

# Functional Assessment Project for Aliza at a High School (Applied Behavior Analysis)

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## ABSTRACT:

*Aliza was 14 years old and was a student of a local high school. The researcher chose Aliza for this study because Aliza expressed her behavior in a significant way that makes her prominent in the class. The study was conducted during spring semester 2012. Teachers, in the past, had many complaints about her behavior that were available in the school record. On the first day of this study when Aliza entered the class she demonstrated inappropriate behavior. She called the teacher "skunk" and got encouragement from her classmates to continue her inappropriate behavior. When teacher informed her not to do that again Aliza was disrespectful and denied that she had had been saying anything to the teacher that was disrespectful. Unlike Aliza, other students in the classroom either stopped their inappropriate behaviors or changed them after they were disciplined. Even though Aliza was disciplined for her behavior she continued to act in the same inappropriate manner.*

Keywords: Behavior Analysis, Derogatory, reprimand

## 1. Introduction

Aliza was 14 years old and was a student of a local high school. The researcher chose Aliza for this study because Aliza expressed her behavior in a significant way that makes her prominent in the class. The study was conducted during spring semester 2012. Teachers, in the past, had many complaints about her behavior that were available in the school record. On the first day of this study when Aliza entered the class she demonstrated inappropriate behavior. She called the teacher "skunk" and got encouragement from her classmates to continue her inappropriate behavior. When teacher informed her not to do that again Aliza was disrespectful and denied that she had had been saying anything to the teacher that was disrespectful. Unlike Aliza, other students in the classroom either stopped their inappropriate behaviors or changed them after they were disciplined. Even though Aliza was disciplined for her behavior she continued to act in the same inappropriate manner.

The second reason researcher picked Aliza was because when teacher and researcher read her record and interviewed her mother, her mother made it very clear to the team that Aliza displays the same disrespectful actions at home as well as at

school. Aliza's teacher and researcher had come to the conclusion that Aliza showed consistency in everything she did at school and at home. For example, she called all of the teachers a derogatory name as well as her brothers at home a derogatory name. Many of her teachers gave her referrals and complained for the actions that Aliza displayed in class.

The behavior in this was chosen was "yelling and calling a teacher a derogatory name." This is a combination of a behavior called "disrespectfulness."

Definition of disrespectful behavior:

"Calling a teacher a derogatory name and yelling loudly."

## Summary Table for example and Non-example

Example	Non-example
May I go to the Restroom?	Using a loud tone to ask something
Following directions	Saying "shut up" to people.
Listening quietly to people.	Using profanity.

## **1.2 Selection of the dimension of behavior and data collection:**

Researcher used observational system for this study, which was the recording of the behavior whenever it occurs. Event recording is a type of observational system in which researcher records number of time a behavior occurs. In the FAP (functional assessment procedure) of Aliza, frequency of the behavior in the class was recorded every time it occurred. This was as many times that the behavior took place in the presence of researcher. The strategy researcher used was known as frequency recording. Aliza used self-monitoring forms to keep track of her behavior. Self-monitoring could be a reinforcement applied as an intervention to inappropriate behavior.

The researcher took notes and kept anecdotal data of the behavior and recorded the behavior each time it occurred in the classroom. From notes and anecdotal data the researcher created a chart. In this study printed anecdotal data sheets were used. The anecdotal data sheet included the behavior types and researcher just put the check in front of the behavior that occurred, which helped me keep track of all those behaviors. The researcher created all the printed forms used in this study. For final product researcher used functional assessment scatter plot and to plot a graph the researcher used a graph paper. The researcher took notes wherever a behavior or an incidence needed description. The recording time was from 8:10 am to 8:55 am, during which intensity occurrence of behavior was observed more than other times. Since present data was only based on observation and was before the application of intervention, therefore, it would become baseline data.

### **3.3 Functional assessment summary statement:**

It was found from the discussion from different teachers that students behave appropriately in activities like cafeteria, assemblies, and free time and on the bus going home. Undesirable behavior was escape motivated. Functional assessment interviews were conducted with some of Aliza's teachers and with her mom. Researcher had a couple of conferences with the student to identify stimuli and settings that are causing

undesirable behavior. After observing the student for ten consecutive school days, researcher formulated following hypotheses based on information gathered from teachers and observations.

#### **Hypothesis # 1**

Aliza does not engage in her disrespectful behavior if short tasks are given instead of a long assignment.

