

Rewards and punishments from the perspective of behaviorism learning theory and its implementation on differentiated learning in elementary schools

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ABSTRACT

Differentiated learning, which emphasizes tailoring instruction to meet diverse student needs, aligns closely with behaviorism learning theory that focuses on observable changes in behavior through reinforcement. Although differentiated learning is recommended to accommodate students' needs, it is still considered unfair by some because it treats children differently. The purpose of this study is to describe rewards and punishments from the perspective of behaviorism learning theory and its implementation in differentiated learning in elementary schools. This study uses a qualitative case study approach. The subjects in this study were elementary school teachers and students in their classes. Data were collected through literature studies, in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. Miles and Huberman's data analysis was used as a data analysis technique in this study. The results of the first study showed that stimulus and response are interconnected and if accompanied by the application of good rewards and punishments, positive attitudes can be formed in students. Then the results of the second study showed that the use of rewards and punishments could lead students to behave better and could increase their motivation and cognitive abilities.



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INTRODUCTION

The achievement of a learning objective can be seen from the satisfactory learning outcomes of students. Satisfactory learning outcomes are obtained from the learning process that activates students. Learning outcomes are said to be successful if the teaching material can be applied effectively in the learning process, which is indicated by changes in students from not understanding to understanding (Nabillah et al., 2025). Therefore, teachers need to understand learning theory well. This is because learning theory gives birth to many models, methods, etc., in learning. This study focuses on the theory of behaviorism learning.

The first learning theory that scientifically described human and animal learning was behaviorism (Kay & Kibble, 2016). Famous figures in behaviorism theory are Watson, Thorndike, Pavlov, Skinner, etc. This theory also explains stimulus and response in psychology (Skinner, 1986). This means that each stimulus given to different people can produce different responses. The response must be directed to the better, especially in learning. In learning so that the behavior of all students changes for the better, teachers can apply rewards and punishments. In human resource management, the concept of rewards and punishments is designed with the main goal of encouraging people to perform better and do good deeds (Syawaludin & Marmoah, 2018).

Rewards and punishments applied in learning can make someone's behavior better. Because in certain situations, teachers can give rewards or punishments to students (Cooper, 1994). Praise and rewards are examples of positive reinforcement (rewards) that can make desired behavior more likely to be repeated. Undesirable behavior can be reduced by punishments. In the context of behaviorist principles, especially reinforcement (rewards) and punishment (punishments), they have been used widely to shape discipline, learning achievement, extrinsic motivation, learning motivation, etc (Amiruddin et al., 2022; Indrawati et al., 2021; Kusumawati et al., 2023). Therefore, the application of rewards and punishments greatly influences the learning atmosphere in the classroom, especially in the 21st century.

Differentiated learning is an approach to teaching and learning that is relevant to the 21st century (Wibowo et al., 2025). C.A. Tomlinson developed differentiated learning in 1999, drawing largely from research on brain compatibility and Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Gentry et al., 2013). Differentiated learning is a series of thoughtful choices made by teachers that focus on the needs of their students (Gray, 2020; Wormeli, 2023). In differentiated learning, teachers actively adapt the curriculum, teaching strategies, materials, learning exercises, and student work to meet the requirements of individual students and small groups of students in order to optimize learning opportunities for each student in the classroom (Hillier, 2011). Adapting information, procedures, and end products to students' needs, learning styles, and abilities is the foundation of differentiated learning (Gentry et al., 2013). When viewed from the learning style, the application of rewards and punishments in differentiated learning certainly provides pros and cons. Teachers must be objective in implementing rewards and punishments in differentiated learning. However, students may not see the same thing, especially for elementary school children aged 7-8 years. Moreover, the latest curriculum in Indonesia, namely the Merdeka Curriculum, highly prioritizes the student-centered approach and differentiated learning.

