

Exploring Behaviour Management Strategies Used By Teachers In Thailand Primary Schools

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the behaviour management strategies used by teachers in Thailand primary schools and the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their strategies. A five-part questionnaire, comprising - Participants' Background Information, Behaviour Management Strategies, and Perceptions of Effectiveness of the strategies was completed by 50 teachers from 10 schools. Descriptive statistics, *t*-tests, and ANOVA were used to analyse the data. The results showed that most teachers used non-aversive behaviour management strategies. The teachers also rated non-aversive strategies as more effective. The study recommends further professional training for teachers, and implementation of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) in a school-wide approach.

Keywords: Thailand Teachers, Student Behaviour in Schools, Behaviour Management Strategies

1. Introduction and Context of Study

There has been a growing concern about the prevalence of problem behaviours in some schools in Thailand (Authors, 2016; Thai Department of Education, 2008) and this study investigated the behaviour management strategies teachers use to manage those behaviours. Thailand is a country in South-East Asia with a population of 65.5 Million according to the 2010 official census. The country has a robust economy with an education system that aims to develop the potential of all students. The basic school system in Thailand has four key stages. Stage 1 consists of the first three years of elementary schooling known as “Anuban”. Stage 2 covers Prathom 1–6; Stage 3 covers Matthayom 1–3 (lower secondary) and Matthayom 4–6 (upper secondary). A vocational stream also runs in two semesters of a school year. In addition, Stage 4 covers university and college education (ONEC, 2004). On the completion of each level, students are required to pass NET (National Educational Test) examinations known as O-NET (Ordinary) and A-NET (Advanced). Thus the Thai education system is basically a 6–3–3 model followed by a wide range of post-secondary options. Formal education in Thailand takes at least 12 years of basic education, which is followed by higher education in any tertiary institution (ONEC, 2004). Public schools in Thailand are managed by Thai Ministry of Education while the Office of the Private Education Commission (OPEC) within the Ministry of Education oversees the supervision of private schools. In addition, the Office for National Education Standards and Quality Assessment is charged with the responsibility for evaluation of educational achievements of schools in Thailand (OPEC, 2005).

2. The Issue of study

Problem behaviour among students in Thailand has become an issue of concern (Authors, 2016) and yet many teachers have limited knowledge and skills of the different behaviour

management strategies to deal with these behaviours. About a decade ago Samangsri, Assanangkornchai, Pattanasattayawong, and Mukthong, (2007) reported that methods or approaches involving physical punishment observed earlier by Pumwaree (1986), still prevailed. Many teachers in Thailand were using reactive methods such as physical or verbal punishment including, flogging, giving negative feedback and asking students to leave the classroom for displaying unacceptable behaviours (Samangsri, et al., 2007). These practices suggested that teachers had limited knowledge of alternative behaviour management strategies that can be employed to deal with problem behaviours. If teachers in Thailand are to be supported to develop knowledge and skills around alternative /more effective behaviour management approaches, then understanding the kinds of behaviour management strategies teachers currently use in their classrooms is warranted as a precursor to developing better training for teachers.

2.1 Aim of Study and Research Questions

This paper, which is derived from a broader study aimed to explore the management strategies that teachers use in their classrooms for a set of identified behaviours of concern and their perceptions of the effectiveness of those strategies. The relevant research questions were:

- What behaviour management strategies do teachers in Thailand schools use to address challenging behaviours?
- What are the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies to manage challenging behaviours?

- Are there any significant relationships between teachers' background variables on the one hand, and the behaviour management strategies they employ as well as their perceptions of effectiveness of the strategies, on the other?

3. Literature Review

Problem behaviour in schools is a worldwide phenomenon and in all countries, school authorities, teachers and parents are often concerned about the adverse effects of challenging behaviours. The school is expected to be a safe place for children (Nickerson & Spears, 2007), where teaching and learning can take place. However, the presence of problem behaviours in schools can constitute a threat to safety of some children and impede effective teaching and learning.

Problem behaviour is any behaviour that interferes with or has the potential to interfere with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions (Smith & Fox, 2003) or one that interferes with play, or is likely to harm the child and those within the reach of the child (Dunlap, Blair, Umbreit & Jung, 2007). Such behaviours include aggression (both physical and verbal), destruction of property, severe tantrums, self-injury, hitting, biting, bullying and anti-social & out of control behaviours. They may also include everyday behaviours (such as non-compliance, inattention, withdrawal, temper tantrums, attention seeking, talking in class and not settling for learning tasks) that occur at high frequency and/or intensity (Dunlap, Fox, Hemmeter, Joseph & Strain, 2003; Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007). These behaviours become problematic when they occur too often and interfere with teaching and learning or the wellbeing of others.

