EDUCATION

Improving Classroom Behavior Among Grade 1 Learners Using a Token Economy Program

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Abstract

In elementary education, managing disruptive classroom behavior remains a challenge among Grade 1 learners. This study employed a single-group pretest–posttest design to determine the effectiveness of a Token Economy Program in improving the classroom behavior of 33 Grade 1 learners in a public elementary school in Ozamiz City during the School Year 2025–2026. Learners were selected through purposive sampling. Guided by B.F. Skinner's Rewards and Consequences Theory and Action Design Research principles, the study utilized a teacher-made Classroom Behavior Checklist, a Token Economy Program Tracking Chart, and structured lesson plans integrating positive reinforcement strategies. Data were analyzed using the mean, standard deviation, frequency, percentage, and a paired-sample t-test in Jamovi. Findings revealed that before the implementation of the intervention, positive classroom behavior was low while negative classroom behavior was high. After the implementation of the Token Economy Program, positive classroom behavior increased to a high level, whereas negative classroom behavior decreased to a very low level. Results further showed a very highly significant difference in learners' classroom behavior before and after the intervention, indicating that the Token Economy Program effectively promoted self-regulation, participation, and appropriate classroom conduct among Grade 1 learners. The study highlights the importance of reinforcement-based strategies in establishing a positive and organized learning environment for young learners.

Keywords: Classroom behavior; classroom management; Grade 1 learners; positive reinforcement; token economy program

1 Introduction

1.1 Context and rationale

In the context of 21st-century education, teachers still struggle to keep young learners engaged and disciplined while creating a supportive learning environment. Disruptive behaviors that interfere with instructional time and diminish the overall learning experience include inattention, excessive talking, and breaking classroom rules (Valencia-Castro et al., 2024). When these habits are not controlled, they impact not only the particular learner's academic achievement but also the focus and drive of other learners in the class. Structured behavioral interventions are essential for fostering self-control, respect, and cooperation in Grade 1 learners, who are in the formative period of social and emotional development (Wangdi & Namgyel, 2022).

Early grade learners frequently exhibit disruptive behaviors, including being unfocused, talking too much, standing without permission, and not following the classroom rules (Ningsih et al., 2023). These behaviors can interfere with the learning process and create challenges for teachers in maintaining a conducive classroom environment (Hasanah et al., 2024). Behavioral issues remain a

major cause of poor academic performance and teacher stress, despite educators' ongoing efforts to use classroom management techniques (Mushtaq et al., 2024).

Teachers have used several strategies to effectively manage learners' behavior, including behavior charts, warning systems, verbal praise, and other reward-based techniques (Parveen & Yousaf, 2022). Research indicates that token economy systems and other positive reinforcement techniques significantly increase learner engagement and motivation while reducing disruptive behaviors (Rosyida et al., 2025).

Token economies and reward systems have been shown in recent research to be beneficial in influencing learners' motivation and behavior in the classroom, task completion and classroom involvement were greatly enhanced by the use of tokens and praise (Tan et al., 2022). Similar to this, a study showed how organized reward systems encourage learners' excitement and sense of responsibility (Viray-Castillejos, 2022).

Additionally, using reward-based motivation improves learners' relationships with teachers and increases their desire to follow classroom regulations. These results lend credence to the use of a token-based reward system to promote early-grade learners' consistent good behavior (Sigalingging et al., 2023).

Rewarding desired behaviors, including cooperation, respect, and attentiveness, a token economy program provides a methodical approach to behavior management. Learners can identify consequences with concrete and significant benefits by earning tokens for good behavior, which they can then trade for minor prizes or privileges (Valencia-Castro et al., 2024). For young learners who respond best to quick and visible forms of reward, this organized method offers clear expectations, consistency, and fairness (Melissa & Samia, 2022). Furthermore, classroom interventions grounded in positive behavior support can reduce disruptions and promote students' emotional stability (Wangdi & Namgyel, 2022).

