



# A Study of Coping Strategies to Deal with Disruptive Behavior in Special Schools

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**Abstract-** The current study is aimed at exploring the indicators of disruptive behavior among special students, investigating the environmental factors which cause the disruptive behavior in special education schools, finding out the strategies used by male and female teachers to cope up with disruptive behavior and examining the effectiveness of these coping strategies. A self-developed questionnaire comprising five sub-sections was administered on conveniently selected 250 teachers of special schools and centers from Faisalabad, Pakistan. Findings of the study reveal that the most common disruptions which occur in the class are making a noise, showing violence, hitting and breaking the rules. Peer teasing, broken or lost toys, conflicts with other fellows and bullying form other fellows in terms of comments or laughing expressions proved to be the main sources of disruptive behavior. The most frequently used coping strategy in special school is cognitive strategy followed by individualized education program and expressive therapy and relaxation technique is the most effective one followed by behavioral strategies and individualized education program. Educational implications are also discussed.

**Key Words:** Disruptive behavior, special students, coping strategies

## I. INTRODUCTION

Behavior is a set of characteristics which individual presents in certain situations (Abbas & Zafar, 2018). Special children have different type of behavior when compared to normal ones. Special children display diversified types of disruptive behavior in class room like hyperactivity, yelling, breaking the rules, head banging, muteness, hand flapping, spitting, aggression, hitting to oneself and other peers etc. (Cakar, 2013). Disruptive behavior is an inappropriate action of an individual which disturbs his daily routine and academic activities. Teachers can change behavior by using coping strategies (Liukkonen, 2017).

Coping strategies are those actions and specific exertion which support the individual both psychologically and behaviorally to minimize the stressful situation. These strategies are more helpful to control disruptive behavior of special children. Teachers provide extra support to the students in special school intervention to minimize the disruptive behavior (Wilson & Lipsey, 2007).

Special students are those students who do not have certain capability to do routine work as normal students do. They need extra support to complete their work or daily routine work due to disability. They need extra and special educational support. Due to disabilities, they show different types of disruptive behavior in class room. In special school, teachers try to control such a behavior and naughty activities by using different interventions.

Special students need extra care and attention to perform the daily school job. So, special teachers provide additional support and one by one instruction to the students to achieve the goals. Teacher and students have reciprocal interaction between them. Teacher creates a peaceful environment for the support of special students (Matthieu, 2006). Management of the class is the mixture of the methodologies and process that special teacher tries to accomplish to keep up the climate of class where s/he can teach and train, utilizing tool and techniques to change the behavior of the disruptive students (Romi & Roache, 2013). Coping strategies like expressive therapy, sensory therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, behavioral therapy, relaxation techniques and individualized education plan etc. used in advanced countries have always been effective for modifying disruptive behavior. These are supportive tool to achieve the long-term goals (Chukwu, & Okeibunor, 2019).

Conversely, Pakistan has been facing many challenges because it is under-developed country (Abbas, Jalil, Zaki, Irfan, 2020). The main cause to create the destruction is financial problem. Due to lack of facilities, students do not have special equipment to perform specific task according to their disability. Teachers are

not trained in applying the tools and using strategies. Teachers are unaware about applying coping strategies like music therapy, art therapy, cognitive therapy, relaxation techniques and behavioral strategies. They do not know what appropriate timing is for applying these techniques. Another main issue of disruptive behavior is that parents ignore the children's disability due to lack of education. They are unaware about the treatment of the disable children. They do not send their children with disability in school regularly (Hofvander et al., 2009). In this scenario, it is need of the hour to study the existing situation of special students' disruptive behavior in classroom setting and how effectively their teachers deal with them.

Therefore, the current study is aimed at (1) exploring the indicators of disruptive behavior among special students, (2) investigating the environmental factors which cause the disruptive behavior in special education schools, (3) finding out the strategies used by male and female teachers to cope up with disruptive behavior and (4) and examining the effectiveness of those coping strategies.

## II. Review of Literature

The problematic behavior among the students in special school is one of the major issues standing up to the educational system today (Evers et al, 2004) It is the main reason of stress for teachers which influences their efficiency and effectiveness negatively because teachers invest an excessive amount of time and energy to control (Infantino & Little, 2005). At all levels of special education, particularly elementary school level, classroom problematic behavior is viewed as an intense issue for teachers. This is among the big challenges for special school teachers (Steins, Wittrock & Haep, 2016). Disruptive behavior is referred to as antisocial and aggressive behavior which includes hitting to others, spitting, yelling and fighting etc. (Metsäpelto et al., 2015).

