

Abstract

This study investigated whether a sticker-based token economy increased a child's verbal communication of thoughts and feelings. Grounded in the principles of operant conditioning (Skinner, 1963), the study aimed to determine whether earning stickers toward a larger prize (stuffed animals) served as an effective reinforcer. Previous research supports the effectiveness of positive reinforcement for increasing desired behaviors in children (e.g., Gunaretnam, 2021; Hannon, 2015; Walker & Buckley, 1968), though its success depends on the desirability of the consequence (Ismail, 2023). This study utilized a single-case AB research design. The participant's verbal communication and verbal outbursts were observed during 9 one-hour sessions: four baseline sessions and five intervention sessions. Results indicated that during the intervention phase, the participant averaged 1.8 verbal outbursts, compared to 3.5 outbursts during baseline. Additionally, effective verbal expression of thoughts and feelings increased from an average of 5.25 during baseline to 6.8 during the intervention. 60% of the intervention days were better than the baseline days. These results suggest that the sticker token economy was a successful intervention for increasing verbal communication and decreasing verbal outbursts. However, limitations remain and warrant further exploration.

Introduction

- Gunaretnam (2021) found that sensory, natural, material, and social reinforcements were the most effective for increasing desired behavior.
- Hannon, E. (2015) found that a token economy can be used to increase positive desired behaviors and decrease negative behaviors that are trying to be stopped.
- Ismail (2023) found that positive reinforcement strategies effectively increased students' engagement in all aspects except comprehension,; their ability to retain the information given.

Method

Participant:

- One 8-year-old female in 2nd grade

Single-subject AB Research Design:

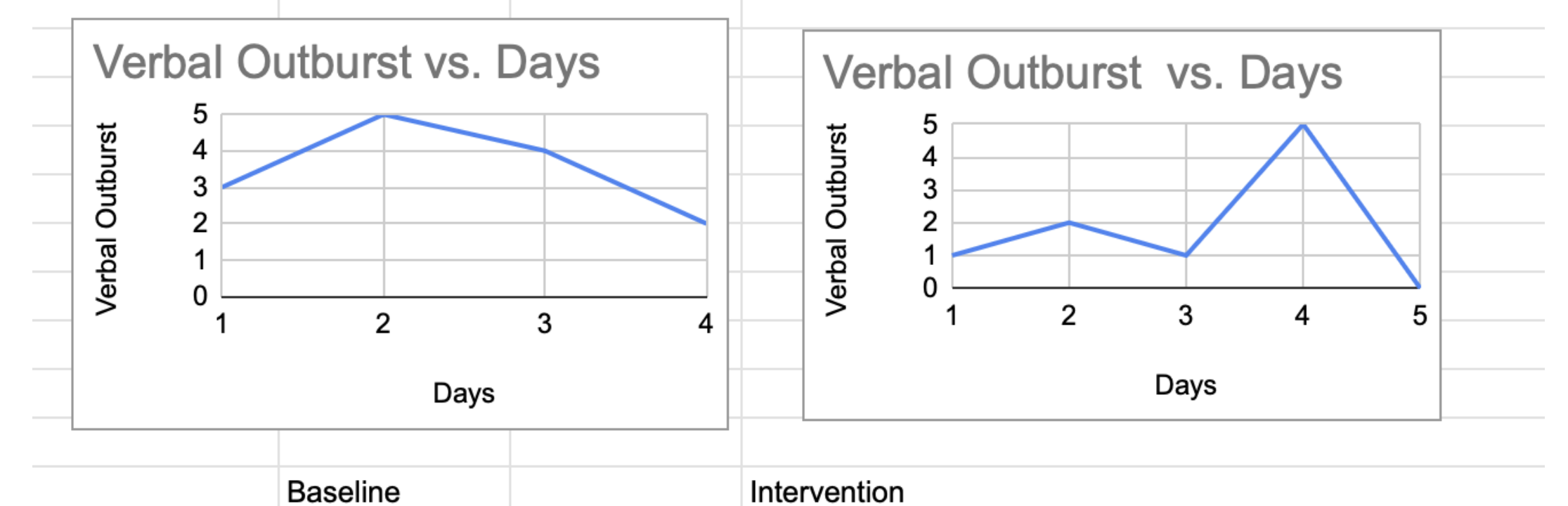
- Phase A (Baseline) - 4 days
 - Observation of:
 - Number of verbal outbursts
 - Number of times she used her words calmly to communicate concerns
- Phase B (Intervention) - 5 days
 - Implementation of a Token Economy:
 - Participant received a sticker when she used her words calmly to communicate (see image)
 - The stickers could then be traded in for stuffed animals on the last day
 - Observation of:
 - Number of verbal outbursts
 - Number of times she used her words calmly to communicate concerns



