



School misbehavior: Elementary students' perspectives on typologies, attributions, and strategies

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ABSTRACT

Extensive literature on school misbehavior has largely focused on teachers' perceptions of the most frequent and troublesome classroom behaviors and the most commonly used strategies to manage them. Students' perspectives on this topic have received comparatively little attention and most of the few existing studies were conducted with secondary students. This study investigates the perspectives of 115 elementary children on appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, on their causal attributions, and on how schools should manage children's behavior. Their answers to an open-ended questionnaire were analyzed through qualitative thematic content analysis. Results suggest that children are exposed to an extensive number of negatively stated behavior expectations. When asked about causal explanations for behavior occurrences, children mainly mention factors related to themselves, particularly their social and emotional abilities. The frequent mentions of proactive strategies, such as explicit teaching, suggest that children's recommendations on behavior management encompass evidence-based practices. Implications for future research, educational policies, and teachers' training and practices are also provided.

KEYWORDS

Elementary children; misbehavior; students' perspectives; causal attributions; behavior management

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

1º ciclo do ensino básico; indisciplina; perspetivas das crianças; atribuições causais; gestão do comportamentos

Indisciplina na Escola: As Perspetivas de Alunos/as do 1º CEB sobre Tipologias, Atribuições e Estratégias

RESUMO

A indisciplina na escola tem sido extensivamente investigada a nível internacional, dando especial enfoque às perceções dos professores sobre os comportamentos indesejados mais frequentes e as estratégias de gestão de comportamento mais utilizadas. Comparativamente, as perceções dos/as estudantes nesta matéria têm sido menos estudadas, com os estudos disponíveis a explorar, sobretudo, as perceções dos/as estudantes do ensino secundário. Neste contexto, o presente estudo teve como objetivo explorar as perspetivas de crianças portuguesas do 1º ciclo do ensino básico em relação à indisciplina na escola, às suas atribuições causais, e às estratégias que consideram adequadas para gerir tais comportamentos. Para a recolha de dados foi utilizado um questionário de resposta aberta, aplicado a 115 crianças. A análise de conteúdo temática dos resultados revelou que as crianças são expostas a um vasto leque de expectativas comportamentais, maioritariamente formuladas de forma negativa. Os/as participantes tendem a atribuir os comportamentos a fatores relacionados consigo próprios, especialmente a competências sociais e emocionais. As menções frequentes a estratégias proativas de gestão de comportamentos, como o ensino explícito, sugerem que as recomendações das crianças estão alinhadas com as práticas baseadas em evidência. Implicações para estudos futuros, para informar políticas educativas, programas de formação de professores/as, bem como as práticas em contextos educativos são discutidas.

Introduction

On average, across OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, teachers spend 13% of their teaching time keeping order in the classroom (OECD, 2015). According to the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), last conducted in 2018, one in three 15-year-old

students reported that there is noise and disorder in every or most of their lessons, with students not necessarily listening to their teachers (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2019).

School misbehavior can be defined as “any behavior by a pupil that undermines the teacher's ability to establish and maintain effective learning experiences in the

classroom” (Kyriacou, 2009, p. 121). The concept is frequently used interchangeably with other terms, such as undisciplined behavior, problem behavior, and disruptive behavior (e.g., Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Lopes & Oliveira, 2017; Merrett & Wheldall, 1984). According to Kyriacou (2009), disruptive behavior is “misbehavior that disrupts the smooth running of the school” (p. 122). In turn, misbehavior is a broader concept that includes behaviors ranging from noncompliance to overt disruption. Considering this broader nature, the term misbehavior will be used throughout this paper, as it comprises classroom behaviors and those that happen in the non-classroom school settings. Despite being less studied, misbehaviors occurring in the school common areas - such as hallways, playgrounds, and the canteen - are estimated to be highly frequent given lower supervision from adults and the unstructured nature of these spaces compared to the classroom (Wheatley et al., 2009).

Most school misbehavior is minor or mild in nature such as being noisy or talking out of turn, not paying attention, not following the tasks, being out of seat, hindering other children, or arriving late for classes. Despite being highly frequent, these behaviors have a low impact when compared to major misbehaviors. The latter, including direct disobedience, physical aggression, destructiveness, armed robbery, or other severe types of physical harm have a considerably higher impact on school running but are much less frequent (Kyriacou, 2009; Kyriacou et al., 2007; Lopes & Oliveira, 2017).

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) report, conducted in 2016, suggests that 6% of the Portuguese 4th grade students attended schools with moderate to severe discipline problems, a lower percentage than the average found in the 61 education systems examined (8%). According to the same report, 38% of the Portuguese students attended schools with minor behavior problems, a higher percentage compared with the average rate found internationally (30%) (Mullis et al., 2017). Despite being less intense, minor misbehaviors are the major cause of teachers’ stress and burnout (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000), affecting teachers’ job satisfaction (Lopes & Oliveira, 2020), and jeopardizing students’ concentration on tasks and their opportunities to learn (Lewis, 2001).

