

Examining the Views and Practices of Preschool Teachers: An Analysis of Reinforcement and Punishment Approaches*

Okul Öncesi Öğretmenlerinin Görüş ve Uygulamalarının İncelenmesi: Pekiştirme ve Cezalandırma Yaklaşımlarının Analizi

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ABSTRACT

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In the present study, an investigation was conducted into preschool teachers' utilization of reinforcement and punishment within the framework of the behavioral approach. The study concentrated on examining the reinforcement and punishment strategies, along with the perspectives of preschool teachers employed in the private sector. A phenomenological study method was employed, wherein open-ended questions were presented through a semi-structured interview format to solicit the thoughts and practices of the teachers concerning reinforcement and punishment. Four open-ended questions were asked, and the responses provided by the teachers were meticulously recorded and transcribed. Subsequently, the recorded responses underwent analysis, coding, and interpretation using the thematic analysis method. The findings illuminated a prevalent inclination among teachers to endorse the use of reinforcement and punishment, reflecting a generally positive sentiment toward these behavioral methods. Notably, the reinforcement method received robust support, with many teachers asserting its efficacy in motivating children. Among the various reinforcement practices, verbal approval emerged as the most frequently employed. Conversely, while some reservations were expressed regarding the use of punishment, a substantial number of teachers advocated for its utilization as a disciplinary method to address undesirable behaviors within the classroom. The most frequently implemented form of punishment was identified as time-out. In summation, the research indicates that preschool teachers harbor affirmative ideas towards the incorporation of behaviorist techniques in their classroom management approaches.

Keywords: reinforcement, punishment, classroom management, behaviorist approach

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Bu çalışmada okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin pekiştirme ve cezalandırma kullanımları davranışsal yaklaşım ışığında incelenmiştir. Araştırmada, özel sektörde görev yapan okul öncesi eğitimcilerinin pekiştirme ve ceza uygulamalarına ve görüşlerine odaklanılmıştır bu açıdan fenomenolojik desen (olgu bilim) yönteminden yararlanılmıştır. Pekiştirme ve ceza ile ilgili düşünceleri ve uyguladıkları uygulamalar hakkında yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yöntemiyle açık uçlu sorular sorulmuştur. Sonuç olarak dört açık uçlu soru sorulmuş, öğretmenlerin yanıtları kaydedilmiş ve yazıya dökülmüştür. Öğretmenlerin cevapları araştırmacı tarafından kaydedilmiş ve tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenip, kodlanmış ve yorumlanmıştır. Öğretmenlerin pekiştirme ve ceza yöntemini büyük ölçüde desteklediği ve bu konuda olumlu görüşlere sahip oldukları ortaya konulmuştur. En çok savunulan görüş, pekiştirme yönteminin çocuğun motive olmasına yardımcı olduğu görüşü iken, en çok kullanılan pekiştirme uygulaması sözel onaydır. Öğretmenlerin ceza konusunda tereddütleri olsa da çoğu öğretmen cezanın sınıf ortamlarında bir disiplin yöntemi olarak ve istenmeyen davranışları azaltmak için kullanılmasını desteklemiştir. En çok kullanılan ceza uygulamasının mola (time-out) olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Bu bulgular doğrultusunda, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin davranışçı tekniklerin sınıfta kullanılması konusunda olumlu düşünceleri olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: pekiştirme, cezalandırma, sınıf yönetimi, davranışçı ekol

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INTRODUCTION

Psychology's development has been profoundly shaped by the behaviorist perspective, underscored by the seminal contributions of influential figures, notably commencing with Watson and evolving through the work of Skinner (Watrin & Darwich, 2012). This period, especially in the mid-20th century, witnessed an unparalleled dominance of the behaviorist approach, solidifying its position as a defining characteristic in the study of human behaviors (Mcleod,2022). This era marked a pivotal chapter in the history of psychology, lighting the discipline's focus on observable behaviors and external stimuli.

Even today, behaviorist concepts continue to find extensive application across diverse fields, including business, psychology, and education (Araiba, 2020). Behaviorism has played a crucial role in establishing psychology as a scientific discipline, employing objective methodologies, especially experimentation (Glover & Ronning, 2013). Cook (1993) outlined three foundational tenets that characterize behaviorism: Behavior takes the center stage in psychology; psychology does not concern itself with an inner mind separate from behavior; and the explanation of behavior does not necessarily require reference to internal mental events or processes. According to behaviorists and Skinner's (1953) perspective, objective methodologies are restricted to studying individuals' reactions to external stimuli. Behaviorists rely on observation and experimentation methods, asserting that the organism-environment relationship between humans and animals is fundamentally identical, leading to the undertaking of animal psychological studies (Watson, 1913). Glover and Ronning (2013) highlighted the significant impact of classical and operant conditioning theories in the 1960s, shedding light on the intricate relationship between conditioning and learning in various facets of human behavior. Skinner, who is best known for creating teaching machines and programmed instruction based on operant conditioning theory, played a pivotal role in shaping education (Hilgard & Bower, 1966). Programmed instruction personalizes education, allows students to progress at their own pace, and provides immediate feedback to minimize errors. Hilgard and Bower (1966) emphasized that numerous instructional design theories, influenced by behaviorism, advocate for observable and quantifiable outcomes in programmed instruction. These theories emphasize assessing student readiness, delivering knowledge in manageable amounts, and reinforcing students for their performance.

