

Behaviour Management Practices in Early Childhood Education and Development Classrooms in Nepal

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Abstract

Context: Early childhood education and development (ECED) is a basic foundation for human learning that plays a crucial role in shaping children's social and emotional behaviour. The ECED centres primarily focus on children's behaviour management to establish a child-friendly environment.

Purpose: This paper explored children's behaviour management practices in ECED classrooms.

Methods: A phenomenological research design has been applied to this study, and 5 teachers from Mahalaxmi municipality, Lalitpur, Nepal, with more than 3 years of teaching experience in ECED centres and a bachelor's degree, were purposively selected to explore their lived experiences in children's behaviour management. The schools were intervened by ECEC Innovation in Education, for teacher training and classroom management. The information was collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations to explore the teachers' lived experiences.

Results: The study revealed that teachers relied on positive reinforcement, classroom rules, routine-based management, and child-centred approaches to regulate their behaviour. Collaborative strategies such as teacher-child-centred communication and emotional support were found to be effective in minimising disruptive behaviours. However, large class sizes,

limited resources, and insufficient professional training constrained the implementation of best practices.

Implication: The study highlights the importance of continuous professional development for ECED teachers and the integration of developmentally appropriate, positive behaviour management strategies that provide ECED teachers with insights into children's behaviour management. Strengthening institutional support and policy frameworks can enhance classroom practices and improve behavioural and learning outcomes for young children.

Keywords: Behaviour management, supportive learning environment, praising children, positive reinforcement

Introduction

Early childhood education and development (ECED) covers the crucial developmental stage of cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth from birth to age eight ([Saracho, 2023](#)). The ECED stage establishes the framework for lifetime learning and well-being, as early experience strongly influences subsequent academic, social, and emotional trajectories ([Canfield et al., 2023](#)). Children's brains are developing at an unprecedented rate at this time; thus, educational interventions must promote healthy behaviours and character traits. To shape how they interact with their surroundings, peers, and authority figures, and eventually aid in the development of their character and social integration, behaviour management is an essential component ([Badau & Mihaela, 2022](#)). ECED programs are growing in Nepal, but they face several obstacles. Promoting equitable and prosperous early childhood education requires an understanding of behaviour management strategies in ECED centers ([Kitamura, 2024](#)).

The literature on ECED emphasizes its role in reducing long-term social costs, improving cognitive abilities, and minimizing health risks ([Neuman & Powers, 2021](#)). UNESCO highlights the importance of early childhood education that addresses several developmental areas focused on children's well-being, gender equality, and lifelong learning. By reducing the need for special education, effective ECED instruction fosters inclusivity in the classroom and helps close socioeconomic divides. Effective behaviour management, on the other hand, is crucial to the success of ECED because it guarantees that children not only gain knowledge but also develop self-control and prosocial behaviour, which are crucial for character development ([Badau & Mihaela, 2022](#)).

Jean Piaget's cognitive developmental theory indicates that children move through stages of assimilation and accommodation, during which behaviours arise from their evolving comprehension of the environment. Egocentrism and symbolic thinking affect how behaviour is expressed and controlled throughout the preoperational period (ages 2-7), a period common among many ECED children. Regarding the children's learning, Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of social interactions and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), where peer collaboration and educators' directed scaffolding help students learn new behaviours using cultural tools ([Saracho, 2023](#)). According to Erikson's psychological stages,

positive behaviour management fosters initiative and self-worth by highlighting the significance of autonomy vs. shame in early development and of trust vs. distrust in infancy.

Evidence-based, positive behaviour management techniques have replaced punitive ones in early childhood education (Badau & Trifan, 2022). Setting clear goals, fostering relationships, and implementing preventive measures to reduce problematic behaviours are effective strategies ([Mestari et al., 2024](#)). For example, establishing developmentally appropriate routines and regulations promotes independence and predictability while reducing interruptions (Bradshaw et al., 2012). Prosocial behaviour is encouraged by positive reinforcement, such as praise and prizes, and focused interventions are made possible by understanding behaviours as manifestations of unfulfilled needs ([Bradshaw et al., 2012](#)). According to Bradshaw et al. (2012), the study endorses the use of a social-emotional learning (SEL) program that incorporates empathy-building and emotional regulation to reduce aggression and improve cooperation.

