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SCHOOL CLIMATE AND BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT IN ROMANIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

A healthy learning environment is most of the time positively correlated with a positive school climate. The present article is aiming to provide an overview on school wide discipline prevention in Romanian educational context and to identify existing practices to support and prevent school indiscipline in order to create a positive school environment which will facilitate learning. Participants included 114 teachers from primary and secondary schools and 5 stakeholders from Argeș county, Romania. The main research questions investigated the school climate and addressed the assessment of existing practices in reducing student disruptive behavior and enhancing student

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competence and teacher classroom management in place in nowadays schools. The main findings of the research indicate a grow of disruptive behaviors and indiscipline in classrooms. The urge of effective classroom management techniques is a major concern for teachers who state that classroom discipline as their biggest problem. The number of classroom disruptive behaviors is increasing and school indiscipline is a real phenomenon that cannot be denied and have to be addressed. Hence the preoccupations at the national level of teachers and school decision-makers to address it efficiently.

Keywords: discipline, socio-emotional support, positive school climate, SWPBS

Introduction

School indiscipline and disruptive behaviors in classrooms are known as a reality of the school environment, but left unaddressed in the primary school can escalate through high school and determine long-term negative consequences not only on the individual level of the students, but also on the classroom level, affecting peers and teachers, and community level as well. Indiscipline and problematic behaviors should be tackled in schools, because within those settings preventing interventions can be set and can reach a great number of students, as well as adults (teachers, educators, psychologists, non-teaching staff, parents). Studies (C. M. Evertson & K. W. Neal, 2006; S. G. McClowry et al., 2009) shows that students with challenging behaviors spend less time engaged in academic activities and have fewer positive interactions with their peers and teachers.

C. M. Evertson, K. W. Neal (2006, pg. 8) consider that learning-centered learning is more dynamic than the traditional one “in terms of long- and short-term goals enacted, variety and flexibility of activities offered, and opportunities for multiple roles for students and teachers. The need for effective

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management is critical in all classrooms, but the complexity of a learning-centered classroom increases the challenge". In this new context of "snowflake culture", teachers lack necessary skills to deal and manage challenging behaviors. Studies (K. L. Lane et al., 2011) show that low classroom management skills and the lack of confidence of teachers affect the ability to teach effectively and offer best learning opportunities for their students. A healthy school should offer a positive climate to support student learning, development, and well-being, to provide safety, support and adequate academic challenges, active and engaging activities. A report done by The Pennsylvania State University (2018) shows that a positive school climate would improve social, emotional, and academic competencies have public health benefits. In order to achieve a positive school climate, researchers (T. J. Lewis & G. Sugai, 1999; R. H. Horner, M. G. Sugai, A. W. Todd, Lewis, T., 2005; S. G. McClowry, et al., 2009; F. A. Anderson et. al., 2010; J. Swain-Bradway, et al., 2017; C. Bodiford McNeil, L. Borduin Quetsch, C. M. Anderson, 2018) propose several frameworks, models, programs of positive behavioral interventions and supports. The main aim of those researches was to build school capacity to meet students' educational, health (including mental health), social, and psychological needs. A core aspect of any positive behavioral interventions and supports is its focus on the prevention of problem behavior through the direct teaching of expected behaviors across school settings, as well as providing more intensive and/or individualized interventions for students requiring additional supports to be successful (R. H. Horner, M. G. Sugai, A. W. Todd, T. Lewis, 2005).

Definitions and theoretical framework

Even though behaviors can't be seen and measured and due to extensive research of behaviorism psychology gained a place within sciences, it is still a lot of interpretation on the meaning of the behavior. Human behavior is a complex construct, behind a human behavior there is a complexity of motives and reasons. In order to better understand our research initiative, it is important

