Verbal Abuse of Teachers against Students in Iraqi Secondary Schools

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Abstract

Verbal abuse is a very influencing category that can influence the degree of motivation and the class participation of the student. A designed questionnaire has been designed and distributed to thirty high school students, sixteen males and fourteen females in several high schools in Al Najaf. The results show that the degrees of the verbal abuse in the selected schools are very little and the teachers are very aware of the rules and regulations of the high schools teaching. It is not nil but very rare and it has been noticed that mine degree of abuse causes a degradation in the motivation of the students.

The data analyses show that 70% of the boy students prove that their teachers never behave badly with them. 18% of them stated that their teachers sometimes behave badly. The discussion shows that the girl students have experienced the bad behavior of their teachers more than the boys. 59% of them never experience that type of misbehavior, and 26% of the selected girl students have sometimes experienced that bad behavior.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, Social constructionism, verbal abuse, bullying, class participation, gender, teaching skills,
1. Introduction

This paper has tackled an important issue in the Iraqi secondary schools which is the verbal abuse of the teachers against their students. In the review of literature, some works have been reviewed to see their results in similar setting. Also, the research has stated the definition of the term ‘verbal abuse’ and the skills of the high school teachers, the researchers also stated the factors which influence the degree of the verbal abuse such as age, gender, and the teachers’ competence.

The paper consists of three main parts, the first part is the introduction, problem of the study the research questions. The second part of the study is the literature review of the previous works in this area of study and the methodology of the paper. The final part is the data analysis, discussion and conclusion.

1.1 Research Questions

The research would try to answer the following:

1- What are the main reasons of the verbal abuse by the teachers against the students?
2- What is the influence of gender, skills, and experience of the teacher on the degree of the verbal abuse?
3- Do the class participation and the academic achievement of the students cause the teacher to verbally abuse them?
4- What is the influence of the verbal abuse on the academic motivation of the students?
5- What are the possible solutions to prevent such a kind of abuse against the students in order not to hinder their motivation, participation and achievement?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sociolinguistics

This discipline of language has been emerged recently by Thomas Callen Hodson. He has discovered a vast influence of the norms, cultures, traditions of society on the language of that society. As it has been said by one of the linguists “if you want to learn the culture of a specific society, learn their language” (Gumprez & Cook 2008:78).

It has been proved that there is no chance to disconnect the relation between the language on one hand and the gender, ethnicity and the social class of such a society on the other hand (Coulmas, 2013:42-44).

2.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is the social approaches frame work that everybody chooses to use and interact in a society. These right choices of
these approaches are the factors which determine what is right or normal and abnormal. Among these social approaches is the right use of a language aspect in the right social situation (Gumprez & Cook 2008:81).

2.3 Verbal Abuse

This topic was not thoroughly investigated, some of the works which go through this topic will be explained and what are their conclusions and contributions. Verbal abuse could be defined as a verbal bullying, insult or assault that could be assigned to the victim or about the victim (Infante 1995 and Evans 1992: 1,6). It is a negative statement that defines a person or a group of people by using call-naming, insults or ridicule taunts or threats (Infante 1995 and Evans 1992: 1,6).

The verbal abuse could be performed not only by speech but also by other indirect para linguistic cues that mean projective meanings such as a tone of voice, body language or gestures accompanying the utterances. From another viewpoint, the verbal abuse is a speech act that leads to derogatory consequences for the respondents regardless of the intent to hurt (Davies & Harre 1990). The rude people who exert verbal abuse believe that their aggressive behavior is justified and they do not aware of the hurt caused by their verbal aggression (Martin etal. 1996)

Casarjian (2002: 38) states that the verbal abuse as any violent verbal attack from the teacher toward the students, these attacks may include words like dams, stupid …..etc., these words may have psychological influence on the student, and as a result his academic contribution might deteriorate. Another definition of verbal abuse is stated as "constant name calling, harsh threats, and sarcastic comments that continually beat down the child's or student's self-esteem with humiliation” ( Garbarino et al, 1986: 86).