#### **Hypothesis # 2**

Aliza engages in work and follows instructions when teacher reminds her to do so, but she does not do work and disrespects when she is left alone.

Researcher decided to test these two hypotheses in the classroom with Alicia.

Aliza showed her undesirable behavior due to different reasons. Whenever expectations were set for turning in her work or doing her class work, she would show her behavior. Difficulty of the task and length of the task also seem to be affecting her behavior and consequently, Aliza would show her behavior.

Setting events were mostly unknown but whatever information researcher had about her home was not encouraging. Her mom worked two jobs and was absent most of the day and comes home late in night from work. During that time Aliza engages in conflicts with her siblings most of the time. Alicia did not have any friend that lives close by. She stayed home most of the evening and either watched TV or played games.

In her class Aliza was one of the twelve students who showed up daily. The total number of students was sixteen students but four were no shows. Aliza's behavior was escape motivated. She tried to avoid/escape from teacher demands, reprimands and tasks. The consequences of the behavior were the combination of reprimands and rewards according to the behavior. Respectful behavior and completion of the task resulted in token and points to use as free time on Friday. While undesirable behavior resulted in student/teacher conference, and a contract or parent contact.

### **1.3 Summary Statement form**

<u>Pace/Activity/ Event</u>	<u>Predictor</u>
<u>Problem behavior/s</u>	<u>Maintaining</u>

consequences

Less attention	Teacher's
Calling teacher a name/yelling	Escape from expectations/ task
at home/class work	→
.	→
	Class demands

### **Behavior Support Plan for Aliza**

Problem Behaviors

- 1- Calling Teacher a derogatory name
- 2- Yelling: talking loudly

### **3.4 Functional Assessment Summary Statements**

Whenever expectations were set to complete a task in a fixed time, Aliza would engage in undesirable behaviors. She would yell and would call teacher's names. Aliza engaged in the behavior to escape from the work and sometimes to get teacher's attention, though the teacher had already explained and demonstrated the task in detail. Her mom was the only parent and worked two jobs and she stayed out until 9:00 PM in the night. That was the setting event that effected directly on Aliza's behavior. Competing behavior plan from O'Neill et al (1997,P 88) had been followed to organize the support plan.

Completes work	⇒
Praise from teacher / success	↑
Mom works two jobs	⇒
Task provided with in fixed time	⇒
Call teacher a name work	⇒
Escape/ from and	↓
yells	or to get
.	Respect
class rules and	⇒
attention/	
follow instruction	or reward

## **2. General Approach**

### **2.1 Setting Event Strategies:**

Telephonic contact by teacher with her mother in order to discuss progress: Aliza liked to get a lot of praise from parent.

Whenever I told mom that Aliza was improving and her grade is also shows increment, she supported us always and showed her satisfaction over that information. Mom was also happy to hear that Aliza had started turning in her work more than before.

### **2.2 Predictor strategies:**

The teacher reminded Aliza several times to complete her work in a fixed time. Several small tasks were given instead of one big task with five minutes of free time and instructions in each task. Self-monitoring sheet was used and token was given at the completion of the self-monitoring sheet.

### **2.3 Teaching strategies:**

The teacher discussed several important segments to complete a task in short steps. Aliza was supposed to raise her hand in order to get the teacher's help and was supposed to turn in her completed work in the basket and completed self-monitoring sheets to the teacher to get tokens as a reward. The teacher reviewed this information with Aliza before the start of the intervention. Aliza seemed to understand this well because she followed all these with interest and happiness.

### **2.4 Consequence Strategies:**

- 1- The teacher encouraged Aliza to do her work in a fixed time and reminded her about the rewards many times.
- 2- The teacher praised Aliza on a completion of a task and awarded her five minutes free time and a token on the completion of the self-monitoring sheets. She received one token and 5 minutes of free time for each completed task.
- 3- If Aliza still showed undesirable behavior and her teacher would remind her about the consequences.
- 4- If still undesirable behavior continued and the teacher would write a contract with the student and points would be taken off from the token and the free time would be reduced.

### **3.5 Routines:**

The students were supposed to take care of their folders. Each folder had a cover sheet that was meant to keep track of assignments. Since school had a block

schedule each period was broken into several small sections for different activities. Instructions were given in the beginning of the period and then reading or written tasks were provided followed by labs/quizzes or movies.

