

Understanding and Navigating Challenging Behaviors in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract. *The purpose of this research is to establish the rate of display of difficult behaviors among children in early learning centers and their teachers self estimated competency in implementing evidence based behavioral interventions for such pupils. The type of survey design used was descriptive survey technique and the sample comprised of 50 educators in different settings of early childhood education. The results of this study indicate that paren t-child problematic behaviors are something which is frequently observed and parental means are equal to \$ 2. Nine behaviors per child per day. Still, 12% of the educators admitted to having low confidence in how to address these behaviours while 20% expressed that they are not aware of the best practices in the field. Therefore, the current study reinforces the importance of professional development in the further improvement of teacher's competencies in managing student behavior. Increased interaction between teachers and parents is also denoted as essential in managing problem behaviors learning environment. Finally, this study suggests the need for gender sensitive training for educators and more studies on the ways of enhancing positive learning environments to improve children's achievement in early childhood education.*

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of early childhood education, the purpose of this research was to better comprehend and manage problematic behaviors. The quantitative method was utilized in order to acquire data from the fifty instructors who were working in early childhood education environments. The prevalence of problematic behaviors, instructor's confidence in confronting them, and the use of evidence based interventions to support children's social emotional development were all analyzed using descriptive statistics. According to the findings, difficult behaviors are relatively prevalent in early childhood education. However, educators typically feel confident in their ability to address them and are using evidence based interventions to support the development of children. On the other hand, the research underscored the necessity of continuing training and assistance in order to encourage favorable outcomes for all children who participate in early childhood education. The findings add to our knowledge of how teachers handle problematic behaviors in the classroom and have significant repercussions for both future research and practice in the field of early childhood education.

According to Cliffe & Solvason (2020) and Majumdar (2022) early childhood education, also known as ECE, refers to the period of time during a child's life when they are most impressionable and are most likely to acquire essential social, emotional, cognitive, and physical abilities. Early childhood is the period of life that a child is in between the ages of three and five years old. This stage is distinguished by quick growth and development in all aspects of the child's life. The Early Childhood Education (ECE) program is designed to foster the growth and development of children by supplying them with a setting that is both secure and compassionate, as well as activities that are both fun and educational.

However, a significant number of toddlers and preschoolers display challenging behaviors that can not only impede their own educational progress but also the progress of their classmates. Aggression, disobedience, temper outbursts, hyperactivity, and disengagement are examples of the behaviors that fall into this category. Young children may exhibit challenging behaviors for a number of reasons, including physiological disparities, disposition, developmental deficits, past traumatic experiences, and environmental variables (Sameroff & Seifer, 2021; Hoover, 2020; Menand & Cox, 2022).

It is essential for educators and caretakers working in early childhood education environments to have an understanding of problematic behaviors and the skills necessary to negotiate them in a constructive and compassionate fashion. Effective strategies for managing challenging behaviors in early childhood education can lead to positive outcomes, such as improved social and emotional development, better academic performance, and stronger relationships with peers and adults. These outcomes can be beneficial for both the children and their families. Therefore, obtaining a better understanding of challenging behaviors in early childhood education and developing effective interventions and strategies to address them is essential for the creation of a supportive and positive learning environment for young children. This can be accomplished by reading more about the topic here.

According to Patterson et al. (2017) and Schroeder et al. (2020) in early childhood education, having an understanding of problematic behaviors and the ability to manage them is essential for a number of reasons. To begin, confronting behaviors can have a significant effect on early children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development. This is especially true for younger children. According to Jirout et al. (2019) and Pechmann et al. (2020) children's ability to concentrate and participate in activities can be negatively impacted, and their relationships with adults and other children can suffer as a result of challenging behaviors. These behaviors can also interrupt the learning environment. These behaviors have the potential to continue into later years if they are not addressed in a constructive and encouraging manner, which can lead to more substantial problems both in the classroom and outside of it.

Second, overcoming problematic behaviors in early childhood education requires an in depth comprehension of child development, individual disparities, as well as the social and societal environment in which children are living their lives. Instructors and caretakers have a responsibility to be conscious of the factors that contribute to challenging behaviors in children, as well as to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to develop appropriate interventions and strategies that support children's growth and development. The successful regulation of difficult behaviors in early childhood education can contribute to favorable consequences for children and the families of those children. Children are able to develop positive self esteem, social skills, and the ability to regulate their emotions when challenging behaviors are addressed in a constructive and encouraging fashion. Additionally, they have the opportunity to develop healthy relationships with both their classmates and adults, which can contribute to their future scholastic and social success. It is helpful for instructors and caretakers to provide support and direction to the families of children who exhibit challenging behaviors so that the entire family can benefit.