Categories of misbehavior

The most common misbehaviors found in schools have been largely studied worldwide, especially regarding teachers’ perceptions of the most frequent or troublesome misbehaviors. Merrett and Wheldall

(1984, 1988) found that the behaviors causing greatest concern among teachers were talking in the classroom (specifically talking out of turn), hindering other children, nonattendance, and disobedience. In a systematic review, Beaman et al. (2007) also found that talking out of turn was the misbehavior most reported by teachers. According to Türnükü and Galton (2001), noise, shouting out, and talking without permission were the most common misbehaviors encountered by elementary teachers, both in Turkey and England. Kyriacou et al. (2007) found similar results while surveying English and Norwegian teachers, with talking out of turn ranking as the most frequent misbehavior reported, followed by work avoidance and interrupting other students. Despite minimal attention given to misbehaviors in other school settings, the canteen seems to be particularly susceptible to misbehaviors such as being out of seat, staff defiance, and hindering other children (Wheatley et al., 2009).

In Eastern countries, different trends are observed regarding the most frequent and troublesome misbehaviors. According to Chinese teachers (Ding et al., 2008; Shen et al., 2009), daydreaming and non-attention were consistently described as the most frequent and disturbing behaviors. For their part, Japanese high school teachers found “resting head on desk during lessons” as the most frequent pupil misbehavior (Kyriacou, 2010).

Among the few studies examining students’ perceptions regarding misbehavior, most found students’ perceptions to be similar to those of teachers. These studies, mainly conducted with secondary school students, described minor behaviors such as talking out of turn, being out of seat, talking back, and disrespecting the teacher as the most frequent and troublesome (e.g., Infantino & Little, 2005; Sun & Shek, 2012).

Causal attributions

From their systematic review of teachers’ causal attributions for students’ achievement and misbehavior, Wang and Hall (2018) concluded that teachers tended not to implicate themselves as a causal factor when faced with students’ misbehavior, instead generally referring to student and parent-related factors. Several previous studies have reached consistent results. Hughes et al. (1993) conducted a study with elementary teachers who reported pupils’ personality as the main factor accounting for misbehavior. Kulinna (2007) found similar results with a group of teachers, who generally attributed misbehavior to causes external to themselves, namely home and student-related factors. In a study comparing teachers’, mothers’, and psychologists’

attributions to school misbehaviors, Savina et al. (2014) concluded that teachers as a group generally downplayed their own responsibility in students' misbehavior.

Some studies have attempted to compare students' and teachers' causal attributions. Sun (2014) concluded that teachers and 7–9 grade students explained the causes of classroom misbehavior multidimensionally, including factors related to the student, the family, the teacher, peers, and the school. Both teachers and students found student-related factors such as fun, pleasure seeking, and attention seeking to be the leading cause of misbehavior. However, while the second factor ascribed by teachers was family-related, students referred to school-factors, namely “boring lessons”. These results are consistent with the findings of Cothran et al. (2009) that while teachers attributed misbehavior mainly to unknown or home factors, secondary school students ascribed it to the need for attention or to the lack of meaningful class content. Students also identified fun and social status as factors for misbehaving.

Management strategies

Little et al. (2002) organized the strategies teachers use to manage behaviors under two broad categories: preventative and reactive. Preventative strategies included practices that teachers used to lessen the likelihood of misbehaviors occurring (e.g., establishing rules), whereas the reactive strategies included practices that teachers used in response to a child's misbehavior (e.g., providing a consequence). Preventative strategies, also referred to as proactive strategies, were associated with a positive approach to behavior management, while reactive strategies were commonly related to a negative and remedial approach (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008). There is a considerable body of research pointing to the value of proactive and positive approaches in reducing misbehavior, whilst coercive discipline practices appear to result in more student misbehavior (e.g., Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Lewis, 2001; Wilks, 1996).

According to a literature review by Wilks (1996), while teachers tended to use positive verbal responses for academic behaviors, they used predominantly negative responses for social behaviors. This trend has been confirmed in several studies whose results suggested that teachers primarily used coercive discipline as a reaction to misbehavior, failed to increase their use of preventative strategies, and did not actively involve students in decision-making about behavior management (e.g., Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Lewis, 2001; Shook, 2012). In a study conducted by Shook (2012), although rules, routines, and reinforcement were

identified as teachers preferred classroom management strategies, when misbehavior occurred teachers were found to be more disposed to use strategies such as individual talks, punishment, and removing the child from the classroom. This finding suggests that despite the preference for proactive strategies to manage the classroom, teachers relied mainly on reactive strategies when responding to students' misbehavior. More recently, Stahnke and Blömeke (2021) found that both novice and expert teachers, when asked to analyze, interpret, and make decisions regarding classroom management situations, referred to more reactive than preventative practices.

