THROUGH THE POSITIVE DISCIPLINE LENS: PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS' BUSY AGENDA

(Research article)

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Abstract

In primary school years, classroom management mostly occupies the agenda of teachers working at this level. In this context, the evaluation of educational environments from the perspective of the concepts of positive psychology has gained importance in recent years. The main aim of this study is to examine the discipline understanding of kindergarten, primary school and English teachers working at the primary education level in the lens of classroom management. Sequential explanatory design of mixed method research was used. Kindergarten, primary school, and English teachers (N=105) working in public schools in Istanbul, selected by random sampling, constitute the sample of the research. Teachers' thoughts on positive discipline were collected through a questionnaire. The findings obtained from the teachers' questionnaire responses led the researchers to conduct semi-structured interviews to obtain in-depth information about the subject. For this purpose, interviews were conducted with 9 teachers who were randomly selected from the sample group. According to the survey results, "disruption" in primary classes was on the top of the problems' list teachers reported. In the semi-structured interviews, presenters asked the real cases in the teachers' classes and disruption scenarios. Regardless of branch, stated that they faced similar problem behaviors in their classrooms.

Keywords: positive discipline, classroom management, primary education, teacher

1. Introduction

Seligman (2011) describes the positive psychology as "the scientific study that constitutes the pleasant life, the engaged life and the meaningful life.". (Ackerman, 2018). Positive psychology focuses on positive experiences, positive states, and traits. Primary teacher of any subject needs to possess these feelings to enable their pupils to enjoy the entire education at school. Teacher motivation arises from job satisfaction and the fulfillment of psychological needs. It is closely related to classroom dynamics which in return has an impact on student motivation. It effects the interpersonal relationships between teachers and learners. Positive Psychology, specifically in language teaching derives from the «humanistic» approaches of Abraham Maslow's (1908-1970) « hierachy of needs » like physical, social esteem and self actualization; Jerome Bruner's (1915-2016) «constructivist theory» and Gertrude Moskowitz'(1978) « Caring and sharing ».In 1970s and 1980s humanistic approaches took a holistic view of the learner, combining cognition and affect and the learner is treated in some sense as a 'whole person'.

Positive discipline is interrelated with the positive psychology of the teacher and has been described as increasing success by responding to psychological and academic needs of children. Positive discipline is building students' sense of community, preparing them for successful living, and increasing their academic achievement (Stepp G. , 2011; Stepp G. A., 2011; Dreikurs, 1974; Nelson, 2007). Discipline is not punishment. It is teaching students to impose limits on themselves. Democratic teachers provide firm guidance and leadership. They allow students to have a say in establishing rules and consequences. There is no punishment or reward.

Students' positive engagement fosters ownership. negative emotions on the other hand, lead to cognitive/ or physical stress (Puchta, 2017). Tests, doing homework, classroom activities, pair work or group work, textbook, intensive or extensive reading, parent or teacher attitudes, school atmosphere and many other factors might cause stress which might end up with misbehavior. Using positive discipline means more than teaching students about life skills. It also means creating a whole new school environment where misbehavior is almost diminished. With positive discipline, teachers have a chance of creating an atmosphere where students know they count, the discipline is positive, they encounter positive engagement, and students and parents are included in problem solving. The most important issue over here is to train empowered teachers who possess self-efficacy, autonomy, and growth mindset. Empowered teachers develop students' ownership over their learning, and they can encourage their students to become creative and critical thinkers. Such teachers are able to develop the most effective classroom management techniques.

Teachers should develop caring, supportive relationships with and among students, organize and implement instruction in ways that optimize students' access to learning if they wish to have a better classroom management. They need to take non- confrontational approach and not start with things that are going wrong but start with good ones. They need to create informal chit chats and remind the students that they are doing well. They need to create a positive and safe environment in their classes. They need to spare time for learner training on learning styles and strategies. They need to teach their students that they learn from their mistakes so making mistakes is a normal process of learning. They need to listen to their students. They need to create an atmosphere where students enjoy learning and have fun. All these items bring a busy agenda for teachers but on the other hand make them more satisfied in their profession.

Employing positive discipline in our classes are highly beneficial for the learners. A few of them could be cited as follows: Students show respect for the teacher, students are on task and engaged, less disciplinary measures are needed, students see rules as fair, attendance improves, classroom management becomes easier, etc…

Nelson (2007) believes that creating a Positive Discipline classroom is a process of putting together parts of a puzzle. The authors warn teachers and parents on permissiveness, for misperceptions of positive discipline and ask them to be careful on not letting students do whatever they want. Teachers need to help learners to develop interpersonal, intrapersonal, systemic and judgement skills.