Disruptive behavior has been a main zone of research interest for many last centuries. Internationally, the interest of educationists towards inclusion is increased day by day. In educational setting, disruptive behavior in general and special schools is the main interest (Mohamed Emam, 2016). Many researchers identified the relationship between disruptive behavior and academic performance. It influences the peers learning and overall school performance. It also disturbs the discipline of the class and school (Blank & Shavit, 2016).

First step to control the disruptive behavior in special school is classroom management. Classroom management is more necessary for special children. Teachers arrange different kinds of activities for special children like painting, music therapy and other outdoor activities like jumping, running and push-ups. Main purpose of these activities is to engage the students who are disruptive. (Kuhlenschmidt & Layne, 1999).

Second step is necessary to engage the disruptive students. It is use of behavior modification techniques. Positive reinforcement, appreciation techniques, token economy and applied behavior analysis are used to control the problem behavior of the students. Disruption of the students can ruin the decorum of the class. These techniques improve the positive behavior and try to reach the mind-set of the students. Aggression, hyperactivity of the students can be controlled by applying these techniques (Sugai, & Sailor, n.d.).

The adapting techniques encompass the particular activities, both behavior and mental that individuals utilize to decrease or limit distressing occasions (Özben, 2010). Individuals have been using certain techniques for example critical thinking strategies (problem focused) and feeling centered (emotion focused) techniques (Folkman & DeLongis, 1986) to cope up with disruptive behavior. Maladaptive and adaptive methods for coping initiate negative impact for disruption such as anxiety and depression. (Bulmash & Bagby, 2009). Researchers discriminate the different types of disruptive behavior modification techniques. (e.g., feeling centered versus issue centered adapting; approach versus evasion (Zimmer & Skinner, 2011).

The class room behavior modification techniques are less concerned with causes and understanding the problem of the class behavior. The focus, rather, is consistently on the different behavior and its alteration. With respect to teachers' strategies, the modification of the behavior techniques focus on coordinating, controlling and regulating the classroom condition to calm the students down. The program is termed as assertive discipline (Jordan, 2014).

As far as the case of punishment is concerned, Australian researchers proposed that the punishment is ineffective and not useful to the students to control the disruption in the schools (Caffyn, 1989; Lewis, 2001; Roache & Lewis, 2011). In a nutshell, A rich literature related to special students' disruptive behavior and coping strategies used by concerned teachers is available from all over the world. However, it is very limited when it comes to Pakistan. It is need of the hour to address the issue in here. Therefore, the main purpose of the research is to find the prominent indicators of disruptive behavior and

environmental factors which cause the disruption in the class. The research further identifies the frequency and effectiveness of the coping strategies to control the disruptive behavior.

### III. Methodology

#### Research Design

Nature of the present study is descriptive. Therefore, survey method is used to collect data regarding objectives of the study.

#### Population

The population of the research consisted of all teachers of special schools from district Faisalabad, Pakistan.

#### Sample

The sample consisted of 250 teachers of special schools and centers. Both male (43.6%) and female (56.4%) teachers participated in survey. The age range of the teachers was 25 years to 62 years and experience ranged from 1 to 20 years. The teachers belonged to hearing impaired (10.8%), visually impaired (13.6%), mentally challenging (19.2%), physically Handicap schools (11.2%) and centers (45.2%). The qualification of the teachers was intermediate to M.Phil. Level. Contract and regular based teachers were included in this study. The entire sample belonged to middle socio-economic status.

#### Instrumentation

According to the demand of study, self-developed questionnaire was used for data collection. It comprised five parts which are described below in detail.

#### Demographic information

This part described the background characteristics of the teachers. It is developed by the investigator or researcher to collect the information about teacher's demographic detail such as name, gender, age, experience, qualification, school name, area of specialization and types of school.

#### Indicators of disruptive behavior

This part of the scale evaluates the indicators of disruptive behavior among students with disabilities. It shows how frequently certain behavior occurs in the class. This part consists of 12 items. Five-point Likert scale (1. Never, 2. Seldom, 3. Sometimes, 4. Often, 5. Always) was used for gathering the responses.

