

Effect of Behaviour Control Strategies on A Disruptive Elementary School Student: A Case Study

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Abstract

Disruptive behaviour in elementary schools can interfere with teaching, learning, classroom management, peer relationships and the overall school environment. Students who display persistent disruptive behaviours require carefully planned interventions that address behavioural needs while maintaining their dignity and opportunities for positive participation. The present case study examined the effectiveness of selected behaviour control strategies in reducing disruptive behaviour in a ten-year-old Grade V student who demonstrated persistent difficulties across multiple school settings. The study was conducted over one academic semester using systematic classroom observation, teacher behavioural checklists, anecdotal records, school records, staff meetings, interviews with parents and school personnel, and direct observation by the researcher. The intervention programme included behaviour-specific social reinforcement, a structured point and reward system, additional recess and privileges, strategic ignoring of minor attention-seeking behaviours, activity curtailment, supervised time-out, role-playing, coaching, and continuous school-home collaboration. Findings indicated a substantial improvement in the frequency and intensity of disruptive behaviours following consistent implementation of the intervention programme. Social reinforcement and positive behaviour support emerged as the most effective strategies, particularly because they provided recognition and attention for appropriate behaviour. The structured reward system further encouraged self-regulation and positive participation. Strategic ignoring was useful for minor attention-seeking behaviours but was less effective when disruption was severe. Activity curtailment and supervised time-out were useful as supplementary consequences when applied judiciously and consistently. The study highlights the importance of individualized behaviour intervention, positive reinforcement, teacher consistency, parent-school collaboration and continuous monitoring. Although the findings are limited by the single-case design, they demonstrate the potential value of systematic, positive and collaborative behaviour management in elementary education.

Keywords: Disruptive behaviour, behaviour management, positive reinforcement, social reinforcement, elementary education, classroom discipline, case study, school-home collaboration

INTRODUCTION

Schools play an important role not only in academic development but also in the development of social, emotional and behavioural competencies. A positive classroom environment requires students to participate appropriately, follow established routines, respect others and regulate their behaviour. When a student repeatedly interrupts instruction, refuses to follow directions, disturbs peers or engages in inappropriate behaviour, the effects may extend beyond the individual student to the teacher, classmates and overall classroom climate [1].

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Disruptive behaviour may take many forms, including excessive talking, leaving one's seat without permission, refusal to complete tasks, interrupting teachers, teasing peers, arguing, inappropriate use of school property and other behaviours that interfere with teaching and learning. Occasional misbehaviour is a normal part of childhood development; however, persistent and intense patterns may require systematic intervention [2].

Behavioural difficulties should also be understood within the broader context of the child's developmental, family, academic and social environment. A student's behaviour may be influenced by difficulties in learning, attention, peer relationships, family circumstances, classroom expectations, emotional needs or previous experiences with school. Therefore, behaviour management should not be reduced to punishment or control. Effective intervention should identify desirable behaviours, teach appropriate alternatives, reinforce progress and provide consistent consequences when necessary [3].

Contemporary classroom management approaches emphasize positive behaviour support, reinforcement, clear expectations, structured routines, self-monitoring and collaboration between teachers and families. Behavioural learning theories suggest that behaviour followed by positive consequences is more likely to be repeated, while inappropriate behaviour can be reduced through carefully designed consequences and opportunities to practise alternative responses.

The present case study examines the effect of selected behaviour control strategies on a Grade V student who displayed persistent disruptive behaviours in several school settings. The study focuses particularly on the relative usefulness of positive reinforcement, rewards, strategic ignoring, activity curtailment, time-out, role-playing, coaching and school-home collaboration [4].

Statement of the Problem

The present study sought to examine the effectiveness of selected behaviour control strategies in reducing disruptive behaviour in a Grade V student.

The central research question was:

How effective are selected behaviour control strategies in reducing disruptive behaviour among an elementary school student?

Objectives of the Study

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

- To identify the behavioural characteristics of a disruptive elementary school student.
- To examine the possible academic and social factors associated with the student's behavioural difficulties.
- To implement selected behaviour management strategies in the school setting.
- To observe changes in the frequency and intensity of disruptive behaviour following intervention.
- To identify the strategies that appeared most effective in encouraging desirable behaviour.
- To develop practical recommendations for teachers, parents and school administrators working with students displaying similar behavioural difficulties.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative case study design. A case study was considered appropriate because the purpose was to understand one student's behaviour in depth and to examine behavioural changes following systematic intervention within the natural school environment.