Specifically, in the early childhood period, as it is crucial in children's cognitive, social, emotional, and moral development, it has become necessary to appropriately apply reinforcement and punishment systems used in children's education at this age. The concepts of reinforcement and punishment have also been used as a discipline method in education over the years. Güder et al. (2018) pointed out that to prevent the behavior from repeating after the individual has engaged

in unwanted activity, punishment occurs when someone else places the person in a situation they do not want to be in or denies them access to a scenario they want. In this instance, punishment creates a stressful condition for people, and as a result, people refrain from engaging in the action out of anxiety and dread of punishment. However, people can become accustomed to both rewards and penalties, and may continue engaging in undesired activities despite the consequences. This demonstrates how the impact of the punishment wears off over time (Yılmaz & Babaoğlu, 2013).

In the field of classroom management, teachers use a variety of techniques to modulate student behavior, including both the reduction of undesirable behaviors and the reinforcement of positive behaviors (Yılmaz & Babaoğlu, 2013; Güzelyurt et al., 2019; Bünyamin & Altunhan, 2022). This assumes particular significance in the context of early childhood education, a critical period wherein children undergo foundational cognitive and socio-emotional development. Empirical evidence underscores the widespread adoption of these pedagogical strategies among preschool teachers (Uysal et al., 2018). Nevertheless, teachers' detailed application of reinforcement and punishments reveals strategic considerations similar to a carefully devised plan (Bulut & İflazoğlu, 2007; Temiz, 2020). Preschool teachers frequently use methods such as making eye contact, ignoring, and reward-punishment to address children's negative behaviors (Güder et al., 2018). However, a notable theme in the literature suggests a potential area for improvement, indicating that some preschool teachers may benefit from additional support in grasping effective classroom management practices (Güzelyurt et al., 2019). This underscores the requirement of refining pedagogical approaches to align with the difficulties of preschool classroom dynamics.

The study conducted by Forness et al. (1976) concluded that preschool teachers tended to have a repertoire of 45% repulsive remarks and 65% praise in their sessions with children with behavioral problems. Further, in multivariate models explaining age and gender, Briggs-Gowan et al. (2014) identified punishment as an insensitivity strongly linked with reinforcement learning. Specifically, higher punishment insensitivity was associated with significantly lower overall performance and more error (passive avoidance) on trials with penalties. However, a study conducted by Güder et al. (2018), it was determined that the most common behavioral problems encountered by teachers in their classrooms are "tantrums", "crying", "yelling," and "stubbornness". In the study, teachers who have children in their classrooms with behavioral problems described their emotions as "helpless" and "exhausted" the most. Problem behaviors have been determined to affect the education process and create disruptions negatively. Regarding problematic behaviors, teachers frequently use techniques like "making eye contact,"

“ignoring,” and “reinforcement-punishment.” Güder et al. (2018) found that kids behave more impulsively because adults do not model and teach appropriate conduct.

When examining the existing literature, it becomes apparent that numerous studies have investigated teachers' perspectives on reinforcement and punishment across various educational levels. At the primary level (Turkan & Yaraş,2013; Kansızoğlu & Şama,2015), while studies conducted at the elementary level (Wahab et al., 2013; Yılmaz & Babaoğlu, 2013; Sun et al., 2015; Kansızoğlu & Erdoğan,2015) have provided insights into teachers' ideas regarding reinforcement and punishment strategies. Transitioning to the middle school level, Açıkgoz & Babaoğlu-Çelik (2023) have contributed to this area of research, with additional research by Keleş & Kahraman (2022) addressing the topic across mixed education levels. However, there has been limited attention given to preschool teachers' utilization of reinforcement and punishment in their classrooms. Türk et al. (2019) conducted a study with preschool teachers, revealing that out of 20 teachers surveyed, only one indicated the use of these methods in the classroom environment. Nonetheless, the current study primarily focused on the challenges encountered in implementing these methods rather than exploring their efficacy. In contrast, other studies have specifically examined preschool teachers' practices regarding reward and punishment. For instance, Güzelyurt et al. (2019) and Hun and Altunhan (2019) investigated preschool teachers' perspectives on these strategies. Remarkably, these studies did not categorize the results into negative and positive views and practices concerning reward and punishment strategies. In the study of Güzelyurt (2019), findings indicated that the majority of teachers employed both rewarding and punishing techniques in their classrooms, particularly during the establishment of classroom rules and issuing warnings. Regarding views on reward and punishment, teachers expressed support for using rewards to reinforce desired behavior. However, these studies did not extensively explore negative perceptions or objections to punishment or reinforcement. Notably, the teachers in these studies expressed overall support for the use of punishment in their classrooms. Therefore, the current study includes the negative ideas about these methods.

Another notable study focusing on the preschool level was conducted by Han and Altunhan (2022), shedding light on the utilization of reward and punishment. Han and Altunhan (2022) discovered that preschool teachers often employ symbolic and social rewards rather than material incentives. These rewards are utilized to motivate students, modify behavior, and establish classroom rules. Moreover, the study investigated the specific practices associated with rewards and punishments thoroughly. Regarding rewards, symbolic rewards such as stickers were found to be the most preferred method, followed by positive reinforcement. In terms of punishment, teachers predominantly utilized strategies such as exclusion from play and time-out. In this context, it is noteworthy that the choice of reinforcement and punishment methods can

have a significant impact on classroom dynamics and student behavior, highlighting the importance of understanding teachers' perspectives and practices in this regard.

