

Factors Affecting Teachers' Attitudes towards Students' Challenging Behaviour in Primary Schools

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Abstract

This paper aims at measuring primary school-teachers' attitudes towards students who display a range of inappropriate behaviours in regular classrooms. Following a multistage cluster sampling, 1090 government primary school-teachers were surveyed from one division of Bangladesh. Teachers' attitudes towards students' inappropriate behaviour (TASIB) scale developed by Malak, Sharma and Deppeler (2017) was used for collecting data. Both descriptive (Mean, SD) and inferential (multiple regression) statistics were used to analyse data. The results revealed that the teachers held slightly positive attitudes toward students who display inappropriate behaviour in the classroom. Their attitudes were found to be higher toward students' overall unproductive behaviour ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.00$) than aggressive behaviour ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 1.25$). The satisfaction level of training as a demographic variables was found to be a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.317$, $SE = 2.498$, $p < 0.05$) of teachers' attitudes. The findings are discussed with possible implications for policy and practice in the context of primary education in Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Challenging behaviour, inappropriate behaviours, teacher attitudes, primary education*

1. Introduction

Teachers' understanding of students' classroom behaviour has been investigated emphasizing several aspects including perceptions and patterns of inappropriate behaviour, and prevalence and seriousness of such behaviour. Context has consistently been significant, having impacted teachers' understanding of student challenging behaviour. However, within students' behaviour of concern, examining teachers' attitudes based on a systematically developed and standardised instrument is rare in contemporary literature. This paper looks into primary teachers' attitudes toward teaching students who display challenging behaviour.

Teacher's behaviour in the classroom determines how students will learn in the classroom. Human behaviour is shaped by various factors of which both attitude and belief are the most significant basics (Ajzen, 1991). Attitude is "a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour" (Eagle & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). The psychological tendency is referred to as an internal state and a type of bias that predisposes the individual toward evaluative responses that could be positive or negative (Eagle & Chaiken, 1993).

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A key reason for students with diverse learning needs being segregated from regular schools is unfavourable attitudes of teachers toward them (Grieve, 2009). Teachers are considered key individuals for making a classroom accessible to all learners (Jerlinder, Danermark & Gill, 2010). Teachers' commitment is thereby crucial for student learning (Sautner, 2008) and is likely to be understood as a reflection of individual attitudes, which psychologists have defined as a blend of beliefs and values (Jordan & Stanovich, 2003). Values can be conceptualised as principled preferences for acting in accordance with beliefs (Lieberman, 2009). Sometimes, people may not act out what they believe. Some may have positive beliefs toward students with diverse needs including those with challenging behaviours; however, they may not demonstrate these beliefs, which may make an inclusive structure difficult to implement. In the following section, attitudes and perceptions are presented interchangeably to discuss the influence of numerous factors on classroom teachers in responding to student behavioural issues.

2. Review of related literature on challenging behaviour

Student's challenging behaviour is a context-specific phenomenon. According to Gu, Lai and Ye (2011, p. 21) "Student problem behaviors are relevant to school environment and culture, which have tremendous influences on student values, beliefs, motivations, and attitudes". It is evident that understanding of what is appropriate or inappropriate classroom behaviour varies widely from: one cultural context to another (Bear, Chen, Mantz, Yang, Huang, & Shiomi, 2016; Rowe, Rivers, & Kamphaus, 2013); school to school within similar contexts (LeBlance, Swisher, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2007); classroom to classroom within a school (Alter, Walker & Landers, 2013). The following table outlines the behaviours perceived to be challenging based on the frequency of occurrence and degree of severity in various cultures worldwide.