Cothran et al. (2003) explored the perspectives of secondary students' on effective classroom management, finding that students displayed more positive behavior in classes where teachers set early and clear expectations and developed caring and respectful relationships. This is consistent with findings from Fefer and Gordon (2018), and Gage et al. (2018), that the implementation of evidence-based classroom management practices by teachers was associated with student engagement, while the implementation of punitive strategies appeared to negatively influence students' perceptions of school climate. Nevertheless, studies conducted to explore students' perspectives suggested that teachers were seen to react to misbehavior by increasing their use of coercive practices, like punishments (Lewis, 2001; Pšunder, 2005). Twardawski and Hilbig (2022) have recently compared teachers' and 10-year-old students' views on the purposes of punishment in the school context, concluding that teachers expressed a preference for general prevention as the goal of punishment, whereas students' endorsement of this goal was rather low.

Present study

Although considerable research has been devoted to school misbehavior, its causes, and its management strategies, less attention has been paid to students' perceptions of these issues. In Portugal, few studies on school misbehavior have been published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Lopes et al., 2017), and none of which have acknowledged students' perspectives. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is clear in stating the right of children to express their own views in all matters affecting them (United Nations, 1989). The relevance of acknowledging this participatory right in the research domain is frequently claimed, namely through conducting research with children, rather than on children (John, 2007). On this particular topic, the relevance of exploring students' perceptions

has been consistently addressed, either as a way to help researchers understand how students perceive and engage in misbehaviors, or as an essential perspective to develop adequate and meaningful interventions (Infantino & Little, 2005; Sun & Shek, 2012). The present study seeks to fill this gap by exploring elementary students' perceptions about school behavior, their causal attributions, and the behavior management strategies they consider that schools should use.

Method

Participants and instruments

A total of 115 elementary school-aged children (49.2% girls) studying in an elementary public school in the north of Portugal participated in this study. The participants were aged between 6 and 11 years old ($M = 7.75$; $SD = 1.18$), attended the 2nd to 4th grade, and were distributed in five classrooms, corresponding to five different teachers. The participating school was integrated in a school cluster, which are common in Portugal. School clusters reflect groupings of independent schools that are geographically close, serve different educational levels, and are directed by the same management board. All participants in the present study were from the same school. The study initiative resulted from a school-wide intention to promote a more positive behavior management approach and was part of the school's psychology services annual activities' plan, which was approved by the school pedagogical board. As suggested by positive behavior management approaches, the fidelity and sustainability of implementation benefits from an initial evaluation of values and beliefs, resources, and specific needs (Horner et al., 2014). To understand students' beliefs and perspectives, an open-ended questionnaire (Table 1) was designed. The questions aimed to explore: (a) students' perceptions about appropriate and inappropriate behaviors inside and outside the classroom (i.e., questions 1 to 4); (b) their causal attributions to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (i.e., questions 5 and 6); and (c) their perceptions about how appropriate behaviors can be fostered and how inappropriate behaviors should be handled at school (i.e., questions 7 and 8).

Data collection

Data collection was performed at the end of the 2018/2019 academic year by the school psychologist, who holds a PhD in Psychology and has experience in data collection procedures. Parents' informed consent and children's assent was obtained prior to data collection. The purpose of the study and its voluntary nature were explained to students, parents, and teachers. Anonymity and confidentiality in data treatment were ensured. Completion of the questionnaire, which took between 30 to 40 minutes, occurred in the children's regular classroom. The school psychologist read the questions aloud and stayed in the classroom as children completed the questionnaire, clarifying students' doubts when needed. Participants were given the time they needed to answer to the questions in a paper and pencil format. The participation of children struggling with writing was ensured – their answers were collected orally and recorded on the questionnaire by the school psychologist.

Data analysis

Questionnaire answers were analyzed through a thematic content analysis, following the steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). After data transcription, the first author conducted a process of repeated reading to become familiarized with the data and search for meanings and patterns. During this recursive reading, different colors were used to highlight common patterns and initial ideas for coding were written in the margins of the files. Secondly, initial codes were generated through the analysis of the units of meaning across the entire dataset. Units of meaning were defined based on the semantic content of participants' answers, following a predominantly inductive approach. Based on Bardin's (2002) relevance criterion, the answers that suggest a wrong interpretation of the question were excluded from the corpus of analysis (i.e., 205 units of meaning – 11% of the initial corpus). The answers that repeat the content of the question or do not include objective content were also not analyzed (i.e., 51 units of meaning – 2.7% of the initial corpus). Initial coding was

Table 1. Questionnaire.