Teachers often believe that a well-managed classroom is equivalent to an orderly and quiet environment, but the reality is that a productive learning environment can be noisy because learning is not a passive activity. Learning requires talking, sharing, discovering, experimenting, and questioning, all of which can create noise. Most teachers believe that an effective classroom management plan relies on rewards and punishments. In fact, as stated earlier, for a positive disciplined class there is no need for reward and naturally punishment is out of question.

Quantitative Research Questions:

1.What are primary school teachers' beliefs and attitudes about positive discipline?

After analyzing the quantitative data, the researchers found the need to explore what kind of problem behaviors primary teachers encounter during their lessons as well as solutions they create in order to deal with these classroom management issues. Therefore, the researchers generated the following research questions:

Qualitative Research Questions:

1.What are the problem behaviors faced by the primary teachers (kindergarten, primary and English)?

2.How do they apply solutions related with positive discipline to solve these problem behaviors?

2. Method

A mixed method research was conducted to find out the answer to the above question. The aim of this research was to examine teachers' (n=105) beliefs and attitudes towards positive discipline for a better classroom management. To find deeper layers of the research question, the researchers preferred to use explanatory sequential mixed method. In this design, qualitative data is collected after predominantly quantitative data are collected and analyzed. Priority is often in quantitative data. Qualitative data is mainly obtained to increase quantitative data. Data analysis is interrelated and often combined in data interpretation and discussion sections (Creswell, 2003). First, a questionnaire consisting of 2 open-ended questions was asked to the teachers. According to the analysis of the survey data, a semi-structured interview was implemented with 9 teachers (3 teachers from each branch) from the study group of 105 people in order to conduct an in-depth analysis of the prominent beliefs and opinions.

2.1. Population

The Target Population of the Study was teachers (n=105) who work at kindergarten and primary schools in İstanbul, and they were chosen randomly by convenient sampling from European side of Istanbul.

Table 1. *Teachers' Branches Frequency*

	Woman		Man		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Kindergarten Teachers	32	38,6	3	13,7	35	33,5
Primary School Teachers	28	33,7	5	22,7	33	31,4
English Language Teachers	23	27,7	14	63,6	37	35,1
TOTAL	83	100,0	22	100,0	105	100,0

As seen in the table above, most of teachers from 3 branches are women. %33,5 of participants are kindergarten teachers, %31,4 of participants are primary school teachers and %35,1 of participants is English language teachers.

Table 2. *Frequency of Taechers' Age and Teaching Experience Years (Quantitative Phase)*

Age Range	f	%	Years of teaching experience	f	%
20-25 years old	10	9,52	0-5 years	15	14,29
26-30 years old	14	13,33	6-10 years	17	16,19
31-35 years old	16	15,24	11-15 years	18	17,14
36-40 years old	16	15,24	16-20 years	18	17,14
41-45 years old	16	15,24	26-30 years	10	9,52
46- more years old	33	31,43	31 and up	27	25,72
TOTAL	105	100	TOTAL	105	100

As seen in Table 2., the age distribution of teachers is very close to each other. Teachers aged 31-35, 36-40 and 41-45 years old make up 15.24% of the participants. When the years of service are examined, the rate of teachers with 31 years or more experience is 25.72%.

Frequency of Teachers' Age and Teaching Experience Years (Qualitative Phase): 1 out of 9 teachers who constitute of the study group in the qualitative phase of the research is male. The age range of the teachers is 4 for those who are 20-30 years old, 1 for those between 30-40, and 4 for those who are 40 and over. In terms of length of service in teaching, those with 0-5 years of service are 4, those between 6-10 years are 2, those between 21-25 years are 1, and those between 26-30 are 2. While English and kindergarten teachers are the group with the fewest years of service among the branches, the teaching experience of the classroom teachers is 26 years or more. While 2 of the 9 teachers in the study group work in a private school, the rest are in a public school.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

The data of the research were collected with a survey and semi-structured interview form. These instruments are explained below.

2.2.1. Beliefs and Attitudes About Discipline Survey

The data were gathered by a survey developed by the researchers to determine the demographic characteristics (age, gender, years of Experience) of kindergarten teachers, primary school teachers and English teachers in the research, as well as their beliefs and attitudes about discipline and positive discipline. Before its implementation, the survey was piloted with 30 teachers and they did not report any problems in completing it. The survey has two open-ended questions: What do you think about discipline? What does positive discipline mean to you?