Saputri and Widyasari (2021) offered a different perspective on rewards and punishments, emphasizing that these techniques can promote disciplinary behaviors that may not have been present at the beginning of the semester. They argued that disciplinary behaviors could be cultivated by implementing reward and punishment methods. However, unlike the literature focusing on the preschool teacher's use of rewards or reinforcement, the present study primarily centered on reinforcement, distinguishing it from the concept of reward by involving stimulus or behavior change processes. Reinforcement aims to increase the frequency of a behavior by providing a consequence dependent on the behavior (Marcus & Vollmer, 1996). In contrast, rewards have the ability to influence behavior by increasing the likelihood of the person's repeating the activity to receive the reward again (Bhanji & Delgado, 2014). However, rewards may not always lead to lasting changes in behavior (White, 1989). Also, while all rewards can be considered forms of reinforcement, not all reinforcement involves rewards and intrinsic motivation (Cameron & Pierce, 1994). Thus, unlike existing literature, the current study specifically examines the views and practices of preschool teachers regarding reinforcement, focusing on teachers who have implemented these methods in their classrooms and gained firsthand experience. Additionally, considering the potential long-term effects of reinforcement and punishment methods on students' behavior and development, understanding teachers' perspectives and practices is essential for promoting effective classroom management and student learning outcomes.

On the other hand, the current study is notable for assessing the current status of educational approaches, determining the function of reinforcement and punishment in preschool education, noting the effect of behaviorism theory in preschool, and studying views and practices while bearing in mind that teachers in the study applied this technique in their classroom at least once. The results of the present study can be used to determine the quality of educational outcomes based on behaviorism theory in the early childhood period, as well as how preschool teachers perceive and use punishment and reinforcement as a discipline method in the classroom. The present study aims to examine preschool teachers' opinions and practices about using reinforcement and punishment. The study questions listed:

1. What are teachers' opinions regarding the use of the reinforcement technique in the classroom environment?
2. What are the teachers' classroom practices regarding the use of reinforcement?

3. What are teachers' opinions regarding the use of punishment techniques in the classroom environment?
4. What are the teachers' classroom practices regarding the use of punishment techniques?

METHOD

Research Design

The study used a phenomenological study approach to find out what preschool teachers working in the private sector have views about the reinforcements and punishment and the strategies they use in their classrooms. Phenomenology can provide a strong research base for studies that aim to investigate phenomena using terms that are familiar to people, although the findings and conclusions may not be entirely obvious (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2021). Understanding how individuals see the environment in certain circumstances and throughout particular periods is the aim of phenomenological research (Neubauer et al., 2019).

The phenomenology pattern was preferred in the research because the focus of the research is on how preschool teachers working in the private sector interpret the experiences they have gained from the methods they use in the classroom and their opinions and practices about them. Phenomenology study allows the revealing of the meaning, describing the common views and practices of the participants and interpreting the opinions and interpretations of the views and practices. Phenomenology research may need to provide generalizable results according to the nature of qualitative research (Levitt, 2021). However, in the phenomenology approach study, a common problem or situation is selected for in-depth investigation of the reasons and the data collection to describe the situation or the problem and provide the solutions (Creswell, 2012). This approach includes analyzing an individual's conscious experiences and the surrounding circumstances to comprehend and provide context for the experience's content (Smith, 2003). This approach involves analyzing an individual's conscious experiences and the surrounding circumstances to understand and provide context for the content of the experience (Smith, 2003). The phenomenological study also clarifies and interprets the experiences as a result of the interactions they have accumulated over a period of time (Çilesiz, 2011).

Study Group

The research study group consists of preschool teachers in private schools affiliated with the Provincial Directorate of National Education in a district of Ankara in the 2022-2023 academic year. Each teacher has 20-25 students, and they do not have students with special education in the classroom, as indicated by the teachers. The criterion sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used to determine the study group.

Purposive sampling is a popular qualitative research technique used when selecting knowledgeable people (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Clark, 2011). In the current study, teachers knowledgeable about the reinforcement and punishment method and who had experience using it in their classrooms were preferred. In this respect, the criterion sampling method was used. Criteria can be created by the researcher, or a previously prepared criteria list can be used (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Purposive strategies are justified by the researcher's presumption that particular categories of persons may have a distinct, significant, or distinctive viewpoint on the phenomena under study based on their prior theoretical grasp of the subject matter (Robinson, 2014). Thus, the researchers prepared a list of criteria before selecting the participants.

The criteria list for participation in the study includes: 1) employment as a preschool teacher at a private school in Ankara, 2) willingness to conduct interviews, 3) knowledge of the reinforcement and punishment technique and finally, 4) implementation of this technique in the classroom at least once. Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Demographic Characteristics	Categories	F	%
Gender	Female	18	100.0
	Male	0	0
Age	21-30	8	44
	31-40	6	33
	41 and over	4	22
Degree Level	High School	6	33
	Undergraduate	8	44
	Associate degree	4	22
	Graduate	0	0
	PhD	0	0
Seniority Level	1-5 years	7	38
	6-10 years	6	33
	11-15 years	2	11
	16 years and over	3	16
Total		31	100.0

Data Collection Tools

While preparing the interview form, interviews were held with three teachers similar to the sample questions were asked about reinforcement and punishment and their answers were noted. When the teachers were asked about "positive and negative" forms of punishment and reinforcement, they were confused, and the researchers decided not to divide the questions into these forms, but after the answers were given, they classified answers as "positive and negative reinforcement".