1. What is an appropriate behavior in the classroom?
2. What is an appropriate behavior outside the classroom (e.g., playground, hallways, canteen)?
3. What is an inappropriate behavior in the classroom?
4. What is an inappropriate behavior outside the classroom (e.g., playground, hallways, canteen)?
5. Why do you think there are appropriate behaviors at school?
6. Why do you think there are inappropriate behaviors at school?
7. How do you think appropriate behaviors can be fostered at school?
8. How do you think inappropriate behaviors should be solved at school?

conducted manually and separately for the answers from each question of the questionnaire. Codes and the respective units of meaning were organized in separate sheets of an Excel file – one for each questionnaire’s question. In a third phase, codes were compared to each other to identify common themes. As a result of this process and considering that the same themes emerged in different questions, three broad themes were created: *Appropriate and Inappropriate Behaviors*, *Causal Attributions*, and *Management Strategies*. Each broad theme comprised its own system of categories. The categories were developed based on the refinement of the initial codes through the re-reading of all the units of meaning in each code, leading to the collapse of some coherent codes into categories. A deductive-inductive approach (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005) was used through the recursive process of categories’ definition, iteratively comparing the content emerging in the data with the existing literature about school behavior. Once the themes and categories were defined, the units of meaning were adjusted based on a recursive process of reading-coding-reading. The themes and categories were then reviewed by the second and third authors and discussed among the three researchers, checking whether the data cohered together meaningfully within each theme and category. After discussing and refining the final categories, a description was developed and the frequency of units of meaning (i.e., the number of mentions among the participants) was calculated for each category, leading to the report presented in the results section. Peer debriefing was used to increment reliability and validity through all the phases of this process (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005).

Results

Appropriate and inappropriate behaviors

Regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviors inside and outside the classroom, participants’ answers were segmented into 1 208 units of meaning: 654 (54.1%) of which include appropriate behaviors and 554 (45.9%) inappropriate behaviors. Participants mostly identified appropriate behaviors using the negative form ($n = 356$; 54.4%) – e.g., “not to talk”; “not to hit”; “not to run”; “not to disturb” – whereas inappropriate behaviors are mainly identified in the positive form ($n = 455$; 82.1%) – e.g., “to yell”; “to hit the peers”; “to run”; “to be unpolite”. The categories of behaviors created are described in Table 2, along with the frequency of each category. The categories are ordered from the most to the least frequent, both in the table and in the text.

Silence maintenance

Regarding the classroom, participants referred to behaviors associated with keeping the noise down (63), such as yelling or not, making noise or not, and keeping silent or not. References to talking in the classroom (31), chatting with peers (26), and talking when not supposed to (9) were also mentioned. Participants further identified behaviors associated with raising their hand before speaking (29) and with taking turns to talk (11). Behaviors outside the classroom were directed at maintaining appropriate noise levels (51), keeping silent (8), and not disturbing other classrooms (3).

Table 2. Categories of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

Category	Description	F	%
Silence maintenance	Includes references to verbal and non-verbal noise in different school settings, to an adequate verbal participation in the class, and to the respect for others’ turn to talk.	231	19.1%
Aggressive behaviors	Includes references to verbal and non-verbal behaviors that cause physical or psychological harm to others, as well as to the damage of others’ belongings.	226	18.7%
Posture and movement	Includes references to children’s posture during class time and to the suitable ways of moving in different school settings.	169	14.0%
Social and emotional abilities	Includes references to children’s behaviors that reflect social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making.	160	13.2%
Attention maintenance	Includes references to attention maintenance, active listening, playing and disturbing other students during class time.	131	10.8%
Canteen associated behaviors	Includes references to behaviors and specific conduct during lunchtime.	106	8.8%
Compliance/noncompliance	Includes references to behaviors directed at adults associated with obedience, disobedience, following rules and directions.	93	7.7%
School properties’ preservation	Includes references to the preservation of school infrastructures and materials, as well as to cleanliness maintenance.	45	3.7%
Academics	Includes references to schoolwork, learning, and achievement.	21	1.7%
Consequences	Includes references to several reactive consequences that teachers use contingent to the child’s behavior, such as rewards and punishments.	13	1.1%
Other behaviors	Includes less frequent references to behaviors that do not fall within the above categories.	13	1.1%
TOTAL		1208	100%

Aggressive behaviors

Participants mostly identified actions that cause physical injury to others such as hitting (99), hurting (29), pushing (21), fighting (12), and kicking (4). Verbal aggressive behaviors included making fun of others (22) and name-calling (21). There were also references to the damage or theft of others' belongings (10) and to bullying (8).