In the analysis of the data, answers for each question were transcribed into separate documents in order to identify and categorize. Teachers' branches were coded according to their branch's first letter in Turkish. For kindergarten teachers "A", primary school teachers "S" and English Language teachers "İ" was used while coding papers.

2.2.2. Disruption Interview Form

In qualitative phase, "Disruption Interview Form" were developed by the researchers. Based on the results of "Beliefs and Attitudes About Discipline Survey", 3 main questions were formed: 1-What are the problem behaviors faced by the primary teachers (kindergarten, primary and English)? 2-How do the teachers apply solutions related with positive discipline to solve these problem behaviors? Third question consists of a scenario and 2 questions based on it. It narrates a child's disruption in a primary classroom. The

scenario-based questions are: 3-a. What would you do if you were in Ayşe Teacher's place? Why?, 3-b. What would you say to Ahmet? How would you explain this situation to other children?

2.3. Data Collection Procedure

In the current study, surveys were administered in 2021-2022 academic year to kindergarten, primary school and English teachers who work in elementary schools in Istanbul's European side. In quantitative phase: With the convenience sampling method, the researchers reached 105 teachers. The questionnaires were taken to the schools where the teachers work, those who had time to fill in were waited and filled questionnaires were taken. In addition, each teacher was waited on at the school while leaving the questionnaire, as there might be questions, they might want to ask. In qualitative phase: Researchers chose teachers (three branches) randomly from the quantitative phase group to implement semi-structured interviews. At first, teachers who have convenient time to arrange time for interview were requested to participate in the study. Then, researchers interviewed with every teacher in an appropriate room of the school together. During the data gathering, voice recorder was used by one researcher and the other took notes of dialogs and general observations. After completing data procedure, voice recordings were transcribed to the written format.

2.4. Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in this research. Content analysis is the systematic scanning of printed or visual materials and analyzing thematically in certain categories. The data obtained by content analysis classified among specific themes, thus revealing relationships between data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Teachers' answers were examined, and each answer was coded by researchers. After coding process, themes were identified. The reliability formula proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was used for the reliability calculation of the study. Reliability = Agreement / (Agreement + Disagreement): As a result of the calculation, the reliability of the study was calculated as 93%. According to the analysis of the data, these 2 main themes were identified. Each main theme's sub-themes are shown in the table below. In qualitative analysis, content analysis was used and according to 2 main themes, data was coded. In qualitative phase, the reliability of the study was calculated as 95%. Theme tables for two phases of the study as follows:

Table 3. *Themes*

Quantitative Phase Themes		Qualititative Phase Themes	
1	Teachers' beliefs about discipline	1	Problem Behaviors
1.1.	Order-Rules	1.1.	Self-control
1.2.	Behaviors		Anger and aggression
			Chatting with friends
2	The Meanings of Positive Discipline for Teachers	2	Teachers' Solutions
2.1.	Love and Respect	2.1	Verbal warning
2.2.	Reward for positive behavior	2.2.	Advice
2.3.	Self-control	2.3.	Punishment

3.Findings

3.1. Quantitative Results

Research Question 1: What do you think about discipline?

The aim of classroom management can be defined as teachers' "controlling" their classrooms and ensuring that their students behave well (Garett, 2014). Nevertheless, the two goals of class management emphasized by Evertson and Weinstein (2006) need to be emphasized: to create environments for academic and social-emotional learning. To say that there is no need for discipline for good classroom management does not only conform to the definitions of classroom management, but also to the nature of learning. The presence of the rules and order sub-theme (f: 55) in the analysis of teachers' answers may be considered normal when examined in relation to the literature. The finding that discipline as a word means to teachers is "order" make researchers think about the teachers' beliefs and attitudes about discipline as expected in typical classroom management aspects.

In the context of 21st century skills, it is emphasized that classroom management and the discipline which is the most relevant concept should not be focused on academic content with unchanging rules and teacher-centered approach.

99İ: Control, order. Regular environment created to tell your lesson.

12A: An environment requires regular rules.

44S: Rules, order, sanction, punishment.