Questions were simplified, and similar measuring instruments were examined. The questions were reviewed by two field experts and two language experts, and the questions were

reviewed by a qualitative research specialist. An interview form was prepared depending on the responses. At first, a preliminary application was performed for two preschool teachers to ensure that it was understandable; however, these instructors did not participate in the actual application, so the form was produced. As a result of these applications, an attempt was made to create a feasible, consistent, verifiable, and persuasive interview form. In the final stage, interviews were conducted with 18 preschool teachers working in the private sector and recorded in the interview forms. Voice recordings were made from the teachers who gave permission. The data entered into the forms during the interview were transferred to the computer as raw data.

However, alternative explanations were provided to help participants understand the questions more effectively. Hence, the interview questions were flexible and additional questions and descriptive explanations were added throughout the interview session, which lasts between 20 and 30 minutes for each participant. At the beginning of the interview, the demographic characteristics of each participant was taken verbally, and the researchers transcribed the interview process later.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to identify and report themes or patterns, is organized and described as a dataset, and allows researchers to make comments (Clarke & Braun, 2017). In thematic analysis, it is used to describe the experiences, daily lives, opinions, behaviors, practices and practices of the people participating in the research on a particular subject (Clarke & Braun, 2017), and these experiences are aimed to be understood in full detail. (Clarke & Braun 2006). As a result, it focuses on people's thoughts, feelings, and actions. According to Clarke and Braun (2006), six stages of thematic analysis were used in the study.

1) First, the researcher should get used to the data and read it repeatedly by transcribing it. In our research, the data were transcribed by two researchers, who separately coded the data and compared the results. Thus, each researcher read the transcripts separately and noted their initial thoughts about the data. 2) The second step includes collecting data on each code and identifying interesting features. In the current study, frequency of responses were examined to find whether they were a common idea or practice among teachers and then, interesting data were also reviewed. 3) Generating potential codes and bringing together data that may be relevant to all codes. In the present study, codes were generated, and data were categorized according to the codes. 4) At this level, the data coded at the first and second levels are compared, and the suitability of the quotations is examined. Both researchers compared their codes and discussed their suitability and similarity at this stage. 5) Clear names have been assigned to each theme. In the current study, both researchers independently generated codes, compared them, and selected the shorter and simpler ones. 6) Then, interesting quotes that fit the codes need to be selected and

analyzed. Since the teachers gave similar answers, repetitive quotes were excluded for each question, and only quotes that would be more interesting and would enrich the analysis were included.

Inter-rater reliability refers to the level of accord between two or more raters, observers, coders, or examiners (Lange, 2011). It deals with the issue of uniformity in implementing a rating system. Also, in the present study inter-rater reliability method is used that; two researchers coded the interviews and agreed on the codes. Cohen's kappa coefficients unveiled a substantial level of concurrence between the two researchers. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress the significance of the reliability coefficient, emphasizing its pivotal role in research. It is crucial that this coefficient exceeds the 90% threshold. In the current study, the inter-coder reliability achieved an impressive level of 92%, indicating a substantial consensus among coders. This robust reliability underscores the consistency and accuracy of the coding process, enhancing the credibility of the study's findings. Moreover, such a high level of agreement instills confidence in the reliability and validity of the data collected and analyzed for the research objectives.

Ethical Considerations

Detailed information about the research, including its purpose, questions, data collection methods, and procedures, was presented to the Human Research Ethics Committee of the state public university before the research began. Once approved, the data collection process commenced. Each participant was provided with a form explaining the study's aim and their rights, and they were reminded that they could withdraw at any time. The anonymity of each participant was ensured, and they were identified as P1, P2, etc. The interview process is recorded, and participants give their consent for the voice recording. In terms of confidentiality, participant names are neither used nor revealed.

RESULTS

When the findings were examined, the participants' views were divided into two for reinforcement as negative and positive views and two codes for punishment as positive and negative punishment practices. While the subcode of reinforcement included positive and negative reinforcement, the subcode of punishment was divided into positive and negative punishment.

The views and practices of preschool teachers regarding using reinforcement

The views and practices of preschool teachers regarding using reinforcement are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2*The views of preschool teachers regarding using reinforcement*

Category	Codes	f
Positive views	Increasing the motivation of children	9
	Facilitating classroom management	7
	Developing intended behaviors	7
	Reducing behavioral problems of children	3
	Showing differences between right and wrong behavior	3
	Increasing teaching effectiveness	2
Total		32
Negative views	Decreasing internal motivation of children	5
	Decreasing academic success of children	3
	Not recommending reinforcement as a classroom management tool	3
	Not suggesting using reinforcement too often in preschool	3
	Not suggesting using reinforcement too often in preschool	3
Total		14

As seen in Table 2, the views of the participants about the reinforcement category are shown in two codes. According to the results in Table 2, most teachers considered reinforcement as a discipline method, and reinforcement is mainly used to motivate children to do activities. Motivation is followed by using reinforcement to acquire desired behaviors. Teachers indicate that they teach the acquisition of desired behaviors more effectively using reinforcement. An example of the answers given by the participants on this subject is presented below:

P8: "Since a more European approach is adopted in my school, we use the reinforcement, but not by giving the reinforcement directly to the child. I mean, I give the reinforcement verbally or physically due to behavior that needs to be earned, increasing his motivation."

Some participants who used reinforcement as a discipline method thought that reinforcement was effective in increasing the intended behaviors. An example of the answers given by the participants on this subject is presented below:

P3: "To motivate children, I use reinforcement. We applaud the children in the morning to encourage them; I provide them with the materials and activities they want later, but not always; and I support them with loving words."

The participant continues by giving examples,

P3: "Assume the children are aimed to achieve a specific behavior that the parents feel uncomfortable with, such as when the rules are broken; if the child is on the right track, I encourage the child, but not individually, for the desired conduct, but totally throughout the group."