The causes of problem behaviour can be biological, (for example, pain), medication or sensory stimulation. Other causes include environmental factors such as noise, lighting and

access to preferred objects or activities; psychological factors such as feelings of being excluded, devalued, labelled, disempowered; and physical factors such as suffering a condition or intellectual disability and social factors such as boredom and seeking social interaction (Farmer & Aman, 2009; Matson & Boisjoli, 2007; Matson & Nebel-Schwalm, 2007; Rojahn, Matson, Mahan, Fodstad, Knight, Sevin, et al., 2009). Whatever the form of behaviour labelled “problematic” it is a type of behaviour most unlikely to respond to routine intervention strategies available to teachers. Thus, it has the potential to negatively impact upon learning and limit the child’s ability to get along with peers.

3.1 Effects of Problem Behaviours

While teachers do not necessarily know the reasons for students exhibiting problem behaviours, they need to manage these behaviours in their classrooms as they affect students, teachers and classroom learning (Porter, 2007). In fact these behaviours can threaten the wellbeing of both students and teachers (Porter, 2007; Geving, 2007; Yoon, 2002; Wald & Losen 2003). There is also evidence that such behaviours are linked to a number of academic and social problems (Conway, 2005). Their occurrence in the classroom can impact upon student learning as they result in decreased opportunities to learn for the individual child and his/her peers (Carter, Stephenson & Clayton, 2008; Little, 2005; Sela-Shavovitz, 2009). They are also a threat to personal and peer safety (de Zubicaray & Clair, 1998; Porter, 2007).

In terms of their effect on teachers, problem behaviours consume a lot of teacher-time and affect teachers’ ability to teach. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and Lewis (1997) also reported that aggressive student behaviour not only impedes learning outcomes for students, but it is linked to teacher stress. This is corroborated by Carter, et al. (2008), Geving (2007) Little (2005), Sela-Shavovitz, (2009) and Wald and Losen (2003) who refer to the fact that challenging behaviour constitutes a source of stress or even depression for

teachers. They negatively impact on teacher efficacy and wellbeing (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997) and are part of the reasons why teachers leave the profession (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Furthermore, problem behaviours lead to negative teacher attitudes and concerns about teaching and also about particular groups of students (Authors, 2007; Aniftos & McCluskie, 2002; Gilmore, Campbell, & Cuskelly, 2003; Konza, 2008; McLeod, 2000; McNally, Cole & Waugh, 2001). In these stressful situations, teachers often apply approaches that are ineffective and coercive (Lewis, 1997).

3.2 Strategies for Managing Behaviour

Teachers use different behaviour management strategies and research suggests that some strategies are more effective than others (Evans, Harden, Thomas & Benefield, 2003). Aversive strategies are seen as less effective in managing and creating lasting change in students than proactive strategies (Glen, Cheryl & Lise, 2011; Landau & Gathercoal, 2000; Maag, 2004). Aversive strategies include punishment in its varied forms, (corporal punishment seclusion or detention; referrals, suspensions and expulsions, time-out; response cost or taking away a privilege. The other strategies seen as ineffective include vague rules (Cotton, 2001; Landau & Gathercoal, 2000 Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013); ignoring misconduct (Cotton, 2001; Rademacher, Callahan & Pederson-Seelye, 1998); and inconsistent responses to misbehaviour (Gottfredson, 1989; Rademacher et. al., 1998). In line with this position, Skiba and Peterson (2000) concluded that the use of disciplinary practices such as suspensions, loss of privileges, reprimand, or expulsion in controlling problem behaviours in most cases, creates a negative learning environment and exacerbates problem behaviour (Westling, 2010). These strategies are reactive and punitive in approach and tend to make less positive impact on the lives of the students (Horner, Sugai & Horner, 2000, 2010). In particular, suspensions and exclusion have been found to have negative outcomes