The study did not seek to establish a universal causal relationship between particular interventions and behavioural outcomes. Rather, it documented the implementation of a structured behaviour management programme and examined observable changes in the participant's behaviour [5].

Participant

The participant was a ten-year-old male student enrolled in Grade V. Psychological assessment using the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) indicated an IQ score of 89, suggesting functioning within the broadly average range, although individual cognitive abilities showed some variation [6].

The student's father, aged forty-two, worked as a truck driver and was frequently away from home. His thirty-five-year-old mother was a homemaker. The student belonged to a blended family and reportedly experienced rivalry with an older stepbrother. He had previously attended a government school but was transferred because of persistent behavioural difficulties.

Physically, the student was reported to be healthy, with normal hearing and vision. However, behavioural difficulties were observed across several settings, including classrooms, the library, school transport and other areas of the school. The student's cognitive assessment also indicated relative weaknesses in arithmetic reasoning, auditory memory and abstract reasoning.

These academic difficulties were considered relevant because learning frustration may sometimes interact with behavioural difficulties. However, the study did not assume that the student's cognitive profile was the direct cause of his disruptive behaviour [7].

Ethical Considerations

Parental consent and student assent were obtained before implementation of the intervention programme. Information concerning the student was treated confidentially, and the case is presented for educational and research purposes without identifying personal information.

The intervention was designed primarily around positive behaviour support. More restrictive strategies were used only when considered necessary and were implemented with supervision and attention to student safety and dignity.

Data Collection

Data were collected over one academic semester beginning on 12 September 2025. Multiple sources of information were used to develop a comprehensive understanding of the student's behaviour.

The following methods were employed:

- systematic classroom observation;
- teacher behavioural checklists;
- anecdotal records maintained by teachers and the principal;
- cumulative school records;
- staff meetings;
- informal interviews with teachers, parents, classmates, bus staff and security personnel;
- direct observation by the researcher; and
- regular communication between school personnel and the family.

The use of multiple sources provided methodological triangulation and reduced dependence on a single observer or source of information.

Teachers maintained regular records of both desirable and undesirable behaviours. These records helped identify recurring patterns and provided a basis for reviewing the effectiveness of interventions.

Initial Behavioural Profile

At the beginning of the intervention, the student demonstrated a pattern of behaviours that interfered with classroom functioning. These included inappropriate interruptions, difficulty following instructions, disruption of classroom activities, inappropriate interaction with peers and difficulty maintaining expected behavioural standards in different school environments.

The student's behaviour was not restricted to one classroom or one teacher. Similar difficulties were reported in the library, school transport and other school settings. This indicated the need for a coordinated approach rather than an intervention limited to a single classroom [8].

The observations also suggested that the student responded positively to attention and recognition. Consequently, the intervention emphasized opportunities for the student to receive attention for appropriate rather than disruptive behaviour.

Intervention Programme

The intervention programme consisted of several complementary strategies. The strategies were not applied in isolation; rather, teachers and other school personnel were encouraged to implement them consistently.

Behaviour-Specific Social Reinforcement

Social reinforcement involved providing immediate and specific positive feedback when the student demonstrated desirable behaviour. Instead of general praise, teachers were encouraged to identify the specific behaviour being reinforced.

For example, appropriate participation, completing a task, following instructions, remaining seated or cooperating with classmates was acknowledged positively.

This approach was intended to shift the student's attention from obtaining recognition through disruptive behaviour to obtaining recognition through appropriate behaviour [9].

Structured Point and Reward System

A structured point system was introduced to provide clear behavioural expectations and predictable reinforcement. Points were awarded for specific desirable behaviours and could be exchanged for predetermined rewards or privileges.

Additional recess time, special responsibilities and opportunities to participate in class activities were used as meaningful incentives. The system provided an immediate connection between behaviour and consequence and helped the student understand what was expected of him.

Strategic Ignoring

Minor attention-seeking behaviours were sometimes ignored when doing so did not compromise classroom instruction or safety. The purpose was to avoid unintentionally reinforcing low-level disruptive behaviour through excessive teacher attention.

Strategic ignoring was used selectively. It was not considered appropriate for behaviours involving significant disruption, aggression, safety concerns or serious violations of school expectations [10].

Activity Curtailment

Temporary restriction of preferred activities was used following inappropriate behaviour when positive reinforcement alone was insufficient. The consequence was connected to the behaviour and explained clearly to the student.

However, activity curtailment was applied cautiously because physical activity and recess were also

valuable opportunities for the student to release energy and participate positively with peers.

