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☎ : 91-11-25285894

Chennai Office:
170, 7th Street, 4th Road,
Mugappair Eri Scheme,
Near Ambedkar Play Ground,
Mugappair West, Chennai-600 037.
Cell: 093827-80035
website : www.neelkamalpub.com
e-mail : sales@neelkamalpub.com
jcgr_neelkamal@rediff.com

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BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS AMONG THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS (CORRECTIVE STRATEGIES)

Ramaa S., Asha Joseph & Remith George Carri

Abstract

The study has been attempted to identify the behavioral problems among elementary school children and it aims at finding out the strategies adopted by the teachers to correct these problems. It is a survey type study. The finding will help in understanding the gravity of behavioral problems among elementary school children. This can help the elementary schools in providing training to teachers to handle the behavioral problems and helps in preventing and correcting behavioral problems among elementary school children.

Elementary education plays a vital role in the development of youngsters' character, creativity and knowledge. Character formation is the most important aspect of the development of an individual. Knowledge without character is like giving a person a powerful weapon without teaching him how to use it. It could result in more harm than good to the individual and the society.

The best formative years in one's life are childhood. It is a known fact that the minds of

children are just like bee's wax. It could be shaped and molded to the required shape easily. For the better growth and development of children and to modify their behavior, elementary education is essential. This stage is very significant because this is the time for the improvement of behavior structure of the child. Pupils at primary level normally belong to the age group of 6 to 14. During this age they have a variety of problems, belonging to various categories like physical,

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- *Dr. Ramaa S. (Guide)* is a Professor of Education, Department of Education, RIE (NCERT), Mysore.
 - *Asha Joseph* is a Field Investigator with the same institution.
 - *Remith George Carri* is a Research Scholar with the same institution.

psychological and social. Nearly half of all children exhibit some difficult behavior at some stage as they mature. It has also been suggested that at any one time, up to 20% of children and young people may be affected by emotional and behavioral problems of some kind (Buchanan, 1999). Research suggests (e.g. Cooper, Smith and Upton, 1994) that while some children experience long-lasting and serious behavior problems, for the majority behavior problems appear to represent just a phase in development. Buchanan (1999) studied children's behavior at 7, 11 and 16 years, and showed that around half the children who had behavioral difficulty at one age had grown out of it by the next stage, yet very few had received any formal treatment or intervention in that time. There is considerable evidence that the number of children with troubled behavior is rising (Rutter and Smith, 1995) and that these difficulties are not distributed evenly amongst the population. Poverty, poor housing and poor educational attainment are all associated with higher levels of behavior difficulties and the heaviest concentrations are in the inner urban areas.

The children of today are the youths of tomorrow and the future

citizens of the country. Therefore proper development and growth of children should be ensured even in the earliest age. The positive steps in this line taken by the school or the home together ensure a healthy democracy in the country.

The behavioral problems of the children upset and affect the classroom teachers in the teaching-learning process. It is also true that a problematic child affects himself apart from annoying and disturbing other children, teachers and others. In India where most of the schools do not have educational psychologists, the children with scholastic backwardness are not getting any professional help though school achievement is given a lot of importance.

Teachers should identify the children with different problems; understand the causes of these wherever possible. They should understand the impact of the problems on the achievement of children in scholastic and non-scholastic areas as well as social and emotional adjustment. Many studies have shown that children's behavior may be quite different from one setting to another (Johnson).

Concept of Behavioral Problem

According to Good's Dictionary of Education,

Behavioral Problem is that

- which damages an individual or the group physically, socially or mentally
- antisocial behavior that has resisted sincere effort by outside forces to change it to acceptable behavior.

“The behavioral problems occur in those children who deviate from this group because of certain undesirable habits, personality habits or behavior in the home, school or society; where conduct interferes or likely to interfere with the individual’s fullest development and usefulness- socially, educationally or hygienically and whose behavior may result in serious handicaps of one sort or another in later life”.

In the broad sense ‘problem behavior’ is a term that applies to any kind of behavior that creates difficulties (interferes with effective functioning of the students or classroom groups) or reveals the presence of difficulties (indicates that the student or the group is not functioning effectively). Problem behavior is often produced or aggravated by emotional conflicts.

Nature of Behavioral Problem

Most children with behavior problems show behavior that differs only in degree and severity

from that of ‘normal’ children. In other words, what defines the ‘problem’ is the excessive degree to which the behavior is exhibited. The distinction between the difficult behavior that occurs in most children and behavioral problems is:

- the degree of the destruction and disruption
- the occurrence in more than one situation
- the persistence of the behavior over time (Buchanan, 1999).

Emotional and behavioral problems are often divided into two broad categories. Externalizing behaviors have direct or indirect effects on other people; examples are aggression, defiance, disobedience, lying, stealing and lack of self-control. Internalizing behaviors primarily affect the student with the problem; examples are anxiety, depression, withdrawal from social interaction and daydreaming. Although students with externalizing behaviors are those that teacher are more likely to refer for evaluation and possible special services, students with internalizing behaviors are often at just as much risk for school failure.