for students. For example, in the 1990s many schools in the United States, put in place zero tolerance policies with respect to challenging behaviours, which resulted in a sharp rise in out-of-school suspensions and expulsions (Advancement & Civil Rights Project, 2000; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). The increase in school suspensions had negative outcomes on students (American Psychological Association, 2006) and some reports suggested that students who experienced frequent suspension missed important instructional time, were at greater risk of disengagement, had diminished educational opportunities and had a higher dropout rate (Addressing Suspension Report, 2013, Online; Losen & Gillespie, 2012). Similarly, Hemphill, et al. (2010) found in Australia that higher rates of suspension were prevalent among children in disadvantaged communities. Such frequent exclusion of students compounded their academic difficulties, reducing their engagement, and also increasing their antisocial behaviour (Hemphill et al, 2010). In Thailand, The Basic Education Commission (BEC) (2007) reported that schools tended to expel students with challenging behaviour rather than working to resolve their behaviour. Such students, the report noted, tended to get into a cycle of socially problematic behaviour such as taking drugs or committing crimes.

In view of the above issues with aversive strategies, there have been calls for the use of more proactive strategies (Banks, 2014) Such strategies are preventative and designed to equip students with information/knowledge and skills to engage in more acceptable behaviours (Lane, Wehby, Robertson & Rogers, 2007). Sustainable behaviour change requires, establishing relationships with students (Sun, 2014) and getting them to learn new behaviours that serve the same function as the problematic behaviour being replaced (Banks, 2014). In order to achieve such outcomes, teachers need to eliminate the facilitating factors (including antecedents) and employ proactive /preventative measures such as social-skill training and positive behaviour support strategies (George, Harrower & Knoster, 2003; Graves & Arbor,

2002; Horner, Sugai & Horner, 2000; Reinke, et al., 2013; Stephenson, Martin & Linfoot, 2000; Victor, 2005).

Traditional strategies such as positive and negative reinforcement (praise and approval, other rewards including token economies) and others such as modelling, shaping, self-monitoring, positive programming, and Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) are recommended by many researchers (see the works of Caldarella, Christensen, Young, & Densley, 2011; Cameron, 2006; Carr, Dunlap, Horner, Koegel, Turnbull, Sailor, Anderson, Albin, Koegel & Fox, 2002; Clunies-Ross, Little & Kienhuis, 2008; Curtis, Van Horne, Robertson & Karvonen, 2010; Lewis, Jones, Horner & Sugai, 2010). Some research reveals teachers' use of reinforcement contingent behaviour-specific praise is associated with increase in students' academic engagement and minimising disruptive behaviour (Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Ling and Barnette, 2013; Ling, Hawkins, & Weber, 2011; Moore, Robertson, Maggin, Oliver & Wehby, 2010). Educators have also reported the use of token systems to manage a wide range of students' academic and problem behaviours (Christensen, Young & Marchant, 2004) and to address their self-management skills (Self-Brown & Matthews, 2003). The use of contingencies of this kind has been reported to bring about a significant reduction in disruptive behaviour, yielding positive academic outcomes and improvement in students' social behaviours (Lo & Cartledge, 2004). Teacher use of contingencies can increase positive verbal interactions and decrease negative verbal interactions (Hansen & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2005; Ling & Barnett, 2013), decrease transition time, and increase achievements, appropriate classroom behaviour, and peer social acceptance (Yarborough, Skinner, Lee & Lemmons, 2004). The outcomes according to Cameron, Banko, and Pierce (2001) and Akin-Little, Eckert, Lovett, and Little (2004) are due to the fact that a child's intrinsic motivation tends to increase on account of the teacher's use of positive reinforcement. Several studies also report of the benefits of School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support strategies (Baba & Tanaka-Matsumi, 2011; Curtis,

et al. 2010; Lewis, et al., 2010; Sugai, et al., 2004) and in the USA, these approaches have been found to reduce dropout rates in schools (Dynarski, et al., 2008).

4. Method

A total of 50 teachers from 10 primary schools in Bangkok and Samutprakarn districts participated in the study. The participating schools were purposely selected to represent urban and rural schools. The teacher participants, made up of 18 males (36%) and 32 females (64%), were between the ages of 26 and 57 years. The majority had completed bachelor degree qualification (n=31=62%). The others had secondary qualifications (n=5=10%) teachers college (n=3 =6%) and postgraduate qualification (n=11=22%). The teachers responded to an open invitation sent to their schools. Information about the study indicating that participation was voluntary was sent to all selected schools. Teachers who wanted to participate were required to fill out and return the questionnaires to a deposit box in the administration building.