One of the researches states that teachers use their power to exert Kinds of abuses, one of them is the verbal abuse. This is a big problem that needs to be treated rapidly, although there are many rules to govern the rights of the students and teachers, but the teachers continue their abuse to students, So there must be a strict procedure in schools to stop the verbal abuse as it has a great impact on the education process as a whole (Sharpe, 2011:8-9).

Any kind of abuse in the period of childhood has a great negative influence on the emotion, psychological and behavioral impact on the individual in the adulthood. The hurting words, the negative insulting phrases such as bad children, stupid, not good enough …..etc., all these
are accepted by the child with fear, but their influence will appear in the Future (Roth 2004: 38).

2.3.1 The Characteristics of Verbal Abuse
There is an interesting remark in the verbal abuse concerning the gender, in most of the cases, the abuser is a male and abused person, a female but this not always true.

1- The verbal abuse actually hurts the personality and the abilities of the child.
2- The verbal abuse might be implicit such subtle comments or brain washing, or it might be explicit such as name-calling, blaming and accusing.
3- The verbal abuse is stealthy; it means the person might insult another with his/her knowledge or realization.
4- The verbal abuse is not a consequence of an issue; it is an issue by itself. Any issue can be resolved after a long conflict, but the issue of verbal abuse will stay long in order to be solved.

The verbal abuse may contain an incongruence message, i.e., the abuser wants to tell you something sincerely and honestly, but actually he tells you what is wrong about you, so it has a double impact. Oklahoma Coalition Against Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault (405) 524-0700.

2.3.2 Categories of Verbal Abuse
The verbal abuse could be categorized into several forms or categories; the first one is the threat which means saying something scary or terrified to control the addressee's behavior, such as threatening a student to fire him/her out of the class or to hit him/her with a stick. The second category of the verbal abuse is the negative prediction which means that the abuser predicts something bad about the child's future or that he would not achieve any things in his academic and real life (Garbarino et al, 1986).

The third category of verbal abuse is ridiculing and teasing which includes ridiculous comments on the students to make fun of him and humiliate him. These comments may be about the students' mistakes, or his appearance, clothes or sometimes his way of speaking. (Garbarino et al., 1986). The final category of verbal abuse is shaming and public criticizing which means the discussion and comments of the student's mistakes in front of other students or in public. This will embarrass him and cause a great harm on his character (Schaefer,1997:626). Other categories or forms of verbal abuse suggested by Hamarman & Bernet (2000), they are terrorizing and verbal assaulting. Terrorizing
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This means assaulting the student or the child verbally and creates a climate of fear and worry and fear. This climate makes the student thinks that the world is unpredictable. Verbal assaulting includes name calling, threatening, insults and humiliation that continually impair the student's or child's self-esteem.

2.4 Teachers' Verbal Abuse in School

Verbal abuse in schools could be defined as the teachers' verbal attack on the students' characters or abilities (Casarjian 2000 as cited in Brendeg etal, 2007:27). In other words, this definition is used to give a general understanding about the way in which a teacher verbally attacks students which might influence their abilities, characters and class participation (Kvachadze & Zakarei shvili, 2009:31).

Five categories could be labeled under the verbal abuse:

1. Verbal put downs and name calling: This category defines teasing, name calling at the pupil by the teacher as stupid or dummy (Casarjian 2000).
2. Threats: this behavior implies a kind of threat against the pupil to control his/her behavior like harassing the student to withdraw him/her from a class or a school. (Krugnan & Krugman 1984 ,Shuba 2000)
3. Negative predictions: this kind of abuse is very influential on the students' characters, it is a kind of prediction that the students will never achieve any success in his school or in his entire life (Schaefer,1997:626).
4. Ridiculing and teasing: This type of abuse is the ridiculous or sarcastic comments on the student's mistakes. Sometimes the teacher makes fun of the student's appearance (Garbarino etal 1986).
5. Shaming and public criticism: The behavior is a damaging one when the teacher discusses the weak points or defects of the students in front of other students. Also comparing the student's level with other students, this is a negative scale and has a negative influence on him/her(Schaefer, 1997:626).