Table 1: Cross-cultural teachers' perceptions of inappropriate behaviour

Study	Country	Most frequent behaviour	Most troublesome behaviour
Shen et al. (2009)	China	Non-attention	Non-attention
Ding et al. (2008)	China	Daydreaming	Daydreaming
Sun & Shek (2012)	Hong Kong	Talking out of turn	Disrespecting teachers
Poulou & Norwich (2000)	Greece	Lack of concentration	Work avoidance
Didaskalou & Millward (2001)	Greece	Talking out of turn	Physical aggression: Pushing or hitting peers
Alter et al. (2013)	USA	Off-task behaviour	Off-task behaviour
Little (2005)	Australia	Talking out of turn	Talking out of turn
Stephenson et al. (2000)	Australia	Distractibility	Disruptive behaviours
Arbuckle & Little (2004)	Australia	Distractibility	Adherence to classroom rules
Kyriacou & Martin (2010)	Spain	Talking out of turn	Aggressive behaviour
Esturgo & Sala-Roca (2010)	Spain	Talking out of turn	-
Woo et al. (2007)	Singapore	Internalising behaviour	Disobedience to teachers
Marais and Meier, 2010	South Africa	Disruption	Aggressive behaviour

Challenging behaviour in the context of Bangladesh

Historically, Bangladesh teachers are authoritarian in their responses in classroom teaching as punitive approaches had been an integral part for over the past few decades in Bangladeshi school culture. However, due to a policy adoption in 2010, any types of physical or mental punishment have been banned in educational institutions (Ministry of Education, 2010). After the removal of this form of punishment, teachers are still finding themselves in a difficult situation concerning discipline.

Studies on student challenging behaviour in the context of Bangladesh is limited. Very few literature could be located on student challenging behavioural perspective in Bangladesh searching internationally recognised search engines or databases. The study conducted by Malak, Deppeler and Sharma (2014) provides a definition of challenging behaviour in the context of Bangladesh and outlines eight categories of inappropriate classroom behaviours including aggressive, lack of respect for teachers, disruptive, complaining, frequently leaving the classroom, stealing, inattention and inappropriate language use. Another study suggests that teachers continue to use punitive strategies for their managing their classes and they showed a sense of helplessness regarding responding to students misbehaviour without punishment (Malak, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2015). However, since there is no punishment in schools and teachers struggle with addressing inappropriate student behaviour, this study could determine how to make teachers more positive when it comes to addressing inappropriate student behaviour in regular classrooms.

Factors affecting teachers' attitudes toward students' challenging behaviour

There is a range of factors through which teachers' attitudes could be shaped. The majority of the factors regarding challenging behaviour are related to teacher characteristics, though student and school characteristics also influence teachers' attitudes. Even within the relationship between student and teacher, there are several issues which cause teachers to behave differently towards students exhibiting inappropriate classroom behaviour. A significant factor is the demographic variable of teachers including gender, age, teaching experience, religion, ethnicity, education and training, and close contact with students (Andreou, & Rapti, 2010; Little, 2005; Tafa & Chlouverakis, 2000). Location of school (e.g. urban and rural), type of school (e.g. public or private), student-teacher ratio, and student-teacher relationships are also recognised as significant factors that influence such teachers' attitudes by teachers toward those students who behave inappropriately (Henricksion & Rydell, 2004; LeBlance, Swisher, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2007). These factors are taken into consideration for outlining the research question of the study.

3. Research questions

This study investigated the following research questions:

1. What level of attitudes do primary teachers hold towards students exhibiting challenging behaviour in the classroom?
2. Is there any significant relationship between the demographic variables of teachers and their attitudes to teach students who display challenging behaviour?

4. Methodology

A total of 1190 primary school teachers were sampled from 263 Government primary schools in various parts of one division. A five-stage cluster sampling procedure was employed to select participants located in urban, suburban and rural schools.

Upon permission of the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), data were collected in monthly sub-cluster meetings in each selected subdistrict. Respective education officers of the selected sub-districts were contacted and provided with a copy of the permission letter along with a survey package consisting of explanatory statements and a questionnaire. The survey packages were distributed to teachers who attended the professional development program during regular sub-cluster meetings. The teachers were asked to return the completed questionnaires in a cardboard box placed in the meeting room.

A cross-sectional survey comprising a demographic questionnaire and a scale employed for collecting data from primary schoolteachers. The survey instrument is described below:

Part one of the survey was designed to gather demographic information about the teachers. Teachers were asked to provide information on gender, age, years of experience in teaching, contact with students who behave inappropriately (experience in teaching students demonstrating inappropriate behaviour), highest educational qualifications, training in behaviour management and class size (average number of students in a class).