Supervised Time-Out

A supervised time-out procedure was introduced for more serious disruptive episodes. The purpose was not humiliation or punishment but temporary removal from the reinforcing classroom environment, allowing the student an opportunity to regain self-control.

Time-out was conducted under adult supervision and for a limited duration. The student was subsequently supported in returning to the learning environment and discussing more appropriate behavioural alternatives.

Role-Playing

Role-playing activities were used to help the student understand social situations and practise appropriate responses. Scenarios involving classroom participation, peer interaction, following instructions and managing frustration were enacted.

Video recordings of selected role-playing sessions were used to support self-reflection. Reviewing the recordings helped the student recognize his own behavioural patterns and consider alternative responses.

Coaching Support

Individual coaching was provided to support both behavioural and academic improvement. The student was guided in areas such as following routines, managing frustration, completing tasks, interacting appropriately with peers and seeking help when necessary.

Academic support was also important because repeated academic difficulty can contribute to frustration and avoidance [11].

School-Home Collaboration

Regular communication with the parents was maintained through meetings, telephone communication and home visits. Teachers and parents discussed progress, difficulties and appropriate reinforcement strategies.

The objective was to create greater consistency between school and home expectations. Consistency was particularly important because behaviour change requires repeated opportunities to practise appropriate responses.

Findings

The intervention programme was associated with noticeable improvement in the student's behaviour across several school settings. Although the study did not employ a controlled experimental design, systematic observations and reports from multiple school personnel indicated a reduction in both the frequency and intensity of disruptive incidents.

Effectiveness of Social Reinforcement

Social reinforcement emerged as the most effective strategy. Behaviour-specific praise and immediate positive feedback appeared to satisfy the student's need for recognition while directing that need towards appropriate behaviour.

Teachers reported increased cooperation and greater compliance with classroom expectations. The student increasingly responded positively when appropriate behaviour was noticed and acknowledged.

This finding supports the principle that attention can function as a powerful reinforcer when it is deliberately connected to desirable behaviour.

Effectiveness of the Reward System

The structured point and reward system was also effective. Clear behavioural expectations provided the student with a concrete understanding of how rewards could be earned.

Additional recess time and special privileges appeared particularly motivating. The system also helped teachers maintain consistency in responding to behaviour.

Participation in class celebrations and positive group activities contributed to improved peer acceptance. Thus, the reward system appeared to have both behavioural and social benefits.

Effectiveness of Strategic Ignoring

Strategic ignoring showed limited but specific usefulness. It appeared appropriate for minor behaviours that were primarily intended to obtain attention. However, it was not sufficient for behaviours that significantly interrupted instruction or created potential safety concerns.

The finding emphasizes that ignoring should be treated as a selective strategy rather than a universal response to disruptive behaviour.

Effectiveness of Activity Curtailment

Temporary restriction of preferred activities was useful in responding to inappropriate behaviour. However, the strategy required careful application.

The student appeared to benefit from opportunities for physical activity. Therefore, excessive restriction could potentially have unintended consequences. Activity curtailment was most appropriate when used briefly, proportionately and in combination with positive reinforcement.

Effectiveness of Time-Out

Supervised time-out was useful for severe disruptive episodes. Temporary removal from the immediate situation gave the student an opportunity to regain control and return to the classroom.

Its effectiveness depended upon consistent implementation, appropriate supervision and clear communication. Time-out was most useful as a supplementary strategy rather than the central component of the behaviour programme.

Effectiveness of School-Home Collaboration

Regular communication between school and home contributed to greater consistency in behavioural expectations. Parents were kept informed about progress and concerns, while teachers received information regarding behavioural patterns outside school.

This collaboration helped create a common approach to reinforcement, expectations and monitoring.

DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that a comprehensive and individualized behaviour management programme can contribute to substantial improvement in disruptive behaviour. The strongest response was observed when positive behaviour was immediately recognized and reinforced.

Social reinforcement was particularly important because the student's behaviour appeared partly associated with a need for attention and recognition. Rather than providing attention primarily when the student behaved disruptively, teachers were able to redirect attention towards desirable behaviours.

The structured reward system complemented social reinforcement by making expectations visible and consequences predictable. This encouraged the student to develop greater self-regulation and understand the relationship between behaviour and outcomes.

The findings are broadly consistent with behavioural learning principles, according to which reinforcement increases the likelihood that desirable behaviour will be repeated. They also support classroom management approaches that emphasize clear expectations, consistency, positive teacher-student relationships and opportunities for success.

The study further indicates that consequences such as activity curtailment and time-out can have a role within a broader behaviour support plan. However, these strategies should not become the primary means of classroom management. They should be applied proportionately, safely and consistently, while maintaining opportunities for the student to learn and practise alternative behaviours.