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to conceptualize and define what are disruptive behaviors and what school indiscipline means and how can be measured. We need to define challenging behaviors to better understand what constitutes a challenging behavior. Often challenging behaviors are subjective, still aggressive and abusive behaviors have been very specifically identified by researchers. Lorber, N. M. (1966) is using the term of inappropriate behavior and indicates early patterns of challenging behaviors as aggression, vandalism, truancy, tardiness, dropout. He is also using the term of "poor behavior", defined as a behavior incompatible with and undesirable in the best interest of the educational success and effective operation of a class. In 2011, R. M. Oliver, J. H. Wehby, D. J. identifies and targets in their classroom management study disruptive, aggressive behaviors such as noncompliance, verbal disruption, teasing, being out of one's seat, damaging school furniture or other's property, hitting others. C. Cavanagh & B. Edelstein (2017) defined as maladaptive behaviors all challenging behaviors that cause problems to an individual themselves or others around them. L. S. Wakschlag et al. (2010) identifies disruptive behavior disorders and syndromes (DBDs) in preschool children, defining them as a deviation from age appropriate norms (giving as an example "loses temper and defies adults") and exaggeration of normative developmental processes ("easily annoyed," "often angry and resentful"). R. H. Horner et al. (2005) is adding to the disruptive behaviors in schools with bullying, insubordination, noncompliance, withdrawal. In Romanian context studies (M. Constantinescu & C. Constantinescu, 2017 (1); M. Constantinescu, C. Constantinescu, C. Dumitru, 2017 (2)) identify poor communications skills of teachers with students, pedagogical insufficient training, low motivation for their profession as important factors of increased disruptive behaviors in schools. To sum up, we would consider as a disruptive behavior any behavior that is hindering the learning and development process of students and is affecting the well-being and the quality of the educational process within the school environment and beyond it. J. M. Dru (2019) is analyzing the

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impact of disruptive behavior on the working life and its manifestation in the digital area.

Research design

The paper is presenting the results of a quantitative and qualitative analysis on behavior classroom management undertaken in the framework of the "Building School-Wide Inclusive, Positive and Equitable Learning Environments Through a Systems-Change Approach [SWPBS]", an ERASMUS+ KA3 project with reference number 606687-EPP-1-2018-2-CY-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY, financed by European Commission. This current research, performed in Romania as part of a larger study in the other project partner countries (Cyprus, Greece, Finland), explores the most frequent disruptive behaviors from classrooms and school services to support teachers and student to manage those behaviors and ensure prevention. The *research purpose* was to assess the school climate and behavior management techniques to address disruptive behaviors in classrooms. The final outcomes were to identify schoolwide discipline prevention policies and student socio emotional supports offered by Romanian school community. Problematic behaviors are growing and school is failing to offer a safe environment. The motivation of this study comes from the need to assess the current situation in Romanian schools in order to prepare and implement the Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support Framework.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned aim, the project is setting the following *objectives*: to measure the incidence of problematic behaviors in Romanian classrooms; to explore the principles and school procedures in managing problematic behaviors; to measure the effectiveness of existing discipline practices and policies; to identify schools needs for needs for promoting positive and preventative learning environments. To achieve the proposed research objectives, we have used as *research working methods*: focus

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group interviews, questionnaire and data analysis. The research plan was followed an exploratory descriptive design. With a view to identify the current school needs concerning the efforts to prevent school indiscipline and

to create a positive school environment, meant to facilitate learning, the interview was attended by 5 people from different backgrounds, respectively 3 school inspectors, who monitor school discipline in various schools, 1 director of a secondary school with students aged between 3-15 years old and a school psychologist. The questionnaire was applied to teachers and explored the problematic behaviors, classroom management skills, discipline practices and policies. The *sample* investigated was formed by 114 teachers (educators) from Arges county and can be visualized below (*Table 1*).

Table 1 Demographic characteristics for key stakeholders (N= 114)

Variable	n (%)
Gender	
Female	75 (65.79)
Male	39 (34.21)
Age (years)	
Median	46.42 (range 29-71)
Professional background	
School principal of primary school	24 (21.05)
Inspector of primary school	10 (8.77)
Other	80 (70.17)
Work experience in Education	
Median	5 (range X-X)
Bachelor degree	44 (39.63)
Master's degree	65 (58.55)
School community	

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Village, or rural area (fewer than 3 000 people)	64 (56.14)
Small town (3 000 to about 15 000 people)	7 (61.40)
Town (15 000 to about 100 000 people)	9 (7.89)
City (100 000 to about 1 000 000 people)	34 (29.82)