The second part of the survey included a scale called Teachers' Attitudes Toward Students' Inappropriate Behaviour (TASIB) developed by Malak, Sharma and Deppeler (2017). The scale consists of 13 items that fall within two distinct factors: unproductive behaviour and aggressive behaviour. The response format is designed based on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6). The alpha coefficient for the total scale, for Factor 1 and Factor 2 were 0.91, 0.92 and 0.75 respectively. The scale yields a total score, the value of which can range from 13 to 78. The lower value of the scale indicates that a teacher has an unfavourable attitude towards teaching students who demonstrate inappropriate behaviour in the classroom compared to those teachers who obtain a higher score.

5. Results

The demographic information received from the survey indicates that the sample constitutes 57.7% male and 42.3% female teachers. In terms of their age, majority of the teachers (43%) were between 30 and 39 years old, while only 8% of them were from 50 years or above age-range.

The highest educational qualifications of participants ranged from a master's degree (26.7%), a bachelor degree (34%) to below bachelor degree (39.50%). With regard to professional qualifications, 59.3% participants held a Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed), 1.4% held a Diploma in Education (Dip-in-Ed), 6.7 % held a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and 32% of the participants indicated they had no professional degrees. The majority of teachers (39%) had taught for more than 10 years while a minority (25%) had teaching experience between 6 to 10 years. With regard to professional qualifications, 59.3% participants

held a Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed), 1.4% held a Diploma in Education (Dip-in-Ed), 6.7% held a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and 32% of the participants indicated they had no professional degrees. Though the majority of participants (75%) indicated having experience of teaching students who display inappropriate behaviour in the classroom, a very small percentage (4.8%) of teachers indicated they had received any training in classroom management strategies to address students' inappropriate behaviour. In terms of success in teaching such students, the majority of participants rated as average (50.5%), while (41.6%) and (7.9%) reported their success as low and high, respectively.

The overall mean score of primary schoolteachers' attitudes on the Teachers' Attitudes toward Inappropriate Behaviour (TASIB) scale was 4.06 (SD = 0.99). A score close to value of 4 on the TASIB scale refers to that participants 'somewhat agree' with the statements that examine their attitudes toward students' inappropriate classroom behaviour. Therefore, the overall mean score suggests that the primary schoolteachers of this study held slightly positive attitudes toward students who display inappropriate behaviour in the classroom.

Table 2: Attitudes scores of the teachers towards inappropriate student behaviour

Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Physically aggressive towards peers	3.596	1.490
Talking out of turn	4.217	1.279
Moving around the classroom	4.427	1.177
Refusing to follow teacher's direction	4.199	1.373
Verbally aggressive towards peers	3.771	1.482
Aggressive towards teachers	3.827	1.514
Telling a lie	4.309	1.270
Stealing from peers	4.128	1.378
Using culturally inappropriate language	4.196	1.286
Requesting to leave classroom	4.154	1.374
Wasting time without doing anything	4.190	1.399
Complaining against peers	4.171	1.343
Lack of respect for teacher	3.657	1.609

The mean scores of two factors (aggressive behaviour and unproductive behaviour) of TASIB scale were also analysed. Primary schoolteachers held higher level of attitudes toward unproductive behaviour (M = 4.22, SD = 1.00) than aggressive behaviour (M = 3.71, SD = 1.25). Scores of items for unproductive behaviour suggest that teachers had the most positive attitudes toward students who move around the classroom (M = 4.42, SD = 1.17) followed by those who tell a lie (M = 4.30, SD = 1.27). Analysis also shows several items including students who do not follow teacher's directions (M = 4.19, SD = 1.37), use culturally inappropriate language (M = 4.19, SD = 1.28) and those who waste time without

doing classroom tasks ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.39$). Teachers' attitudes within the factor of aggressive behaviour indicate they were less favourable towards students who are verbally aggressive towards teachers ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.51$) followed by those who are disrespectful towards teachers ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 1.60$) and least favourable towards those who are physically aggressive towards their peers ($M = 3.59$, $SD = 1.49$).