Some participants who use reinforcement as a discipline method state that reinforcement facilitates classroom management. Teachers who use reinforcement as a discipline method and

find it appropriate to use it explain the effects of reinforcement on the child as follows. On the other hand, teachers who do not use reinforcement and do not see it as appropriate, explain its effects on the child as follows.

P12: "In the context of preschool education, I regard the reward as a reinforcing tool. However, I believe that it should not be prioritized above other subjects at all educational levels, including preschool. The reward is well-liked in today's modern educational philosophy. I believe using external rewards to guide a child is comparable to punishing them."

The participant continues by giving examples,

P12: "I agree with the authors that I read about this issue before that we should let the child discover their own internal drive. Rewarding the child for good conduct will only work temporarily; either the child will become accustomed to the incentive and stop responding, or the behavior will disappear when the reward is removed."

Table 3

The practices of preschool teachers regarding using reinforcement

Category	Codes	f
Positive reinforcement	Verbal Approvement	9
	Physical approvement	7
	Emotional approvement	6
	Indirect reinforcement	3
	Not suggesting using reinforcement too often in preschool	3
Total		25
Negative reinforcement	Giving extra play time	2
	Cancelling the punishment	1
Total		3

In table 3, the preschool teacher's practices about reinforcement are indicated and coded as positive and negative reinforcement. Most teachers use positive reinforcement, whereas there are only two participants in negative reinforcement. It is stated that the most used positive reinforcement methods are verbal and emotional approval by nine teachers, and seven teachers support using physical approvement and stickers. The example of the answers given by the participants on this subject is presented below:

P6: "I usually use stickers when I reinforce the kids, but instead of giving the sticker out of the package, I made it more fun. I prepared a "magic sticker box" for the kids, and they get excited every time they see the box."

P8: "I provide verbal and emotional approval reinforcement, and I oppose food-style rewards since they may be unhealthy for youngsters. Smiling at the child and letting him perform the activity or play with the item he wants are excellent techniques for motivating children.

The participant continues by giving examples,

P16: "I normally provide verbal encouragement such as "well done, excellent job," but occasionally a grin or a hug is all required."

Finally, other participants who utilize reinforcement stated that selecting a class leader, giving responsibility, allowing them to play with the toy they want, and supporting them with nice words are effective reinforcers for children.

The teacher's views and practices about the punishment

The preschool teachers' views and practices about the punishment are indicated. The views are categorized with the categories applied in the reinforcement section, which are positive and negative. Also, practices are divided into two categories: negative punishment and positive punishment.

Table 4

The views of preschool teachers regarding using punishment

Category	Codes	f
Positive views	Reducing undesired behavior	7
	Facilitating classroom management	5
Total		12
Negative views	The use of discipline methods unintendedly	4
	Harmful for the children's psychology	5
	Causing children to feel anger toward the teachers	5
Total		14

Table 4 shows the participants' views on the punishment category. Most teachers express support for the use of punishment in kindergarten settings. However, contrary to these findings, most teachers do not consider punishment to be a good or preferable method of discipline. They state a reluctance to use punishment in their classrooms. Despite their reservations, they acknowledge the necessity of employing punishment in certain situations, particularly to address undesired behaviors. This finding underscores the importance of effective classroom management, as also highlighted in the reinforcement section. However, upon analysis of negative perceptions surrounding punishment, teachers expressed concerns that it may incite aggression in children towards teachers and could potentially pose psychological risks.

Most frequently, an equal number of the other participants thought that even if they did not want to use the punishment because they could not find a better discipline method, they had to use it, categorized as an "unintentional use of punishment."

P12: "The school where I work and I do not support the use of punishment, and we do not use punishment either; as an alternative to this, when the child behaves negatively, I talk and explain that the behavior is incorrect."

Finally, the present study focused on the teacher's practices about punishment; the most popular technique was time out, where the child is excluded from the activity and sent to the corner of the classroom. Time out is followed by a verbal warning and the practice of discouragement of the misbehavior in the classroom environment as positive punishment. For the negative punishment, the majority of teachers apply the method of the deprivation of the favorite item.

Table 5

The practices of preschool teachers regarding using punishment

Category	Codes	f
Positive Punishment	Time out	6
	Verbal warnings	5
	The use of discouragement for the misbehavior	5
	Explaining the correct behavior	4
Total		20
Negative punishment	Removing the favorite item	6
	Ignoring	3
Total		9

In addition, some participants favor the punishment method in the classroom as a discipline method. The views of one of the preschool teachers in the study, which summarizes the subject, are presented as an example below.

P6: "You will not take the child out of the classroom alone (Time out); you will take the child; you will find an empty classroom with you; you will explain the child's misbehavior in detail. But if you take that child and locate him in another classroom, the child will not understand that the behavior is wrong."

On the other hand, some participants also focused on the effects of using punishment on children. Participants emphasized the effects of punishment on children as punishments increase the child's aggressive behavior.

P7: "Having a punishment corner in the classroom helps him correct his behavior. I think punishment is effective in gaining a sense of responsibility; punishments do not bring permanent behavior, and verbal punishment methods may be perceived as a threat by children."