1.2 Strategy

First-graders are more likely to experience behavioral problems because they are still acclimating to the structured routines of formal schooling. They frequently have trouble staying seated, adhering to regulations, and contributing appropriately during class discussions (Hasanah et al., 2024). In response, the researcher created the Token Economy Program, an intervention in which learners receive tokens for completing tasks, listening to discussions, actively participating without making noise or disturbing others, adhering to classroom rules, and responding to oral recitations (Tan et al., 2022). Learners are allowed to collect as many tokens as they like during the week, as long as they behave appropriately. The total number of tokens at the end of the week corresponds to specific tangible rewards, such as two candies for one to three tokens, a pencil for four to five tokens, and so forth. Tokens can also be revoked for misbehavior; each time a pupil stands, speaks, or interferes needlessly, one token is revoked. This method helps pupils develop self-control, responsibility, and consistently good behavior through accountability and positive reinforcement (Baroroh & Karim, 2025).

Learners who receive praise and reinforcement for their efforts show more confidence and excitement for learning assignments (Marmoah et al., 2022). This is consistent with the tenets of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), which promote proactive, structured approaches to student behavior management and the development of inclusive learning environ-

ments. Instead of instilling a fear of punishment, positive educational environments with regular rewards foster cooperation and self-discipline (Yassine & Tipton-Fisler, 2022).

There appears to be a practical knowledge gap in prior research. There is a lack of rigorous research in the prior literature directly examining the use of token reward systems among early-grade learners in the Philippine setting. Some of these unexplored behavior management practices appear to be lacking in primary classroom management. The field of elementary education is ripe for an investigation of practical focus research on the effectiveness of token economy programs in improving classroom behavior. Many prior studies focus on the theoretical aspects of positive reinforcement and behavior modification. However, there are very few practical studies or action research on token economy programs applied to Grade 1 learners in actual classroom settings. This is an important and worthy investigation in the context of classroom management and behavioral interventions for early-grade learners in Philippine schools. An investigation of these issues is important because teachers need practical, evidence-based strategies that translate behavioral theories into concrete classroom actions for managing disruptive behaviors effectively. Furthermore, previous theoretical research has focused primarily on broad or foreign contexts of behavior management, and very little practical research has been done on implementing token economy programs for Grade 1 learners in the Philippine educational field (Miles, 2017).

The significance of this study lies in its potential to help improve classroom behavior and create a more positive learning environment for first-graders. Anchored in B.F. Skinner's Rewards and Consequences Theory, it aims to show how a token economy program can guide learners to follow classroom rules, participate actively in discussions, and develop good behavior habits. This study is beneficial to teachers by providing practical strategies for behavior management and fostering learner engagement. It helps learners by motivating them through structured positive reinforcement, promoting self-discipline, and encouraging a love for learning. Furthermore, it benefits researchers and educators by providing insights into effective classroom interventions that can inform future strategies to enhance learner behavior and learning outcomes.

1.3 Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the token economy program in improving the classroom behavior of first-grade pupils. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before the implementation of the token economy program?
2. What is the level of classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners after the implementation of the token economy program?
3. Is there a significant difference in the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before and after the implementation of the token economy program?

1.4 Null hypothesis

H01: There is no significant difference in the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before and after the implementation of the token economy program.

2 Methods

2.1 Research design

A single-group pretest-posttest design was used in this study to assess the extent to which a Token Economy Program improved classroom behavior among first-graders. The study attempted to apply behavioral theory to classroom practice, guided by the principles of Action Design Research (ADR), which emphasized the iterative development and evaluation of practical interventions (Cronholm & Göbel, 2022). This design was deemed suitable for investigating how a structured token-based economy program could foster good behavior, cooperation, and attentiveness in young learners. The intervention aimed to reduce disruptive behaviors and promote self-discipline in first-graders while making the learning process more supportive and engaging through the regular use of positive reinforcement.

2.2 Research setting

The study was conducted at the elementary level, specifically involving Grade 1 learners at a public elementary school in Ozamiz City. This school served learners from kindergarten to Grade 6 and accepted a diverse pupil population. It offered subjects prescribed by the Department of Education.