The purpose of this study is to describe rewards and punishments from the perspective of behaviorism learning theory and its implementation in differentiated learning in elementary schools. Research with a purpose that is almost similar to this study has been conducted by Syawaludin & Marmoah, (2018). The main difference is that this study discusses rewards and punishments in differentiated learning, while this study Syawaludin & Marmoah, (2018) discusses the application of rewards and punishments in lower and upper classes. This is certainly new in this study because the curriculum and characteristics of students and teachers are different because they have gone through the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken almost all sectors in the world, including education. From initially learning directly in class, it has changed to indirect learning using Zoom, etc. Even in Indonesia, there has been a change in the curriculum due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before COVID-19, Indonesia used the 2013 curriculum; then schools were given the option to implement the curriculum or the emergency curriculum. After that, the Merdeka curriculum was born, which is still used today. This certainly has a major impact on students' attitudes and the way teachers teach, which will affect the climate both during learning. Therefore, this study must be carried out because changes in sample characteristics and the use of rewards and punishments in differentiated learning can lead to an objective view of teachers because of their different applications.

Differentiated learning is highly promoted in the era of the Merdeka curriculum. It is in this curriculum era that the term Penggerak School is known. This research has another unique aspect, which is the school used. Researchers found that Penggerak School was best in Blitar City. This is indicated because the sample schools in this study are among the best in the Serenada program. Blitar City's Serenada (Sekolah Religius Nasionalis Berbudaya) program is a cutting-edge initiative to strengthen character education (Suryanah et al., 2023). This is certainly a concern because learning at that school can certainly differ from other schools, especially in the application of rewards and punishments. Several studies also show that the application of rewards and punishments, if carried out properly, appropriately, and wisely, will have a positive impact on student development, motivation, and performance (Kusumawati et al., 2023; Sidin, 2021). There are several differences and similarities between the two studies. However, the most unique aspect of this study is the location of the sample, a factor that has not been explored before. This uniqueness could certainly influence the differentiation methods used by teachers. This is crucial, as differentiated learning can sometimes lead to misconceptions. For example, misconceptions between teachers' understanding and implementation of differentiated learning (Anggara et al., 2023; Izza & Adi, 2023; Mulyanto et al., 2023). This of course means that the application of rewards and punishments will also affect learning. Therefore, under such conditions, this research is essential.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative case study approach. This study describes rewards and punishments from the perspective of behaviorism learning theory and its implementation in differentiated learning in an elementary school. This study was conducted at the elementary school level in December 2024. The sample for this study consisted of one classroom teacher and one class of first-grade students from an elementary school. The selected elementary school is included in the Penggerak

School in Blitar City, Indonesia. The quality of human resources in this study sample is considered very good. The number of Penggerak Schools in Blitar City is also still relatively small. Apart from that, the school is also listed among the provincial Adiwiyata schools and is recognized as one of the best organizers of the Serenada program. In addition, the teachers and students in this study were in one of the first classes to implement the Merdeka curriculum. This is important because since the Merdeka curriculum was introduced in Indonesia, there have been many changes such as the emergence of driving schools, driving teachers, etc.

Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and literature studies. Interviews were conducted with class teachers, questionnaires were given to students, and reference sources in books or journals. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, questionnaires, and literature studies. This was done so that bias would not occur in the results of this study. Interviews in this study were conducted in depth using interview guidelines. Interview guidelines in in-depth interviews function as a guide to direct the conversation, but still provide space for the interviewer to dig deeper and follow the developing flow of conversation. The interview guidelines in this study relate to the theory of behaviorism learning, the application and impact of reward and punishment, differentiated learning, the application of the Merdeka curriculum, reinforcement, and teacher demands in the curriculum. The interview guidelines used were valid with content validation by expert lecturers. This also applies to the questionnaire instrument. The questionnaire given to students covers three major things, namely the application of rewards, punishments, and differentiated learning.