Creating a learning environment that is encouraging and supportive, as well as one that confronts problematic behaviors, can ultimately be beneficial to the larger community (Elias et al., 1997). According to Denham et al. (2019) and Getie (2020), children are more likely to acquire favorable attitudes toward education and learning when they feel secure, encouraged, and involved in the learning process. These attitudes have the potential to have long term advantages for the children's scholastic and social achievement (Mortimer, 2018; Quílez-Robres et al., 2021; Zarrella et al., 2018). This can also help to contribute to the development of a positive school atmosphere, one in which children, families, and teachers collaborate to create an educational setting that is accepting and inclusive of all students.

METHODS

This study used a descriptive survey design for efficiently and effectively establishing the extent and nature of communication challenging behaviors that are present in early childhood education settings and the level of assertiveness the educators have in handling them. This approach was used since it would enable the researcher to capture current practices and perception of early childhood educators. Convenience sampling was employed to recruit 50 instructors from different contexts of early childhood education. These participants were selected because of their convenience and voluntarism in offering their data making data collection easy. It was especially appreciated that convenience sampling was useful in practice while it may not include participants who could be strictly deemed as most accurate representatives of the overall population of early childhood educators, this possibility was discussed during the analysis.

The tool used in this study was a self administered questionnaire developed by the author with close consideration to questions that can elicit a clear one and a half to two page response about the educators experience, understanding, and perception on challenging behaviors. The development of the questionnaire was informed by a review of literature and other questionnaires that have been used in the field of early childhood education where most of the measures used have been found to have good validity. Demographic Information collected some basic information about the participants including their years of experience, educational attainment and type of EEC setting where they conducted their practice. Specific instruments used were Behavioral Management and Confidence Assessment which consisted of self administered multiple choice questions, Likert scale questions and also other free text questions. The multiple choice questions focused on knowledge gains on practices and strategies that faculty applies in handling difficult behaviours. Likert scale questions were from 1 to 5 to evaluate the participant's perceived agreement or confidence when responding to questions based on their ability to identify and implements difficult behaviours, knowledge on research based interventions and their willingness to talk to parents/caretakers about these issues.

In order to verify the reliability of the instrument a pilot study was conducted with a sample of educators who took part in the study but were not involved in the main study. From the feedback received from this pilot, adjustments were made on the wording of questions, elimination of issues that would create confusion, and general validation of whether the instrument collected the right data or not. Consequently, the internal consistencies of the scales on the measurement of the overall likert scaled questionnaire were determined and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was computed to verify the reliability of the measurement model.

The data collection process included forwarding the final questionnaires through the use of the internet tools including Google Forms and SurveyMonkey. Information on the completion of the questionnaire was accorded and the participants were given assurances that they would remain anonymous. The data was gathered using the response of the participants in a period of four weeks, where constant reminders were made to the participants to participate in the survey. This particular method of conducting the research proved effective since the online format of administering questions make it easier to complying with the analysis section.

Descriptive statistics was used in data analysis to summarize the responses this included Mean, percentage and standard deviations. Besides these simple percentages though, correlation between the variables like the frequency of the challenging behaviors and how confident the educators are were conducted. In analyzing the findings, qualitative data were analyzed using the "SPSS" software, which helped in the elimination of biasness while making the assessment of the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effective intervention and managing of difficult behaviour in early childhood facilities is crucial in a constructive learning environment. Teachers, who play the key role in the upbringing of young children, ought to feel and be ready to manage such behaviors. This study aimed at

determining how often such behaviours occur, the educators confidence levels and their awareness further, how well acquainted they are with research based approaches and these form the findings that present the current state of early childhood education.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Years of Experience	1-3 years	15	30%
	4-6 years	20	40%
	7-10 years	10	20%
	More than 10 years	5	10%
Educational Qualification	Diploma	10	20%
	Bachelor's Degree	30	60%
	Master's Degree	10	20%
Type of Education Setting	Public Preschool	22	44%
	Private Preschool	23	46%
	Daycare Center	5	10%

Interpretation: Most of participants have 4-6 years experience (40%) and the main education level of all participants was Bachelor degree (60%). The following demographic data could be deduced about the participants. These results indicate that the participants of the study are relatively older, workplaces experienced, educated employees with most of them either working in private or public preschools. A rather reasonable number of educators with diplomas, which make up 20 percent of the total, is also indicative of the diversity of their education.