The development of young children is negatively impacted by punitive methods, such as corporal punishment ([Duarte et al., 2023](#)). According to studies, physical punishment promotes long-term aggression, anxiety, and depression, yet causes immediate dread and cooperation ([Jones et al., 2023](#)). Reduced cognitive development, more mental health problems, and worse literacy results are all linked to corporal punishment that triggers physiological stress responses that alter brain structure and increase the risk of injury ([Duarte et al., 2023](#)). Additionally, it erodes teachers' confidence, leading to avoidance behaviours and low self-esteem. Evidence from the various scenarios demonstrates that punishment perpetuates a cycle of violence by encouraging aggressiveness as a conflict resolution tactic ([Jones et al., 2023](#)).

In contrast, positive discipline supports ethical development and internal motivation, which is consistent with developmental theories ([Mestari et al., 2024](#)). Due to cultural norms and resource limitations, behaviour management techniques in the Nepali setting may combine conventional and emerging approaches. Due to their lack of training in positive strategies, teachers often create a fearful and disruptive environment, which can make youngsters feel afraid and less confident ([Zinsser et al., 2022](#)). Due to packed classrooms and limited resources, teachers often focus on control rather than on scaffolding.

To change children's behaviour, meaningful education cultivates the critical thinking, values, and life skills that are essential to students' social and personal development ([Bradshaw et al., 2012](#)). According to the Education Act (1971), education in Nepal is classified into basic education for children aged 5 to 12 and early childhood education for those aged 4 to 5. The Education Act defines basic education as education from ECED to class 8 (Education Act, 2028 (1971)). Children's behaviour is greatly influenced by the instructor, curriculum, community, and classroom management. A healthy learning environment and discipline are produced by an efficient seating arrangement ([Hoekstra et al., 2024](#)).

A lack of a stimulating teaching and learning environment, adequate physical facilities, appropriate learning resources, and trained teachers creates behavioural problems among children ([Matthews & Lippman, 2020](#)). Children in primary education are very active,

energetic, and stubborn. However, ECED children generally do not pay attention to the teacher's instruction, which makes it challenging to manage and engage them in classroom activities. Sometimes the children would shout and scream, destroying the learning resources and class materials. Moreover, ECED children often appear to be unfamiliar with completing their assignments. Thus, children's behaviour management is a burning issue in a developing country like Nepal. Teachers are tired of controlling children and becoming frustrated with their profession.

Upon visiting the ECED classroom, we found teachers shouting at children, using phrases such as 'shut up', 'keep quiet', and 'head down'. Furthermore, we saw corporal punishment, including hitting and beating with sticks, for behaviour management. These cases shocked us and made us explore constructive ways to manage children's behaviour.

Thus, this study helps ECED schools and teachers with effective teaching practices that enhance learning performance. The study aims to explore the students' behaviour management practices in the ECED classroom.

Methods and Procedures

This study employed a phenomenological study design applying a purposive sampling technique. The participants were purposively selected teachers who are teaching in ECED centres in the Mahalaxmi municipality, Lalitpur. Who were experienced with more than three years and had completed a bachelor's degree in education. The schools were intervened by ECEC innovation in education, for teacher training and classroom management. The information was collected through in-depth interviews and classroom observations to explore the teachers' lived experiences ([Korumaz et al., 2020](#)). The research has mainly focused on examining students' behaviour management practices in the ECED classroom. The information was collected through an in-depth semi-structured interview in the natural setting of the teacher. Moreover, both participant and non-participant observation were conducted to explore the behaviour management practices of the ECED children. The information was obtained from the classroom observation, including teaching and learning materials, classroom management, wall decorations, and different pictures and diagrams that reflect the teacher's experiences.

The information was transcribed in Nepali and translated into English. The translated information was verified with the participants. The transcribed verbatim texts were coded for the thematic analysis. At first, similar code was clustered in a group as a basic theme. The basic themes were clustered into an organised theme, and the organised theme was clustered as a global theme. The global themes were discussed and analysed, linking them to relevant literature.

Maintaining Ethical Issues

Ethical considerations were maintained, ensuring voluntary participation in the study and informed consent. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the study procedure, and potential risks before their participation, and they were free to discontinue at any time without incurring penalties. The recorded interviews were safely kept in a private

folder, with a personal key. Participants' privacy was maintained through pseudonyms, such as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5 and information was kept safe using a personal key in a private folder.

Results and Discussions

This section discusses information gathered from participants across different themes. Mainly, the themes are establishing a supportive learning environment, praising the children, involving children in classroom rules, and promoting positive reinforcement and rhymes and stories as means of learning.

