Research Paper

A Strategic Outline of Children's Emotional and Behavioral Problems

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ABSTRACT

Major contributors to illnesses and disabilities among young individuals are mental health issues like developmental disorders, depression, anxiety, and behavioral issues. As per the WHO, 10% of the world's children and adolescents suffer from a mental disorder, however the majority of them never ask for assistance or medical attention. For people aged 15 to 19, suicide is the fourth most common cause of death. Lack of attention to children's and teenagers' psychological and psychosocial development has long-term effects that limit opportunities for adults to have fulfilling lives. Mental illnesses in children can be managed and treated but it is crucial to be aware of the occurrence of these issues so that suitable services for mental health can be designed and offered to the children who need them, improving their chances of living long, healthy lives. In a classroom setting, teachers undeniably have the larger responsibility. They play a crucial role in every educational system and are essential in establishing a positive learning environment. By utilizing all the resources at their disposal, educators and support staff can help the child succeed. This theme based paper emphasizes that children with mental problems can have better lives with early identification and the right strategies that can be used with them for better results.

"Children with behavioral problems are more than likely to face negative future outcomes." (Williams, 2013)

The formative years of life- childhood and adolescence- are crucial for mental health. The brain is undergoing fast growth and development at this period. In order to assume adult roles in society, children and adolescents develop cognitive and social-emotional skills that influence their long-term mental health. The wellbeing and development of children and adolescents are influenced by the environment in which they are raised. Early stressful events in families, schools etc. raise the risk of developing mental illness. Many of these issues are momentary and could even go unnoticed. But occasionally, the severity of these issues and their overall implications on a child's growth might be grave (Morita et al., 1993).

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International research (Botha and Wolhuter 2015; Kourkoutas, Vitalaki, and Fowler 2015; Scriva, Heriot, and Kourkoutas 2015; Simpson and Mundschenk 2012) highlights the difficulties that children with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties (SEBD) pose to inclusive education systems as well as to their peers, teachers, parents, and families.

Many children and adolescents experience mental health difficulties that limit their complete access to the involvement in learning. They may infrequently experience low wellbeing, feel stressed out, and require assistance in order to rebuild their confidence and address issues in their lives. These difficulties restrict them to attend and engage in all parts of school life and are frequently misunderstood and can result in actions that are conflicting with expectations set by schools or programmes.

In order to address the challenges faced by children, it is imperative for the teachers and parents to provide a conducive environment for their holistic development. It is also pertinent to use the collected knowledge on how to create nurturing educational environments as well as the issues that the COVID-19 worldwide epidemic has exacerbated.

Defining Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD):
The term 'emotional disturbance' is defined by Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) 2004 as a condition displaying one or more of the following criteria over a lengthy period of time and to a noticeable degree that adversely impacts a student's educational performance. The criteria includes:
- a learning disability that cannot be accounted for by mental, sensory, or physiological elements
- a failure to establish or keep fruitful interpersonal connections with classmates and teachers
- inappropriate sorts of conduct or emotions under ordinary conditions
- a continuous overall feeling of sadness or sorrow
- a propensity to experience physical symptoms or anxieties linked to interpersonal or educational issues.
- the phrase covers young people with schizophrenia. Unless it is confirmed that they are experiencing an emotional issue, socially awkward students are not included in the term.

The term "emotional and behavioral disorder" refers to a disability that is characterized by psychological or behavioral responses in school programs that are inconsistent with ideal age, based on culture, or ethnic norms and negatively impact student achievement, including intellectual, sociocultural, vocational, or programming skills; beyond a momentary, expected reaction to strenuous events occurring in the environment; continually demonstrated in two separate settings, with at least one of them being the student's home environment.

Characteristics of the Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders:
The students who experience EBD are usually categorized into two sub-groups: those who exhibit externalizing conduct and those who exhibit internalizing behavior. Aggression, disturbance, and other outbursts are examples of externalizing behaviors; internalizing behaviors include issues like sadness, anxiety, and social withdrawal, where the main challenge is private or internal. The most typical issues that teachers see are externalizing. Internalizing issues, on the other hand, can be crippling, and students might exhibit both types of issues simultaneously or alternately.

Externalizing Behaviors- "Mental disorders with key symptoms that include outward actions as opposed to interior feelings" is a common definition for externalizing disorders (Thackery & Harris, 2002). Problems defined by acting out, such as aggressive and destructive actions, are referred to as externalizing behaviors. Impulsivity, oppositional behavior, attentional problems, hyperactivity, and temper tantrums are examples of externalizing symptoms. Externalizing issues are typically obtrusive, disruptive, and frequently include hostile behavior that can be physically and verbally intimidating.

