

Individualized Teacher-Child Relationship (ITCR) Strategy to Enhance Academic Performance of Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

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Abstract

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common psychological disorder of childhood. This disorder has negative impact on the students' learning. Teachers tackle and handle this problem in a variety of ways based on their knowledge and experience. Similarly I also had ADHD children in my class understudy. Teaching to ADHD children was a challenging job for me because they had extreme energy and restlessness in their behaviour and were unable to focus while learning something. This Action Research had been designed to solve this immediate problem with a major focus on the adjustment of their behaviour and improve academic learning outcomes. In order to achieve the objectives I used Williford's strategy of "individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR). This strategy provides important contexts for the promotion of children's emotional health and learning. The data were collected through multiple means; class assessments, observational notes and weekly discussions with the subjects. It was found that individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR) strategy is effective for teaching ADHD children and it has a positive impact on students' behaviour and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Action research, ADHD, individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR)

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Introduction

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a common psychological disorder of childhood that may persist till the adulthood. The primary signs and symptoms of ADHD are low or insufficient attention and over energetic or hyper activity condition of a child. The signs of the ADHD are most prominent and obvious in the age cohort from 3 to 12 years. The intensity of the disorder can be mild, moderate or severe. This disorder is more or less gender specific because mostly it is found with male children than in females and its ratio can reach up to 5:1. As more male children are prone to this disorder therefore it is common observation that more boys in the classroom show hyperactivity and inattention as compared to the girls of the same age group. The ADHD children are source of great challenge for teacher because they generally create discipline problem in the classroom and show average or below average academic performance if left unattended. A question in my mind; *“how can we adjust their behaviour and improve their academic learning?”* served as the core idea for this action research.

I conducted this action research in a primary school where I taught for one year to realise this study. In my under study classroom of grade one, over the past few weeks I had been observing and noticing some students who were not behaving well in the classroom. They sought more attention and energy of class teacher than other students as far as academic learning and behavioural tuning were concerned. I selected three children, A, B, and C, who comparatively had have higher unrest, carelessness and even not performing well on reading and dictation in English. Although they were very active, sharp and vibrant in and outside the classroom but their academic performance was neither up to the mark nor improving even after getting continuous attention and assistance from me other teachers. Their hyper-energy and inattention in academic learning were clear pointers of psychological disorder. When I consulted this case with the psychiatrist then I came to know that they were facing with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) of different intensities. In the beginning, their attention deficit and hyperactive behaviour made me feel drained. I spend more time in controlling and patrolling them than teaching in the classroom.

I discussed his case with my fellow teachers and also reviewed related literature on ADHD so that the problem could be well explored and understood properly and then solved. After knowing and understanding the problem I explored a range of strategies and solutions that could be applied to improve their behaviour and academic performance. The purpose of my Action Research was to explore and analyze Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) students, identify the academic problems faced by them and adjust my teaching method and strategies to manage and adjust their behaviour so that children listen instructions carefully, control their impulses and perform better in class assessments. In fact, my main focus was to help them control

their impulsive behaviour by themselves, be independent learners and achieve better grades in classroom.

Literature Review

Attention Deficit and Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) is source of other problems that range from intra to inter-personal. It is a common observation that the effect and impact of ADHD is mild during physical activities but vigour during academic learning because hyperactive children cannot concentrate and are constantly restless from inside therefore it is difficult for them to behave normal in the classroom setting. As the ADHD behaviour is more evident in passive mode it can be source of disarray and disturbance in educational institutions (Hartz, Williford, & Koomen, 2016). Children ratio up to 30% or more demonstrates disruptive and twitchy behaviour at home and in the school (Egger & Angold, 2006). In the classroom the ADHD behaviour of both girls and boys is more robust as compared outside of the classroom. Similarly ADHD girls practice more word exchange and than boys whereas ADHD boys practice physical acts and sometimes physically assault their fellows (Abikoff & Jensen, 2002).

The inattentiveness and restlessness if not directed constructively can result in negative activities and attitude of child. Abikoff and Jensen stated that hyperactive children have difficulties in interacting with others, display squabbling, poor friendship skills and poor communication skills (Abikoff & Jensen, 2002). According to Dendato, being a bullying child or bully or victim can be part of hyperactive pattern of behaviour (Dendato & Diener, 1986).