Establishing a Supportive Learning Environment

An emotionally safe and welcoming classroom environment fosters positive behaviour in children. Public schools in Nepal lack learning resources for ECED classrooms. However, teachers can encourage positive behaviour by cultivating a sense of belonging, respect, and warmth. Displaying students' artwork, arranging child-friendly seating, and lovingly greeting children each day are all effective strategies for establishing trust and emotional safety. Children prefer to follow classroom norms and engage positively when they are appreciated and included ([Wang et al., 2020](#)). Classroom management plays a vital role in teaching and learning; however, behaviour issues might also occur due to a lack of motivation and a poor classroom environment.

School behaviour issues can arise from the school climate. The engagement of school administration, school staff, and parents is crucial to fostering positive behaviour and discipline ([Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014](#)). Competent, experienced teachers significantly impact classroom management and create an effective learning environment.

Effective classroom management creates a positive learning environment. The nature of courses, teaching-learning strategies, and school rules and regulations influences students' learning motivation ([Erdogan et al., 2010](#)). [Erdogan et al. \(2010\)](#) further stated that the lack of implementing a daily schedule and regulations creates disciplinary problems. The lack of coordination among teachers, principals, and parents is also a cause of behaviour problems, leading to classroom management issues ([Sherpa & Baraily, 2020](#)). Likewise, the number of students and the availability of space also play a vital role in discipline and classroom management.

Creating a learning environment focused on student behaviour management and scheduled planning leads the children towards positive behaviour management that creates motivation for positive action, and negative behaviour management leads to aggressive behaviour and causes deep psychological harm in their lives ([Saunders et al., 2013](#)). Moreover, positive guidance avoids punishment and promotes positive language while managing misbehaviour. Positive guidance emphasizes the use of clear, direct, and culturally appropriate language ([Garrity & Longstreth, 2020](#)). Regarding the positive statement, a participant P3, stated that "Walking slowly is better than saying 'do not run', speaking slowly rather than shouting." Positive guidance helps children feel safe and secure and develops their self-confidence. Thus, behaviour management requires effective counselling and scaffolding, along

with rewards and positive reinforcement, to help children behave appropriately and achieve their learning goals.

Praising the Children

Positive reinforcement for positive activities helps develop good behaviour in children. Good classroom behaviour, such as being a good listener, acting appropriately, sitting properly, and respecting others, creates a peaceful and manageable environment ([Monteiro et al., 2021](#)). Regarding the positive reinforcement, P3 asserted that “the children get a reward for their good behaviour. Children get a sticker or a star for performing good behaviour.” Similarly, P4 stated that “words of affirmation, such as thanks, good job, well done.” In the same vein, P2 mentioned that “providing prizes for their good behaviour, however, it’s costly for the teachers.” Based on the statement, the teachers are using positive reinforcement to encourage the children’s good behaviour in the classroom. Similarly, praise enhances children’s intrinsic motivation to learn ([Bear et al., 2017](#)).

Furthermore, in early childhood settings, positive reinforcement is a more effective and developmentally appropriate behaviour modification strategy than punitive measures ([Tamang & Sherpa, 2025](#)). The establishment of a nurturing, psychologically secure learning environment is facilitated by verbal praise and acknowledgement of desired behaviour, which reinforces beneficial behaviours. Children absorb positive behavioural norms, build self-efficacy, and become intrinsically motivated when they receive consistent, genuine verbal praise. The development of prosocial behaviours, such as empathy, collaboration, and respect for one another, is largely dependent on self-esteem, which is enhanced by such reinforcement. As a result, the deliberate use of positive reinforcement is a crucial instructional strategy for promoting the full socio-emotional development of early learners and maintaining positive behavioural patterns.

Involving Children in Classroom Rules and Promoting Positive Reinforcement

Involving children in formulating classroom rules promotes a sense of ownership. Ownership and effective implementation of rules create a sense of responsibility, empowering individuals to feel accountable and fostering positive behaviour ([Wang et al., 2020](#)). Similarly, students’ participation in rule formulation internalizes the expected behaviour, reducing conflicts and disruptions among children. Concerning this issue, P3 asserted that, “students who participate in rule formulation take active roles.” Moreover, a participatory approach promotes mutual understanding and respect and creates a common cooperation ([Boyce et al., 2025](#)). Furthermore, involvement in rule-setting establishes predictability and safety for children in the classroom.