4.1 Instrument

A 5-part questionnaire used in this study consisted of:

1. Teacher background questionnaire (Section A)
2. Behaviours of Concern to Teachers (Section B)
3. Teachers' Behaviour Management Strategies Questionnaire (Section C)
4. Teachers' Perception of Effectiveness of Strategies Questionnaire (Section D)
5. Teachers' Perception of Difficulty Managing Behaviours (Section E)

In this article, we report results from Sections A, C and D.

Section A of the instrument required respondents to tick an appropriate box for their gender; age; levels of educational qualification such as secondary, teachers college, bachelor degree or postgraduate; number of students in class; and years of teaching experience. Section C required respondents to indicate their use of a range of behaviour management strategies identified in Section B (Behaviours of Concern to Teachers). Respondents were asked to rate their use of each strategy as follows: Not at All = 1, Sometimes = 2, and All the Time = 3. In Section D, teachers were asked to record their perceptions of the effectiveness of these strategies. The participants were required to rate the effectiveness of their strategies in managing the challenging behaviour as follows: Not at all Effective (1), Moderately Effective (2), Effective (3), and Highly Effective (4).

The instruments were developed by the researchers based on a literature review of behaviours considered unacceptable in general education classrooms across a range of country and/or cultural contexts. The participating teachers identified behaviours of concern and then provided responses to the types of behaviour management strategies they used to address these acceptable behaviours. To provide a range of possible responses to the behaviour management strategies questionnaire, the works of Bob Algozzine “Disturbing Behaviors Checklist” (2000), Maag (2004), Mastropieri and Scruggs (2010) among others, were reviewed. This review provided insight into a range of classroom behaviours and management strategies. The strategies identified included various forms of proactive, reactive and /or reinforcement and punishment strategies, which were then incorporated into the questionnaire.

4.2 Data Collection Process

The data collection process commenced shortly after ethics approval by the University Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Approval number: HE12-232). A letter was

sent to the Thai Ministry of Education seeking permission to collect research data from schools in Bangkok and Samutprakarn. Subsequently, the questionnaires were handed to teachers who had expressed interest in participating the study and a date was chosen for return of the completed questionnaires. In order to ensure that participants understood the meaning of the different behaviours, brief definitions of the strategies were attached to the questionnaires. Since the questionnaires were to be completed anonymously, consent was implied in the completion of the questionnaires. There was reluctance on the part of teachers to complete the questionnaires. This manifested in the fact that out of the 120 questionnaires sent to the selected schools, 58 were eventually returned, which is a response rate of 48.3%. Some of the returned questionnaires were incomplete and therefore excluded from the analysis.

4.3 Data Analysis

SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Scientists) was used to analyse the data. An initial internal consistency reliability test yielded Cronbach's alpha values within the agreeable range of 0.5 to 0.9 (Cooksey, 2007) for all of the questionnaires. The reliability analysis for the behaviour management strategies and effectiveness of strategies showed alpha values of 0.91 and 0.85 respectively.

The actual data analysis for each of the research questions was carried out using a number of statistical procedures, including Analysis of variance (ANOVA), Descriptive statistics, and *t*-tests. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the first and second research questions above, seeking to examine teachers' behaviour management strategies and teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies. For the third research question, a series of *t*-tests and one-way between-groups ANOVA were calculated for each background variable (as

independent variables) and each of the measures of strategies used to manage behaviour and effectiveness of practices (as dependent variables).

5. Results

The results of the study are presented under the different headings: Behaviour strategies used by teachers to address challenging behaviours, Teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of behaviour management strategies, and Influence of teachers' background variables.

5.1 Behaviour Strategies Used By Teachers To Address Challenging Behaviours

Table 1 shows that the behaviour management strategies used by teachers with relatively high mean scores are Praise (M = 2.32), Counselling (M = 2.22), Warning (M = 2.20) Thumbs-up and High-five (M = 2.18), Use of stickers (M = 2.1), Correction (M = 2.08) and Shaping behaviour (M = 2.04). Table 1 also shows that up to 13 management strategies have mean scores of less than 2 but more than 1.5, including Instructional approach (M = 1.88), Behavioural rehearsal (M = 1.82), Check-in-Check-out (M = 1.70) and Pre-correction (M = 1.72), indicating that these strategies are used less frequently.

Those behaviour management strategies with low mean scores (below 1.5) are Seclusion (M = 1.46) Caning (Physical Punishment) (M = 1.32), and Special trips (M = 1.30). Two of these strategies are punitive and are the least used by teachers.