2.5 Teachers' Characteristics and Skills

The studies on verbal abuse diagnosed some personal characteristics of the teachers who exert this abuse. These characteristics are essential factors that decide the abuse. Those criteria are age, gender and skills

2.5.1 Age
Some studies as stated below show that age of an individual in the career of teaching and care taking contributes a lot in the degree of the verbal abuse.

According to Trocme et al (2001:78) 48% of female abusers were aged (31-40), 22% were aged (26-30) and only 7% were aged under 25. In the case of male teachers there was a slight difference, 51% were in the age group (31-40), the next high group with 24% was in the age group above 40. The age of (26-30) was only (15%) in the male abusers.

In the US, 41% of the female abusers were in the 20’s, 35% are in the age of 30’s, indicating that the majority of the abusers in US and Canada were between 20 to 40. On the other hand, the male abusers in the same study were 34% in their 30’s and 29% in the age of 20’s. Therefore, for males, Canadian reports indicate that most male abusers are under 30 but in the US males, most of them are between 20-40 years of age (Martin etal., 1996).

2.5.2 Gender of Abusive Teachers

In the school setting, the gender of the abusive teacher is not highly considerable. Both male and female teachers abuse student in equivalent percentage. McEvoy (2005) indicated that 30% of his study samples were male abusive teachers, 12% were female and 57% were both in the same degree. It can be said that both male and female teachers abuse students if they are exposed to teaching environment. As mentioned before, age and gender are not key factors of abusing the students by the teacher, there are other key factors which influence the degree of abuse by the teacher such as the teachers’ skills which highly influence the teachers’ abuse against students. The age factor may be influenced by some aspects such as the presence of children at home whether it is a child or not, the older teachers may abuse students because they take the role of caretaking of children at home as grandparents. Concerning time again, teachers may abuse students because they have been in this profession for more than five years. McEvoy (2005) found out that 89% of teachers who experienced teaching for more than five years bully students. Again he stated that the teachers who have secured government jobs abuse students because they feel that they would not be punished for that abuse. Finally those teachers who have more than five year experience in
teaching and have secured job they consequently fall in the age group of the teachers who are abusing students.

2.5.3 Teachers’ skills

Any teacher in any academic institution must have some skills to accomplish the hard job of teaching. Teachers’ competence is the first skill that the teacher must have to control his class. The teachers’ competence means that the teacher must have the excellent knowledge to answer students’ questions. Plan his lecture carefully, follow the curriculum correctly and have enough knowledge to control his material (Wragg, 1999: 133)

The lack of competence will lead to some problems in the class such poor classroom organization failure to adopt the curriculum and technological change and failure to follow the prescribed material; as a result, there would be a poor deliver to the lecture objectives and inadequate control of the classroom. This lack of competence will eventually lead the teacher to get nervous and abuse any student objects his way of teaching. In the same manner, the students who are not engaging in the lecture will try to make some problems to get rid of their boring feeling, that behavior will lead the teacher to exert verbal abuse

There are several domains of competence that teachers are expected to demonstrate

1- Commitment to student duties and learning which is evaluated based on whether the teacher is committed to the well-being of students and follow their progress in learning.

2- Professionals knowledge of the teacher has a great influence, the teachers ways of teaching, their familiarity to the curriculum, their assessment strategies, all these elements influence the degree of the teachers abuse against their students.

3- Leadership in the teaching and learning environments is one of the most factors of abuse. If the teacher gets an excellent leadership on his students or dealing with other professionals, parents, headmasters of course he will demonstrate good results and the abuse will be very rare or non. (Education Act, 1990)

To sum up, teachers need to be adequately competent to follow and support their students in the process of learning. Teachers must treat their students equitable and with a high degree of respect. Teachers also must vary their instructional ways of teaching and their techniques of
assessment. In following these guidelines, the teachers will not abuse their students and they will get the results they expected.

On the other hand, teachers who do not meet these competence factors may strongly engage in a kind of abuse. If students feel that their teacher is not competent enough and is not able to control his class. They will start to make a kind of trouble to change their teacher or to try to make him/ her leave them, as a result the teacher will exert a kind of abuse against them.