This study uses two data analysis techniques. The first objective uses documentation techniques with data collected from literature studies. For literature studies, researchers used several sources from articles, books, and other online magazines to reach accurate conclusions. Then the second purpose, data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's qualitative analysis such as data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. In the interview, an interview transcript was also made. Then, the collected data was reduced. This reduction was done by sorting out important and unimportant information, especially in the interview transcript. In the results and discussion, the researcher also presents several interview transcripts that have been translated into English. From these things, we then see how they match the questionnaire answered by the students. Then, the data was presented and conclusions could be drawn according to the research objectives to be achieved. These steps are part of method triangulation, which clearly supports the credibility/validity of the results of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rewards and Punishments from the Perspective of Behaviorism Learning Theory

The first objective of this study is to describe rewards and punishments from the perspective of behaviorism learning theory. According to Steinberg, behaviorism is a behavioral science that focuses primarily on observable behavior, or what individuals “do” (Silk, 1981). In 1983, Skinner stated that: *“I am sometimes asked, ‘Do you think of yourself as you think of the organisms you study?’ The answer is yes. So far as I know, my behavior at any given moment has been nothing more than the product of my genetic endowment, my personal history, and the current setting”* (Boghossian, 2006). Behaviorism does not view internal mental states as constructivism does. The focus of behaviorism is on the external observation of valid relationships between and among externally observable stimuli and the resulting responses (Boghossian, 2006). So behaviorism views a behavior carried out by humans (stimulus and response), where this can be observed. According to Skinner in 1953, there are five steps that need to be taken when guiding the process of behaviorism change, namely: (1) setting behavioral goals, (2) determining appropriate reinforcement, (3) choosing procedures to change behavior, (4) implementing procedures and recording results, and (5) evaluating progress and revising as needed (Griffith & Hamza, 2006). Apart from Skinner, there are many figures who discuss behaviorism.

Thorndike is one of the famous figures in the theory of behaviorism. Thorndike wrote that the most basic type of learning is the creation of associations (relationships) between brain impulses (responses) that appear as behavior and sensory experiences (perceptions of stimuli or events) (Schunk, 2012). He thinks that selecting and connecting through trial and error is a common way for people to learn (Schunk, 2012). Thorndike proved this by conducting experiments on animals (Thorndike, 1911).

The experiment conducted by Thorndike is known as Thorndike's puzzle box. The experiment resulted in three laws, namely the law of readiness, the law of exercise, and the law of effect

(Syawaludin & Marmoah, 2018). Of the three laws, rewards and punishments are studied in more depth in the law of effect. The law of effect, or the law of consequence, is Thorndike's most famous explanation for trial and error learning in the puzzle box (Rilling, 2000). This law explains that the response will be weak if it is preceded by an unpleasant effect and the response will be strong if it is preceded by a pleasant effect (Saracho, 2023). In rewards and punishments, when a stimulus elicits a response that obtains a reward, the relationship between the stimulus and the response will be strong. While in punishment, the opposite will occur. In addition to Thorndike, Watson is also one of the figures in behaviorism theory.

Watson rejected Thorndike's law of effect. Watson claimed that Thorndike did not have a better behavioristic explanation of trial and error learning (Rilling, 2000). However, Thorndike's puzzle box inspired Watson to develop the sawdust box. In Watson's box, there were two groups of rats who had to dig through sawdust. The rats dug in order to get to the food that was located in the box above the pile of sawdust. Watson reported that the learning curves of the two groups of rats were almost exactly the same, so the results were a bit confusing. However, Watson still disagreed and did not have an alternative solution to Thorndike's law of effect (Rilling, 2000). Watson and Skinner have the same opinion that behavior is a fundamental problem within oneself (Moore, 2011). Then when Skinner developed the concept of operant and reinforcement principles in 1938, this concept was an alternative to Thorndike's law (Rilling, 2000). The implications of Skinner's operant behavior concept are included in his behaviorism theory, which is often known as "*radical behaviorism*".

"*Radical behaviorism*" has several principles, one of which is behavior (Moore, 2011). The term "*behavior*" refers to aspects of an organism's functioning that involve interactions or relationships with its surrounding environment (Moore, 2011). Skinner used the three-part stimulus-response-consequence contingency to understand selection based on consequences (Roessger, 2012). "*Reinforcers*" are consequences that make a reaction more likely to a response, while "*punishers*" are consequences that decrease the likelihood of a response. Both of these are also often known as rewards and punishments. Rewards and punishments are the provision of observable behavior and the resulting response. The provision of rewards and punishments is a form of control behavior that can influence human behavior. This is in line with the opinion of Pierce and Elping in 1995, where there are two main fields of study, one of which is experimental behavioral analysis, which focuses on understanding behavior by managing and changing elements that influence human, animal, and other behavior (Roessger, 2012).