Table 1 here

5.2 Teachers' Perceptions of The Effectiveness Of Behaviour Management Strategies

Descriptive statistics were calculated for the responses given by the teachers about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies they used to manage students' challenging

behaviours. Table 2 shows that the management strategies with high percentage rating “Not Effective” are Caning (Physical Punishment) (36%) and Special trips (30%). Thus teachers did not perceive these strategies to be effective in managing problematic behaviours. On the other hand, those strategies that teachers rated as “moderately effective” were Seclusion (46%), Pre-correction (38%), Debrief and Exclusion (36%), Environmental restraint (32%), Caning (Physical Punishment) and Check-in-Check-out (30%).

The behaviour strategies that teachers perceived as “highly effective” were Verbal praise (38%) and Use of stickers (32%) and the others next in line are Response cost (54%), Thumbs-up (52%), Verbal praise (50%), Instructional Approach, Referral, and Social skills (44%).

Table 2 here

5.3 Influence of Teachers' Background Variables

A series of *t*-tests and one-way between groups ANOVA procedures were carried for the most and least frequently used behaviour management strategies and background variables. The results showed that for both sets of indicators (more frequently used and least frequently used strategies), there were no significant findings for Gender, Training in special education, Teacher qualification, Number of students in classroom and Number of students with disabilities in classroom.

The only significant findings in the analysis of background variables and the Effectiveness measure were Professional duties and School District. (Tables 3 -6).

The one-way between-groups ANOVA with post-hoc tests was conducted to explore the effect of the background variable Professional Duties on the measure of perception of

effectiveness of behaviour management strategies. The analysis revealed that Professional Duties, divided into Subject teacher (Group 1), Classroom Teacher (Group 2), Special Needs Teacher (Group 3) and Other (Group 4), showed statistically significant difference at $p < .05$ level on effectiveness scores among the 5 groups [$F(3) = 452, 2.86, p = .047$], as indicated in Table 3 and 4.

Table 3 and 4 here

The Multiple Comparisons (Table 5) shows that the difference in perceived effectiveness is between Classroom teachers and Special needs teachers. The mean difference is significant ($p = .079$) at the 0.117 confidence level.

Table 5 here

Table 6 shows the t -test for effectiveness of behaviour management strategies and school district of study participants. The teachers from Samutprakarn Rural District have a higher mean score ($M = 57.1$) than the teachers from Bangkok District ($M = 46.8$). The t -test is significant ($p = .01$), indicating that teachers in Samutprakarn district perceive their strategies as far more effective than those in Bangkok district.

Table 6 here

6. Discussion

The study found that teachers used behaviour management strategies such as Praise, Counselling, Warning, Thumbs-up and High-five, Token economies (Use of stickers), Correction, and Shaping Behaviour. On the other hand, strategies including Instructional approach Behavioural rehearsal, Check-in-Check-out and Pre-correction are used less

frequently. More importantly, behaviour management strategies such as Seclusion, Caning (Physical Punishment) and Special trips which are punitive are least used by teachers. These findings reflect the general principles enshrined in positive behaviour approaches that recommend the use of less punitive or aversive strategies (Arthur-Kelly, 2006; Baba and Tanaka-Matsumi, 2011; Sugai, and Horner, 1999; Maag, 2004). Teachers' use of contingent, behaviour-specific praise has been shown to elicit an increase in students' academic engagement, minimise students' disruptive behaviour and improve students' social behaviours (Chalk & Bizo, 2004; Lo & Cartledge, 2004; Moore, et al., 2010). Indeed Cameron, Banko, and Pierce (2001) and Akin-Little, Eckert, and Lovett (2004) concluded that children's intrinsic motivation tends to increase on account of teachers' use of positive reinforcement. Further, the use of contingencies in managing disruptive behaviour increases positive verbal interactions and decreases negative verbal interactions (Hansen and Lignugaris-Kraft, 2005), and increases achievements, appropriate classroom behaviour, and peer social acceptance (Yarborough, Skinner, Lee & Lemmons, 2004). Therefore, the use of more proactive behaviour management strategies by Thailand teachers as found here, although modest, is sign of a move away from reactive to proactive approaches (Lane, Wehby, Robertson [& Rogers, 2007). This finding indicates that although the teachers in the participating schools are not implementing school-wide positive behaviour supports, they are still using less of the authoritarian behaviour management styles that Porter (2007) believes can lead to over-use of teacher power and culminate in many students demonstrating more unacceptable behaviours as a way of taking back power. The finding also provides an indicative position about teachers' practice so that the Ministry of Education and Thai teacher training institutions can develop appropriate behaviour management training courses for both pre- and in-service teachers.

