom and keep students interested at the same time. School policies that deter over-disciplining and endorse measures that support respect, empathy, and involvement in learning should be framed by educational authorities to guarantee the positive academic results of students in the long term.

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