#### **4. Description of general intervention approach:**

The intervention was a group of different strategies. Self-monitoring and token systems were introduced. The student kept a daily record of her assignments and overall behavior in class. Whenever Aliza brought her completed self-monitoring sheet, she got a token to use as free time on Fridays. The token was a stamped card that meant five minutes of free time. Long tasks were broken into several short step activities. Aliza got five minutes of free time after completion of each short task. The teacher reminded Aliza about completion of assignments during the five minutes of free time that she earned when a task had been completed. During that free time the teacher explained the next step and provided the instructions of what to do next. In this way, the teacher ensured more attention provided to Aliza.

#### **3- A description of the baseline and intervention data:**

There was a significant change that had been observed in baseline and intervention data. Trends of the target behavior were huge in the beginning of the baseline period. Aliza used to yell whenever communicating with the teacher. If she needed guidance or whenever expectations were set, she never answered politely. As we look at the baseline data two times Aliza showed her undesirable behavior for 25 or more times during the observation period. Seven times more than twenty and seven times between fifteen to twenty times she was disrespectful. As compared to the baseline if we see intervention data Aliza showed her undesirable behavior 23 times five or less than five times during an observation period. During four observation periods Aliza did not show any disrespectful behavior. That was a very encouraging and amazing achievement for Aliza. If we consider low frequency during baseline data, seven times Aliza showed her

disrespectful behavior for less than ten times. Out of those seven times, two times Aliza showed her disrespectful behavior five or less than five times. The reason may be that either class was watching educational movies or was doing poster activities along with intervention strategies. In the same way during the intervention, two times frequency of occurrence of Aliza's disrespectful behavior was more than 10 times. This marks the beginning of her intervention actions.

#### **3.1 Effectiveness of the project:**

##### **Comparison of data in terms of trends, level and overlap:**

As we look at the baseline of our data two times Aliza showed her undesirable behavior for 25 or more times during the observation period. This is seven times more than twenty and seven times between fifteen to twenty times she was disrespectful. As compared to the base line if we see the intervention data Aliza showed her undesirable behavior 23 times five or less than five times during the observation period. During four observation periods Aliza did not show any disrespectful behavior. This was a very encouraging and amazing achievement for Aliza. If we consider low frequency during the baseline data, seven times Aliza showed her disrespectful behavior for less than ten times. Out of those seven times two times Aliza showed her disrespectful behavior five or less than five times.

In the same way during the intervention, two times frequency of occurrence of Aliza's disrespectful behavior was more than 10 times. It may be that this was the beginning of the intervention periods for Aliza. As far as points of overlap are concerned there are two points where the data from the baseline almost overlaps with intervention data. The sixth session of the baseline overlaps with the sixth session of the intervention data. Both the sessions had three and four time's frequency of disrespectful behaviors. In the same way if we observe the tenth sessions of the baseline and intervention it overlaps. During the baseline Aliza showed her disrespectful behavior nine times during the intervention and Aliza showed her behavior fourteen times.

#### 4.1 Description of possible changes in relevant variables:

Here in the project the independent variables were a package of curricular modifications that were based on functional assessment data. The dependent variables were calling the teacher derogatory names and yelling to the other relevant variables that were talking with classmates, leaving their seats or engaging in disruptive behaviors and profanity. Writing names on the board controlled most of these relevant dependent variables. The other strategies had also been used such as the student/teacher contract and the parent contact. No data was taken for these relevant variables, as the intensity of occurrence was a lot less than the target behaviors.

There were many changes done during this project that effectively worked on Aliza's behavior. The assigned seat of Aliza had been changed three times during this period. The first time her assigned seat was changed was when she had trouble with one boy. Both were being moved to different corners of the classroom. It was very effective to reduce the chances of a fight and trouble was almost gone. The second times the whole class got a new seating plan and every body moved. That was also effective for at least a day. The third time Aliza was moved to the back of the class on her wish. That helped to get her confidence in the class and she started behaving a lot better than before. The changing of the assigned seat was not part of the intervention strategy.

Another change that helped a great deal was a telephonic contact with the parent. That was a very effective strategy that helped in implementations of the intervention. The parent was very supportive in the intervention and appreciated the contact. The teacher informed her about the progress Aliza was showing.

Other teachers who had applied the similar intervention plan with Aliza also let her know how she was doing in their

class. One teacher was using the hypothesis number one as interventions while the other was using hypothesis number two as a strategy. Both the teachers adopted the intervention strategy in their classes. That helped a great deal as Alicia saw the same treatment in all the classes. That was the uniformity in all classes. In order to keep uniformity in the class the whole class following similar strategies but no data was kept for the behaviors of anyone other than Aliza.

