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use of operants-
intentional



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Q; Describe How Skinner's Approach of Operant Conditioning Can Be Applied to the Kenyan Education System. INTRODUCTION B. F. Skinner is termed as the father of operant conditioning. In developing the theory, he stated that an individual's behavior is a function of its consequences.

This approach was rooted on a belief that in attempts to understand behavior, one should look at the causes of an action and its repercussions, rather than focusing on internal cerebral events, in order to get the best results. Operant conditioning is actualized by the use of operants- intentional actions that have an effect on the environment of an individual, administered upon a desired response. According to Skinner, a behavior is likely to be modified through a number of processes. These include;

(i) Reinforcement; These are responses that cause a behavior to occur with greater frequency. The reinforcement could be positive (reward) or negative (escape).

(ii) Punishment: This is response that decreases the probability of the repetition of behaviour. Positive or negative, punishment results in weakened behavior. Operant conditioning is based on the assumption that human behavior is learned. Bearing in mind that the reinforcement theory focuses on observable behavior, it has been used in many areas of study, including the raising of children and training of learners.

By learning to adjust reinforcement or motivation through stimuli, schools in the Kenyan education system can help teachers gain a broader understanding of human behavior exhibited by pupils in the classroom setup. Learners receive a positive or negative response from

teachers depending on their actions. Reinforcement for good behavior in the Kenyan education system is mostly done in form of tangible items, praise and occasionally, money and tokens. The most instant form is praise, whereby the learner receives feedback on the spot every time desired behavior is recorded. For example, in training students to have etiquette in communication, the teacher can ask them to lift their hands up when they want to make verbal contributions and stand up as they speak. Upon recording the behavior, the teacher praises them, making the learner have the need to impress the teacher again, increasing the chances of the student repeating the same behavior. Constant praise is pleasing to the learner, hence ensures that there are efforts to sustain the desired behavior.

Praise is followed in rank by tangible rewards, ranging from pens, pencils, books, foodstuff and others depending on the region. These are mostly given sparingly, especially during prize giving ceremonies in schools. Tangible rewards make the recipient have a sense of achievement. The learner sustains efforts of hard work in hope to be rewarded again, increasing the probability of recurrence of good behavior.

Money and tokens such as vouchers are rarely used though most appreciated. Reinforcement for undesired behavior ranges from verbal disapproval, spanking, pinching, mild caning, and grounding from trips amongst others, depending on factors such as gender, intensity of undesired behaviour and the frequency in which it occurs. In some instances, inappropriate remarks are recorded from teachers, seeing that since the ban of corporal punishment, there are very few forms of punishment.

In the case of praise or disapproval, teachers can positively reinforce good performance by the use of symbols such as ticks or 'good' and 'excellent' remarks on classroom assignments and exams issued. This ingrains the message of achievement and encourages the learner to make efforts to submit similarly satisfying work in future. Sermon to the office for revision of poor work submitted or an instruction to repeat the work tempts the student away from making the mistakes again. To note is that most teachers apply reinforcement schedules according to what they find practical in their set up, rather than taking the theoretical approach, which is recommended. To identify the method to be used, a variety of factors are to be considered. These include the schedule of reinforcement employed and the response cost.

Reinforcement can be continuous or partial. (a) Continuous reinforcement; This is rewarding the learner every time they display desired behaviour during learning sessions. Continuous reinforcement generates long lasting changes in learning. It is most applicable in the case of public institutions where top achievers require constant motivation to maintain healthy competition; else they drop drastically in academic performance. This is with the consideration that public schools are highly populated. (b) Partial reinforcement; Also called intermittent reinforcement, the learners are only reinforced occasionally when desirable behaviour is recorded during the learning sessions. This method keeps the learners on toes; not knowing when a reward would come their way, hence ensures constant efforts to maintain good academic performance. Operant conditioning has strength in the fact

that it is helpful in the raising of children, teaching them and shaping their behaviour.

Learners rewarded for good behaviour are likely to continue with good behaviour, while those punished for undesirable behaviour are less likely to model the behaviour again. It has a weakness in that if positive behaviour is reinforced all the time, the reinforcement either gets exhausted or extinct. Also, the learners may develop dependency towards. For example, if the tangible item offered gives instant gratification.

g. sweets, the learner may eventually struggle to maintain the positive behavior without the reward. In this case, the choice of reward is to be put into serious consideration.

In addition, teachers should tactfully employ both continuous and partial reinforcement for optimal academic success of learners. With nurturing the student being the focal point of the learning process, employing operant conditioning methods in the planning of lessons makes it possible to ensure that students learn good behavior and useful life skills. If teachers bear a good attitude and take a positive approach in the application of operant conditioning, the results attained would be desirable. REFERENCE 1.

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