2.3 Participants of the study

This study included thirty-three (33) Grade 1 learners from one section taught by the researcher, selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included pupils enrolled as Grade 1 learners in the selected section for the 2025–2026 school year and those willing to participate in the study. The researcher confirmed that these criteria were met before conducting the study. However, other sections at the same grade level were not included in the study.

2.4 Research instruments

Token Economy Program Tracking Chart. This was developed to monitor first-grade learners' classroom behavior during the intervention. The chart included the names of all participating learners, making it personalized and engaging. Every time a learner demonstrated positive behavior such as following classroom rules or participating in discussions, a coin-shaped token was placed beside their name on the chart. Conversely, if a learner misbehaved, the corresponding token was removed to provide immediate feedback on their behavior.

This approach aligned with studies showing that visual cues, immediate reinforcement, and tangible rewards could enhance pupil engagement and classroom behavior (Skinner, 1953). The chart was checked daily by the classroom teacher and student teacher to ensure accuracy and consistency in documentation.

Classroom Behavior Teacher Checklist. This was used as the main instrument of this study to measure the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners. The checklist was answered by the class adviser and student teacher based on the learners' observed behaviors in the classroom, such as following rules, participating in activities, paying attention, and interacting with classmates. It was administered twice: before the implementation of the token economy program to determine the learners' initial behavior level, and after the program to assess any changes in their behavior. The scores from the checklist were then compared to determine whether the token economy program had a significant effect on the learners' classroom behavior and participation.

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by education experts and refined for clarity, relevance, and accuracy. It was then pilot tested to assess its effectiveness. To check reliability, Cronbach's alpha was used, and the results (M = 3.51, SD = 0.50) indicated that the questionnaire was consistent. The items were considered relevant to the study as they emphasized the level of Grade 1 learners' behavior.

Grade 1 learners' behavior was measured using a 4-point Likert scale, with 4 indicating very high compliance and 1 indicating very poor compliance. The response categories and their interpretation are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Response scale and interpretation of the Classroom Behavior Teacher Checklist.

Response	Continuum	Interpretation
4 – Always	3.25–4.0	Very high: Consistently demonstrates positive classroom behavior and shows minimal negative classroom behavior
3 – Often	2.5–3.24	High: Frequently demonstrates positive classroom behavior with occasional negative classroom behavior
2 – Sometimes	1.75–2.49	Low: Inconsistently demonstrates positive classroom behavior and frequently exhibits negative classroom behavior
1 – Rarely	1.0–1.74	Very Low: Minimal positive classroom behavior and consistently exhibits negative classroom behavior

Lesson plan. A teacher-created daily lesson plan incorporating the Token Economy Program was used. The lesson plan defined the objectives, activities, and classroom routines while incorporating tokens as a reinforcer for positive conduct. It outlined the methods for removing tokens in the event of misconduct, as well as when and how tokens were earned (e.g., by obeying instructions, actively participating, and demonstrating good behavior). The lesson plan guided the teacher in applying consistent behavioral reinforcement during each class session, ensuring the planned, systematic use of the token reward program throughout the six-week intervention period. It also documented weekly milestones for token counting, recognition, and distribution of minor prizes, supporting the reliability and consistency of the intervention.

2.5 Data collection

Before implementing the study, approval was sought from the Dean of the College of Education, the DepEd superintendent, and the School Principal of the public school where the study was conducted. Once approval was granted, the researcher coordinated with the Grade Level Coordinator and the classroom adviser. Informed consent forms were distributed to parents or guardians, and assent was obtained from the learners who agreed to participate. The data collection procedure was conducted in three phases.

Pre-Intervention Phase. The researcher observed and recorded learners' classroom behavior using the behavior monitoring sheet. No token rewards or tracking charts were implemented to ensure accurate measurement of baseline behavior. The data collected included instances of rule-following, participation in class discussions, and occurrences of disruptive behavior.

