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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A RESEARCH PLAN FOR IMPROVING PRIMARY PUPILS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT AFTER SCHOOL PROVISION IN LONDON

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ABSTRACT

It is generally acknowledged that tuition benefits students and primary pupils but little is known about the benefits of after school tuition and how parents and teachers could help primary pupils achieve in this activity. One way by which parents and carers feel they will raise a child's standards is by private tuition. It is suggested that parents and carers would benefit from a training programme using cognitive style research aimed at facilitating interest and reflectivity. The training programme is based on data gathered by a survey which informs parents and teachers how to help pupils achieve goals set by the school. This paper suggests how organisational and parents' goals for pupils may be achieved through after school tuition.

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INTRODUCTION

'Parents in the UK are much less likely to spend more than an hour per day helping with their children's homework compared with parents in other countries, a survey suggests' (Coughlan, 2018). A survey of 27,830 parents in 29 countries found only 11% of UK parents spent an hour per day helping their children. Consequently, the UK falls behind such countries as India. Furthermore, poorer pupils are likely to receive less tutoring and help with homework. However, 'Private tutoring is the "hidden secret" allowing better-off families to stop their less able children from failing at school' (Richardson, 2017). Research also revealed 56% of Asian and 42% of Black students say they had experienced tutoring, compared with 25% of White children (Richardson, 2017). Poorer children and families often have high aspirations, but lack social capital. They therefore need access to better information about the options open to them, and appropriate support and advice. Although there is adequate information regarding the outcome of private tuition, little is known about the benefits of after school tuition and how progress is measured. Also there are no guidelines for parents and teachers to develop confidence and motivation among primary pupils.

This paper discusses how the use of styles of primary pupils and by parents may help improve attainment during after school tuition and at school.

ABOUT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

School Subjects: All schools in London offer a wide range of subjects such as English, mathematics, science, art, history, geography, music, (ICT), physical education and religious education. All schools teach personal, social, health and citizenship education.

Special educational needs (SEN): All schools are required to have a policy of SEN under the 1996 Education Act. They follow an approach to identifying, assessing and monitoring pupils' special needs. Most pupils with special needs are taught in mainstream schools. Some of these have centres which provide for a range of learning difficulties.

Language service: Bilingual staff can help pupils in the transition to school using a range of community languages. Bilingual teachers help with communication between home and school in terms of:

- Progress of pupils
- Pastoral care
- Advice on choosing subjects and careers
- Information about the British school system

The schemes employ staff to ensure children experience a wide range of child-centred activities, for example, arts and crafts, computer programmes, cooking, drama, creative play, football, pottery and quiet areas used for reading (The London Borough of Hounslow, 2018). There are many facilities at school which invite pupils to broaden their skills and gain others. However, it is suggested that some pupils need to be encouraged to develop interests by providing conditions where they feel they could thrive. After school tuition offers an alternative, where there is more one-to-one interaction and support. This would enable teachers to develop academic skills the pupils are lacking by using appropriate strategies such as the learning style of the pupil.

RESEARCH SOLUTION

My employment is at an independent centre and provider of after school Maths and English for primary pupils. The centre consists of a variety of ethnic groups with a mixture of socio-economic statuses. Parents pay monthly and prices are set based on year grouping. The price ranges are found on the provider's website. The main objective of the centre is to cater for children who have expressed interest in after-school tuition or those whose parents have a pressing need to see their children progress at school, particularly in the core subjects of Maths and English. After-school support that focuses on tutoring in both core subjects for Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 will help meet these client needs. The marketing of courses lies in the vicinity of the centre and is targeted to parents who may be interested in the centre's courses and resources, such as relevant workbooks and teachers. A central aim of managers at the centre is to develop strategies to enhance marketing procedures. An envisaged result is that parents would be shown evidence of students' progress through a presentation of collected data from students and parents' comments. Parents and carers will be informed to make decisions about the suitability of the centre for their children. An important aim of the centre is to present itself in a favourable light and build a strong brand based on a positive reputation.