Externalizing behaviors are easily recognizable by others. The majority of issues arise when ED students engage in externalizing activities (Kaufmann, 2009). These kinds of actions could lead a student to lash out at others in an aggressive, violent, defiant, and criminal manner (Liu, 2004).

Internalizing Behaviors- Internalizing behaviors (Williams, 2013) include:
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Social alienation
- Substance abuse
- Feelings of sadness, guilt, shame or loneliness
- Anxiety and irritation
- Fearfulness
- Difficulty paying attention
- Eating disorder
- Selective mutism
- Somatic problems
- Self-critical thoughts
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts/ attempt

These disorders are frequently difficult to identify and measure owing to their covert and internal nature (Wilmshurst, 2005). Internalizing behaviors are sometimes more challenging to identify. These self-destructive actions are carried out by the "self". When a student engages in these actions, they run the risk of hurting themselves rather than inflicting harm on others. Similar-age classmates and adults are more prone to reject these youngsters.

Other Behaviors- EBD comprises a broad range of conditions aside from the two major sub-groups of externalizing and internalizing conditions. Attention and activity disorders, behavioral issues (which can manifest as overt aggression or covert antisocial behavior), special problems of adolescence (which includes delinquency, substance abuse, and early sexual activity), anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia are a few of the sub-categories of difficulty that Kauffman and Landrum (2009) list. Numerous different emotional disorders can co-occur, appearing as co-morbid.

Students with an EBD frequently exhibit symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. In a classroom setting, children are likely to demonstrate attention deficit disorder. They frequently exhibit indicators of social skills issues as well. Due to the characteristics of the EBD, students are socially reserved and dislike engaging with other students. Social skill development is hampered as a result.

The aforementioned traits present difficulties for the student not only in their daily lives and social relationships, but also in the educational setting. Students with EBD frequently engage in conduct that is in opposition with that which is connected with learning.

Factors Causing Emotional and Behavioral Problems:
Emotional and behavioral disorders' root causes have not been fully identified. However, research indicates that a convergence of biological, psychological, and environmental elements contributes to emotional problems.

Biological Factors:
- genetic factors
- abnormalities in the child's neurological and biological growth
- central nervous system injuries
- certain infections causing brain damage, resulting in the emergence of mental diseases or a worsening of their symptoms
- malnutrition or allergies
- temperament
- physical illnesses

Behavioral Factors:
- lack of adaptable responses
- exposure to unwanted attitudes or behaviors
- exposure to negative environmental stressors that causes dysfunctional behavior

Psychological Factors:
An emotional or behavioral disorder may be influenced by a variety of psychological factors (Gargiulo, 2004; Hallahan &Kauffman, 2006; Jensen, 2005; Kauffman, 2005):
- dysfunctional family dynamics
- an unexpected loss of a significant person
- mental, physical or academic neglect
- academic failure
- high stress levels
- strained relationships with peers and adults
- substance abuse
- childhood trauma, such as physical, mental or sexual abuse, cases of bullying
- feeling of unworthiness, low self-esteem, worry, hostility, or loneliness
- lacking parental affection, parental disapproval, animosity, or strict discipline
- controlled parental supervision
- lack of apparent control over their life or decisions

Identification of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders:
Identification:
The monitoring of a student is the first step in the identifying process. The instructor who interacts with the student the most frequently does this task. They record observed actions and situations that take place in the classroom.

After going through the initial screening, a student who has been identified is then put through a more thorough assessment process. These tests evaluate behavior and attitude.

Stages of identification proposed by Bower:
The description of EBD is based on Bower's (1969) proposal of a developmental path for diagnosing emotional instabilities in children and adolescents. Although this classification presents difficulties for educators and psychologists, it nevertheless offers a valuable starting point because it describes the kinds of assistance that these adolescents may need at home, at school, or in both settings:

Stage 1: Children who encounter and exhibit the typical issues associated with development, inquiry, and reality testing

Stage 2: Children who, as a result of conflicts or traumatic experiences, exhibit a larger number and intensity of emotional issues symptoms.

Stage 3: Children whose symptoms continue to some level beyond usual expectancy but who can adjust to school

Stage 4: Children with persistent and reoccurring symptoms of emotional disturbance who can, with assistance, create some positive relationships in a school environment

Stage 5: Children with persistent emotional problems who would benefit most from residential schooling or short-term placement at home.