3. Experiment

3.1 The data of the research have been collected according to a designed questionnaire and distributed to thirty students in different secondary schools in Al Najaf in February 2019. The participants are sixteen boy students and fourteen girl students. The questionnaire consisted of 48 questions.

The data have been analyzed by using the SPSS program and Microsoft excel in forms of charts and tables. The results have been described according to pie charts and table to show the degree of the verbal abuse of the teachers against the student.

3.2 Participants

The participants are thirty students, sixteen boys and fourteen girls, they are selected from different high schools, public and private. After giving clear information and directions of filling the questionnaires. Originally they were thirty two students but two questionnaires have been left because two girl students have missed the other side of the questionnaire.

3.3 Data analysis and Discussion

The data of this research have been collected according to a designed questionnaire. The first nineteen questions have described the teachers' behavior towards students. Questions from 20 to 34 consider the positive behavior of students regarding their work, participation and behavior inside the class. Questions 35-48 state the negative behavior of the students concerning their homework and attitudes towards school work, behavior inside the class and their teachers. There are 14 girl students and 16 boy students participated in the questionnaire.
As it has been mentioned before, questions 1-19 show the teachers' behavior towards the students. It would be too long to analyze each question but it is enough to select some prominent questions. Concerning girls, Statement 1 shows that eight students out of fourteen have never been assigned with bad mark by the teachers. Only two often have been remarked with bad marks and four students show that the teachers sometimes mark them bad. Statement 3 shows that 13 students out of 14 have never been undergone a process of making of them by their teachers. Statements 8, 9, 10, 11 show the same number of students that have never been assigned unpleasant remarks, comment of being unsuccessful students swears on them to make them embarrassed and threat to be expelled out of the class.

![Figure (1) Girls’ answers of questions 1-19](image)
Verbal Abuse of Teachers against Students ........................ (717)

Statements 14 and 15 are about students' mistakes, in statements 14, 4 student show that their teacher never discusses their mistakes together with others, 6 of them said that the teacher sometimes do that.

Three students of 14 said that the teacher often discusses their mistakes in front of others, only one reveals that his teacher very often discusses his mistakes together with others.

Concerning the total average of the fourteen students, we can see that the total answers of 14 students about 19 statements, each student should choose one answer, so the total is $14 \times 19 \times 1 = 266$.

The students scored 192 answers as never, sometimes answer got 48, often 23, very often got only 3, so we can judge that 72% of the answers show that teachers never behave badly towards the students. Only 18% of the students prove that sometimes behave according to the statements above in the diagram. Only 8% of the students say that teachers behave like this often. Very often got only 1.1% that has only three scores out of 266.
The boy students show a little different diagnosis about statement 1-19. They are 16 students. Statement 1 reveals that 10 students have never been assigned with bad marks, 3 students scored sometimes, 1 is often and 2 very often got bad mark.

In statement 3 which is about making fun of students when they express their opinions, eight students show that they have never been under the action of making fun, six students say that their teacher sometimes make fun of them, only two students said that their teacher often make fun of them.

Concerning statement 8 which is about unpleasant remarks about students' appearance, thirteen students never face such situations, the rest 3 students proved that sometimes their teacher make bad remarks about their appearance.

Statement 9 is that the teacher predicts that the students won't be successful in the future, 12 students has never been judged to be unsuccessful in the future, also three students said that sometimes their teacher predicts that they would be unsuccessful in the future. Only one student has scored often about his teachers.

Statement 10 is about teachers' swearing on the students to make them embarrassed by swearing on them, four students have been sometimes sworn on them by their teachers, two got often and only one got very often. Statement 11 is about threatening the student to be expelled outside the class. 12 students out of 16 has never been threatened to be expelled outside the classes. 3 students have been sometimes expelled from their classes. Only one student has been expelled very often.

Again statements 14 and 15 about are the students' mistakes. Statement 14 is about discussing the students' mistakes with others. 5 students have never been undergone this behavior, 3 students sometimes got their mistakes discussed with others, 5 students proved that their teachers discussed their mistakes with other often, 3 students have been in this experience very often.