However, children at early age who show inattention and restlessness in the class are likely to miss opportunity to gain essentials skills and experiences necessary for next stages of academic and social lives (Doumen, et al., 2008), consequently such children and school environment both are at risk due to the mismatch of behaviour (Bierman, et al., 2013). Preschoolers' classroom is a place where their social and emotional learning occurs and complex behaviour is developed through meaningful interaction with teachers and peers. The quality of learning experiences depends upon the quality of teacher-child interaction and relations (Williford et al., 2017), the nature and strength of this relationship have long term effects on the normal and challenging children's academic performance and achievements; Responsive and repetitive interactions reduces children's stress and improve motivation that ultimately help overcome ADHD traits. (Hatfield & Williford, 2017). Tested and trusted teaching methods and techniques based on scientific approach exist to teach early grades children effectively but majority of the teachers do not have information, knowledge or access and required skills to use such interventions (Reinke, et al., 2014)

In a classroom boring teaching method, non-congenial environment, exam anxiety and isolation can result in "displacement activities" (Greenglass, 2006). Special

attention from teachers and parents can improve student's attention and help diminish hyperactive behaviour. Griffiths suggests parents should take help from "cuddle and read" approach to reduce the potential for receptive attention deficit at home (2002). Nigel Mellor (2004) pointed out that learning difficulties do not necessarily lead to hyperactivity but it can be the outcome of other psychological and biological factors.

Action Research Question

When I started teaching class first, there were three students who were facing Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). For the sake of confidentiality the three are named as A, B and C. I observed that the student A was suffering with mild while B and C with moderate level of disorder. I wanted to teach these students how to be focus, listen attentively, to complete any given tasks and behave in normal way. For this I needed suitable strategy and methodology. I found answers of my queries after reviewing literature on how to teach students faced with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Ultimately I came up with research question: What is the relationship between individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR) and child's behaviour and how it can affect learning outcomes?

As I wanted to help them in learning and adjust their behaviour to an acceptable level through equipping them with skills and strategies therefore I did smart planning. Based on peer discussion and in-depth literature reviews I found that providing clear instructions, giving positive feedback, building relationship of trust, being well organized and well planned could increase their motivation and these practices in turn could lead to successful learning outcomes.

Planning Action

Based on my observations I decided to follow Williford's model of *individualized teacher-child relationship* (ITCR) (Williford., 2016) in order to motivate them through positive feedback. I was also of the opinion that developing good relationship with student will help achieve my goals i.e. acceptable behaviour and improved learning outcomes. Positive feedback as suggested by child psychology could be the key to success. I also evaluated my behaviour to find any shortcoming or misalignment, if any. Soon I realized that I was inconsistent in actions and wobbly with my students. Therefore I readjusted my behaviour and decided to show more patience and flexibility in behaviour. I also noticed that the day when the activities were well planned and well organized that day I could engage all the three students more actively in different class tasks and they were less noisy and disturbing. Similarly, if they were provided strategic praise and positive reinforcement then they completed their work.

Methodology

In order to achieve the set objectives of the study *SMART and Systematic* approach was used. I selected Williford ITCR model and blended it with Mosier's model of positive reinforcement (Mosier, 2009) (Williford., 2016). Williford's "*individualized teacher-child relationship* (ITCR) model provide important contexts for the promotion of children's emotional health and learning (Williford., 2016) whereas Mosier's (2009) strategy helped me to use of positive reinforcement, empathetic understanding, attentive listening and being consistent (Mosier, 2009).

I applied this blended model by modifying it to individual child needs. For this purpose I began to initiate relationship with student and listening attentively in order to make them know that they are being listened. I also started providing guidance and counselling individually to the students and told them what are they expected to do in the classroom. In a log book I penned down their activities and observed changes and also let them know the positive development in their behaviour and improvement in learning. I planned and organized each and everything component of their daily lesson plan very carefully and implemented very consistently. Classroom rules updated with student's suggestions and make them clear about rules. Incentives and tokens were provided for positive reinforcement. Timely feedback was provided along with further suggestions. I, deliberately, started ignoring their minor mistakes to develop their interest and confidence in academic learning.

I recorded and analysed the data of written tests and feedback from students in order trail the changes. In this way I was in better position to give them a feedback and guidance to correct their mistakes and overcome shortcomings so that, next time, they could be more focused in their tasks and act moderately.

Data during the whole period was collected very carefully with an objective to verify the usefulness of the *individualized teacher-child relationship* (ITCR) strategy. I collected data through class assessments, activities, observational notes of behaviour in classroom and weekly discussions. For this purpose written tests, rule abiding checklist before and after the implementation of my strategy were used as data collection tools. In order to have an in-depth insight and understanding of the progress and problem I also conducted brief discussion sessions on weekly basis with the subjects.