With the second sub-theme of "Behaviors (f: 31), it is proven that teachers' beliefs about discipline is traditional and centered on the behavioral approach. In the explanations about the concept of discipline, we come across that finding: Teachers emphasize the correction of wrong behavior by teacher. It is necessary to change not only the negative or unwanted ones, but also teachers' actions to prevent them. While teachers focus on the expected behaviors from students, they don't emphasize that behaviors which are the output of an effective practice including a healthy communication process.

7A: Identify the wrong lines of behavior and set rules.

101S: Sanctions on students to turn negative behavior into positive behavior.

81İ: Knowing what needs to be done is the attitude and behavior that will make the students' lives easier.

Research Question 2: What does positive discipline mean to you?

The teachers involved in this research expressed positive discipline in a different way from Dreikurs' definition in related literature. The analysis of answers brought us to the following themes under positive discipline: 2.1. Love and respect (59), 2.2. Reward for positive behavior (19) and 3. Self-control (7). According to Dreikurs (1964) and Nelson (2000), positive discipline encourages students to focus on solutions and helps them develop self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and problem-solving skills. When we compare the findings of this research with the explanation of positive discipline, although teachers' perspectives on the subject are mostly based on love and respect, we see that they continue their behavioral approach with the second theme. Teachers emphasized that students should be treated with

love and respect. However, if there is a problem during communication with student, teacher should manage the process by rewarding positive behavior which is one of the tools of the behavioral approach. Nelson's (2000) Positive Discipline Program, based on Dreikurs 'concepts, suggests that the teacher explore the motivation underlying students' behaviors and work together to solve problems in collaboration with families and children. Encouragement is one of the key actions in communicating with children. From these points, it is seen that the knowledge of the teachers about the positive discipline approach participating in this research is limited and insufficient. As a result of the collaboration process, the importance of children's self-control behavior answer is rarely seen in this finding of the study. These findings point out that based on teachers' beliefs about positive discipline underlies teachers tend to reinforce teacher-centeredness and positive behavior. The absence of any differences in the perspectives of kindergarten, classroom, and English teachers, who play an important role in the lives of children in the early childhood years, should also be considered as a topic of discussion. If we take into consideration the fact that kindergarten teachers should implement child-centered and development-based education, it is expected that the beliefs and attitudes of kindergarten teachers in this research should be separated from other branches in a positive way.

5A: Rewarding good behavior.

90S: Positive behavior, positive thinking

94İ: A set of rules based on mutual trust.

3.2. Qualitative Results

1.What are the problem behaviors faced by the primary teachers (kindergarten, primary and English)?

In the interviews with primary school teachers, they stated that they encountered 20 different problematic behaviors in their classrooms. These behaviors are broken down into code and themes. These behaviors were found to be irritability(f:5), inattention(f:10), constant crying(f:4), stubbornness(f:6), running away from school(f:2), introversion (f:3), anger, and aggression (f:9), chatting with friends during work(f:7), and inability to control oneself (f:10).

S-1: Inability of the child to control himself, not interested in the lesson, not engaging in conversation, children fighting with each other.

A-3: I often encounter behaviors such as aggression and anger problems, introversion and shyness, nail biting, bed wetting, thumb sucking.

İ-1: Nervous – anger, Offensive – offended.

2.How do the teachers apply solutions related with positive discipline to solve these problem behaviors?

Verbal warning (f:10) comes first among the solutions used by teachers in the context of classroom management. It has been determined that especially English and classroom teachers raise their voices gradually and warn children about their behaviors.

The second most preferred solution is advice (f: 8). It is preferred to inform children about the consequences of their behavior and to advise them to empathize with their friends who generally behave negatively.

As a third method, although the teachers did not use the word punishment, (f:7) they mentioned that they applied sanctions such as depriving children of problem behavior from

recess or playing, giving extra responsibility, and compensating for the damage they caused to the environment.

S-1: In these cases, there is usually a penalty for not going out for recess. Why? In order to make him realize his mistake, he is asked to write what he missed on the board in his notebook. Freedom never includes the right to harm others. Penalties may result as a result.

İ-3: It should be said that when Ahmet has a problem, he should try to talk about it with his teacher. If there is a problem, it can be said that it is much easier to solve when he comes and talks with his teacher, and his behavior only makes things more difficult.

OO-1: First, I would call out to the class and give an encouraging speech on behalf of the children who are exposed to negative behavior by saying that those who are disturbed by this situation raise their hands and tell their friends how they want them to compensate by reporting their discomfort to their friends. I would tell them that they wanted their friends to replicate their work.

