

Full Length Research Paper

Teachers' Perception and Management Strategies of Behavioral Problems in Primary School Children

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The current research examined the perception of primary school teachers about the occurrence and management of behavioral problems of pupils. The sample consisted of 60 primary school teachers, both males and females, within the age bracket of 20 to 50 years. The sample was approached in a non-segregated private school system. A questionnaire was used to assess the perception of teachers. Data was analyzed qualitatively using content analysis. Results revealed that perceptions of occurrences of both the conduct and the emotional problems were significantly different for boys and girls. The results identified the three most frequently perceived conduct problems as: noise making, talking without permission and unauthorized movement in class. The three most frequent perceived emotional problems were: lack of focus, over reliance on teacher and anxiety about the lesson. Teachers employed reinforcement strategies more frequently to deal with these problems. Parental neglect was identified as the most commonly perceived cause of behavioral problems. This study holds significant implications for academia.

Keywords: Teachers' Perception, Primary School Children, Behavioral Problems, Management Strategies, Perceived Gender Differences.

INTRODUCTION

Behavioral problems in childhood are stable enough to justify important investment in early evaluation and prevention programs. Effective resolution of these problems relies on parents' and teachers' convergent efforts. Understanding and effectively perceiving, the scope of pupils' emotional and conduct problems, aids teachers and professional counselors in devising didactic programs that are more likely to meet pupils' needs in a better way. In more children, where the troublesome and forceful practices are going on inside the home, they might be analyzed as having 'oppositional disobedient turmoil'

LITERATURE REVIEW

The way a teacher perceives his/her pupils serves as a reflective appraisal and has an impact on the pupil's attitudes and behavior. Teachers'

understanding of their awareness and interpretation of pupils' behavioral problems and how they choose to deal, or to not deal is an influential factor in the elimination or persistence of at least some of children's behavioral problems (Brophy and Rohrkember, 1981).

Numerous researches depict that when people have a firm belief, they create a reality equivalent to that belief. Merton (1957) further advanced this idea by pointing out that even when the original belief is false, an individual's unconscious actions can make it come true. Many studies on the impact of perception and expectations of teachers suggest that positive evaluation of a pupil's behavior induces positive teaching and consequently higher achievements. This process is known as the Pygmalion effect (Tenenbaum and Ruck, 2007).

Applying this notion in the classroom setting, when a teacher forms a negative perception of a pupil who is not displaying appropriate behavior in the

classroom, the teacher will have negative or low expectations from that pupil and can unintentionally communicate these expectations. This influences learning indirectly by affecting pupils' own beliefs about their competencies, their expectations for success, and consequently their effort and other achievement behavior.

The role that teachers play in their pupils' life needs to be studied in the indigenous scenario. It is a significant phenomenon, especially relevant in the Pakistani context, since the number of counselors available in our schools is limited, and there are many schools that do not have any counselors at all. Naturally, teachers have to bridge the gap between the pupils and guidance services. According to Pakistan Education Statistics 2010-2011, there are only 151 teacher training institutes in the public sector and 33 private sector institutes. Whereas there were over 442,398 registered primary school teachers according to a UNESCO survey (2006-2007). These figures show that there is a dearth of teacher training facilities in Pakistan. As expected, this affects teachers' ability to tackle and to help the pupils with their behavioral and emotional problems. In Pakistan, the teacher/pupil ratio is 1:38 at the primary level that shows the quantitative challenge confronting the teachers in Pakistan (Pakistan Education Statistics, 2006-2007). Whereas, numerous studies have found that it is critical to have a 1:25 teacher - pupil ratio for an effective primary education system. This empirical challenge in addition to the lack of training and skills on the part of the teachers rendered resolutions of pupils' emotional and behavioral problems next to impossible.

Rationale of Current Study

This study endeavors to investigate pupils' behavioral difficulties from the perspective of their teachers and the management strategies that are used in response to these perceived behavioral problems. The incentive for this study comes from the fact that although there is sizeable literature on psychosocial difficulties of pupils and their impacts on the educational accomplishments of school children (Achenbach, Dumenci and Rescorla, 2003; McGee, Prior, Williams, Smart, and Sanson, 2002), there is inadequate literature examining teachers' perspectives about conduct problems of pupils and how they mediate to aid pupils. The information in this proposed research study will highlight the importance of having effective teacher training programs that will assist teachers in understanding behavioral issues arising in the classroom setting of their pupils and to handle stress more effectively through positive management mechanisms.

This is a significant issue bearing in mind the fact that the number of school counselors in Pakistan is

very limited and some schools even do not have any counselors at all, as a result, the teachers have to bridge the gap of school guidance services. There is also a lack of appropriate mental health services for children in Pakistan. Although teachers are of course not qualified to be experts in psychological issues, they interact with children on a daily basis, and for substantial amounts of time. They should be keen observers in identifying their pupils' behavioral problems. One of the first steps towards ensuring the psychological well-being of school children in Pakistan would be the correct identification and awareness of their problems for early interventions and proper management so that these behaviors do not become more pronounced in later life and lead to criminality and development of various other personality disorders. This will furthermore enhance the academic capabilities of children and function well in a competitive society.