An important finding is the role of the wider school environment. Since disruptive behaviour occurred in several settings, intervention needed to involve teachers, administrators, transport personnel and the family. Consistency across adults and environments reduced the possibility of contradictory expectations.

The student's academic difficulties also highlight the importance of addressing learning needs alongside behaviour. Behavioural intervention is more likely to succeed when students are supported academically and given realistic opportunities to experience success.

Educational Implications

The case has several implications for elementary education

First, schools should identify behavioural difficulties at an early stage rather than waiting until they become severe. Early observation and intervention can prevent negative patterns from becoming established.

Second, teachers should receive training in evidence-based classroom management. Behaviour-specific praise, reinforcement, clear rules, structured routines and appropriate consequences can improve classroom climate.

Third, behaviour management should be individualized. A strategy that works for one student may not work equally well for another. Teachers should consider developmental level, academic needs, motivation, family context and behavioural triggers.

Fourth, positive reinforcement should receive greater emphasis than punitive responses. Students should be given frequent opportunities to experience success and receive recognition for appropriate behaviour.

Fifth, schools should establish strong partnerships with families. Behavioural expectations are more effective when students encounter reasonable consistency between home and school.

Finally, behaviour intervention should be continuously monitored. Teachers should review whether a strategy is actually producing improvement and modify the intervention when necessary.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Teachers should prioritize behaviour-specific social reinforcement as a primary classroom management strategy.
- Schools should establish clear and age-appropriate behavioural expectations.

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- Structured point or reward systems may be used where they are meaningful and consistently implemented.
 - Strategic ignoring may be used selectively for minor attention-seeking behaviours when safety and instruction are not compromised.
 - Activity curtailment should be brief, proportionate and used as a supplementary consequence.
 - Time-out, where used, should be supervised, limited and consistent with school policy and child-safeguarding principles.
 - Role-playing and coaching should be incorporated to teach students alternative behavioural responses.
 - Academic difficulties should be addressed alongside behavioural difficulties.
 - Schools should provide professional development in positive behaviour support and classroom management.
 - Parents should be involved in developing and monitoring individualized behaviour plans.

Teachers should maintain systematic behavioural records to monitor progress.

Future research should examine similar interventions with larger samples and more rigorous single-case or experimental designs.

LIMITATIONS

The study has several limitations. First, it involved only one participant, and therefore the findings cannot be generalized to all students exhibiting disruptive behaviour.

Second, the study was conducted in one school over one academic semester. Behavioural outcomes may have been influenced by contextual factors specific to the student, school, teachers and family.

Third, the study relied substantially on observational and qualitative information. Although multiple sources were used for triangulation, observer expectations may have influenced interpretation.

Fourth, the study did not employ a control or comparison group. Consequently, improvements cannot be attributed exclusively to any single intervention.

Finally, behavioural change may require continued support beyond the intervention period. Long-term follow-up would be necessary to determine whether the improvements were sustained.

CONCLUSION

The present case study demonstrates the potential effectiveness of a structured, positive and individualized behaviour management programme for an elementary school student exhibiting persistent disruptive behaviour. The intervention combined social reinforcement, a structured reward system, strategic ignoring, activity curtailment, supervised time-out, role-playing, coaching and school-home collaboration.

Among the strategies used, social reinforcement appeared to be the most effective. Immediate and behaviour-specific recognition encouraged the student to seek positive attention through appropriate conduct. The structured reward system further motivated the student by making behavioural expectations clear and outcomes predictable.

Strategic ignoring was useful for minor attention-seeking behaviours but was not sufficient for serious disruption. Activity curtailment and supervised time-out were useful as supplementary strategies when positive approaches alone did not adequately address more serious incidents. Their

effectiveness depended on careful, consistent and supervised implementation.

The study also demonstrates that behaviour management cannot be viewed as the responsibility of the classroom teacher alone. Teachers, school administrators, parents and other school personnel must work together to provide consistent expectations and reinforcement. Academic support is equally important because learning difficulties and behavioural difficulties may interact.

Although the single-case design limits generalizability, the study provides an important practical message for elementary schools: effective behaviour management is not simply about stopping undesirable behaviour; it is about teaching, reinforcing and sustaining desirable behaviour.

A supportive school environment should therefore combine clear expectations with encouragement, structured consequences with empathy, and behavioural accountability with opportunities for success. Such an approach can contribute not only to improved classroom discipline but also to the student's academic participation, peer relationships, self-regulation and overall development.

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