#### 5. Discussion of Hypothesis:

Two hypotheses were formulated originally and were applied in the classroom.

Hypothesis # 1 was "Aliza does not engage in her disrespectful behavior if short tasks are given instead of long assignments." This was tested in the class immediately after the start of the intervention. Aliza was given short tasks instead of large assignments. Aliza seemed comfortable with the short tasks. As a result Aliza's involvement in undesirable behavior went down quickly. She started turning in more work than before, respecting the class rules and much more. As soon as this hypothesis had been applied, Aliza's "calling the teacher a derogatory name" behavior had disappeared completely. But her "yelling at the teacher" behavior persisted for sometime. The frequency of occurrence was a lot less during the intervention than the baseline. The data I collected supported hypothesis #1 to be true and it worked very well.

Hypothesis # 2 was " Aliza engages in work and follows instruction when the teacher reminds her to do so, but she does not do work and disrespects when she is left alone."

This hypothesis was also applied immediately during the intervention phase. Aliza was given five minutes of break at the completion of a short task. During that time the teacher provided her with the instruction for the next short tasks for only 30 seconds. That was done before the start of next short task. The teacher praised Aliza's completion of the tasks. In my opinion this hypothesis showed good results and worked very well for

Aliza. The data supported the success of this hypothesis.

### 3.2 Discussion of relevance and long-term effectiveness:

The intervention was relevant and showed many changes in the student. Some evidence came from the discussion with the parent. She informed us that Aliza’s behavior got better at home and does not call her sisters a derogatory name as she used to do. Complaints about her behaviors had greatly reduced. Her other teachers also appreciated change in her behavior. Aliza definitely learned a new social skill showing her that to become popular among peers one should be polite and should not use abusive language, that is profanity and calling people names.

At this moment I am not planning to change anything in the intervention as it is working well. In future that may change the setting if I have same student in different class or different student with similar behavior.

#### 6. Discussion of student’s satisfaction:

Aliza showed great interest and satisfaction with the results. She is respectful of teachers and class rules. She started turning in more work than before. This raised her grades significantly. When Aliza saw her progress report with better grades she was very happy. She showed her progress report to every one in the classroom. The relationship with her peers had also been better than before.

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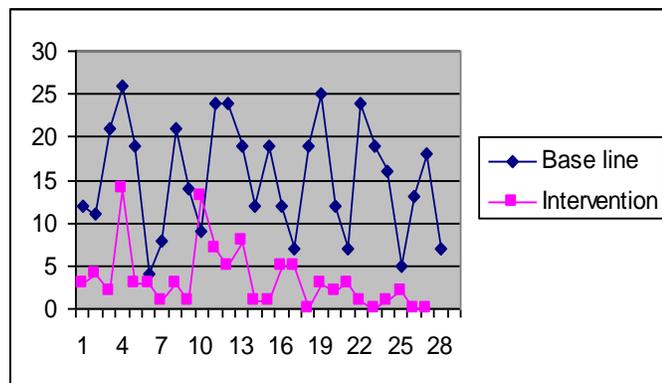
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#### Key to read scatter plot (next page)

/ Yelling  
 / Calling a name  
 Functional Assessment Scatter plot  
 Student: Aliza Grade: 9<sup>th</sup> School: XYZ High School  
 Date(s): Jan to May 2012 Observer Tanvir Malik  
 Behavior(s): Calling Teacher a derogatory name and yelling which is talking loudly  
 Period: 1st

		Days of The Week					
Activity	Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Total
Lab safety	8:10 to 8:40	//////	////	////			19
Lab equipment	8:10 to 8:40				////	////////	17



Notes taking on lab safety	8:40 to 8:55	///		//			5
Diagram of an apparatus	8:40 to 8:55				///	///	6
<b>Total</b>		10	6	8	9	14	47

**Diagram of competing behavior model:**

<u>Setting Events</u>	Predictor	Desired Behavior	Consequences
Mom works two jobs	Less teacher attention, sets expectations to complete a task in a fixed time		Student pays attention, do her work and succeed.
		Student respects class rules and adults	
		Problem behavior	
		Student calls teacher a name	Maintaining Consequence
		Replacement behavior	Escape from assignment and Student gets reprimands and loses privileges. Student gets free time and chance to play on computer.
		Student understands and respect class rules	