Statement 15 is about passing the other students' attention to one of the student's mistakes. The teachers of seven students have never got other students attention about the students' mistakes. 8 students have sometimes got their mistakes entitled in front of other students, only one student has experienced this terrible behavior very often.
Verbal Abuse of Teachers against Students .......................... (719)

If we look at the total line, we can see that 59.8% of the 16 students have never been through these negative behaviors of the teachers against them, 26.6% of the 16 students have sometimes been under these behaviors, 7.2% of the students have often experienced through those behaviors, 6.25% of the students scored very often to be under these behaviors.

Fig (3) boys’ answers of questions 20-34

The second part of the questionnaire is about positive behavior of the students towards their school work, class participation and the degree of engagement inside the class. We have fifteen statement and for each statement there is a series of frequencies (very often, often, sometimes, seldom, never). We will not analyze each statement, but we will select some statements and the readers can see the diagram which clearly
figured. Let’s start with statement 20 which is about the students attention, we can see that 4 students have paid attention very often while the eight students out of 16 have often paid attention. Only two students have sometimes paid enough attention in the class and the final two never paid any attention.

Statement 23 is about the way in which the students engage to do their school work, it is proved that 4 students have very often done their work thorough and well, other 9 students showed that sometimes they did the work thoroughly and only one student has never done that. Concerning statement 26 which is about the importance of school, 11 students think very often that school is very important, other 4 students out of sixteen often think that school is very important, only one student thought that sometimes school is very important.

Statement 27 is about confronting difficult problems in the school. 4 students out of sixteen are very often persistent to confront difficult problems in school; other 7 students are often persistent to face school problems. 4 students are sometimes persistent to face school problems and the final student has never been persistent to face any problem in the school.

Statement 30 is about asking questions to get more information from the teacher. 5 students have very often asked question to get knowledge, other 7 students have often raised question to get extra information rather than the lesson, the final 4 students sometimes ask question to get knowledge.

Statement 31 is about trying finishing assignment the difficult assignment, 7 students very often try to finish difficult assignment. 7 students often try to finish the difficult school work. Only two students sometimes try to accomplish their difficult school work. Only one student seldom tries to finish the difficult assignment. Statement 34 is about engaging with teachers in a conversation about subject matters before or after school. 4 students like very often to engage with teachers in a conversation outside the class. 6 students often like to engage in such a conversation with teachers. 2 students only sometimes engage in a conversation with a teacher outside the class, three students seldom engage in conversation like these, the final student has never engaged in conversation with his teachers outside the class or school.

To sum up, It has been clearly that 30.8% of the sixteen students very often like go through these positive action and behaviors with their teachers. 34.1% of the students often engage in these actions with their
teachers. 17.9% of the students sometimes like to engage in these positive actions with their teachers. The students who seldom participate in these promising actions and behavior are only 10% of the students. 5.4% of the students have never felt positive to engage in the positive actions with their teachers.

The female Students have different frequencies about answering statement 20_34. This figure will focus on the same selected questions to get parallel results along with boys. It is important to remember that girl Students are fourteen. Concerning statement 20, three girl Students pay attention very often to the lecture, eight students often pay attention to the lecture, the last three students sometimes pay attention to the lecture as we have said before statement 23 is about finishing the school work, 3 girls very often attempt to do the their work thorough and well rather just finishing it, only one student often do her work thorough and well. six Students sometimes do their work thoroughly, another girl seldom try to do her work well, three Students have never done that before. Concerning the important at the school in statement 26,seven Students very often said that school is important, another five Students often said that school is very important, the rest two Students sometimes think that school is important. Statement 27 is about the students’ persistence to confront difficult problems. Five students are often persistent to confront difficult problems , three Students are sometime persistent to do that, other 3 are
seldom persistent to force real problems, the final three students have never been persistent to force any difficult problems.

Statement 30 is about asking questions to get more information. The girl students show relatively equal frequencies, three students have very often asked to get extra information, two students have often raised such questions, other three students sometimes have asked questions to get more information, two students seldom raise such questions, the final four students have never asked questions to get extra information.