In 1957 Skinner wrote that stimulus 'classes' have unique characteristics that enable them to control responses that appear new and that response 'classes' (Roessger, 2012). In the field of education, especially in schools, the stimulus in rewards and punishments during the learning process in the classroom is the teacher. This means that teachers play an important role in reinforcement during learning. Skinner himself divided two types of reinforcement, namely positive and negative.

Positive reinforcement is also known as reward (Omomia & Omomia, 2014). Reward can occur when a response is rewarded; the response tends to be repeated. Another example is when a teacher in class observes that there are several students who tend to show positive behavior, such as completing assignments on time, actively participating in discussions, or working well in groups. Positive behavior carried out by students can get positive reinforcement from the teacher. Positive reinforcement can be done by giving praise or direct attention to students because their behavior is in accordance with what the teacher wants.

Negative reinforcement is different from punishment. Negative reinforcement aims to increase behavior, while punishment aims to decrease behavior. Negative reinforcement means that responses that allow escape from painful or undesirable situations tend to be repeated (Omomia & Omomia, 2014). Negative reinforcement is the process of strengthening behavior by removing or avoiding unpleasant stimuli. In other words, when someone does an action that removes or avoids something undesirable, then the behavior tends to be repeated. For example, a student who completes an assignment faster so as not to be late, because to avoid punishment from the teacher.

One of the consequences of students making mistakes is punishment, which is intended to lessen or stop these acts or behaviors (Fernando et al., 2025). However, if the reinforcement contingency shifts, the behavior might resurface (Omomia & Omomia, 2014). This describes circumstances where a person suppresses a behavior because of the unfavorable effects it may have. However, the behavior might reappear if the circumstance or contingency (like a reinforcement or trigger) changes. When a

teacher chastises a student for being impolite, for instance, the student may cease the behavior in class but continue it in other contexts where the same penalties do not apply. From the explanations above, it is true that stimulus and response are interconnected and if accompanied by the application of good rewards and punishments, positive attitudes can be formed in students. Where this is in accordance with several studies (Sidin, 2021; Syawaludin & Marmoah, 2018).

Implementation of Reward and Punishment from the Perspective of Behaviorism Learning Theory in Differentiated Learning in Elementary Schools

The second objective of this study is to describe the implementation of reward and punishment from the perspective of behaviorism learning theory in differentiated learning in elementary schools. The results of this study reveal that the application of reward and punishment in differentiated learning can run better if accompanied by high learning motivation. This can direct students to behave better and can increase their motivation and cognitive abilities. This is also in line with several previous studies (Asmawati et al., 2020; Lilawati, 2022; Marliza et al., 2023). What distinguishes this study from the three studies is the location where the data was collected. Previous researchers did not explain in detail the reasons for the location. This could certainly influence the results. The findings of this study were obtained from interviews with teachers and questionnaires given to students regarding rewards and punishments.

Teachers in this study have special rules for all learning that are made through class agreements/class beliefs/class rules. The use of class agreements also shows that student learning discipline can be improved and students will automatically reduce undisciplined behavior (Simanjuntak et al., 2024). The following shows a short transcript of the teacher's interview with the researcher regarding class agreements.

Researcher: "Do you have specific rules for each learning material, or are they the same? For example, in math, it has to be like this. Is it the same for the others?"

Teacher: "There are specific rules. We create these rules together (teacher and students), namely through class agreements. So we have agreements, made by the students themselves. The students discuss them, and then they agree or not. If they agree, there are five agreements here."

Teacher: "There are seven class agreements."

Researcher: "Yes, ma'am."

Teacher: "The first is to always keep the classroom clean, be disciplined and punctual, help each other, speak politely, respect each other, focus during the lesson, and complete all assignments."

Researcher: "If students violate class agreements, what kind of reprimand do they usually receive?"