It is envisaged that teachers will retain students' and parents' interest and confidence in the centre as a provider of primary education, but also an establishment that proactively creates the right conditions to help children learn new materials much more easily, but also develop holistically.

ORGANISATION BACKGROUND

The centre requires a large number of applications for the after school education of primary pupils in order to be profitable and would like to expand its potential for delivery of a variety of courses. This is in line with its aim to develop a primary after school service, as well as secondary and post compulsory education outside of school hours. Finally, the centre would be looking to run courses which are accredited. Pupils are initially assessed before beginning their year-books based on their academic levels and competences. Teachers go through children's books in English and Maths and make corrections.

As a teacher of Key Stage 1, I ask parents to target particular areas to help students improve their performance and achieve their target results. By marking booklets, teachers can see where pupils are achieving targets and where they need to develop. Detailed notes are then made for each student and quantitative performance data is presented in the form of a table.

OBJECTIVES

The expected outcome of the research is to know enough about parents' support of primary school pupils so as to design a training plan for parents. The outcome of the research will also help teaching staff at the centre plan and devise strategies for achieving the highest standards possible for after school education.

To conduct the research, decisions need to be made about:

- Location of the centre and type
- Design of a case study, including aims and objectives, research questions and sampling procedures
- A large enough sample size or population that is representative of the target market, so that repeatable business decisions that meet most of their needs can be made
- Data collection procedures
- Data analysis techniques
- Writing a report and disseminating findings to the client and other education providers in London.

Schools would be interested, as this would help them reach their expected standards of competency in reading, writing, grammar, comprehension and maths. They may want also to use the research findings to develop training programmes for parents. In this way, parents and pupils, as well as schools, will benefit.

The overarching research objectives are:

- Examine parents' contribution to addressing Maths and English of primary pupils attending after school tuition.
- Examine ways of designing training to help parents address children's gaps in knowledge of English and Maths.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

The review addresses the assessment of how cognitive styles may be useful for the development of a training programme for pupils. Teachers are sometimes faced with the predicament of setting tasks which suit individuals' styles of learning and providing the appropriate learning environment which helps them to aim achieve learning goals. It may be that those who are relatively successful problem solvers are reflective and will take their time while problem solving. This would inevitably influence their achievement in the classroom. The aim of the research is to identify if interest of subject material influences children's performances in the class-room when they engage in problem-solving. It could be that being interested in a particular subject provides the facility for pupils to grasp significant concepts of a topic'. There is sufficient research to suggest that how interested pupils are in topics is related to

their levels of reflectivity and this has a bearing on their analysis of information presented to them during after school tuition. A study conducted by Rasheed- Karim (2014) showed that both boys and girls tend to spend more time with things they find interesting compared with those which are uninteresting or neither interesting nor disinteresting to them. That is, pupils are more reflective with things of interest. It is also evident that the age range of 7-8 is changeable in what they find interesting as hobbies and interests are not yet well developed or are only beginning to form. The types of strategies participants used on tasks such as the matching familiar figures test were ordered problem solving strategies and this was mostly among girls. Teachers could train boys to problem-solve for example using the strategies which girls use. As pupils are changeable from what they like or prefer to do, it is recommended that teachers should be more concerned with how pupils examine and analyse tasks and problems regardless of perceived impulsivity/reflectivity.

Interests: An examination of discussions of styles points to a definition by Snow (1992). He suggests that interests draw individuals' attention towards particular directions where the object of interest elicits excitement and joy or a challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is noteworthy that some children could be more interested in schoolwork or a particular area than others and this makes them learn more about it. Such interest may be symptomatic of the object's novelty (Loewenstein, 1994); internal motivating forces (Bandura, 1977); social-cultural constraints such as access individuals have to aspects of a culture, knowledge constraints and self-perceptions of ability (Deci, 1992). Kolb (1971) on the other hand, discussed that interest arises when characteristics of tasks and situations coincide with styles of individuals. Sternberg and Zhang (2001) concluded that dispositions of individuals and styles facilitate particular interests.