Factors at school may aggravate the problems that these students already have. Their

inappropriate behaviors not only interfere with the academic achievement but also incur rejection by their classmates, thus leading to social as well as academic failure. Many students, especially those with externalizing behaviors, may eventually seek the companionship of the few peers who will accept them and typically behave in similarly inappropriate ways. Antisocial students often provide mutual support for one another's antisocial behavior and may introduce one another to 'drugs, alcohol etc. Such difficulties undoubtedly contribute to the high dropout rate of students with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Common Characteristics of Behavioral Problem

Although students with behavioral problems are a very heterogeneous group, several characteristics are often observed in students in this category.

- Difficulty in interacting with others in a socially acceptable ways. *
- Difficulty in establishing and maintaining satisfactory interpersonal relationships
- Poor Self-concept
- Deteriorating academic performance with increasing age.

Need and Importance of the Study

Since behavioral problems can change a child's personality and even the functioning of normal mental activities, these have to be carefully observed and solved. In India, the studies pertaining to the emotional and behavioral disorders are very much limited.

For the all-round development of the children, the school programme should function and work smoothly and effectively without any obstacles on the way. But in our schools, we come across many obstacles which disturb and affect the smooth functioning of school programme. Behavioral problems among students are the major problem which upset and affect a classroom teacher in his teaching-learning process.

It is also true that a problem child affects himself apart from annoying and disturbing other children, parents and teachers. Thus, children with behavioral problem imbalance smooth functioning of the school. When the school fails to function smoothly, our children cannot be developed in a desirable direction accepted by the society.

Most of the behavioral problems can be corrected by

teachers, with the help of specialists, if needed, because teacher is the central component who faces the real-time situation with the emotionally and behaviorally disordered children.

It is therefore essential to see if teachers are trained in identifying the children with behavioral problems, understanding the causes wherever possible, understanding the impact of the problems on the achievement of children in scholastic and non-scholastic areas as well as social and emotional adjustment, their management in school as well as classroom and also in providing remedial instruction wherever possible and feasible.

Academic success of students will be enhanced if schools promote the emotional health and well-being of pupils.

Hence the investigators were interested to know the different behavioral problems prevalent among elementary school children and how the teachers respond to solve those problems.

Objectives of the Study

- To construct a tool to find out the strategies adopted by the teachers to correct the behavioral problems.
- To study the various strategies

adopted by the teachers to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control problems among elementary school students.

- To know what percentage of teachers prefer constructive strategies or * punishment strategies to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control.
- To know what percentage of teachers try to bring a change within the individual or try to change the environment for solving the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control.
- To know experience level of the teachers who prefer constructive strategies or punishment strategies to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control.
- To find the grade of the students on whom constructive strategies or punishment strategies are more employed to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control.

Research Questions

- ❖ What are the strategies adopted by the teachers to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control problems among elementary school students ?
- ❖ What percentage of teachers try to bring a change within the individual or try to modify the environment for solving the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control?
- ❖ What percentage of teachers prefers constructive strategies to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control?
- ❖ What is the experience level of the teachers who prefer constructive strategies to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control?

- ❖ What is the grade of the students on whom constructive strategies are more employed to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control?

Method

It was a survey type study.

Sample of the Study

The sample required for the study was chosen from the population consisting of elementary school teachers of Kottayam district of Kerala.

In Kottayam district, three different elementary schools were selected, among which two are aided schools and remaining one is an unaided school. The sample consisted of 51 teachers who were cooperative and were willing to provide the necessary data. The teachers were with different levels of experience. The table below shows the distribution of samples.

Tools Used for the Study

A questionnaire has been used

<i>Experience of the teachers</i>	S_1 <i>(Aided school)</i>	S_2 <i>(Aided school)</i>	S_3 <i>(Unaided school)</i>
1-5	7	6	3
6-10	7	5	5
11-15	7	7	4
Total	21	18	12

as a research tool by the investigator for effective and systematic collection of data regarding the strategies adopted by the teachers to correct the behavioral problems related to academic, non-academic and impulse control problems of children. The tool consists of 20 different items related to classroom

or school behavior (academic / non-academic) and impulse control problems of children and was taken from the book "A RESOURCE BOOK FOR REMEDIATING COMMON BEHAVIOR AND LEARNING PROBLEMS" by Thomas McIntyre (1989).

Findings

From table 1, it is clear that

Table-1: Preference of the Strategies Adopted by the Teachers to Solve Behavioral Problems

<i>Behavioral problems</i>	<i>Bring a change within the individual</i>	<i>Bring a change within the environment</i>	<i>Put a condition</i>	<i>Super- vision</i>
*1 cheats on tests and assignments.	6	16	11	18
2 always asking for help	14	16	12	9
3 does not bring correct materials to class	27	14	10	-
4 does not complete homework	-	26	14	11
5 does not study	26	14	11	-
6 fails to finish things he starts	26	13	-	12
7 says schoolwork is too difficult	26	25	-	-
8 looks to see what others are doing, before starting work	13	28	10	-
9 satisfied with inferior performance	14	37	-	-
*10 attempts to runaway from classroom or school ground	10	14	9	18