Teacher: "What kind of reprimand do they receive? Well, probably just a reprimand. When they're reprimanded, it depends on whether they did something right or wrong. If it's wrong, we reprimand them. Then, of course, we use restitution, Miss. Restitution creates conditions for students to correct their mistakes so they don't repeat them. So, like the story yesterday, for example, "What are you doing?" For example, littering. "Is littering good or bad? If not, what then? If it's bad, should it be repeated or not? Should it be imitated or not?" So, it's a kind of reprimand, but it also provides motivation if what they did was wrong."

Having classroom rules can certainly make students more disciplined in their classes. Additionally, the way the teacher corrects, like the transcript above, and tends to be motivating will undoubtedly impact student behavior for the better. This is done in order to create positive discipline and so that student behavior changes for the better for a long time. This means that teachers already understand the theory of behaviorism learning well. This is also in line with the questionnaire given to students. Most students agree that the admonition received when students make mistakes makes students increase their sense of responsibility. Teachers have also received PMM certificates related to the topic of positive discipline. This means that teachers already understand what punishment is. So, teachers will not have difficulty in implementing rewards and punishments in differentiated learning. This is also in line with the following teacher's statement:

Researcher: "In this learning theory, do you understand behaviorism?"

Teacher: "Yes. As teachers, we must understand this theory to manage children's behavior in the classroom."

The teacher in this research sample explained that he already understood very well how differentiated learning works. This can be seen in the following transcript.

Researcher: "In your opinion, what is the difference between differentiated and non-differentiated learning?"

Teacher: "It's true that differentiation is still highly valued, although it's been declining. Actually, differentiation is good. We need to be able to group children. I happen to have a child with special needs in my class. So, I group him with me sometimes. If he's not with me, he might be disruptive. His disruption isn't actually just a little annoying, but it's more like shouting."

Researcher: "So he gets excited, ma'am."

Teacher: "Yes, he becomes the center of attention. The child who was originally focused on me shifts to his friend. So I really need differentiation. I also need differentiation for the children, who, in the first grade, many of them don't memorize letters at the beginning. If they don't memorize letters, their reading ability is definitely poor. That's why I differentiate, I group those who can and those who can't. So, the treatment is different and depends on the material..."

Researcher: "So you don't focus on learning styles, ma'am?"

Teacher: "Yes, it's more about the student's needs."

From the transcript results above, While the teacher demonstrates an effort to implement student-centered learning, some misconceptions about differentiated instruction are still present, particularly in understanding its full scope. For example, teachers often group students as able and as unable. This can lead to misconceptions among beginning readers, as they are categorized based on whether they can read or not. However, while the grouping may reflect an attempt to address student needs, it is important that such decisions are grounded in a comprehensive understanding of content, process, and product differentiation. This is done so that teachers can provide differentiated treatment based on student needs. This is the principle of differentiation. However, the teachers' teaching methods almost all demonstrate a bias toward students. Because good learning is one that shows its bias towards students (Armadhani & Utama, 2024).

The act of grouping students based on needs reflects the teacher's initial efforts in implementing differentiated learning, although further clarification and development are needed to fully align with the principles of differentiated learning. Moreover, reading is a fundamental foundation of learning. This is also in line with Masters (2010), who stated that differentiated learning refers to the methods used by teachers to meet the needs of each student in their daily teaching, track their progress, determine their unique learning requirements, and meet these needs in their practice (Chandra Handa, 2019). In addition, the teacher's statement that differentiation should not only focus on learning styles, but also on students' needs is also very appropriate. For example, when giving a trigger question, teachers often make it into difficult, average, and easy categories. The teacher does this so that all students have the opportunity to answer the teacher's questions. This is in accordance with the questionnaire filled out by students that most students agree if the teacher teaches according to their abilities.

Rewards come in many forms, both visible and invisible. Giving rewards can also increase students' learning motivation (Saputra, 2025). Teachers give various rewards to students. For example, teachers often give praise to students. According to the teacher, praise for elementary school children is enough to make children happy. Reward does not have to be in the form of goods. However, sometimes it is also good. The teacher said that giving rewards in the form of goods is less effective. This can be seen in the following transcript.