Impulsivity versus Reflectivity and Global versus Detailed Analysis: Researchers discussed how impulsive and reflective individuals process information in terms of global and detailed analysis. For example, Morgan (1997) reported that in school activities that require problem solving skills, impulsive children are less likely than their reflective peers to use effective strategies. During problem solving, when impulsive children discover effective strategies, they seldom employ such strategies consistently. Morgan also investigated whether impulsive children were global or detailed problem-solvers. He identifies that impulsive children process perceptual information in a global manner whilst reflective individuals are more analytical. Zelinker and Jeffrey (1976) also reported that reflective individuals tend to analyse stimuli into component features, whereas impulsives treat the stimulus as a whole. According to Zelinker and Jeffrey, reflectives would excel on tasks requiring attention to detail, whereas impulsives would perform better on tasks amenable to a global approach such as template matching. Zelinker and Jeffrey found that impulsives performed better than reflectives when a change to be detected in a visual discrimination task was located in the contour (global analysis) rather than within the image (detailed analysis).

Impulsivityversus Reflectivity and Academic Performance: A number of studies reported that reflectives performed better than impulsives on tasks such as matching to samples (Kogan 1976), inductive reasoning (Ault 1973; Kagan, Pearson and Welch 1966), serial learning (Kagan 1966; Kagan, Rosman, Day, Albert, and Phillips, 1964), recognition memory (Siegel, Kirasic and Kilberg,1973), reading (Erickson, Stahl and Rinehart 1985; Halpern 1984; Kagan 1965). Cathcart and Liedtke (1969) recognised the superior performance of reflectives on arithmetic achievement whilst Klein, Blockovich, Buchalter and Huyghe (1976) found that reflectives made fewer errors than impulsives on convergent problem solving tasks. An explanation by Fink and McCown (1993) is that impulsivity seems to be inversely related to academic achievement. Impulsivity seems to be a moderator variable between intelligence and academic success. For example, individuals who are high in impulsivity and have high academic ability tend to have lower grades than individuals with high academic ability and low impulsivity (Helmers, Young and Pihl 1995; Zeidner 1995). An explanation is that individuals with poor academic performance tend to show an impulsive/careless problem – solving style. They use poorer problem solving strategies in tasks where the response is not as obvious and give the first answer that comes to mind (Fink and McCown 1993).

Others such as McMurran, Blair and Egan (2002) proposed that impulsivity may be an obstacle to learning in the early development years. For example, Sternberg and Zhang (2001) discussed that impulsive children make relatively more errors while reading prose, on serial recall tasks and visual discrimination. However, these studies do not discuss differences between boys and girls of school age. Of relevance, Gurian and Stevens (2004) as well as Sax (2005) elucidated that girls are better at object discrimination, can deal with moderate stress such as timed tests less successfully, have more serotonin and oxytocin and so make fewer impulsive decisions compared with boys. That is, girls tend to think more of the consequences of their actions.

METHODOLOGY

Rationale for the Design of a Case Study: A case study is an in-depth exploration of a system of individuals, events, activities and processes. Yin (2014) affirms that surveys cannot always answer the questions researchers pose but case studies using triangulation methods can guide data collection and analysis. Yin explains that researchers should interrelate phenomena and their contexts. Stake (1995), Miles and Huberman (1994), Merriam (1998) and Creswell and Creswell (2018) view the case as bounded by time, activity and process as well as involving one or more individuals. Request for participants is made from a London pool of parents and carers who use after school tuition centres. This is because London is typical of a multicultural city where people ranging in demographics can be found in workplaces. London is also my place of work and I am able to travel easily to education institutions to ask for participation. That is, the foci and boundaries of the research are identified by a group, and types of institutions by spatial location. The research therefore adopts epistemological stances of positivism (Yin, 2014) and constructivism (Merriam, 1998). These stances determine the data gathering procedures. That is, data gathering is in the form of figures which are descriptive and inferential statistics can be persuasive to policy makers if action plans are suggested for making changes in the workplace. To gain a broader understanding of the concerns of parents and carers about their child's progress in Maths and English, a qualitative approach may be used to provide a narrative account of their