Posture and movement

Regarding the classroom context, participants referred to behaviors such as remaining seated (24) and sitting appropriately (16) during the class time. Furthermore, there were references to behaviors associated with running in the classroom (4) and with standing on or under the furniture (2). Behaviors outside the classroom comprised references to running when not supposed to (98), playing in the hallways or not (9), to wait in line for one's turn (5), and to walk quietly (3). The remaining behaviors comprised jumping (3), properly playing with the ball (2), and lying on the floor (3).

Social and emotional abilities

Participants mostly made references to respecting others or not (96), namely teachers, staff, and peers, to helping peers or not (19), and to being polite or not (13). Additionally, participants mentioned behaviors associated with including or not including peers in playing (12), with being or not being friendly and careful with others (12), and with respecting or not respecting others' opinions (4). Participants further referred to being sad or angry (2), to solving problems (1), and to being a positive role model (1).

Attention maintenance

Participants identified behaviors comprising to pay attention in class or not (51), to play during class time or not (41), to disturbing other students or not (22), and to employ active listening or not (17).

Canteen associated behaviors

Participants named behaviors associated with throwing food or water (42), playing with food (23), and misusing or damaging canteen utensils (11). References to wasting food or not (15) and to certain table manners (11), such as eating quietly and with the mouth closed were also made. Some participants described behaviors associated with teasing others while eating (4).

Compliance/ noncompliance

Participants identified behaviors regarding obeying or not obeying the teacher and other school staff (64), following the rules and instructions (17), interrupting the teacher (9), and talking back (3).

School properties' preservation

Participants referred to behaviors associated with the damage and preservation of school infrastructure (30), namely to damage or not to damage the plants and to break or not to break glasses, and with maintaining cleanliness of the various school spaces (15).

Academics

Participants identified appropriate and inappropriate behaviors encompassing completing classwork (9) and homework (3), being a good student and being able to learn (5), answering to the class (2), and not cheating (2).

Consequences

Participants mentioned consequences contingent to the behaviors. Thus, there were references to have or not to have red (5), green (4), and yellow (3) in the color system, and to take home-school notes (1).

Other behaviors

Participants made references to behaviors such as playing carefully and without cheating (6), lying (4), and respecting social norms like knocking on the door and waiting to be invited inside (2). Not to say silly things (1) was also described as an appropriate behavior.

Causal attributions

Concerning the causal attributions for appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, 230 units of meaning were segmented from participants' answers and further analyzed. Table 3 shows the categories of causal attributions along with the frequency of units of meaning in each category. The categories are ordered from the most to the least frequent, both in the table and in the text.

Social and emotional abilities

Participants attributed behaviors to the respect or disrespect towards teachers, staff, and peers (33), to the children's politeness or impoliteness (21), and to their ability to set and follow positive role models (17). Friendship skills (8), the ability or inability to constructively solve conflicts (5), to help others (3), and being careful with peers (1) were also mentioned. The remaining attributions comprised intentionally misbehaving or being mean to others (5), a self-effort to behave well (3),

Table 3. Categories of causal attributions to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors.

Category	Description	F	%
Social and emotional abilities	Includes attributions to social and emotional competencies such as social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making.	98	42.6%
Consequences	Includes attributions to several reactive consequences that teachers use contingent to the child's behavior, such as rewards and punishments.	57	24.8%
Education and explicit teaching	Includes attributions to the role of significant adults in children's education and the explicit teaching of appropriate behaviors.	24	10.4%
Compliance/ noncompliance	Includes attributions to obedience and disobedience directed at adults, as well as to following rules and directions.	21	9.1%
Children traits and characteristics	Includes attributions to natural and immutable traits of children's character.	10	4.3%
Fun, pleasure seeking, and social status	Includes attributions to the enjoyment and satisfaction that comes from misbehaving, and to gain a higher social status among peers.	9	3.9%
Cognitive and academic skills	Includes attributions to academic competencies and achievement, as well as to a way of achieving intelligence.	7	3.0%
School engagement	Includes attributions to a lack of engagement and interest in school activities.	4	1.7%
TOTAL		230	100%

and an inability to adequately regulate emotions such as anger (2).

Consequences

Participants ascribed behaviors to the rewards or punishments contingent to children's behavior, more precisely, receiving or avoid receiving red, yellow, or green in the color system (22), getting or avoid getting grounded (16), taking or avoid taking home-school notes (10), and being or avoid being reprimanded or warned (5). Participants further ascribed appropriate behaviors to a way to cause a good impression (1). There were also a few references to a desire that children have for the consequences of misbehaving (3), such as being grounded.