Table 3: Predictors of teachers' attitudes

Background Variables	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	<i>P value</i>
	<i>B</i>	Standard Error	Beta (β)	
Gender	-1.097	4.654	-0.038	0.815
Age	-0.712	0.668	-0.481	0.293
Experience	0.627	0.68	0.452	0.362
Qualification	3.211	2.949	0.213	0.282
Professional degree	3.883	6.649	0.098	0.562
Experience in teaching students displaying inappropriate behaviour	-0.071	15.913	-0.001	0.996
Training on behaviour management	0.073	0.142	0.076	0.609
Level of training satisfaction	5.093	2.498	0.317	0.048

A multiple regression analysis was utilised to measure the main effect of the TASIB scale as well as to identify any significant predictive demographic variables of teachers' attitudes. Analysis revealed a significant model ($r^2 = 0.142$, $F(8, 1090) = 2.870$, $p < 0.05$) for the TASIB scale. Demographic variables used for regression analysis included age, gender, highest qualification, highest professional degree, teaching experience, experience in teaching students exhibiting inappropriate behaviour, training in addressing inappropriate behaviour, and level of training satisfaction. Out of eight demographic variables only level of training satisfaction was found to be a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.317$, $SE = 2.498$, $p < 0.05$) of teachers' attitudes. This implies that teachers with higher levels of training satisfaction held more positive attitudes compared to those with lower levels of satisfaction.

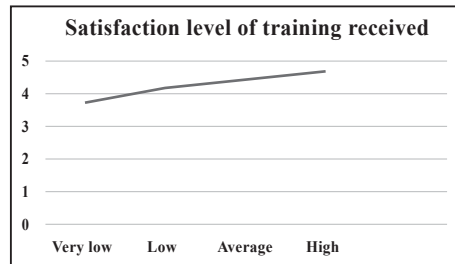


Figure 1: Teachers' attitudes based on the level of training satisfaction

A clear trend of increasing mean scores of attitudes were observed among the teachers in accordance with their increasing level of training satisfaction from 'very low' ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.51$) to 'low' ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.94$), 'average' ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.94$) and 'high' ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 0.30$).

6. Discussion and recommendations

The findings of the study suggest that the primary schoolteachers held slightly positive attitudes toward students who display challenging behaviour in the classroom. In particular, it revealed that teachers' attitudes were less favourable towards students who are verbally aggressive and disrespectful towards teachers. The results also indicate that the satisfaction level of training as one out of eight background variables was found to be a significant predictor of teachers' attitudes implying that teachers who successful training event had more positive attitudes compared to their other colleagues.

The findings may have several implications for policy and practice in the context of Bangladesh. Teachers' responses towards a particular behaviour that was termed as 'lack of respect for teacher'. This behaviour has previously been identified by other researchers as well in the Asian context (e.g., Sun & Shek, 2012), and Western context (e.g., Esturgo-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010). However, the way this particular behaviour was described by Bangladeshi teachers is unique (Malak et al., 2014). The teachers seemed to feel a severe level of emotional harm by this behaviour, which they specified as unwillingness to exchange SALAM (Greetings) with teachers, frequently arguing with them, and/or refusal to follow their directions (Malak et al., 2015; Malak et al, 2014). Many teachers in this study reflected on their own contexts about how they themselves used to respecting their teachers when they were studying in school. Their words regarding 'respect' seem to echo a teacher's feeling who stated, "Whatever my teachers asked was a duty of mine to follow". The belief system of the teachers seems to be supportive of a view of 'authoritarian teaching' (Malow-Iroff, O'Connor & Bisland, 2004) that emphasizes on controlling the behaviour of students and supports that teachers' orders be obeyed by the students without any question.

This finding has important implications for teacher educators and local education officers (UEOs/AUEOs/ URC instructors). In addition to academic learning, primary school is considered to be child's main source of social and behavioural learning (Huq, 2005).