views during interviews which can be used to illustrate findings from quantitative research. Gorard and Taylor (2004) asserted that triangulation between evidence produced by two different research methods is a simple way of combining evidence. Combining methods increases concurrent, convergent and construct validity of the research. It also increases the trustworthiness of analysis by a fuller, more rounded account, reducing bias and compensating for the weakness of one method through the strength of another (Parlesz and Lindsay, 2003).

Survey Questions: The purpose of the survey is to make generalisations from a sample of carers and parents to a population. This will enable the behaviour of parents and carers towards their child's academic progress in Maths and English be understood. The data is collected over time using the interview administered questionnaire (Fink, 2002). This method is preferred because the questionnaire can be completed quickly and it is economic in design. That is, a relatively large amount of information can be gathered from structured questions. The survey is presented using a cross-sectional design and identifies attributes of a large population from a small group of individuals. This procedure is cost effective and interviewees will use single-stage sampling where the researcher has access to the names of the population and can sample the people directly (Creswell, 2014). This investigation will take place at London borough after school tuition centres where parents and carers bring their children. These centres have common characteristics such as small classes, more one-to-one tuition etc. A survey is presented to parents which has themes of investigation for addressing a training design. These themes are created based on the aims and objectives of the investigation and literature such as the report presented by Grayson (2013) of parental engagement and narrowing the gap in attainment, outlining specific roles which parents could take. That is, primary schools should make more use of parents' specialist expertise; it is important for parents to be consulted and to feel that their opinions are valued; communications can be tailored to suit parents' individual circumstances. Furthermore, research indicates that a number of parenting characteristics are statistically associated with children's levels of achievement, for example, parents' relationship and interactions with the child/children.
The report pointed out that poorer children and families often have high aspirations but lack social capital. It would therefore be beneficial if they have access to appropriate information about the options open to them which offer support and advice. In the interest of professional etiquette and ethics, students are not explicitly asked about their progress; however, parents or carers will be given a survey to complete instead. It is important that the sample size of those completing the form is large enough for appropriate conclusions to be made. This survey is Appendix One.

Sample and Location: The research will use data gathered from a sample population of parents that use the tutoring service. Sample data about students' progress will be collected over a year.

Training for Parents: A way of raising teaching performance regarding pupil learning is to improve teaching strategies and the learning strategies of pupils. How a person feels about themselves will affect their performance in terms of beneficial interaction with other pupils and not being overly withdrawn or anxious etc. The home environment is essential when there are parents who are willing to provide learning resources (e.g. books, computer equipment, access to educational software such as the internet etc.) in the home or family which will affect intellectual development such as reading skills and enthusiasm for learning and exploring new ideas and interests with their children (Riding, 2002). Griffin and Morrison (1997) reported that home literacy environment was a good predictor of a child's achievement and Durbin, Darling, Steinberg and Brown (1993) found that parenting styles affect attainment. While uninvolved parents resulted in pupils who are not able to have adult values, indulgent parents produced pupils who lead a culture of 'fun'. It is suggested by Riding (2002) that learning strategy may be developed by the pupil to help in situations where their cognitive style (habitual mode of processing of information) does not naturally fit the task being done. Pupils should be encouraged to consider what modes they prefer. Options include the process of selection where pupils are encouraged to use whatever learning is right for them as individuals. A specific programme of strategy development could be part of the personal and social education of pupils. Riding concludes there is an interactive effect of the home, peers, individual characteristics of pupils and their observable behaviours.