Functional Behavior Assessments (FBA):
The most crucial next step after identifying an EBD is to decide what instructional and behavioral planning is required to ensure the student's academic achievement. This is accomplished by creating an FBA.

FBA identifies target behaviors and develops strategies to eradicate them and replace them with constructive ones. They serve as an addition to the individualized education plan for children receiving special education services.

Providing A Conducive Learning Environment- The Role of a Teacher:
Typically, conducive classrooms are those that have calming natural surroundings. It refers to the ambiance and setting in any classroom that encourages students to actively engage in their education and in classroom activities.

According to Grace Olajide, the teacher is the key figure in establishing a positive learning environment in the classroom. The teacher can have an impact on the child through investigative process, a better learning environment, conditioning, counselling, and re-education, as well as through class cooperation, involvement of the parents, cognitive advancement, modelling, training in particular skills, need satisfaction, and teaching methods. Although students do contribute to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process and other classroom activities, teachers have a larger responsibility.
Some of the key elements that foster or hamper the environment of the classroom are as follows:

- **Teacher's personality**- Teacher's personality influences students' behavior, their relationship with each other students, and the attitude towards learning. A positive learning environment depends heavily on satisfying interpersonal interactions, hence the teacher's personality is crucial. A harmonious learning environment will be produced in the classroom if the teachers can establish harmonious relationships with the students.

- **Teacher-student connection-** One of the most important aspects of a learning environment is the interaction among a teacher and their students. This is a crucial factor influencing students' development, school engagement, and academic

motivation. Numerous factors affect teacher-student interactions, which in turn affect students' behavior and academic performance.

Positive and supportive relationships between students and teacher ultimately increase children's participation, help in motivating them, creating interests and increased academic success.

- **Classroom setting-** One of the key elements influencing student learning is the classroom setting. When students see their classrooms as warm and cooperative, it is the great learning environment. Also, the physical features of the classroom should be pleasant and conducive. Classroom's layout, furniture, display areas for bulletin boards and whiteboards, and climate are all physical components. Each of these needs to be carefully looked at while keeping in mind the teaching purpose and the needs of each individual learner.

- **Teacher's sensitivity towards the needs and issues of the students-** The ability to recognize children's issues and wants is among the most crucial qualities of a competent teacher. Children can concentrate better on learning when they feel at ease or are comfortable with the teacher. When teachers are attuned to the requirements of the students, they are quickly able to identify those who lack the ability to thrive at everything, who are timid around others, who get frequently discouraged, or who are habitually absent from class. A trained teacher acknowledges and values children's many other strengths and leadership traits instead of focusing solely on their academic performance.

Principles of Dealing with Emotional and Behavioral Problems:

Children and adolescents frequently experience behavioral issues. At some point in their development, the majority of individuals struggle to deal with these issues. As kids get older, some of these challenges either disappear naturally or they learn to cope and overcome them through time. An intervention is necessary, though, in some circumstances. In that case, some guidelines must be followed by teachers when dealing with students who exhibit behavioral problems in the classroom.

A few guidelines to respond to the child's behavior are as follows:

1. Children must be valued and treated as unique persons.
2. Teachers must provide empathetic treatment to the students as it reassures them of their value.
3. Keeping in mind the child's developing needs and evolving traits, an opportunity to express themselves should be provided.
4. Establishment of a setting that fosters confidence (often through drama, music, painting, etc.).
5. Acknowledgement of children's efforts, not only their success.
6. Avoid the unwanted behavior.
7. Focus on the desired behavior.
8. Refrain from the negative attention as it can act as a reinforcer.
9. Comparisons and generalizations are not necessary.
10. One should refrain themselves from being punitive to control children.
11. The situations that call for discussion, restriction, or discipline should be carefully chosen.
12. It is crucial to exhibit faith in children and their increasing independence.
13. Independent decision-making must be encouraged.

Educational Practices and Strategies to Improve and Foster Students' Overall Outcomes:
"Every child deserves a champion- an adult who will never give up on them. Who understands the power of connection, and insists that they become the best that they can possibly be." -(Rita Pierson)

A child's continuous development is the aim of education. Education and guidance are closely tied to one another. It is an essential component of education, not an extracurricular social or psychological service. One cannot deny the necessity of professional assistance in helping the child resolve a few of the most complex emotional and social issues peculiar to him or her. However, it is possible to envision the function that guidance-focused educators can play in fostering children's growth and development in areas including academic growth, career orientation, and social and emotional growth.