Statement 31 is about finishing the difficult assignments, five girl students have very often wanted to finish the assignments even if they were difficult assignments, two students often wanted to do such difficult assignments, three students sometimes have finished the difficult assignments, the final four students seldom try to finish the difficult assignments.

Totally the percentages of the five frequencies are relatively equal 21.9% of the students very often like to do these positive behaviors, 20.4% of the students often like to engage through the active positive actions with teachers, 21.9% sometimes wish to do the positive action and do their duties teachers ask them to do, 18% of the students seldom do these optimistic good behavior with their teachers, finally 17.6% of the students never got engaged in that good behavior.

![Figure (5) boys' answers of questions 35-48](image-url)
The third part of the questionnaire is about the negative behavior of students with their teachers or classmates. It is fourteen statements from 35 to 48. The number of boys is 16, statement 36 is about coming late to class. Seven students never come late to class, four students seldom come late to class, only two students sometimes come late to class, three students often come late to class.

Statement 39 is about negative interference with peers' work. 10 students never interfere their classmates' work. Four students seldom interfere them; two of them sometimes do that behavior.

Statement 44 is about initiatives. Five students never do any independent initiatives, three students seldom do such initiatives, four students sometimes start independent initiatives, two students often initiate new thing and two of them very often do that.

Statement 47 is about criticizing the subject matter, 10 students never criticize the subject matter, three students seldom criticize the subject matter, only two students sometimes criticize the subject matter and only one often does that.

The total percentage refers that 42.4% of the students never do these negative aspects, 24% of the students seldom do these negative activities, 20% sometimes do these negative aspects, only 9% often do these aspects and 4% very often go through these activities.

![Figure (6) girls’ answers of questions 35-48](image-url)
The girl students who participated in the questionnaire are 14 students. Concerning statement 36, 5 students never come late for class, another 5 students seldom come late to class, three students sometimes come late, and only one often comes late.

Statement 39 thirteen students never interfere with other peers' work and only one seldom does that. In statements 44 seven students never start any initiatives, three students seldom do such initiatives, and only four students sometimes start independent initiatives.

Statement 47 is about criticizing the importance of the subject matter, seven students never criticize the importance of the subject, four students seldom criticize the subject matter, and only three students sometimes criticize the subject matter. The percentage of the girl students is lower than the boy students.

42, 3% never do these negative aspects, 29, 5% seldom do negative behavior with students and teachers. 19% of the students sometimes go through these negative aspects, only 6, 6% of the students often like to do these activities and finally 2% very often do these aspects.

**Conclusions**

According to the data analysis and discussion, the following will be concluded:

1. The skills and experience of the teachers have great influence on the degree of the verbal abuse.
2. The gender of the students has no influence on the degree of verbal abuse.
3. 70% of the boy students prove that their teachers never behave badly with them. 18% of them stated that their teachers sometimes behave badly.
4. The discussion shows that the girl students have experienced the bad behavior of their teachers more than the boys. 59% of them never experience that type of misbehavior, and 26% of the selected girl students have sometimes experienced that bad behavior.
5. The questionnaires results show that more than 60% of the students like to engage positive actions and behaviors with their teachers.
6. 17% of the boy students sometimes like to go through these positive actions. Only 10% of the students seldom engage in such positive actions.
7. The girl students scored 60% to engage through positive actions. 21% of them very often do that positive action, 20% often do that, 21% sometimes do that.
8. 66% of the boy students did not go through negative aspects or behaviors with their teachers. Nearly 44% of the boy students behave badly with their teachers.

9. Concerning girl students, 71% of them rarely do negative behaviors with their teachers. Only 19% of the girl students sometimes do these negative behaviors. 8% of the girl students rarely do these bad negative aspects.

As a result it can be seen that boy students haven’t been under the verbal abuse, in return the students behave in a good manner and were motivated to participate in the class work.

For girls, the result are a little bit lower but still worthy to be good and the teachers were very good with them and the students are active and eager to learn and participate in the class work.

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