Table 2. Educators Confidence in Identifying Challenging Behaviors

Confidence Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Confident at All	6	12%
Somewhat Confident	25	50%
Very Confident	19	38%

Half the educators (50%) said that they were a little confident on how to identify challenging behaviours 38 percent said they are very confident. Only 12% lacked confidence. Unfortunately, this means that there is still a group of educators that may need further training or professional development in regard to their ability to identify the negative behaviors occurring in their classrooms.

Table 3. Familiarity with Evidence Based Interventions

Familiarity Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Familiar at All	10	20%
Somewhat Familiar	30	60%
Very Familiar	10	20%

Ageing and people with disabilities was somewhat familiar to the majority of educators 60% had a little understanding of it while 20% had a lot. However, 20% of educators stated they are not familiar with these interventions at all, which points to a problem of professional development to make sure that all educators carry enough knowledge in this area to be able to apply it.

Table 4. Comfort Level in Discussing Challenging Behaviors with Parents/Caregivers

Comfort Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Comfortable at All	10	20%
Somewhat Comfortable	25	50%
Very Comfortable	12	24%
Extremely Comfortable	3	6%

About half of the educators (50%) reported moderate comfort when addressing the issue of challenging behaviors with parents or caregivers with the other half being uncomfortable with it. This shows that much of teaching staff who may require assistance in order to improve communication skills for the purpose of discussing issues that may be concerning to families.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Number of Challenging Behaviors	2.9	1.5	1	7
Educators Confidence	7.2	2.1	2	10
Evidence Based Interventions	2.0	0.9	1	4

The mean presented behaviours here are derived from the observation of challenging behaviours by teachers and childcare staff and this revealed that the mean number of presented behaviour per child per day was 2.9 To this last point, the mean was 9 and the standard deviation was 1.5, indicating moderate variability. Teachers self efficacy regarding these behavior issues was at an average of 7.2 on a 10 point scale, indicating a fairly high degree of confidence for this type of work, nonetheless, there are significant fluctuations. In average, the educators responding to the survey said that they incorporated an average of 2 into their lessons. On average, fewer than 0 evidence based interventions per child was given and this shows that there is consistency in managing behaviors.

Table 6. Correlation between Educators Confidence and Number of Challenging Behaviors

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Educators' Confidence vs. Number of Challenging Behaviors	-0.28

Educator's confidence and observed challenging behaviours were also moderately inverse, with a correlation coefficient of -0.28. This implies that there could be a possibility of a negative correlation between self confidence of educators and the rates of challenging behaviors, in this case because those educators with higher self confidence may be able to manage difficult behaviors better. However, the correlation is with other instruments moderate and therefore there are further cofactors.

The findings further showed that it is normal for children in early childhood education setting to exhibit challenging behaviours with a mean of 2.9 behaviours for each child daily. As such, this alignment is well supported by empirical findings whereby Ogundele (2018) and Tanrikulu (2020) identified comparable frequencies of disruptive behaviour in early learning settings. These behaviours have been described by many scholars as key problems that teachers face, the behaviours include aggression, non compliant and hyperactive behaviours (Patnaik et al., 2022; Quail & Ward, 2022). Thus it can be assumed that these behaviours can be moderated by a combination of factors such as individual temperament, developmental level, and ecological setting (Baumert et al., 2017; Greven et al., 2019; Fonagy & Luyten, 2018).

In addition, behavior difficulties have been found to adversely affect learning climate as well as social emotional development of young age children as noted by Burke et al. (2018) and Rademacher & Koglin (2019). Classroom disruptions make it difficult for educators to keep classroom environment of positive support that is essential in communication and children's learning and development (Scherzinger et al., 2019; McGrath & Van Bergen, 2019). Such findings stress the need to identify and intervene early on when children exhibit difficult behaviours in order to prevent these from worsening and cause other more serious problems like, poor academic performance or social problems.