Some of the children's behavior may not be entirely compatible with their stage of development, while other children's actions might be a sign of problems that need to be fixed if they are to engage in society in a meaningful way. Such children need guidance in school settings. There is a greater need of strategies and educational practices to be planned and followed which foster the development of children having developmental issues, specifically emotional and behavioral challenges.

School staff members such as educators, support staff, school counselors, and others play critical roles in creating and putting into practice techniques that take into account the characteristics of students who struggle with emotional and behavioral issues.

Some of the following strategies and practices can be taken into account to help children in overcoming their issues, to help them adjust in their environment in a better way and creating a positive environment that ensures the holistic development of each child:

1. **Methods to Improve Students' Motivation-** There are some techniques that can be used to make teaching engaging, pertinent, and motivating.
   a. Utilization of right technological tools.
   b. To keep students' interest and attention, vary the tasks and the speed at which they are offered.
   c. Use of resources and activities that are age-appropriate.
   d. Give pupils the freedom to decide.
   e. To help students apply what they have learned to real-world situations, use of experiential, hands-on learning activities.
   f. Enhancement of students' interests.

2. **Upholding Learner Engagement-** At times it is difficult to keep child's interest and attention; hence, few measures can be undertaken.
   a. Clarity in the goals of the lesson.
   b. Engagement of pupils in lessons by keeping them interested.
   c. Use of concrete language and short, concise sentences.
   d. Demonstration of cognitive tools like "thinking aloud" to encourage pupils to express their thought processes.
   e. Immediate affirmation and detailed feedback should be given to all pupils.
   f. Use of relevant tools and materials, and student relatable examples should be provided.
   g. Change of voice pitch and demonstration of passion.
   h. Digressions should be kept to a minimum.

i.   To encourage pupils' attention, use of engaging visual and audio presentations.

3. Ways to Encourage Students-
a. Use of certificates or symbolic objects as awards for task completion.
b. Bonus points.
c. Achievement records.
d. Personal notes or remarks.
e. Unique rewards.

4. Importance of Physical Environment- Physical environment plays a key role in positive learning.
a. Defining space and decluttering.
b. Establishment of a peaceful space.
c. Happy, vibrant settings
d. Reducing the elements of distractions.
e. Appropriate seating arrangement and bulletin boards.

5. Setting Rules and Regulations- One strategy to enhance compliance with rules and regulations is to define them in positive, specific terms that reflect the behavior that is expected of people (for example, raising one's hand when called upon to speak) (e.g., no talking) rather than explaining what is unacceptable. Similar to this, penalties for not living up to expectations should be sensible, predictable, focused on the incorrect behavior, and, of course, communicated in advance.
a. Rules must be spelled out in precise, behavioral words.
b. In order for children to remember rules, they must be brief. Reminders could also be put in the classroom.
c. Encouragement to the children to propose rules in order to develop responsibility and accountability.

6. Techniques to Help Students Accomplish Routine Tasks- Establishment of work related patterns and reinforcing those can help students stay on task.
a. Use of cue cards for students.
b. Time to reflect upon the ongoing task.
c. Advance notice can be given while performing an activity or task.
d. Peer support works as the reinforcer and guide for children.
e. Use of praise or encouraging remarks.

7. Increasing Appropriate Behavior-
a. It's crucial to respond positively to student behavior and to fight the urge to concentrate solely (or even mostly) on the wrong behavior.
b. Positive reinforcement can be given to children which includes point systems, stickers, smiles, and public acclaim for a job well done.

8. Decreasing Inappropriate Behavior- Most students don't require interventions that concentrate on reducing inappropriate behaviors because of an improvement in suitable behavior. However, some improper actions could require for the use of "behavior-decreasing consequences."
a. Planned ignoring (the undesired behavior).
b. Use of time-out strategy

9. **Techniques for Supporting Positive Behavior-** A few suggestions to direct and encourage development towards more constructive, adaptable behavior:
    a. Use of token economy for promoting positive behavior.
    b. Classroom conduct chart that shows each student's degree of behavior (positive progress and downfall both) in the classroom.
    c. Learners are required to observe their peers and point out instances of positive behavior. The child who is behaving well and the one who makes the identification both receive a reward.