Results and discussions

The findings indicate that physical and verbal conflicts are the most present between students in classrooms. An overall mean score for the sample was calculated for each item. Further details of the scores can be found in *Table 2* and in *Figure 1*. Overall, the trend in scores demonstrated that the subscale items with the lowest scores were "Student substance use" and "Physical abuse of teachers". Items with the highest scores were "Verbal conflicts between students (e.g., swearing, calling names, comments related to racism/sexual orientation)" and "Physical conflicts between students (e.g., hitting, pushing, fights)". However, one may notice that the scores per items were all smaller than 3, which proves a relatively safe/clean school environment. Finally, a total behavioral Incidents score (severity of behavioral incidents) for each respondent was obtained by summing the scores of individual items. Out of a possible score of 5, indicating a higher perceived level of behavioral incidents frequency, the mean ± SD score was 3.6 ± 0.8.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics on Behavioral Incidents

Subscales	**N**	**Mean (SD)**
Physical conflicts between students (e.g., hitting, pushing, fights)	104	2.22 (0.93)

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Verbal conflicts between students (e.g., swearing, calling names, comments related to racism/sexual orientation)	104	2.75 (0.98)
Psychological conflicts between children (e.g., exclusion of a student from the team, spreading negative rumors)	104	1.89 (0.95)
Cyber bullying by using technological means (e.g., mobile phones, computers, social media, etc.)	104	1.67 (0.82)
Student tardiness (arriving late in school, coming late from break)	104	1.97 (0.98)
Student absenteeism (being absent from school)	103	2.01 (0.88)
Student substance use	103	1.08 (0.3)
Showing disrespect to teachers and peers (e.g., talking back, refusing to work, making negative comments)	104	2.01 (1.04)
Physical abuse of teachers	102	1.09 (0.35)
Disruption during instruction (playing with objects, talking with others, not waiting his turn)	104	2.14 (1.1)
Severity of Behavioral Incidents	104	3.6 (0.8)
Response range 1–5.		

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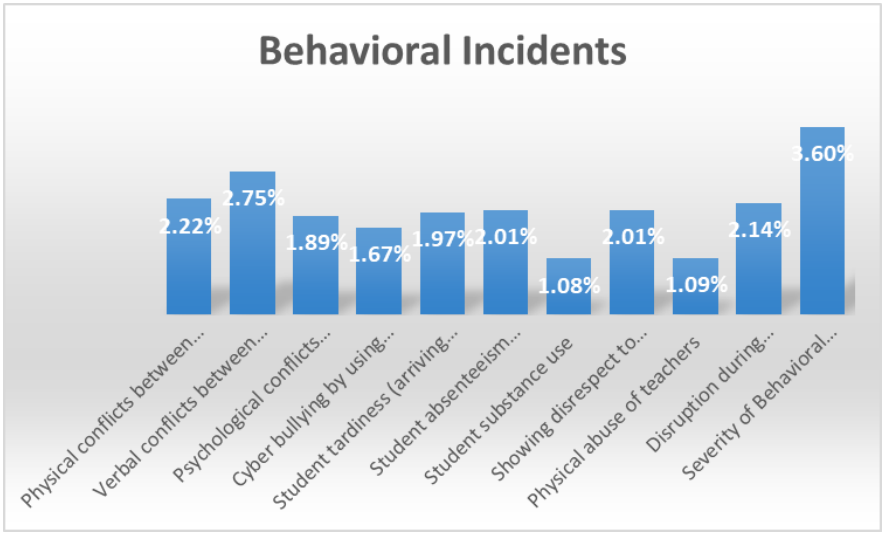


Figure 1 Distribution of behavioral incidents in Romanian schools (Arges county)

For the cases who reported to have a written school discipline, an overall mean score was calculated for each of the additional items. Further details of the scores can be found in *Table 3*. Overall, the trend in scores demonstrated that the subscale item with the lowest scores was the one regarding the comprehensive of the school discipline policy. Item with the highest scores was the one asking if this school discipline policy is consistently applied. As shown in *Table 3*, one may notice that all items got scores above 4, which may be interpreted as an indicator of the fact that school discipline policy is quite good (good quality and usability). Finally, a total quality of written school discipline policy score for each respondent was obtained by summing the scores of individual items. Out of a possible score of 5, indicating a higher perceived level of school discipline policy's quality and usability, the mean ± SD score was 4.2 ± 1.38.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics on Written school discipline

	Yes **N (%)**	**No** **N (%)**

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Subscales	N	Mean (SD)
Having a written school discipline policy	98 (96.1)	4 (0.98)
Is it comprehensive?	102	1.04 (0.2)
Is it clear?	96	4.03 (0.99)
Is it consistently applied?	95	4.29 (0.92)
Is it widely publicized among administration team, staff and families?	96	4.09 (0.9)
School discipline policy's quality and usability	102	4.2 (1.38)
Response range for subscales 1–5.		