Education and explicit teaching

Participants attributed the behaviors to the education provided by significant adults (15), to the presence or absence of explicit teaching of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors (6), and to the help and support provided by teachers and parents (3).

Compliance/ noncompliance

Participants ascribed the behaviors either to the obedience or to the disobedience towards teachers and other school staff (13) and to the compliance or refusal to follow rules and directions (8).

Children traits and characteristics

Participants ascribed the behaviors to the children's nature (6), namely to traits that children are born with or to a natural evilness. Some participants expressed the belief that some children do everything right or do everything wrong (3). A desire to become a mean adult (1) was assigned as well.

Fun, pleasure seeking, and social status

Participants attributed the inappropriate behaviors to the pleasure (5) and fun (3) that comes from misbehaving, and to positive outcomes from misbehavior in increasing social status among peers (1).

Cognitive and academic skills

Participants attributed the behaviors to a high academic achievement (3) and to children's academic competencies, or lack of (3). One participant described the appropriate behaviors as a way to become intelligent (1).

School engagement

Participants ascribed the inappropriate behaviors to learning avoidance (3) and to a dislike of school (1).

Management strategies

Regarding the strategies to foster appropriate behaviors and mitigate inappropriate behaviors, 183 units of meaning were segmented from participants' answers and further analyzed. Table 4 presents the categories of management strategies suggested by children, along with the frequency of units of meaning in each category. The categories are ordered from the most to the least frequent, both in the table and in the text.

Consequences

Participants suggested getting children grounded (28), followed by loss of recess and other privileges (e.g., access to television and tablet) (9). Other consequences among participants' answers included giving children reprimands and warnings (7), using the colors yellow and red as a consequence for undesirable behavior (3), sending home-school notes (2), providing time to think about previous inappropriate behaviors (2), giving

Table 4. Categories of behavior management strategies.

Category	Description	F	%
Consequences	Includes references to several reactive consequences that teachers use contingent to the child's behavior, such as rewards and punishments.	54	29.5%
Explicit teaching and behavioral modeling	Includes references to the significant adults' role in actively and explicitly teach appropriate behaviors, as well as to children's role in setting and following good examples.	36	19.7%
Non-specified adults' interventions	Includes references to the active role of significant adults, without specifying concrete actions.	33	18.0%
Communication	Includes references to positive communicational strategies such as dialogs, conference with children and verbal prompts.	26	14.2%
Help and support	Includes references to the help and support provided by adults to children.	18	9.8%
Restorative behaviors	Includes references to restorative attitudes in order to constructively solve conflicts and maintain positive relationships.	9	4.9%
Other strategies	Includes less frequent references that do not fall within the above categories.	7	3.8%
TOTAL		183	100%

a candy for good grades (1), and changing seats (1). One participant suggested slapping the misbehaved child (1).

Explicit teaching and behavioral modeling

Participants recommended the direct instruction and education provided by teachers and parents (19), as well as the children's role in following positive role models (7) and in setting good examples (5). Participants also assigned the significant adults' role in modeling children's behaviors by presenting them good examples (5).

Non-specified adults' interventions

Participants' answers invoked the role of school headmasters, teachers, and other school staff (13) in fostering appropriate behaviors and handling inappropriate behaviors. Children further suggested calling for these adults' interventions (20) when misbehaviors occur.

Communication

Participants made references to conversations after the occurrence of inappropriate behaviors (10), to dialogs between teachers and children (9), and between parents and children (1). Verbal redirections and explanations about expected behaviors (5) and verbal incentives to keep behaving appropriately (1) were also referred to.

Help and support

Participants mentioned the role of teachers and staff in helping children to behave appropriately (15), as well as the support and advice these significant adults can provide (3).

Restorative behaviors

Participants suggested attitudes that children could adopt following misbehaviors, namely, to apologize (5), to forgive and to give second chances (3), and to tell the truth after lying (1).

Other strategies

Participants described strategies such as peer mediation (2), increasing school human and material resources (2),

actively engaging children in the definition of rules (1), and the use of medication (1). One participant underlined the need for adults to respect the children (1).

Discussion

Classroom behavior has been investigated extensively, particularly concerning teachers' perceptions of the behaviors they find most frequent and troublesome (e.g., Beaman et al., 2007; Kyriacou et al., 2007), their causal attributions for misbehavior (e.g., Wang & Hall, 2018), and teachers' preferred behavior management strategies (e.g., Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Shook, 2012). Students' perspectives on this matter are less common, with most studies focusing on older students (e.g., Cothran et al., 2009; Infantino & Little, 2005; Sun & Shek, 2012). This lack of research among younger students might be explained by the challenges posed by research with children (e.g., ethical issues, data collection methods, developing rapport, language, and clarity of questions) (Punch, 2002). Nonetheless, the right of children to participate in research that affects them must be ensured (United Nations, 1989). Thus, this study aimed to explore elementary students' perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in school settings, of their causal attributions, and of how schools should support and respond to children's behavior.