10. **Teaching New Behaviors-** Use of the following teaching techniques to assist in guiding pupils in learning new behaviors:
    a. Demonstration of the use of behavior appropriately.
    b. Practicing acceptable behavior.
    c. Role playing.
    d. Continuous reinforcement.

The Therapeutic Approach:

When certain tactics and methods fail to produce the desired results, it is crucial to take the child's family in complete confidence and consider therapy modalities while under expert supervision.

1. **Counselling-** In the field of mental health known as counselling, elements of counselling and psychotherapy are combined (Erford, 2018). The child and counsellor work together to improve the child's quality of life while focusing on a wellness model. Counselling can boost moods, treat mental illness, enhance relationships and communication, and foster self-worth and resilience. In this, the child is given an opportunity of self-expression and explicit recommendations are given to overcome his/her issues.

2. **Behaviour Therapy/Modification-** The goal of behavioral therapy is to comprehend how a child came to possess abnormal or maladaptive behaviors. Through the use of operant, classical, and desensitizing conditioning, behavioral therapy aims to eradicate undesirable behaviors from child's life. By removing unhelpful associations, discouraging harmful behavior, and rewarding beneficial behavior, these interventions help people change their behavior.

3. **Play Therapy-** The practice of play therapy has its roots in talk therapy or psychotherapy. It entails a skilled therapist watching a client as they play and doing as they are told. The strategy is founded on the notion that children use play to subconsciously communicate which means that people disclose information about themselves without recognizing it.

   Toys, dolls, paints, and clay are offered, and the therapist merely offers the child the bare minimum of recommendations so that they can take the lead in their own play. A child may express their emotions during play either directly or metaphorically, giving a therapist insight into how they are experiencing. People can communicate topics they otherwise might find challenging when they play together in a secure environment. Children develop their talents and learn how to engage with the world through play. As a result, it comes naturally to them as a form of expression.

4. **Music and Dance Therapy-** Music and dance have been widely used to help the children disturbed children. The release of emotions, tension, attitude, conflicts, etc. can be achieved by rhythmic sounds and structured-unstructured movements. When employed as a group activity, dance aids in the externalization of emotions and

encourages socializing. Music has been used to invoke feelings of happiness, excitement, encourages socializing, and even boosts self-confidence.

5. **Art Therapy-** Children can learn to manage their emotions and develop self-awareness via creation, watching, and discussion of art. Additionally, it enables children to verbalize unsaid and frequently unconscious worries regarding their issues. To assist children in resolving their own inner issues and conflicts, the art therapist incorporates images, art materials, and visual symbols in addition to having a behavioral knowledge.

6. **Role Play-** "Role-playing has emotive, cognitive, and behavioral components" that can create disturbances that help clients change "unhealthy feelings to healthy ones" (Corey, 2013, p. 300).

   It can be beneficial for children in particular since it gives them a chance to act out problematic behavior while offering a performance-based learning opportunity (Corey, 2013; Dobson, 2011).

   Role-playing as a therapeutic practice provides valuable understanding of how people perceive their surroundings and interact with others. Because of this, it can be especially successful in the therapy of trauma by allowing the therapist and the child to revisit past traumas through recreation (Hackett, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The term 'emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD)' refers to a wide range of conditions where a child's emotions or behavior are dysfunctional. Amid average behavior, troublesome conduct, and major behavioral concerns, emotional and behavioral disorders can range in severity.

When attempting to comprehend a child, a variety of theories of causes may be beneficial, but it is crucial to keep in mind that it is incredibly challenging to isolate any one cause for a child's behavior. Additionally, creating interventions is the main goal of diagnosing the cause or, for this kind of matter, any diagnostic. Knowing something's cause is not very useful.

Varied people have different definitions of behavioral disorders and emotional disturbances. There may be different 'expert' viewpoints from parents, family friends, neighbors, teachers, school administrators, and even doctors. Therefore, there needs to be communication regarding the specific issue which the youngster is facing. Most of the time, it is vital to ensure that the parties in question communicate a message that is both clear and understood.

Not all children with an EBD will meet the diagnostic criterion, but that does not imply that they aren't in need of assistance. Therefore, teachers have the utmost responsibility of providing a conducive environment for the holistic and healthy development of each child, especially the ones with emotional and behavioral issues in classroom settings. Also, the strategies and activities should be planned keeping in mind the situation of children with such kind of challenges.

"Each individual wants to feel accepted, loved, respected, feel significant, worthwhile, and feel psychologically secure." (Savage, 1999)

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