Intervention Implementation Phase. The Token Economy Program Tracking Chart was introduced. Learners earned coin-shaped tokens for positive behavior, and tokens were removed immediately if misbehavior occurred to reinforce accountability. At the end of each week, learners who accumulated

the most tokens received small rewards or recognition. Teachers also provided short motivational reminders to sustain positive behavior. All daily observations were systematically recorded on both the tracking chart and the behavior monitoring sheet.

Post-Intervention Phase. The same behavior monitoring sheet used in the pre-intervention phase was utilized to gather post-intervention data. No tokens were awarded during this period to determine whether improvements in learners' behavior were maintained without reinforcement. The pre- and post-intervention results were then compared to assess the overall effectiveness of the token reward program. For scoring and quantitative measurement, behavior was quantified using a behavior rating scale based on daily observations.

Behavioral data were collected using a checklist administered before and after the intervention. Learners' responses were scored on a four-point scale and interpreted using the established continuum to determine their level of compliance with rules, participation in discussions, and overall classroom behavior. The pre- and post-intervention scores were then compared to identify any changes in behavior.

2.6 Ethical considerations

The study strictly adhered to ethical standards to ensure the safety, rights, and dignity of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from parents or guardians, and verbal assent was obtained from Grade 1 learners to ensure their understanding and willingness to participate. Participation was entirely voluntary, and learners were allowed to withdraw at any time without negative consequences. Confidentiality was upheld by ensuring that no learner names appeared in the study; instead, codes or pseudonyms were used to record data, as prescribed by the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Approval was sought from the Misamis University Research Ethics Board (MUREB) to ensure that all collected information was stored securely and accessed only by the researcher and adviser. The intervention posed no harm to the learners, as the token reward program consisted of age-appropriate and non-coercive incentives. The study fully complied with school guidelines and DepEd policies on learner protection and ethical research. Transparency was maintained by clearly communicating the study's purpose, procedures, and expected outcomes to parents, school personnel, and participants, thereby ensuring honesty and integrity throughout the research process.

2.7 Data analysis

The study used the following tools in analyzing the data gathered with the use of Jamovi Software:

- The mean and Standard Deviation were used to determine the average frequency of pupils' positive behaviors, such as following classroom rules and participating in class discussions, as well as negative behaviors, such as disruptive actions.
- Frequency and Percentage were used in determining the number and proportion of pupils demonstrating specific behaviors on a daily and weekly basis.
- The Paired Sample T-test was used to examine significant differences in learners' behavior before and after the implementation of the token reward program.

2.8 Dissemination plan

The study's findings were shared with school officials, cooperating teachers, Grade 1 learners, and their parents through reports, conversations, and simplified summaries, ensuring that they

understood the benefits of the token economy program. Consent and assent procedures were highlighted when sharing results with learners and parents to reinforce ethical research practices. To encourage practical methods for improving classroom conduct, the results were also shared with the university community and other educators through publications, seminars, and presentations.

2.9 Utilization plan

The results of the study were disseminated through poster presentations and publications. A poster highlighting the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations regarding the effectiveness of the Token Economy Program in improving classroom behavior among Grade 1 learners was created and presented during academic or school-based research dissemination events. This enabled teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders to clearly understand how the intervention improved behaviors such as rule-following, participation, and reduced disruptions. Furthermore, the study was prepared for publication in an academic journal or an institutional research repository to ensure that its findings reached a wider audience. Through publication, the research contributed to future studies and supported educators in implementing evidence-based strategies to promote positive classroom behavior among early-grade learners.

3 Results and discussion

3.1 Classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before the implementation of the Token Economy Program

Table 2 presents the level of classroom behavior among Grade 1 learners before the implementation of the Token Economy Program. According to the results, positive classroom behavior was at a low level (M = 1.77, SD = 0.37), whereas negative classroom behavior was at a high level (M = 2.96, SD = 0.50). These results show that before the intervention, learners were mostly engaged in disruptive behaviors and rarely exhibited behaviors such as attentiveness, cooperation, and participation.