METHODS

The sample of the study comprised of sixty primary school teachers, males (n=3) and females (n=57) taken from the branch of a private school system in Lahore. The age range of the sample varied between 20 and 50 years with the majority falling within the 30-39 years bracket (48.3% or n=29). An important factor in the study was the level of education which ranged from Bachelors to Masters. The data showed that most of the population had completed their Masters (51.7 % or n=31). Those with a Bachelor's degree comprised of 41.7% and only 6.7 % individuals were having higher education such as M. Phil. Majority of the individuals were married or engaged (53.3% or n=32). A nominal number of people were divorced or separated (1.7% or n=1) and the rest of the sample was single (40% or n =24). Half (50% or n= 30) of individuals had experience in dealing with children having special needs. Majority of respondents (31.7 % or n= 19) had been teaching for 6 to 10 years .Those with 3 to 5 years teaching experience comprised of (23.7 % or n=14) and fewer number (20 % or n= 12) individuals had experience more than 10 years Most teachers (46.7 % or n=28) were teaching KG and grade 1, (18.3 % or n= 11) were teaching grade 2 and 3, (20 % or n=12) were teaching grade 4 to 6 and (15 % or n=9) teachers were teaching all grades

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was done to analyze results .For this content analysis was used. The questionnaire responses were analyzed further to calculate the frequency and percentages of commonly occurring behavioral. Moreover, teachers perceived causes of

behavior problems were assessed regarding frequency.

The problems perceived to occur always in classroom setting are Noisemaking (%=15), Talking without permission (%=12), Abusive towards classmates (%=2) and Bullying (%=2). The problems that rarely occurred were Unpunctuality (%=47) and Snoozing in class (%=50). Bunking class (%=45) had the highest frequency among the problems that were perceived not to occur at all.

The problems perceived to occur always in classroom setting are Anxiety about failure in the lesson (%=3), Gloomy mood (%=2), Oversensitivity (%=2), Attention seeking (%=2), Over reliance on teacher (%=2) and Lack of concentration (%=2). The problems that rarely occurred were Pessimism (%=45) and Work avoidance (%=28). Pessimism (%=35) had the highest frequency among the problems that were perceived not to occur at all.

The boys displayed significantly higher scores for Aggressiveness in school, Physical aggression and offensive language. There is a significant association between gender and dishonest.

This shows that boys and girls displayed different kinds of emotional problems. The boys displayed higher scores for lack of focus, work avoidance and over-reliance on the teacher. The girls showed higher scores for oversensitivity and extreme shyness. This shows that boys and girls displayed different kinds of emotional problems and there is significant association between gender and gloomy mood

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These causes have been classified into three main categories, namely: Parental factors, personal factors and environmental factors. Most causes were seen to be rooted in parenting and its effects. Personality factors ranked second in terms of the number of causes identified. The category of environmental factors had the least number of causes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research established the prevalence of perceived emotional and conduct difficulties of primary school children. The objective was to give a representation of Emotional and Conduct problems of primary school children through their teachers' perspective and not to unveil the clinical

picture of these problems. Conventionally, most of the children with emotional and conduct complications are taught in their normal classes across Pakistan. Therefore the teacher's perspective is vital for both the pupils' and the teachers' well-being.

A comparison in Conduct and the Emotional problems revealed that Conduct problems were perceived to be more prevalent than Emotional problems - view supported by research conducted by Poulou and Norwich (2000).

These findings also signify that teachers need to be more trained and enthusiastic to make learning more interesting to manage problems of lack of concentration and noisemaking; as one of the highest identified the perceived causes of these problems was lack of interest in the subject being taught.

We analyzed whether behavioral problems displayed by girls and boys are different. In the current research Conduct behavior captures acting out behavior (e.g. being abusive towards classmates and aggressiveness) and Emotional problems included difficulties arising from internal problems. (e.g. extreme shyness, attention seeking). Concordant with substantial past research, male pupils were perceived to display more Conduct problems than female pupils (Chen and Liu, 2003). This is in lines with the present study, as boys were rated to be higher on the problem of aggressiveness and untidiness; girls tend to be rate higher in the domain of Emotional problems.

The finding that the most common perceived cause of almost all of the frequently occurring problems was neglect by parents corresponds to research by Ugodulunwa (2003) in which parental neglect was identified as one of the top three most commonly perceived causes. This finding also suggests the significance of the family in the social and emotional well-being as well as academic success of children.

Teachers are seen as natural helpers because of the nature of their job requirements. If the teachers want their pupils to achieve academic success, they need to have a better understanding of pupils' problems.

The current study extends the knowledge of teachers' perception of behavioral problems of children by expanding to further finding out the management strategies teachers adopt to manage these problems. Teachers' management strategies were assessed by analyzing their answers qualitatively. In the current research most primary school teachers reported utilizing positive management strategies such as counseling, encouragement, etc. Findings of the present study replicated the results of previous researches (Polou and Norwich, (2000); Tillery et al (2005); Sprenger (2011). Negative interventions such as disregard, reprimand, and giving negative remarks to the pupils were seldom stated especially for problems of an emotional nature. None of the teachers

mentioned physical punishment as a management strategy for dealing with behavioral difficulties.

Implications/Conclusion of the study

The current research pointed out that the teachers' opinion of pupils' behavioral problems and their causes are important for formulating and implementing proper management strategies over their group of children.

The finding that noisemaking was rated highest among conduct problems suggests that either primary school children may not be adequately involved in both curricular and extra-curricular activities in school or they lack interest in schoolwork. The implication of this research is that teachers need to be involved and adequately trained to use a variety of teaching methods to keep pupils engaged and make learning more interesting.

It is worth noting that during the analysis, most teachers reported comparatively more varied management strategies in dealing with pupil behavioral problems than with emotional complications. This finding signified that teachers should be educated for coping with children having Emotional complications. Teachers should exercise flexibility in employing these strategies because a strategy that works well in one scenario may not be a sure fix in other situations. In contrast, a pupil's misconduct could be owing to their underlying psychological problems. Behavioral problems are often a sign of underlying psychological problems, e.g., aggressiveness and abuse towards classmates might indicate some kind of abuse at home as these behaviors are learned responses. Thus, the understanding of and helping pupils with conduct problems should come in handy in creating a healthier learning environment in the classroom through better management.

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