In the current study, preschool instructors endorsed teachers' use of punishment and reinforcement in the classroom, consistent with behaviorist disciplinary literature. Teachers

mostly employ positive reinforcement and encourage encouraging talks when managing their classes. Despite having negative judgments about the punishment system, they continue to use it.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the present study is to investigate preschool teachers' views and practices on the use of reinforcement and punishment using a behaviorist approach. The current study revealed that preschool teachers use reinforcement and punishment techniques in their classes. Also, the literature supports this finding that adopts behaviorism techniques of reinforcement and punishment is the most common strategy utilized in school, even in kindergarten (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Kohn, 1994; Moberly et al., 2005; Hoffman et al., 2009).

The first question of the study is teachers' opinions about reinforcement. In their answers, teachers stated that they mostly use it to increase students' motivation in the classroom. It means that the teachers face problems regarding the active participation of the children and their willingness to join the activities in the classroom, and through this method, the children's willingness may be increased. The result is parallel with Han and Altunhan's study (2022) for the reward that most of the teachers used to motivate children. Furthermore, McClelland (1985) backed up these findings by claiming that positive reinforcement may increase children's interest in participating in the educational process, resulting in increased motivation in the classroom. To promote students' active participation in the learning process, teachers are encouraged to be able to manage instructional time, use practical approaches to prevent misbehavior and redirect the children's acceptable behavior (Pianta et al., 2005). Thus, the primary purpose of utilizing reinforcement was to boost the motivation of youngsters (Atkinson, 1957). Our findings also confirmed the literature in that the majority of instructors consider reinforcement techniques as a beneficial strategy to increase children's willingness and motivation to attend the activities more in the classroom.

The teacher's views are followed by classroom management and desired behaviors. These results show that teachers use this method while teaching children the objectives and indicators determined in their daily plans and use short-term solutions for classroom management. The findings differed from those of Türk et al. (2019) and Güzelyurt et al. (2019), who reported that the majority of teachers predominantly employed rewards to encourage desired behaviors. In contrast, the present study revealed that most teachers emphasized children's intrinsic motivation. As reinforcement method was described by Kohn (1994) as "do this, and you will get what you want." As a result, teachers determine the behaviors they expect children to perform with the daily schedule and reinforce them when children implement. Moberly (2005) supported these findings and employed reinforcement to urge students to improve their academic achievement and display more suitable classroom behavior. In this respect, teachers use

reinforcement behavior more often when teaching desired behaviors, but this also reveals the problem of students performing the behavior just to get reinforcement. Thus, teachers in the current study agreed that reinforcing children for utilizing their planned conduct or desired behavior with enjoyable reinforcers would help lessen undesirable behavior. Using reinforcement and punishment, traditional classroom management, which is teacher-centered and based on behaviorism, controls children's behavior, ensures that they remain focused on the educational objectives, and lessens disruptive behavior (Freiberg & Lamb, 2009). Also, the use of reinforcement as a classroom management technique stems from the limited time and more helpful way to teach specific behaviors. Axelrod (1983) supported that reinforcement is a practical and quicker way to reach the desirable behavior. Also, it is believed that teachers should be responsible for students' learning and focus on students' capacity should plan their learning as a complementary skill to enhance teaching effectiveness (Burnett, 2002). As a result, the present study, in line with the behaviorist approach and supporting previous studies, has revealed that this technique is used to increase the frequency of showing the desired and expected behavior from the child in the classroom. The reason for applying might be because it is simple and takes little time.

However, our findings indicate that some teachers did not support the reinforcement because they believed it decreased children's internal or intrinsic motivation. Kohn (1993) did not support reinforcement because of the individual's free will to follow certain behaviors without considering external stimuli. Also, reinforcement decreases intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1971; Wiersma, 1992; Jovanovic & Matejevic, 2014; Hendijani et al., 2016). Thus, the literature was parallel with our findings, and the reason for decreasing intrinsic motivation may stem from a particular behavior to get the reward without focusing on the reasons (Kohn 1994; Michaelsen & Esch, 2021). Also, it is indicated by few teachers that reinforcement decreases academic success, but in the literature, it is thought that it can increase grades and achievement (Axelrod, 1986; Deci, 2001; Adibsereshki et al., 2015; Schieltz et al., 2020). The reason why there is a conflict between the findings and literature may stem from the children's motivation to focus on reinforcement tools after getting an excellent grade.

The teacher's views on punishment were also examined and reinforcement was classified as a strategy for reducing behavioral problems. When children behave properly, teachers praise them while ignoring misbehaving classmates. Atkinson (1956) added the definitions of punishment as performance-avoidant and reinforcement as performance-mastery. This implies that when the intended behavior or objective is adopted in a school setting, the kids' performance is encouraged to help them become experts in that conduct or if the avoidant behavior that is improper for use in a classroom setting is repressed. Finally, Sak et al. (2016) also found that

punishment reduces misbehavior in early childhood education settings. Thus, the literature review and the findings of the present study are found to be parallel for using reinforcement and punishment to decrease the frequency of misbehaviors or inappropriate behaviors. However, indicating the same views on using reinforcement and punishment may stem from misunderstanding the definitions of reinforcement and punishment because, in the literature review, the punishment is used to decrease unwanted behavior. In contrast, reinforcement increases the frequency of positive behavior. According to the study's findings, the primary goal of the instructors' use of punishment and reinforcement as a form of discipline was to facilitate effective classroom management. Deci and Ryan (1985) also referred to this method as "seduction by controlling" to influence children's actions to improve their conduct and make classroom management more approachable (Curry & Johnson, 1990 quoted in Moberly, 2005).