The low level of positive behaviors in the classroom suggests that learners may struggle to demonstrate behaviors associated with order and self-discipline consistently. While first graders are typically energetic and eager, excessive movement and difficulty staying seated can disrupt classroom routines and the flow of instruction. Young learners often exhibit lively and disruptive behavior that poses challenges for classroom management, especially in early childhood and elementary settings (Azeem Ashraf et al., 2024). Issues related to classroom behavior among elementary learners may arise from challenges in sustaining attention, adhering to routines, and controlling their behavior during instructional activities (Hasanah et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the high level of negative behaviors in the classroom suggests that unnecessary movement, excessive noise, and difficulty staying in designated areas during discussions and activities are common. Disruptive behaviors in the classroom can interfere with the learning process and make it challenging for teachers to maintain a conducive learning environment (Hasanah et al., 2024). Ongoing disruptive conduct among elementary learners can further complicate classroom management for teachers, particularly when learners are very energetic and active (Kollerová et al., 2023).

The results suggest that a structured classroom management approach is necessary to help learners manage their behavior while preserving their enthusiasm and engagement in classroom activities.

Utilizing positive reinforcement and reward-based strategies could encourage learners to adopt more suitable behavior in the classroom without suppressing their active participation in learning.

Table 2. Level of classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before the implementation of the Token Economy Program.

Construct	M	SD	Remarks
Positive classroom behavior	1.77	0.37	Low
Negative classroom behavior	2.96	0.50	High

Note: 3.25–4.00 (Very high); 2.50–3.24 (High); 1.75–2.49 (Low); 1.00–1.74 (Very low).

3.2 Classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners after the implementation of the Token Economy Program

Table 3 presents the level of classroom behavior among Grade 1 learners after the implementation of the Token Economy Program. The results showed that positive classroom behavior increased to a high level (M = 3.10, SD = 0.336), while negative classroom behavior decreased to a very low level (M = 1.73, SD = 0.251). These findings suggest that the Token Economy Program effectively improved learners' classroom behavior by encouraging self-regulation and minimizing disruptive actions.

The high level of positive classroom behavior indicates that learners demonstrated more appropriate conduct after the implementation of the intervention. Although they remained active, they were also more focused on being participatory, following routines, staying in designated areas, and managing their behavior while the class discussion was ongoing. Reward-based approaches to classroom management can help reinforce positive learner behaviors and encourage appropriate classroom conduct (Marmoah et al., 2022). Positive reinforcement systems, such as those used in token economy programs, can help develop desired classroom behaviors among young learners (Rosyida et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the very low level of negative classroom behavior indicates that disruptive actions such as unnecessary movement, excessive noise, and classroom distractions were kept to a minimum after the implementation of the program. Token economy interventions are effective in reducing disruptive behaviors by reinforcing appropriate classroom conduct and behavioral control among elementary learners (Yassine & Tipton-Fisler, 2022). Reinforcement-based classroom management strategies also help in establishing a more organized and conducive learning environment while sustaining learner enthusiasm and engagement (Tan et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that the Token Economy Program may be an effective classroom management strategy for highly energetic Grade 1 learners. Teachers may still use reward systems, behavior charts, classroom tokens, and structured reinforcement activities to teach self-control and appropriate classroom behavior. Another option is for school administrators to help teachers by offering training in positive reinforcement techniques and classroom management strategies appropriate for active learners, so they can manage their behavior effectively.

Table 3. Level of classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners after the implementation of the Token Economy Program.

Construct	M	SD	Remarks
Positive classroom behavior	3.10	0.34	High
Negative classroom behavior	1.73	0.25	Very low

Note: 3.25–4.00 (Very high); 2.50–3.24 (High); 1.75–2.49 (Low); 1.00–1.74 (Very low).

3.3 Difference in classroom behavior before and after the implementation of the Token Economy Program

Table 4 shows the difference in the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before and after the implementation of the Token Economy Program. The results showed a very highly significant difference in positive classroom behavior before and after the intervention ($t = 64.9$, $p < 0.001$). This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. There was a very highly significant difference in negative classroom behavior before and after implementation of the program ($t = 29.8$, $p < 0.001$), which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The findings imply that the Token Economy Program was effective on the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners.