#### Environmental factors

This part of the scale assesses the causes of disturbing behavior in the special class. This part has 12 statements. It also has five-point Likert scale (1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, 5. Strongly Agree).

#### Use of coping strategies

This part of the questionnaire evaluated frequency of the coping strategies to deal with disruptive behavior that represents how frequently teachers use it with their students. This portion has many variations of the items in each part. Details are given in table 1. The range of Five-point Likert scale is from 1 to 5, 1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always.

#### Effectiveness of coping strategies

This part of the questionnaire was used to check the perceptions of teachers regarding effectiveness of coping strategies that represents how effective it was to cope up with disruptive behavior. It has also discrepancy of the items in each part. Details are given in table 1. The range of this scale is from 1 to 3, 1=Not Effective, 2=To Some Extent Effective, 3=Highly Effective.

Table 1

*Description of Subscales of the Coping Strategies*

Coping strategies	Scope	Total items	Example items
Expressive therapy	Shows the hidden characteristics	4	Individual play therapy (arrangements of the blocks, classification of blocks in different colors)
Sensory therapy	Activates the senses	5	Music therapy (singing poems and rhymes)
Cognitive strategies	Change irrational thoughts into rational thoughts	5	Counseling
Behavioral strategies	Change undesirable behavior into desirable behavior	10	The appreciation techniques (praise, clapping)
Relaxation techniques	Release the aggression and keep active	6	calm down strategies (breathing exercise)

Individualized education program	Managethe classroom and curriculum	7	Classification of the curriculum providing necessary artificial aids (hearing aids etc.)
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### Data Collection

Survey method is used to gather the responses of the special education teachers. The scale was administered on individuals after seeking their informed consent under ethical considerations. After completing administration procedures, the researchers showed their gratitude to all the participants for voluntary participations in the study.

## IV. Results

Data were analyzed with the help of SPSS. Major findings are given in this section to address the objectives of study.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Analysis of Indicators of Disruptive Behavior*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Making a noise	250	1	5	3.50	1.06
Violence/aggression	250	1	5	3.50	.92
Hitting to others	250	1	5	3.44	.85
Breaking the rules	250	1	5	3.44	.93
Impulsivity	250	1	5	3.31	.89
Hyperactivity	250	1	5	3.26	1.03
Yelling	250	1	5	3.19	.99
Spitting	250	1	5	3.18	1.04
Muteness	250	1	5	3.02	.86
Hitting to oneself	250	1	5	2.94	1.05
Hand flapping	250	1	5	2.84	.93
Head banging	250	1	5	2.74	.95

Table 2 shows that the most common disruptions which occur in the class are making a noise, showing violence, hitting and breaking the rules. Among less displayed disruptive behaviors are hitting to oneself, hand flapping and head banging.

Table 3  
*Descriptive Analysis of Environmental Factor of Disruptive Behavior*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
When peers tease to each other	250	1	5	3.70	1.23
Breaking a favorite toy	250	1	5	3.51	1.05
When he/she has lost something	250	1	5	3.46	.91
Conflicts outside the classroom (e.g.: bus line up)	250	1	5	3.41	1.16
When Peers verbally respond or laugh at the student	250	1	5	3.31	1.12
When he/she is given a time out	250	1	5	3.26	1.09
When he/she sees someone cry	250	1	5	3.25	.92
Presence of specific peers	250	1	5	3.17	.98
During specific academic activities (class work)	250	1	5	3.08	1.07
When Someone isn't friendly to him/her	250	1	5	3.06	1.07
When teacher is working with other students	250	1	5	3.03	1.18
When you persistently make a request to perform a task	250	1	5	3.03	1.01

The descriptive analysis of environmental factor which cause disruption in class in table 3 shows that peer teasing, broken or lost toys, conflicts with other fellows and bullying form other fellows in terms of comments or laughing expressions are the main sources of disruptive behavior. Comparatively, disruption takes place less frequently as a response of certain academic activities which they do not like, unfriendly behavior of others, and engagement of teacher with other students and persistent request to perform some undesirable task.