Also, Kohn (1994) states that the use of punishment can make the children more rebellious to the authority figure; however, our findings also followed these results that the majority of the teachers indicated if the teacher provides warnings to the children all the time, they will be angrier. Also, these teachers who think punishment makes the children more rebellious divided into two halves did not want to use the method, while the others felt pressured to use it. The reason for feeling pressure to use punishment may be the difficulty of finding appropriate discipline methods to gain control of the class (Smyth et al., 2009).

In the study practices of the reinforcement, the third question of the study, verbal approval was the most popular method to reinforce children; most gave an example of "well done, good job, you are doing great." However, Güzelyurt (2019) and Han & Altunhan (2019) found symbolic rewards, especially stickers, as the most popular technique. However, the difference between the current study may stem from the types of schools the data was collected. As Canter and Canter (1992) also concluded, verbal recognition is the most useful and frequently used method to discipline children in the class to show responsible behavior, so the finding is supported. According to Canter and Canter (1992), psychical approval and proximity can help teachers increase the possibility of re-applying the intended behavior; however, it may be obliging when used with verbal explanations. However, in our finding, physical proximity is considered as hugging, clapping so different from physical and verbal approval combinations. The reason for that may stem from thinking of both methods separately. In comparison, Han and Altunhan's study found social rewards as secondly popular.

In the present study, teachers commonly use the timeout method as a punishment for undesirable behavior and this involves removing the student from the classroom or having them wait in a designated area before returning to activities. The number of teachers using this method is much less than the number of teachers using reinforcement, and teachers use it for short-term

solutions. Teachers argue that children are encouraged to think about their misbehavior during a time out. The most popular punishment technique was also time out in the preschool settings (Han & Altunhan, 2019, Sak & Sak, 2016). As literature also showed that time out is one of the popular methods to show the consequences of inappropriate behaviors (Kami, 1984; Smith & Chandler, 2013; Corralejo et al., 2018).

According to Kohn (1994), using strategies such as stickers is related to having power over the children and gaining privileges by utilizing external motivation. Also, time out and thinking about the behavior are considered as related to each other by the teachers in the research. Before the implementation of time out, the children are encouraged to stay alone and consider the entire process. However, according to Curry and Johnson (1990), children do not think about their behaviors because the consequence of the behavior results from someone's judgement (as cited in Moberly, 2005). Thus, there was a conflict between the study's findings and the literature. This may be related to Kohn's (1994) ideas as he supported that individual decisions (free will) of the students should be respected to create social coherence.

Regarding verbal warnings, Lewis (2001) stated that using verbal punishment, like yelling and using negative sentences about the student, can negatively affect the teacher and child relationship and has detrimental effects on the student's responsibility over their behaviors because external sources decided and controlled the behaviors. In contrast to this finding, most of the teachers who supported punishment used the verbal form of punishment in the current study; it may also be related to the quick fixation on the problem for the short-term process (Moberly, 2005) and teacher's self-efficacy (Cohen & Amidon, 2004).

Deprivation of the child's favorite item can also make children angry and, instead of making him obedient to the authority, may damage the relationship between teacher and student and also trust between them (Rich, 1988, Kohn, 1994). In contrast to the literature, the teachers in the study thought that taking the favorite item could help the child to regulate his behavior. Likewise, if the misbehavior stems from that item, primarily toys, they tend to have it and keep it until the end of the day.

The present study was limited to eighteen preschool teachers working in private preschool institutions, and it was found that there were limited studies on reinforcement and punishment in the literature review in preschool settings. In this respect, more detailed studies should be conducted on using behaviorism techniques by preschool teachers. On the other hand, training should be given for teachers to learn alternative methods other than reinforcement and punishment, and positive and negative effects should be explained to teachers based on the contrasting thoughts found in the literature review. Teachers should choose the best classroom management technique based on their experience when learning a new method. Also, as stated in

the literature, it is recommended to provide classroom management training to teachers, as reinforcement and punishment focus on the child's external motivation and may cause the child to focus only on the reinforcement practice to be given without focusing on the reasons for the behavior.

The findings of the present study found that the teachers participating in the study supported behaviorist techniques use, and their thoughts and practices were emphasized. These techniques' benefits and negative impacts can be emphasized in future studies. Long-term studies should be conducted on the effects of reinforcement and punishment on children when they reach the following grades. This literature should focus more on preschool education institutions and teacher's experiences with reinforcement and punishment, so the literature should be developed in this direction. Along with different and alternative discipline methods, children should be supported to learn and experience appropriate behaviors and decrease inappropriate behaviors.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Giriş

Davranışçılara ve Skinner'ın (1953) anlayışına göre, nesnel metodolojiler yalnızca insanların dış uyaranlara ve bu uyaranlara verdikleri tepkileri inceleyebilir. Davranışçılar gözlem ve deney yöntemlerini kullanmışlardır. Pekiştirme ve ceza kavramları, Skinner tarafından popüler hale getirilen ve eğitimciler tarafından yıllardır kullanılan bir disiplin biçimidir. Bireyin hoş olmayan bir eylemde bulunmasının ardından davranışın devam etmesini önlemek için, bir başkası onu istemediği bir duruma soktuğunda veya istediği duruma erişmesine izin verilmediğinde ceza uygulanır.