In this study, the most frequent behaviors, causal attributions, and management strategies acknowledged by children were generally consistent with those found in previous research conducted with teachers and secondary students. Behaviors related to the maintenance of silence (e.g., "to/not to talk out of turn"), the most frequently referred to by the participants, are also those causing the most concern to teachers alongside movement, attention, and obedience, which children in this study likewise referred to (e.g., "to/not to run;" "to/not to pay attention;" "to/not to obey the teacher") (e.g., Beaman et al., 2007; Kyriacou et al., 2007). According to Sun and Shek (2012), secondary students seemed to

agree on these behaviors as the most frequent and troublesome.

Aggressive behaviors, particularly those that are physical (e.g., “to/not to hit the peers”), were the second most mentioned by the participants. This finding contrasts with research conducted with secondary students in which these behaviors were not found to be perceived as frequent or troublesome (Sun & Shek, 2012). This difference might be explained by the fact that aggressive behaviors are more common among elementary students than among older students (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016), with misbehaviors gradually changing from non-verbal to verbal through the child development (Türnüklü & Galton, 2001).

Most of the children’s attributions to appropriate and inappropriate behaviors concerned student-related factors, particularly students’ social and emotional abilities such as social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Young children are typically influenced by adults’ attributions and pick-up on their explanations (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2016), which might help to explain the prevalence of student-related attributions, consistent with the findings from prior surveys conducted with teachers (e.g., Sun, 2014; Wang & Hall, 2018). Additionally, these results show that children may well be aware of the association between socioemotional learning, prosocial behaviors, and behavioral adjustment, as supported by research (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Korpershoek et al., 2016). Participants in this study also frequently evoked consequences, namely obtaining rewards and avoiding punishments, to explain the occurrence of children’s behaviors. In fact, the literature suggests that younger students are more likely to rely on causal attributions that favor the avoidance of potentially aversive situations such as coercive teachers’ responses (Butler, 1994). This may help to explain the participants’ perspective on the efficacy of the consequences typically used by adults to manage behaviors (e.g., “because he/she did/did not get a home-school note”). Despite being identified among participants’ answers, remarks on fun, pleasure seeking, and social status were less frequent than in studies conducted with secondary students (e.g., Lewis, 2001).

Regarding behavior management strategies, consequences (e.g., “to/not to get children grounded”) ranked as the highest mentioned strategy by children, consistent with findings from studies conducted with teachers (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Shook, 2012). In the study of elementary students by Lewis (2001), punishments and rewards were also identified as the most frequent discipline strategies used by their teachers. Regardless of the considerable number of children’s answers that involved reactive consequences, the overall results encompassed many references pointing to proactive

strategies. Specifically, children mentioned strategies that represented teacher-centered preventative approaches such as positive communication (e.g., “with a dialogue”) and help and support from adults (e.g., “teachers and staff can help us to behave appropriately”). These strategies consisted of the adults’ use of positive behavioral techniques to manage student behavior, which research has suggested is effective (Osher et al., 2010). Additionally, explicit teaching and modeling of appropriate behaviors were referenced as a cause for the occurrences and as a strategy for behavior management. Hence, students pointed out explanations for appropriate behaviors such as “because people from school explain and help children” and for inappropriate behaviors like “because their parents do not teach them to behave well”. Accordingly, regarding management strategies, participants made suggestions such as “I think that teachers could teach students what an appropriate behavior is”. Despite the influence of some physical and environmental factors, research suggests that much of human behavior is learned and can be changed, and children in this study seemed to be aware of this idea (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Another relevant aspect to highlight in this study is the extent and the multiplicity of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors reported by children, which contrasts with the limited number of rules and expectations recommended by the literature on efficient behavior management (Simonsen et al., 2008; Sugai & Horner, 2002). It has been found that a limited number of rules and behavioral expectations increases the probability of students remembering and complying to them (Kern & Clemens, 2007). Furthermore, participants in this study identified appropriate behaviors in their negative form. This last finding may have involved children’s exposure to behavior expectations and rules that were predominantly stated and communicated in the negative form, both in the classroom (e.g., “not to talk in the classroom”) and in other school settings (e.g., “not to run in the hallways”). In contrast, research suggests that rules and expectations must be simple, brief, and positively phrased (Barbetta et al., 2005; Kern & Clemens, 2007). These positively stated rules allow students to know and understand the expected behaviors and allows school professionals to directly teach, consistently reinforce, practice, and review school’s behavioral expectations (Sugai & Horner, 2002).