A proposed agenda for training parents might include:

- Maintaining a positive, caring relationship with child/children. Examine their goals, school reports and after school tuition progress on a regular basis.
- Speak to teachers about the child/children's progress each week after tuition.
- Re-examine the reasons for after school tuition.
- Address short term and long term aims for their child/children's education.
- Investigate ways in which they can use their child/children's interests to develop learning plans.
- Provide the necessary resources at home which can complement after school tuition resources.
- Examine ways in which they can develop their child/children's learning strategies using ideas from cognitive style research.

CONCLUSION

Where there are a variety of people from different ethnic backgrounds such as found in London, it is suggested that the parents from these backgrounds may be helped in training programmes by the provision of interpreters or language classes (Grayson, 2013). In this way, they may be able to communicate with their children where the mode of communication at school is in English. Training sessions held once each term will enable carers and parents to communicate their concerns to teachers. The teachers are also helped because they may be encouraged to develop learning plans which may benefit pupils. Centres of learning would also benefit because as parents/carers see their child/children improve, many more families may be encouraged to use after school tuition. An extension of the methodology may include a semi-structured interview where parents and carers explain specific points made in the survey. This will broaden understanding of how teachers and educational centres can provide support for pupils. Such qualitative research may also present conditions for centres to expand their business objective of increasing pupil registration.

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APPENDIX

Survey

This is a survey which asks parents to what extent they support their children's education. The objective is to help parents and teachers, through training, to support learners. The results of this survey will be shared with institutions in London who may benefit from the findings.

Please answer the following questions

1. When did you enrol your child/children in classes after school?

Less than one year ago ☐

1-2 years ago ☐

2-3 years ago ☐

3 years ago or more ☐

OTHER:

2. What is your child/children's gender?

Male
☐
Female

☐
OTHER:

3. Do you teach your children?

Yes OR NO
☐ ☐

4. How many days per week do you spend supporting your child/children's study?

1-2 days per week ☐

3-4 days per week ☐

More than 4 days per week ☐

5. How many hours do you spend with each child per day to provide additional study support?

1-2 hours ☐

2-3 hours ☐

3-5 hours ☐

More than 6 hours ☐

6. Which subject(s) do you ask for at classes?

Maths and English

Maths

English

ANY OTHER:

7. Do you teach your child/children?

Yes OR No

8. Can you please state why you allow your child/children to attend classes after school?

Improve in school

Increase interest in subjects

Be more careful in their studies

Be attentive to teachers

Be more sociable

ANY OTHER:

9. How do you help your child/children progress and achieve better grades at school?

Going through school materials

Using popular education materials e.g study books

Using online materials

Experimenting and observing nature etc.

Going to libraries

Going to museums

Providing rewards for studying

ANY OTHER:

10. How can tutors help your child achieve?

Providing intensive courses

One-one tuition

Increasing their interest ☐

Target weaknesses and strengths ☐

Managing behaviour ☐

ANY OTHER:

11. Do you speak to the tutors about your child/children's progress?

1-2 weeks ☐

2-3 weeks ☐

3-4 weeks ☐

More than 4 weeks ☐

12 Do you discuss how you can help your child/children do better in classes?

Yes OR No

☐ ☐

13. Does discussing your child/children improve their grades at school?

Yes OR No

☐ ☐

14. Can you please state what other things you can do to help your child/children achieve?

Encourage child/children interests out school ☐

Spend more time teaching ☐

Speak to teachers about weaknesses ☐

Ask child/children about what they find difficult at school ☐

ANY OTHER:

15. What types of support can after school teachers offer you that would be helpful?

Behaviour management ☐

Resources to encourage learning ☐

Recoding progress ☐

Encourage motivation to learn ☐

ANY OTHER:

16. Has your child/children improved since beginning classes?

Yes ☐ OR No ☐

Thank you for your participation

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