Bu çalışma, davranışçı yöntemin ışığında, okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin pekiştirme ve ceza kullanımına ilişkin düşünce ve uygulamalarını araştırmıştır. Araştırmanın sonuçları, özel sektörde çalışan okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin sıklıkla bu yöntemleri benimsediğini ve olumlu görüşlere sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu sonuçlar, en popüler pekiştirme tekniklerinin çocukların motivasyonunu artırmada yararlı bir araç olarak görüldüğünü göstermiştir. Bu çalışmada ayrıca, istenilen davranışların artırılması için motivasyonun gerekliliği vurgulanmıştır. Okul öncesi öğretmenleri öğrencilerin motivasyonunu ve istenilen davranışları artırmak için pekiştirme yöntemini kullanmıştır ve bu bulgu literatürle paralellik göstermektedir. Ancak okul öncesi dönemde pekiştirme ve cezaların uygulanmasına ilişkin kavram ve yöntemleri inceleyen yalnızca sınırlı sayıda çalışma bulunmaktadır. Öğretmenler "aferin, tebrikler" gibi sözel övgüleri en çok kullandıkları pekiştirme yöntemi olarak belirtmişlerdir. Uygulamalarda en çok kullanılan diğer bir metod ise fiziksel olarak çocuğu onaylamaktır bunlar arasında başını okşamak en popüler olanıdır. Ayrıca sticker ya da çıkartmalar da popüler bir pekiştirme uygulaması olarak kullanılmıştır. Çoğu okul öncesi öğretmeni cezayı sınıflarında bir disiplin biçimi olarak kullandığını belirtmiştir. Görüşleri olumlu ve olumsuz olarak kategorilere ayrılmıştır ve öğretmenlerin çoğunluğunun ceza uygulamasına ilişkin olumlu tutuma sahip olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bazı öğretmenler ise istemeden cezayı kullandıklarını belirtmişlerdir. En yaygın olumlu fikir, sınıf ortamındaki uygunsuz davranışları düzeltmek için cezanın kullanılmasıdır, ve bu aynı davranışların gelecekte tekrarlanmasının engellenmesine yardımcı olacağı düşünülmektedir. Ceza, literatürde sıklıkla bu şekilde kullanılmaktadır. Olumsuz düşünceler arasında ceza stratejisi sonucunda öğrencilerin öğretmene karşı öfkelerinin artması da yer almaktadır. Bazı öğretmenler cezanın amaç dışı kullanımına dikkat çekmiştir. Literatüre göre bunun nedeni, alternatif yöntemlere ilişkin bilgi eksikliği veya alternatif bir yaklaşım kullanarak hedeflerine daha hızlı ulaşacaklarına dair güven eksikliği gibi faktörlerden kaynaklanmaktadır. Öte yandan en sık kullanılan time-out (mola) yönteminin cezalandırma tekniği olduğu belirtilmiştir ayrıca en sevdiği objeden mahrum bırakma da diğer en çok kullanılan ceza yöntemi olmuştur. Ayrıca, sözlü

uyarı en çok kullanılan diğer bir ceza yöntemi olarak birlikte öğretmenler ve öğrenciler arasındaki etkileşim üzerinde zararlı bir etkiye sahip olabileceği düşünülmektedir.

Yöntem

Bu çalışmada Okul Öncesi öğretmenlerinin deneyimlerinden yola çıkılarak düşünceleri ele alındığı için nitel araştırma modellerinden olgubilim deseni tercih edilmiştir. Öğretmenler amaçlı örnekleme yöntemi ve ölçüt örnekleme yöntemi ile seçilmiştir ve örneklem grubunda özel sektörde çalışan 18 okul öncesi öğretmeni yer almıştır. Öğretmenlere, yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşme formatında sorular sorulmuş ve ses kaydıyla birlikte kaydedilip, yazıya aktarılmış ve tematik analizi yapılmıştır.

Bulgular

Bu çalışma okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin pekiştirme ve ceza yöntemlerini sınıflarında kullandıklarını ve pekiştirme için olumlu düşüncelerinin olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Öğretmenler, sınıf yönetiminde en çok olumlu pekiştirmeyi kullanmaktadırlar ve olumlu görüşleri bulunmaktadır. En çok çocukların motivasyonlarını artırmak ve istedik davranışları artırmak için kullanılması gerektiği görüşünü savunulurken, olumsuz düşünceler arasında çocuğun içsel motivasyonunu engellediği yer almaktadır. Ancak okul öncesi öğretmenlerinin, genel olarak ceza yöntemiyle ilgili olumsuz görüşleri bulunmaktadır fakat yine de bu yöntemi kullanmaya devam ettiklerini belirtmişlerdir. En çok kullanılan olumlu pekiştirme yöntemi sözel olarak onaylama olurken, olumsuz pekiştirme yöntemi serbest oyun sürelerini uzatmak olmuştur. En çok kullanılan olumlu ceza yöntemi ise mola vermek olurken, olumsuz ceza yöntemi sevilen bir oyuncağın/objenin çocuktan alınması olmuştur.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Bulgular, araştırmaya katılan öğretmenlerin davranışçı tekniklerin kullanımını desteklediğini, sınıflarında kullanımlarına ilişkin olumlu düşünce ve uygulamalara sahip olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Gelecek çalışmalarda bu tekniklerin yararları ve olumsuz etkileri üzerine çalışmalar yürümelidir. Okul öncesi sınıflarında pekiştirme ve cezanın çocuklar üzerindeki etkileri konusunda uzun süreli çalışmalar yapılmalıdır. Ayrıca, literatür daha çok okul öncesi eğitim kurumları ve öğretmenlerin pekiştirme ve ceza deneyimlerine odaklanmalıdır, dolayısıyla literatür bu yönde geliştirilmelidir. Farklı ve alternatif disiplin yöntemleriyle birlikte çocukların uygun davranışları öğrenmeleri, deneyimlemeleri ve uygunsuz davranışları azaltmaları desteklenmelidir.