Teacher: "For those who get a hundred, I give them an eraser or a pencil. I've done that before, but I don't think it's effective. I have, but sometimes we give them. So, not every reward has to be something... Last year, for those unfamiliar with this curriculum, every reward was limited to candy and snacks. In fact, it seemed like they were constantly asking for candy and snacks."

Researcher: "Oh."

Teacher: "So, after school, I'd give them a guess, take the snack or candy, shake their hand, and then go home. It used to be like that often. Now, I don't give them, but not as often..."

Researcher: "But now you prefer this, huh?"

Teacher: "Yes, I like this, because the students are different. So, in the beginning (today's students) they weren't given snacks or candy, so they didn't really look forward to it. Students now just clap and give a thumbs up, and they're happy...you know, they're first graders, after all."

From the teacher's explanation above, it can be concluded that giving rewards influences student behavior. Rewards in the form of goods can lead to slightly less positive behavior, such as studying because they want the reward. This is different from giving rewards with sweet words, which actually motivate students to learn. Several studies also show that giving rewards has a positive impact on student learning motivation (Adriana et al., 2023; Arsyah et al., 2024; Sudirman et al., 2023). This is also evident from the results of the student questionnaire, where the majority agreed that receiving praise from the teacher motivates them to do better again. To determine the extent to which teachers have implemented rewards given in differentiated learning, it can usually be seen when students feel happy with their teachers. According to the teacher, students in her class no longer feel jealous when their friends receive rewards from the teacher.

Teachers often give positive reinforcement to students. This is done so that students' motivation to learn increases. Give positive reinforcement can increase students' motivation to learn (Maulidya et al., 2023; Nurcahya & Hadijah, 2020). Students who come to school every morning have different mental states. So giving positive reinforcement is very meaningful; it can even overcome some problems experienced by elementary school children. Elementary school children usually have difficulty reading. Based on teacher information, at the beginning of the school year, almost half of students have difficulty reading. Teachers can overcome this by holding additional classes and doing peer tutoring. During 1 semester, this method can make students better at reading. From half of the class of students having difficulty reading, it changed to a quarter of students having difficulty reading. Even students who become peer tutors often ask teachers to become their friends' tutors again. This proves that peer tutoring is effective in helping students when they have difficulty reading. This is also in accordance with several studies regarding the success of peer tutors in dealing with reading difficulties (Aini, 2025; Dewi & Suhartono, 2022). The reward that teachers give to students who are willing to become peer tutors for their friends is in the form of praise. The teacher has never given punishment. This is in accordance with the transcript of the interview with the teacher as follows:

Researcher: "Ma'am, what punishments have you ever used in class?"

Teacher: "As for punishments..."

Researcher: "Is it just, 'Hey, don't do that?'"

Teacher: "As for punishments, I haven't used them. Just a warning if a student makes a mistake, like, 'Hey, that's not allowed,' then it's returned to the student, for example, 'Is that allowed or not? If it's not allowed, is it good or bad?' They (the students) answer correctly."

Researcher: "So they can now distinguish between good and bad, right?"

Teacher: "Yes, it seems like all children can do it. However, sometimes children repeat mistakes. There are also those who make mistakes unintentionally. Sometimes smart kids make mistakes that may violate class rules, but they don't mean to. The warning is limited to, 'Is that okay or not?', so it's returned to the child."

Researcher: "So, the children here are more likely to break class rules by accident, right, because they're still young?"

Teacher: "That's my version, you know. Because I'm still a child..."

From the transcript above, it can be concluded that punishment is not applied to first-grade elementary school students because it is ineffective. This is due to the children's emotional instability. Teachers provide negative reinforcement, such as reprimands about what is and is not allowed to do. This is done to avoid hurting students' feelings. When students' feelings are hurt, they tend to lack self-confidence. This will ultimately impact students' social and emotional development, which is not achieved. One study also noted that indicators of social and emotional development in first-grade students were not achieved (Dhalu & Anrada, 2019).