Results

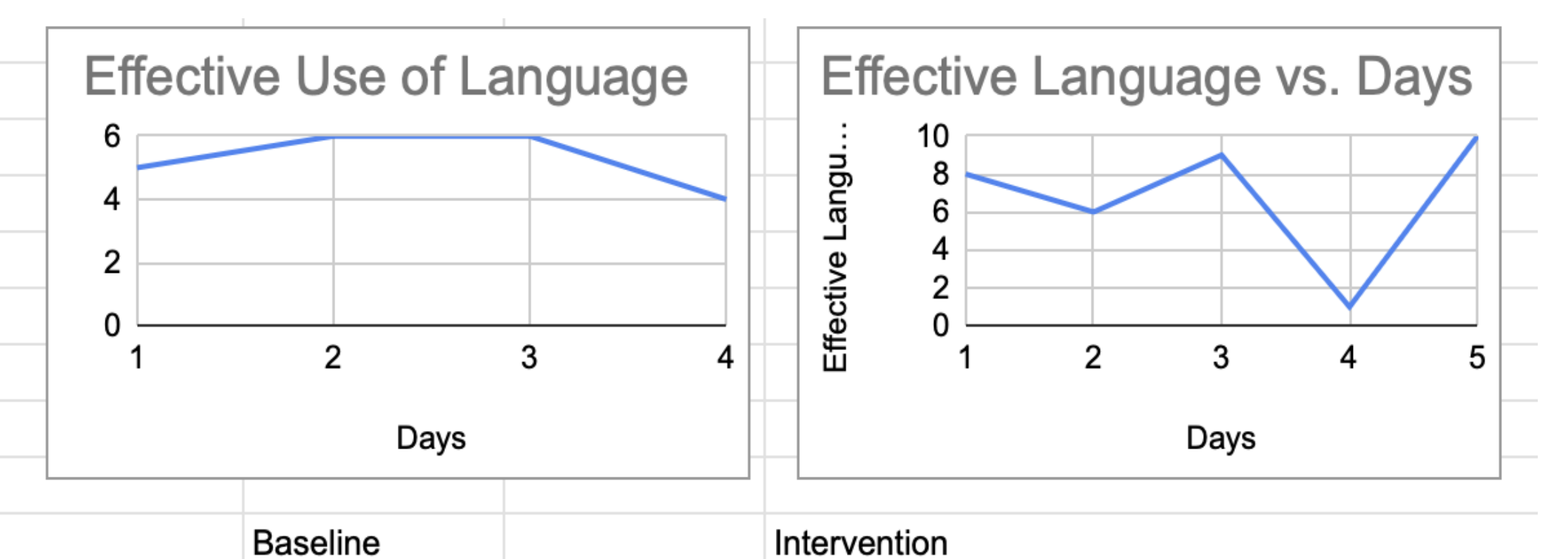
• Verbal Outbursts:

- Baseline: Mean = 3.5 (SD = 1.29)
- Intervention: Mean = 1.8 (SD = 1.92)
 - Note: During the intervention phase, the number of outbursts gradually decreased to 0 on the last day.



• Calm Verbal Communication:

- Baseline: Mean = 5.25 (SD = 0.96)
- Intervention: Mean = 6.8 (SD = 3.56)
 - Note: More verbal communication was observed on 60% of the intervention days compared to the baseline.



Conclusion

In conclusion, implementing a reinforcement plan into the patient's physical therapy session successfully improved her use of calm verbal communication and decreased her verbal outbursts. The AB design is limited by the lack of a second baseline phase to control for the passage of time. In addition, the participant was shown her token economy during the assent process which may have already started to decrease her outbursts during the baseline phase.

**References available upon request