Table 4  
*Use of Coping Strategies*

Coping Strategies	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Cognitive Strategies	250	1.60	5.00	3.92	.56

Individualized education program	250	2.29	5.00	3.88	.51
Expressive Therapy	250	2.00	5.00	3.77	.55
Relaxation technique	250	2.00	5.00	3.74	.61
Sensory Therapy	250	2.00	5.00	3.66	.67
Behavioral strategies	250	1.60	5.00	3.56	.56

Table 4 shows that the most frequently used coping strategy in special school is cognitive strategy (M=3.92, SD=.56) and less frequently used is behavioral therapy (M=3.56, SD=.56)

Table 5

*Effect of Gender on Use of Coping Strategies*

Coping Strategies	Gender	N	M	SD	Df	T value	P value
Expressive Therapy	Male	109	3.75	.55	248	-.48	.63
	Female	141	3.78	.56			
Sensory Therapy	Male	109	3.64	.68	248	-.32	.74
	Female	141	3.67	.67			
COG_STR	Male	109	3.91	.55	248	-.23	.81
	Female	141	3.93	.57			
Behavioral strategies	Male	109	3.55	.54	248	-.23	.81
	Female	141	3.57	.57			
Relaxation technique	Male	109	3.69	.59	248	-1.22	.22
	Female	141	3.78	.62			
Individualized education program	Male	109	3.90	.49	248	-.32	.74
	Female	141	3.88	.53			

Table 5 is evident that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers in use of coping strategies. They apply similar coping strategies to cope up with disturbing students in special school.

Table 6

*Effectiveness of Coping Strategies*

Coping Strategies	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Relaxation technique	250	1.83	3.00	2.60	.30
Behavioral strategies	250	1.80	3.00	2.55	.30
Individualized education program	250	1.43	3.00	2.55	.31
Expressive Therapy	250	1.00	3.00	2.52	.33
Cognitive Strategies	250	1.00	3.00	2.43	.34
Sensory Therapy	250	1.00	3.00	2.40	.40

Table 6 shows that the highly effective coping strategy in special school is relaxation technique (M=2.60, SD=.30) and on the other edge is sensory therapy (M=2.40, SD=.40).

## V. Discussion

The main purpose of the research was to find the indicators of disruptive behavior and environmental factors which caused the disruption in the class. The research further identified the frequency and effectiveness of the coping strategies to control the disruptive behavior. Findings of the study reveal that the most common disruptions which occur in the class are making a noise, showing violence, hitting and breaking the rules. It may be because disabled children have short temperament and are not able to cope with their own disruptive behavior. Among less displayed disruptive behaviors are hitting to oneself, hand flapping and head banging. According to the other researchers, students with disability show disruptive behavior in special schools such as yelling and spitting. Student's aggression occurs in the class many times (Tudor, Ibrahim, Bertschinger, Piasecka & Sukhodolsky, 2016).

Peer teasing, broken or lost toys, conflicts with other fellows and bullying from other fellows in terms of comments or laughing expressions proved to be the main sources of disruptive behavior. Previous research also indicates that conflict outside the class and teasing peers create more disturbance. Outsider conflict grabs the student's attention (Rosen & JB, 2003).

Findings of current study further reveal that the most frequently used coping strategy in special school is cognitive strategy followed by individualized education program, expressive therapy, relaxation technique, sensory therapy and behavioral therapy. Regarding effectiveness of these strategies, the present study discloses that relaxation technique is the most effective one followed by behavioral

strategies, individualized education program, expressive therapy, cognitive strategies and sensory therapy. Previous study indicates that cognitive and behavioral strategies are useful in special school to control the disruptive behavior. Different kind of strategies such as expressive therapy, relaxation techniques and sensory therapy are also used for the same purpose. Expressive therapy was more effective to engage the student with disruptive behavior (Özben, 2010).

Moreover, no significant difference exists between male and female teachers in applying the strategies. The previous study also authenticates that teacher's gender and experience do not affect their use of coping strategies (Sullivan, 2002).

## VI. Recommendations

To control the disruptive behavior of the special students is difficult task for the teachers. So, to create a peaceful environment is necessary in the school for learning achievement and self-help of the students. Teachers should be applying different kinds of interventions to control the disruptive behavior in special school. Teachers may be trained in management skills of the class as it is responsibility of the teachers to create a peaceful environment. Teachers may also be trained in applying the coping strategies at proper time and should be aware about using special equipment on the students in special school. Psychologist may be hired for the student's counselling at regular basis in special school. For further studies, experimental research design may be used to highlight the effectiveness of different coping strategies.

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