Answers are the same solution suggestions that the teachers applied for the problem behaviors they encountered in their classrooms for the problem in the scenario read to them. This situation shows that there is consistency between the answers given by the teachers to the researchers, and that they encounter situations like the desperate teacher in the scenario.

Problem behaviors experienced by children in early childhood can negatively affect their lives in adolescence and adulthood, and depression can increase their tendency to commit crimes. (O'Connell, Tekne & Warner, 2009; Bornstein, Hahn & Haynes, 2010; Liu, 2004).

4. Results, Discussion and Recommendations

Disciplinary issues are at the top of the list of topics that often occupy teachers' agendas. In this study, it was aimed to examine the beliefs and attitudes of kindergarten, primary school and English teachers working at primary school level and to analyze how they offered solutions to the discipline problems they experienced in the light of the findings.

For this purpose, firstly, quantitative research was conducted. It was determined that 105 teachers who participated in this phase of the study had disciplinary beliefs in order to shape children with rules and to make themselves accepted as authority figures. Ugurlu et al. (2015) found the similar results parallel to this study. In Yaman and Güven's study (2014), it was emphasized that punishment reinforces the punished behavior rather than causing extinction. Yılmaz and Babaoğlan (2013) determined that classroom teachers use psychological and social rewards "mostly" and material rewards "sometimes" in maintaining classroom discipline. In the study conducted by Uysal et al. (2018) in kindergartens, they stated that financial rewards are mostly used for children. Gündoğdu's research (2007) results that are parallel with these studies, concluded that the social and corporal punishment methods that teachers use to maintain classroom discipline are less effective on students than other methods.

Concerning positive discipline, beliefs and attitudes emerged under the themes of love and respect, rewarding positive behavior, and self-control. When discipline is asked, elements of traditional education such as strict rules and punishment are conveyed in the answers, while positive discipline is asked to the teachers, it is seen that positiveness is focused on the axis of love. Somayeh et. al (2013) used survey to find out effects of the positive discipline on students' learning processes. According to the principals and teachers' responses, self-control of the students is effective in realization of positive discipline. Khodabakhshi and Abedi (2005) and Lewis (2001) point out that students' commitment can positively influence positive discipline behaviors, while this study and the findings of Somayeh et al, 2013 indicate that the

application of positive discipline techniques will support social-emotional processes. This process involves belonging. As Thakur (2017) states, students need a sense of belonging that promotes capable of completing tasks, connecting with teachers and their friends, and contributing to the group in a meaningful way.

In the second phase of the study (qualitative phase), 9 primary school teachers were asked which problem behaviors they frequently encountered in their classrooms. Since the discipline issue has its equivalent value in practice, it was aimed to reveal how teachers use methods related to positive discipline with this phase. More than half of the teachers stated that they faced anger and aggression problems. Also, Yağan Güder, Alabay and Güner found the same problem behaviors in their research. Both researches point out to lack of self-control situation. For supporting children's self-control, Crockenberg and Litman's (1990) "persistent persuasion" experiment with mothers who have young children nourishing children's initializing process of controlling themselves. Moreover, Bergin and Bergin (1999) took it and adapted to the educators' usage. Persistent persuasion includes providing the child with clear information about what the adult wants, and inviting peer sharing-which keeps negotiation going and allow the child to adopt the adult's goal.

It was determined that the solution methods they used for these problems were mostly verbal warning, advice, and punishment. The results obtained from the two phases (quantitative and qualitative) of the research overlap with each other. Trying to find a solution to the sample scenario conveyed to the teachers in the interviews are alike they use the same methods in their classes shows the consistency between the research results. At the same time, this result shows that there are no differences in method among kindergarten, primary school or English teachers. The problem behaviors encountered disrupt the course of the lesson and show that teachers have difficulties in applying effective classroom management strategies. Disrupting behaviors affecting the order of the classroom have been one of the important issues for which a support system has been requested for schools in recent years (Rose & Gallup, 2005). Our results are in line with Positive Discipline Association's research focusing on the behavior problems teachers encounter in their classes and overall, the school (Chadsey & McVittie, 2006). Therefore, teachers need more trainings about how to implement more effective and contemporary methods in their classes.

Another recommendation is applying a longitudinal positive discipline program in schools. As teachers use and follow in their classes positive discipline lenses, students feel more belonging or connection to their social context. When we consider the climate of the school on a large scale all stakeholders feel more respect and acceptance of themselves.

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