Analyzing teacher's knowledge, it was found that 50% of them felt they were somewhat confident while 38% of the teachers felt very confident in terms of handling Learners difficult behaviours. This is in line with the study done by Poulou et al. (2019) and Lazarides et al. (2020) who noted that teacher self efficacy of behavior management significantly relates closely with the general behavior management in the class and the progression of positive child outcomes. Where

educators are confident, it has been found that there is consequentiality of practice in dealing with the BPS, including lesser rate and severity of PBS.

It is however important to note that in the current study, 12% of the educators indicated that they were very incapable of handling the difficult behaviors. This could be as a result of a number of issues low training, low experience, or low resource. Lack of confidence increases the chances of failure in implementing strategies that are helpful in enhancing the learner's environment through stress and burnout hardly making educators capable of assisting learners (Väisänen et al., 2018; Boujut et al., 2017).

The survey equally revealed that although 60% of the educators had intermediate knowledge of the evidenced based interventions 20% had no knowledge of them. This result shows the absence of knowledge about EBP in early childhood education, which is similar to the study of Durlak et al. Consider that scholars named training as one of the key activities in the promotion of the usage of evidence based interventions. Such interventions may be unfamiliar to some educators and may thus potentially act as a barrier to teachers achieving good outcomes for pupil's behavioural difficulties because studies have in fact revealed that teaching that is grounded in researched based practices is reliable for positive behavioural change than non researched based teaching practices. Implemented with fidelity, evidenced based interventions including Pyramid Model to support Social Emotional Competence of Infants and Young Children reduces difficult behaviors and enhance the social emotional skills of young children /Infant. Whenever teachers have used these interventions, they have greater understanding of the needs of students and building effective teaching environment that promotes the well being of all children including those that exhibit difficult behavior.

The next important result half of the educators said they are somewhat comfortable in talking about the difficult behavior with parents or caregivers and 20% of respondents were uncomfortable at all. This is rather worrisome as the educators and parents always need to communicate effectively in order to address behaviors that are difficult for children to manage. Several studies have established that when parents and teachers join hands children are capable of getting consistent reinforcement from both home and school which can enhance their behavior.

Discussions on requirement of difficult behaviors include lack of training in interpersonal communication or fear of parent's negative response. Teachers can also experience a conflict of cultures in determining behaviours that are normal and can therefore be tolerated. As such, courses that prepare instructors on how to engage in professional communication, cultural sensitivity and conflict management might enable the teachers feel prepared to handle these issues appropriately.

The implication of the study findings carry some crucial practices in the following manner. Firstly, it will be necessary to provide the continuous professional development aimed at increasing educator's knowledge and self efficiency regarding the effective management of problematic behaviours. Such training should focus on the efficacy of the interventions, as well as the sensible methods for their application with students in multiple contexts. Further, the strategies could be applied more effectively and consistently with support systems including coaching and mentoring for such educators.

Second, emerging strategies should be to enhance the communication and cooperation between teachers and parents. Schools and directories of early childhood education could involve professional development sessions and printed material focusing on ways to develop positive relationships with family members which are culturally sensitive. Through free and friendly communication between educators, parents and care givers can better support children's behavioral and emotional concerns. Last, future studies must establish the parameters of teacher's confidence and knowledge of EBPs. It could be possible to design longitudinal studies for investigating the changes in the professional development and support systems in relation to the extent and the capacity of educators in handling the difficult behaviors over time. Further, research should compare how cultural and contextual factors influence the application of

behavior management strategies among educators so as to inform the development of culturally sensitive intervention practices.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions made in this study can provide the audience with the information concerning the frequency and intensity of the problematic behaviors in the settings of initial year education and the educators self estimated level of the knowledge and preparedness concerning the effective interventions. The findings reveal that the referred behaviors are not rare and the participants experience moderate to high levels of self efficacy to address these behaviors. However, a significant percentage of the teachers expressed their inability and lack of knowledge in using research based procedures, this shows the need to provide sufficient professional development assistance. The study also calls for attention to be paid on training teachers with the right tools and knowledge in dealing with unstable behaviors in class, which are vital in determining positive learning outcomes. Better communication between the teachers and the parent is also necessary in developing continuity of care of the child between home and school environments. These results imply that to improve educator's competencies in behavior management and for children to have the optimal developmental training that they needs when in early childhood education unique approaches and training should be avails for the educators. Further research should be focused on establishing what factors affect the confidence of the educators and on what extent strategies of interventions work. Moreover, exploring such cultural and contextual factors might give more comprehension on the way behaviour could effectively be managed with reference to cultural diversity in early childhood education.

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