Implications and recommendations

This study adds value to the current literature on behavior in schools as it explicitly includes non-classroom settings. Participants in this study described a wide range of behaviors that can happen in the canteen,

hallways, and playground (e.g., “to/not to throw food away”; “to/not to yell in the hallways”), related to the preservation of school property (e.g., “to/not to damage materials”) and to student-staff interactions (e.g., “to be unpolite/polite with the playground assistant”). These results underlined the need to account for non-classroom settings when designing school behavior policies and management plans, considering the consistent research findings on the effectiveness of school-wide interventions to promote changes in students’ behavior (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Korpershoek et al., 2016). In particular, the results of this study reinforced previous observations that the school canteen is a setting particularly susceptible to misbehavior (Wheatley et al., 2009).

While drawing attention to the need of fostering more positive and school-wide approaches to manage behaviors in Portuguese schools, at the national level the results of this study provide implications for the initial education and continuing professional development of teachers. International research suggests that teacher education programs do not typically include training in behavior management and intervention strategies (Flower et al., 2017). In Portugal, research relying on teachers’ self-reports concluded that training in this domain is perceived to be sparse, both in pre-service and in-service education programs (Lopes & Oliveira, 2019). This apparent lack of training makes it difficult for teachers to implement and sustain evidence-based practices and systems to support students’ behavior at the individual-, classroom-, and school-levels. Therefore, future research should attempt to understand the magnitude of this constraint by systematically reviewing the courses on behavior management included in the teacher education programs, both in Portugal and internationally.

Some of the strategies suggested by the participants in this study, namely the explicit teaching of behavior expectations, are critical elements of Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a multi-tiered framework for behavioral support. This systemic approach to behavior management is organized in three levels of intensity, from universal to intensive interventions, and has the aim to promote students’ prosocial behavior and the targeting of specific behavior problems. At the universal level, directed at all students, teaching plays a central role as a behavior change tool. The core practices of this level are the establishment of clear school-wide expectations and the preference for preventive behavior management strategies rather than the traditional approach of increasing the number and intensity of punitive procedures (Sugai & Horner, 2002). PBIS has been proving its efficacy by positively impacting schools’ organizational health, students’ academic achievement, and behavior (Lee & Gage, 2020).

One of its core features is the engagement of the full school community in the development of a common school culture. Future actions of PBIS implementation may rely on the method and findings of the present study as a way of involving students and considering their perspectives in the decision-making procedures. Moreover, similar to other countries (e.g., Sørli & Ogden, 2015), future research may contribute to exploring the cultural transferability, applicability, and adaptation of the PBIS model to the Portuguese school system. It is especially important in the context of the current national educational policies toward inclusive education to adequately train and support teachers to improve behavior management, both at classroom and whole-school levels. The national legal framework for inclusive education – the Executive order n° 54 (2018) – is, as PBIS foresees, sustained in a multi-tiered approach to acknowledge the academic, personal, and social development of every student, regardless of their personal and social background. As such, schools and teachers are mandated to develop systems and strategies to promote students’ academic, socioemotional, and behavioral adjustment.

Taken together, these implications, derived from accessing to children’s perspectives, highlighted the potential value of involving children in the decision-making surrounding behavior management. This is in line with the importance of students’ participation, both as students and as active citizens, advocated by the inclusive education policy (Executive order n°54, 2018) and by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Accessing the views of children is considered a way for professionals and researchers to understand their priorities, interests, and concerns about experiences and the meaning they are making of them (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). Moreover, the results of this particular study support the idea that considering children’s opinions may provide useful insights into how to improve the contexts they live in. Besides the fact that the perspectives of these children seem to be aligned with evidence-based practices, their input and contribution in these processes can foster their sense of involvement, which in turn may favor the successful implementation of strategies (Kern & Clemens, 2007). Further research on this topic, aiming to give voice to children, might benefit from adopting different methodologies. In fact, using a multimethod research approach is beneficial to facilitating the participation of young children by reducing the impact of the challenges posed by their age or development stage in their ability to express themselves (Clark, 2005). An in-context observation study could not only expand and give strength to the present findings but would also allow a comparison between self-reports and what happens in educational settings.

Limitations

Despite the potential insights provided by this study, several limitations should be acknowledged. The sample size, along with the fact that participants are all from the same school setting, limits the generalizability of the results. The use of a written questionnaire, considering the participants' age, may have contributed to the set of data with limited interpretability, which was not further explored. Although peer debriefing was conducted at all stages of thematic content analysis, intercoder reliability was not ensured. The use of a single data collection source limits the validity and reliability of these findings. Future studies should consider simultaneously capturing multiple perspectives of pupil misbehavior and school discipline practices (e.g., children's, teachers', and other school staff).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, AL, upon reasonable request.

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