Teachers need to be aware of that teaching appropriate behaviour to students is their responsibility too. Issues regarding student classroom behaviour can be discussed in the sub-cluster meeting which is a monthly event of a school sub-district where around 50 teachers participate for a day long training program coordinated by local education officers

called Upazila Education Officers (UEOs). Contents of sub-cluster training are centrally prepared by teacher educators while the topics are delivered to teachers by UEOs. A positive move forward would be to include a focus on inappropriate student behaviour including issues related to lack of respect are included in the sub-cluster training. The aim would be to support teachers to confidently and effectively address inappropriate behaviour and simultaneously support students to learn appropriate behaviour. In addition, it is imperative that teacher training giving teachers opportunities to discuss and understand why and how student behaviour in modern Bangladeshi classrooms should differ from those in which they learned.

As discussed earlier, there is a critical need for professional support to address teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards positive approaches to managing inappropriate classroom behaviour. Although the government has officially banned the use of corporal punishment in schools (MoE, 2010), there does not appear to have been any introduction or advocacy of alternative approaches to support these policy changes. As a result, teachers' perceptions and understanding, and responses to inappropriate behaviour still seem to be based on the previous disciplinary model. It is important that students' behavioural issues are addressed in all relevant sectors including those involved in professional development activities for pre-service and in-service teachers. Specifically, Upazila (sub-district) Resource Centre (URC) provides a range of subject based training to teachers in regular basis. One possible strategy could be that URC could incorporate classroom management related contents in its subject-oriented training and/ or it could design a separate training exclusively on managing inappropriate classroom behaviour for teachers. In this case, TOT (training of trainer) will be necessary for instructors at URC. Teacher educators at university level could design and implement the required TOTs for URC instructors. Most importantly, Diploma in Primary Education (DPED) might be the most potential program which could be designed comprehensively to make novice teachers aware of proactive strategies to address inappropriate classroom behaviours.

Findings also revealed that the satisfaction level of training as one out of eight background variables was found to be significant predictor of teachers' attitudes. This means that teachers having higher levels of satisfaction on training appeared to have more positive attitudes towards students' challenging behaviour than their colleagues with a lower level of satisfaction. Despite the fact that there are numerous research studies (e.g., Alvarez, 2007; Erbas et al., 2010; Cooper, 2011) suggesting that training can shape teachers' attitudes positively towards students demonstrating inappropriate classroom behaviour, little research has measured how satisfaction level of training could impact on teachers' attitudes towards inappropriate student behaviour. Hence, this finding could add further insights to the training variable of teachers suggesting that not only training is important, but also how satisfied the teachers are with the training they received could play a significant role. There is no single solution for individual teachers that will address challenging behaviour in their classroom; rather approaches should be founded on the collective efforts of all the stakeholders including principal, teachers and community (Korpershoek, Harms, Boer, Kuijk & Doolaard, 2014). Training approaches that involve substantive collaboration and that are focused on professional learning are likely to be successful in engaging teachers and building on their experiences (Rogers, 2015). A high-quality program evaluation mechanism (Korpershoek et al., 2014) can be useful to measure the levels of satisfaction of teachers about the behavioural management training they received.

Studies suggest that professional qualifications as a demographic variable appeared to be a significant predictor of teachers' intentions to teach students who display inappropriate behaviour in the classroom (Malak, Sharma & Deppeler, 2018). This means that teachers with higher relevant professional degrees are likely to have a higher level of intended behaviour than their colleagues who had less or no professional degrees. Previous studies (Barnett, 2003; Erbas, Turan, Aslan, & Dunlap, 2010) suggest that more qualified teachers focus more on student engagement compared to those who are less qualified. The professional qualifications for primary schoolteachers in Bangladesh comprised Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed.), Diploma in Primary Education (DPEd.), Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Master of Education (M.Ed.). In recent years, many novice teachers graduate from universities as well as have higher teaching qualifications such as B.Ed. or M.Ed. It is important that pre-service teaching qualification includes students' behavioural issues. Policy makers in DPE as well as the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) could also consider the insights of the findings, which might convince them to incorporate prior professional qualification as mandatory criteria for prospective teachers and introduce positive behavioural support (PBS) (Sugai & Horner, 2010:2009) training for inservice teachers across the country

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