11 daydreaming	13	14	-	24
12 does not ask questions	16	21	14	-
13 offers to help the teachers too often	12	28	11	-
14 out of seat	17	19	15	-
15 skip classes	20	10	21	-
16 tardy for school or class	14	17	12	8
*17 acts before thinking	14	14	23	-
18 easily overexcited	29	-	8	14
19 unable to refrain from talking	21	20	10	-
Total	318 (32.8%)	342 (35.2%)	195 (20.1%)	114 (11.76%)

* 1 – 9 items related to academic area

* 10 – 16 items related to non – academic area

* 17 – 19 items related to impulse control

32.8% of the teachers try to bring a change within the individual, 35.2% of the teachers try to bring a change within the environment, 20.1% of teachers try to solve the problem by putting a condition, 11.76% of the teachers try to supervise the student to solve the problem.

So we can interpret that the strategies which are helpful to bring change within the individual and the environment are the most preferred among teachers.

From table 2 we see that the number of teachers who use constructive strategies is more than the number of teachers who use

punishment strategies. So we can say that teachers prefer using constructive strategies than punishment strategies.

- For correcting the behavioral problems, the teachers mainly adopted the following type of strategies.
 - a) Bringing a change within the individual
 - b) Bringing a change within the environment
 - c) Putting a condition
 - d) Supervision
- Most of the teachers preferred to adopt constructive

**Table-2: Preference for Constructive Strategies or
Punishment Strategies**

<i>Behavioral problems</i>	<i>Constructive strategies</i>		<i>Punishment strategies</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1 cheats on tests and assignments	22	43	29	57
2 always asking for help	30	59	21	41
3 does not bring correct materials to class	41	80	10	20
4 does not complete homework	26	51	25	49
5 does not study	40	78	11	22
6 fails to finish things he starts	39	76	12	24
7 says schoolwork is too difficult	51	100	-	-
8 looks to see what others are doing, before starting work	37	73	14	27
9 satisfied with inferior performance	51	100	-	-
10 attempts to runaway from classroom or school ground	24	47	27	53
11 daydreaming	27	53	24	47
12 does not ask questions	37	73	14	27
13 offers to help the teachers too often	40	78	11	22
14 out of seat	36	71	15	29
15 skip classes	30	59	21	41
16 tardy for school or class	31	61	20	39
17 acts before thinking	28	55	23	45
18 easily overexcited	29	57	22	43
19 unable to refrain from talking	41	80	10	20
Total	Mean	68	Mean	32

strategies for solving the problems among children.

- Many of teachers preferred to solve the behavioral problems among the children by bringing a change in their environment.
- In order to solve the problems related to academic area the teachers preferred to use the constructive strategies.
- Teachers preferred to use the punishment strategy for solving the problems related to the impulse control.
- Most of the teachers preferred to bring a change within the individual for solving the behavioral problems related to non-academics.
- More number of teachers adopted supervision method to solve the problems related to impulse control.
- Non-academic problems among the students were solved by more number of teachers through constructive strategies.
- Most of the teachers preferred to bring a change within the individual for correcting the behavioral problems related to non-academics.
- Teachers with experience of 11-15 years adopted constructive strategies mainly

for solving the problems related to academics.

- Teachers with 6-10 years of experience preferred mainly punishment strategies for solving behavioral problems related to the academics.
- Teachers with 6-10 years of experience used constructive strategies for solving the behavioral problems related to non-academics while those with 1-5 years of experience adopted punishment strategies.
- There are some behavioral problems for which teachers adopted only constructive strategies to solve them.
- For solving behavioral problems, most of the teachers preferred the strategies to bring a change within the individual which is considered as the most desirable.

Educational Implications

- ❖ The emotional and behavioral problems of students should be identified as early as possible, as it affects the academic achievement.
- ❖ The teachers should be capable of identifying and adopting the appropriate intervention strategies for students with behavioral

problems. For this, the curriculum of pre-service and in-service teacher education should include a detailed study of various emotional and behavioral disorders, their identification and intervention strategies.

- ❖ There is a need for introducing school mental health programmes and guidance counselor in school.
- ❖ The whole-school approach in which the entire school environment prevents the inappropriate behavior should be ensured in every school.
- ❖ Teachers and parents should function together to find out the solution to behavioral problems.

More research on works regarding the types, prevalence, causes and treatments of behavioral problems should be carried out

Suggestions for Further Study

- Similar kind of studies can be carried out for a large sample.
- A similar kind of study, which probes the causes for behavioral problems, can be made.
- This study can be extended for other behavioral problems

other than those considered in this study.

- The similar kind of study can be undertaken to find out the impact of educational, socio-economic status of parents on the behavioral problems of elementary school children.
- The same study can be extended to other cities in Kerala and a comparison can be made.
- The study can be extended to find out the effectiveness of the strategies adopted by the teachers to correct the specific behavioral problems of students.

Limitations of the Study

- The findings of the study were not validated by observing the strategies adopted by the teachers in the actual classroom situation.
- The findings were only on the basis of the teachers responses. It would be better to gather information from other teachers, parents, administrators as well as students.

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