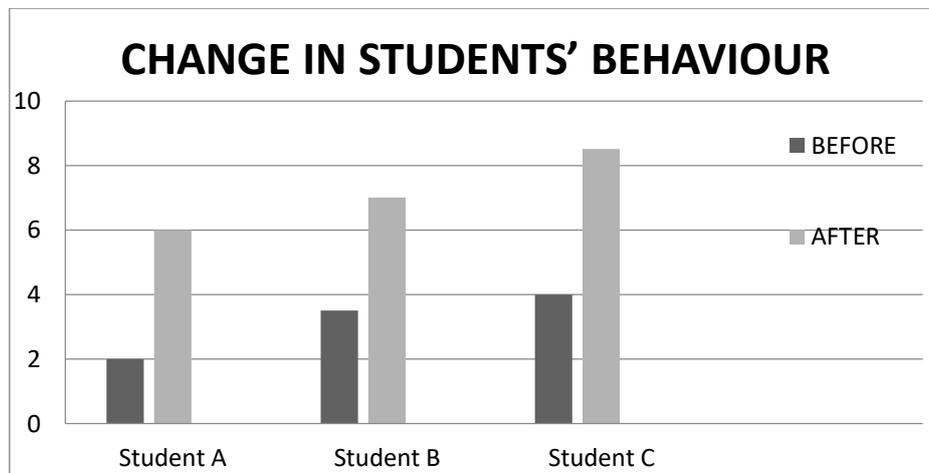
Data analyses

I implemented the individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR) strategy and positive reinforcement strategy. The grades of student's assessments before and after implementation were analyzed and graphed. The graph 1 shows average improvement by 7 points in the class assessments. The graph 2 shows the individual improvement in behaviour and attention of students. It shows clear improvement in after bar.

Table 1:

Scaling Students Behaviour

Students	BEFORE	AFTER
Student A	2	6
Student B	3.5	7
Student C	4	8.5

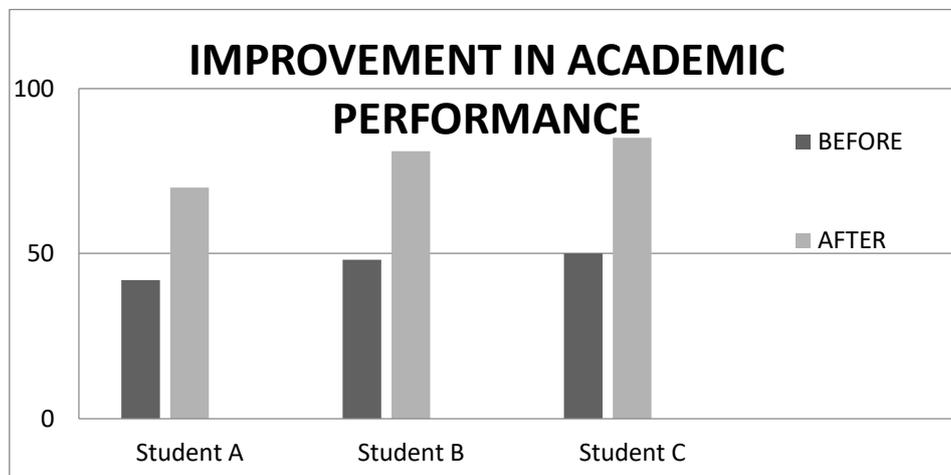


The following table presents pre and post intervention scores. As a result of *individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR)* a significant improvement in the academic performance of the ADHD children is evident. Interestingly students B and C, with severe ADHD problem, also sowed great progress and they performed very well in the post intervention test. This testify the effectiveness of the teaching strategy of Williford's based on the *individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR)*.

Table 2:

Pre and Post Intervention Diction Scores

Students	Pre	Post
Student A	42	70
Student B	48	81
Student C	50	85



Results and discussion

Behavioural adjustment and enhancing academic efficiency of ADHD students was an interesting but challenging job. I used SMART and systematic approach to achieve the objectives and get desired results smartly. At first students' learning needs were analyzed and assessed then teaching method and strategies were designed and shaped accordingly so that learning could be maximised. As it was my first experience of teaching at early grade level therefore every experience was a novel lesson and source of enjoyment for me. I implemented the strategy of individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR) and positive reinforcement this resulted in significant improvement in the behaviour and grades of students. I believe that only an informed teacher can be the best teacher. In order to be an effective teacher, I always try to make my teaching responsive to the situation and apply suitable strategies and change them according to the need and behaviour of the child. I call this process "teaching tuning or adjustment". I believe that before tagging and blaming an ADHD child one must analyse student's individual learning needs and apply best possible teaching strategies accordingly.

Conclusion

On the basis of the results of this study it can be concluded that individualized teacher-child relationship (ITCR) strategy was very helpful for me in teaching children with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD). ITCR strategy had a positive impact on controlling students' behaviour and as well as improving academic learning outcomes. This successful action research has reinforced my teaching therefore I will utilize this strategy in future teaching as well so that students with ADHD learning disorders could be helped.

Reflection

Individualized teacher-child relationship has a positive impact on students' behaviour and learning. The problem of attention deficit and hyperactivity can be minimized through individualized care and personalized teaching. I think other teachers can also practice this and such other strategies to adjust behaviour of ADHD children and can improve their learning. Although the efforts that are made are time consuming and demand patience but its rewards are very pleasant both for teacher and students. This study focused on effective teaching and learning strategies only but during the period I observed that there is need of further studies on improving ADHD students' peer relationship, confidence and classroom discipline.

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