6.1 Teachers' Perceptions Of Effectiveness Of Strategies To Manage Challenging Behaviours

The findings (Table 2) show that behaviour strategies rated as highly effective were Response cost, Thumbs-up, Verbal praise, Instructional Approach, Referral, Story-telling, and Social skills. This finding corroborates typical routine practices in many schools in the USA, where the use of rewards/ tokens such as stickers, stars, praise, awards, privileges and non-punitive measures to promote students' good behaviour (Fantuzzo, et al., 1991). Verbal praise and Use of stickers are reported to be working well for teachers in addressing problem behaviours and in this case, the study's finding reflects Sarasaen's, (2000) conclusion that Thai students were eager to learn with teachers who praised and rewarded their behaviour and made them gain satisfaction.

Furthermore, Table 2 shows that most teachers rated Caning (Physical Punishment) as the least effective behavioural management strategies used in addressing students' problem behaviour. These strategies are reactive and punitive in approach and tend to make no positive impact in the lives of students (Horner, Sugai & Horner, 2000). The finding is consistent with other research, which indicates that reprimands, detentions, punishments, seclusion and restraints are ineffective strategies for improving students' challenging behaviour in schools (Farmer, 1999; Sugai, 1996; Walker, Colvin & Ramsey, 1995; Williams, 1998). This finding is also consistent with Skiba and Peterson's (2000) conclusion that the use of severe disciplinary practices such as reprimand, suspension, loss of privileges or expulsion produces negative learning environments and exacerbates challenging behaviours.

6.2 Background Variables And Effectiveness Of Behaviour Management Strategies

The only significant findings were related to the background variables of Professional duties and School District. Tables 3, 4 and 5 show that classroom teachers and subject teachers

reported higher perceptions of effectiveness of their strategies, which implies that they were coping fairly well in managing students' problem behaviours. On the other hand, Special needs teachers reported lower perceptions of effectiveness. This result is surprising but may be due to the fact that special teachers are dealing with children who have more severe problems on average and don't have the same authority over entire classes as classroom teachers.

In terms of the differences between school districts, Table 6 shows that teachers from Samutprakarn Rural District had a higher mean score for perceptions of effectiveness of the behaviour management strategies compared to teachers in the urban school district. This difference may be explained by the apparent differences in the school ecology between rural Thai schools and their urban counterparts in terms of their structural, cultural and political systems (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). School cultures are influenced by context, in this case, local community culture. It is likely that teachers in the rural areas – where relationships are still more personal than urban areas – play more active roles in bridging school-community relations, which might transfer into more active roles in shaping classroom ecology, enabling students to show preference for conforming behaviours (see Arthur-Kelly, Lyons, Butterfield and Gordon, 2003). In other words, this finding could be attributed to likelihood of better cooperation between the teachers and parents in close-knit rural communities. This might facilitate or support behaviour interventions used by rural school-teachers. In this sense rural school children – who are still living more traditional lifestyles – might listen more to teachers' instructions than those in the urban areas. (Bambara, Goh, Kern, & Caskie, 2012; Fox, Dunlap & Powell, 2002).

7. Conclusion

This study set out to explore the strategies used by teachers in managing students' problem behaviours, as well as the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the strategies. Teachers used non-aversive strategies such as High-five, Thumbs-up, and Stickers more than others and considered strategies such as Verbal praise and Use of Stickers to be more effective than all other strategies. Background variables such as Professional duties and School district influenced teachers' responses to effectiveness of their strategies.

There is need to rethink existing approaches to handling students' problem behaviours to make them more effective. First, there is a need for the Ministry of Education and schools to put in place policies and behaviour management frameworks that embody evidence-based behavioural management practices such as School-wide Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) systems, while de-emphasising the use of reactive or non-evidence-based approaches. Schools need to create enabling environments that would facilitate teachers' capacities to address students' problem behaviours more effectively.

Secondly, the Ministry of Education needs to provide better training to up-skill teachers in order to improve their practices around managing problem behaviours, which implies that schools should organise regular in-service training for teachers. Such training would raise the quality of teaching and learning, ensure safety of students and staff, and bring about a great reduction in time wasted in addressing behaviour issues in classrooms.

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