The reprimand given by the teacher is enough to change the students' behavior. This is also in accordance with the questionnaire filled out by students that most students agree to correct their mistakes after being reprimanded and will not repeat them again. However, specifically for two students with special needs, the teacher gives leniency by not giving punishment but reprimands. The teacher does this because he understands their condition. The two students usually sit near the teacher during

learning so as not to disturb other friends. Other students also do not feel jealous of this. This indicates that the student's emotional intelligence is good. Peer interactions are directly related to the student's emotional intelligence (Fadhilah & Mukhlis, 2021). When a student's emotional intelligence is good, their emotional control will also be good. Jealousy isn't a form of emotional intelligence, but emotional intelligence helps someone manage jealousy in a healthy way.

Aside from emotional intelligence, teachers argue that student motivation to behave better is the biggest challenge in implementing rewards and punishments. Low motivation of children is because they spend more time at home than at school. If the school environment is good but the house is not, then motivation or other reinforcement given at school will be in vain. Because teachers have experienced dealing with children who are addicted to online games. To overcome this, there must be good cooperation between teachers and parents of students. So, teachers have implemented rewards and punishments in differentiated learning well. Differentiated learning is carried out so that all students are able to achieve the learning objectives that are implemented. The success of learning objectives can be seen from the learning outcomes obtained. Proven by the number of students who have good grades on daily tests. In addition, learning outcomes are also the focus of every school system (Omomia & Omomia, 2014). So, the implication of this study is to report that the application of reward and punishment in differentiated learning can run better if accompanied by high learning motivation. This can direct students to behave better and can increase their motivation and cognitive abilities. Moreover, this study used first grade.

This study was conducted in one of the classes that first implemented the Merdeka curriculum at its level. The Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia was first implemented in grades 1 and 4. The Merdeka Curriculum is something new and will only be fully realized at the elementary school level in 2024. Curriculum changes in Indonesia are one way for education to be able to adapt to developments in the 21st century. Students need to acquire 21st-century skills, both now and in the future (Benek & Akcay, 2022). In the Merdeka curriculum, there is a Pancasila Student Profile. The Pancasila student profile is a character that must be developed and fulfilled in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum (Yani et al., 2023). Students must have six characteristics of the Pancasila student profile, one of which is critical thinking, creativity, etc (Sutrisno et al., 2023). Critical and creative thinking is part of the 4Cs. The 4Cs themselves also include the highest level of transversal abilities, or “*meta-competencies*” (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). In addition, the Merdeka curriculum also emphasizes student-centered learning and uses differentiated learning. The majority of studies have found that teachers have misunderstandings about differentiation practices in general (Putra, 2023). Therefore, teachers must really understand differentiated learning, especially when implementing rewards and punishments.

Indonesia supports the development of teacher competencies in accordance with the times, especially in implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka curriculum through one of the features on the Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM), namely training. PMM is a digital platform designed to help principals and teachers support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and improve learning in schools (Ambawani et al., 2023; Ramdini et al., 2024). Closely related to reward and punishment, there is one topic of training, namely positive discipline. In this topic, the training material contains material on punishment vs. consequences vs. restitution. Punishment is described in more detail along with rewards in this study. Punishment can be given when students violate class rules or do other bad things.

The results of this study may not be as applicable to larger populations or students at different educational levels because it was carried out with a particular group of elementary school pupils in mind. Furthermore, the behaviorist perspective was the main focus of the study, which offered a clear theoretical foundation but excluded other learning theories that might have provided complementary insights. Additionally, because of the short observation period, the long-term impacts of using rewards and punishments in differentiated learning were not thoroughly investigated. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, the results nevertheless make significant contributions and can be a useful guide for instructors and upcoming studies.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to describe rewards and punishments from the perspective of behaviorism learning theory and its implementation in differentiated learning in elementary schools. This study successfully revealed the stated objectives. The results of the first study showed that stimulus

and response are interconnected and if accompanied by the application of good rewards and punishments, positive attitudes can be formed in students. Then the results of the second study showed that the use of rewards and punishments could lead students to behave better and could increase their motivation and cognitive abilities. Based on the findings, future research is recommended to explore the long-term impact of rewards and punishments in various educational settings and among different age groups. Practically, educators are encouraged to integrate motivation-enhancing strategies alongside behaviorist approaches to maximize the effectiveness of differentiated learning in the classroom.

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