As far as the effectiveness of existing discipline practices and policies is concern, an overall mean score was calculated for each of the items. Further details of the scores can be found in *Table 4*. Overall, the trend in scores demonstrated that the subscale item with the lowest score was "School discipline programs have been in reducing problem behaviors in your school?". Item with the highest score was "School practices have been in supporting students with socio-emotional and behavioral needs?" Finally, a total Effectiveness of existing school discipline practices score (items 1, 3, 4) and school discipline policies (item 2) score for each respondent was obtained by averaging each participants' responses.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics on the Effectiveness of existing school discipline practices and policies

Subscales	N	Mean (SD)
School discipline programs have been in reducing problem behaviors in your school?	101	3.61 (0.92)

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Policy discipline guidelines have been in guiding schools to reduce problem behaviors in schools?	101	3.56 (0.92)
School practices have been in reducing problem behaviors in your school?	103	3.81 (0.97)
School practices have been in supporting students with socio-emotional and behavioral needs?	103	3.86 (0.95)
Effectiveness of existing school discipline practices	103	10.13 (X)
Effectiveness of existing school discipline policies	101	3.16 (X)
Response range for subscales 1–5.		

The frequency of receiving training on school discipline programs was initially assessed. For the cases who reported to receive training on school discipline programs, an estimate the number of in-service training hours was assessed. Further details of the scores can be found in *Table 5.*

Table 5 ***Descriptive statistics on professional development training***

	Yes N (%)	**No N (%)**
Receiving training on school discipline programs	37 (38.5)	59 (61.46)
	N	**Mean (SD)**
Estimated number of hours	30	50 (40.48)

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Finally, a total limitation on promoting positive learning environments score for each respondent was obtained by averaging each participants' 5 responses.

Table 6 Descriptive Statistics on Current limitations on promoting positive learning environments

Subscales	N	Mean (SD)
Lack of or inadequate number of personnel with expertise in schoolwide prevention (e.g., school counselors, school psychologists)	104	3.08 (0.81)
Lack of or inadequate teacher training in preventative positive-based classroom practices	104	2.39 (1)
Lack of or inadequate supports within the school to help specific students with socio-emotional and behavioral needs?	104	2.56 (1.02)
Likelihood of complaints from families	103	2.3 (0.94)
Lack of or inadequate time for collaboration among staff	104	2.34 (0.87)
Limitations total score	104	11.54 (X)
Response range for subscales 1–4.		2.31

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We got many additional comments from our respondents to the questionnaire, considered important by them for creating positive learning environments with emphasis on schoolwide discipline prevention and student socio-emotional supports. Few of these comments, representing potential measures and actions to address schoolwide prevention, are rendered below: *"Encouraging parents to work in partnership with teachers, strengthening positive attitudes towards school and work"; "Developing partnerships with local institutions - police, gendarmerie and NGOs in order to create safe environments, without danger to the physical and psychological integrity of students"; "Conducting diverse activities adapted to the school environment, specific to the frequency of events / forms of violent manifestation with direct involvement of pupils, parents, school counsellor in cooperation with NGOs, public institutions"; "Students to propose measures to be taken when indiscipline acts take place"; "Extra-curricular activities to raise interest and help them socialize and collaborate. Role games"; "The disciplinary methods available to teachers are extremely low and conditional on pupils' status. Students have many rights and few duties. The only method of sanctioning is to reduce the note to wearing"; "Families of more involved students and a constant connection with school"; "Monitoring student activity, facilitating communication, meetings with representatives of the justice system, and setting up a school intervention group."*

Conclusion

Managing classroom disruptive behaviors to ensure a positive school climate is a concern expressed by teachers from Romanian schools, confirming the increasing of problematic behaviors and the need to tackle them seriously. Even though teachers, school principals and school inspectors didn't report any severe and extreme indiscipline, the indiscipline is a reality, its incidence is high and school indiscipline affects almost every school, and every

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classroom. Hence the preoccupations at a national level of teachers and school decision-makers to address it efficiently. Therefore, the implementation of a positive approach, such as the SWPBS framework is strongly needed to create a positive school environment and to promote schoolwide prevention and stronger socio-emotional supports for students, teachers and everyone involved in the educational process.

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