The significant difference in positive classroom behavior indicates that the intervention was effective in motivating learners to demonstrate more appropriate classroom behavior after the program's implementation. Although the learners were already active and engaged before the intervention, the Token Economy Program helped them control their behavior more effectively while maintaining their enthusiasm and cooperation during classroom activities. Positive reinforcement strategies, such as token economy systems, can help improve appropriate classroom behavior and learning motivation among elementary learners (Baroroh & Karim, 2025). Interventions based on rewards have also been shown to help strengthen desirable behaviors and learner engagement in classroom settings (Rosyida et al., 2025).

On the other hand, the highly significant difference in negative classroom behavior indicates that disruptive behaviors such as excessive movement around the classroom, making unnecessary noise, and other energetic behaviors were significantly reduced after the implementation of the intervention. Token economy strategies are effective in reducing disruptive classroom behavior by reinforcing appropriate classroom behavior and promoting behavioral control among young learners (Yassine & Tipton-Fisler, 2022). Organized classroom management systems that use rewards and reinforcement also establish a more conducive learning environment for elementary learners (Zoder-Martell et al., 2023).

Findings suggest that the Token Economy Program can be a useful intervention in managing the behavior of highly energetic Grade 1 learners without limiting their participation and enthusiasm in classroom activities. Teachers can continue to use reinforcement-based strategies, such as classroom tokens, reward charts, behavior-monitoring systems, and recognition activities, to maintain positive classroom behavior. In addition, school administrators can provide professional development programs and workshops on positive classroom management strategies to help teachers effectively manage disruptive behavior and promote active learner participation.

Table 4. Difference in the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before and after the implementation of the Token Economy Program.

Variables	t-value	p-value	Decision
Positive classroom behavior (pre vs post)	64.9***	<0.001	Reject H_{01}
Negative classroom behavior (pre vs post)	29.8***	<0.001	Reject H_{01}

Note: ***p < 0.001 (very highly significant); **p < 0.01 (highly significant); *p < 0.05 (significant).

4 Summary and conclusions

4.1 Summary

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Token Economy Program in improving the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners at a selected public elementary school in Ozamiz City during the School Year 2025–2026. Specifically, it examined the level of classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before and after the implementation of the Token Economy Program and the significant difference in their classroom behavior before and after the intervention. The study focused on 33 Grade 1 learners to determine how the Token Economy Program influences positive and negative classroom behaviors among highly energetic learners.

4.2 Findings

This study yielded the following findings:

1. The level of positive classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before the implementation of the Token Economy Program was low, while negative classroom behavior was high.
2. The level of positive classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners after the implementation of the Token Economy Program was high, while negative classroom behavior was very low.
3. There was a very highly significant difference in the classroom behavior of Grade 1 learners before and after the implementation of the Token Economy Program.

4.3 Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following are the conclusions:

1. Grade 1 learners manifest low positive classroom behavior and high negative classroom behavior before the implementation of the Token Economy Program due to excessive movement, unnecessary noise-making, and difficulty regulating behavior inside the classroom.
2. The implementation of the Token Economy Program improves positive classroom behavior and minimizes negative classroom behavior among Grade 1 learners by encouraging self-regulation, proper classroom conduct, and behavioral control while maintaining learner participation and enthusiasm.
3. The Token Economy Program serves as an effective classroom management intervention for highly energetic Grade 1 learners as evidenced by the very highly significant difference in classroom behavior before and after the implementation of the program.

4.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Grade 1 teachers may continuously implement reinforcement-based classroom management strategies such as token systems, reward charts, classroom incentives, and behavior monitoring activities to help highly energetic learners regulate their behavior and maintain appropriate classroom conduct.
2. School administrators may conduct seminars and training on positive reinforcement and effective classroom management. They may also allocate a budget to support teachers in implementing a token economy program.

3. Future researchers may conduct similar studies using a wider scope of participants and additional behavioral variables to further validate the Token Economy Program's effectiveness in improving classroom behavior among elementary learners.

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