Regarding the participation of children in classroom rule formation, P1 stated, “Participating the children in classroom rule formation fosters democratic and effective classroom management”. Moreover, another participant P2, asserted that “childrens participation foster accountability, self-discipline, and ownership in the children. Similarly, P3 stated, “Participating in the creation of rules helps students better grasp their goals, demonstrate greater acceptance, and grow to respect the opinions of others.” The statement asserts that children’s participation in classroom rule formation promotes inclusive involvement and

mutual respect, especially for shy and marginalised students. In the same vein, teachers need to adopt a facilitative rather than a dictatorial role to collaborate in creating norms. Teachers ensure clarity and age appropriateness by facilitating conversations, helping children identify appropriate behaviours, and using kid-friendly language, illustrations, and examples. Frequent rule reviews further strengthen students' shared accountability and flexibility. Moreover, reinforcement for children is crucial for effective classroom management. In early childhood settings, positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment. Regarding the positive reinforcement, P4 stated:

ECED teachers apply verbal appreciation, tokens, or praise to recognise positive conduct. For example, to motivate pupils, community schools may implement "Star of the Day" or "Helping Hands" charts. Children can establish a connection between positive behaviour and recognition when they are told, You did a great job sharing your toys.

The statement asserts that positive reinforcement in early childhood classrooms promotes motivation for effective behaviour by helping children link positive acts with recognition, thereby creating a supportive and stimulating learning environment. In the same vein, P4 stated:

The teacher provides instructions before the class starts. When they shout, the teacher uses a soft voice to calm them down. Teachers reward good behaviour and focus on the positive. Children are given more privileges to play and sing as a reward for good behaviour and completing tasks, and fewer privileges to play on the computer and reduced playtime for misconduct.

The statement shows that positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment in early childhood settings. ECED teachers in Nepal can use praise, tokens, or verbal appreciation to acknowledge good behaviour. Encouragement fosters self-esteem, which is crucial for the development of prosocial behaviour. In the Nepali context, classroom behaviour is often influenced by home culture, language, and community values. Teachers need to respect local traditions while guiding children towards democratic classroom norms. Understanding children's cultural backgrounds helps teachers interpret behaviour more empathetically.

In conclusion, prioritising encouragement over punishment and using positive reinforcement is essential to maintaining established school rules. Teachers need to encourage children to repeat positive behaviours, acknowledge effort, and build confidence through vocal praise, nonverbal cues, and modest privileges. This improves intrinsic motivation and fosters a supportive learning environment. Positive reinforcement and student involvement work together to create a classroom environment where students feel engaged, respected, and emotionally protected. Ultimately, this method prepares children for responsible citizenship and lifelong learning by reducing behavioural issues, enhancing peer interactions, and fostering social and self-regulation skills.

Rhymes and Stories as Means of Learning

Rhymes and stories motivate children to enjoy themselves in the classroom and help develop moral lessons that transform their behaviour. Teaching with rhymes and stories

promotes motivation in learning and facilitates moral development. Rhymes and stories enhance children's imaginations and help them internalize social and ethical lessons. Language development, emotional expression, and cultural transmission are parts of social behaviour ([Lew-Levy et al., 2023](#)). Storytelling and rhythmic language activities enhance children's moral reasoning and social skills, which contribute to the regulation of classroom behaviour ([Aprinawati, 2024](#)). A motivational and enjoyable learning environment fosters a positive classroom atmosphere for behaviour management ([Aydm & Karabay, 2020](#)). Regarding the importance of rhymes and stories, participant P3 stated:

Singing rhymes and telling stories help children engage with peers and learn to cooperate, thereby developing social interactions among children. The use of rhymes and stories helped to create a calm, structured, and enjoyable learning environment, which is essential for early childhood development.

The statement shows that rhymes and stories create an enjoyable and child-friendly environment in class. Chiefly, the role of the teacher in the ECED classroom is to engage children in a meaningful learning environment. In this regard, participant P3 stated, "rhymes are appropriate in capturing children's attention and regulating classroom rules." Similarly, Participant P4 asserted, "When I start singing rhymes, even those who were disturbing others stop and join in singing it. It helps me to settle the class without shouting." The children enjoy singing chants and rhymes repeatedly, which supports children in self-regulation ([Williams, 2018](#)). Moreover, stories are also crucial for shaping positive behaviour and reinforcing moral values. Teachers used stories to teach concepts such as sharing and listening. In this regard, participant P5 noted, "I tell them stories at first, then the children share. I found the children were trying to imitate the actions of stories when they were playing." Stories allow children to relate to characters and situations, making it easier for them to understand acceptable behaviour. Children learn social norms and behaviours through interaction and meaningful experiences ([Hardecker & Tomasello, 2017](#)). Rhymes and stories reduce disruptive behaviour by fostering active engagement in learning in class.

Regarding the implications of rhymes and stories P5 shared, "Some children who are quiet start talking when we discuss a story, especially when we ask how the character feels." Children were more willing to express their feelings through story-related discussions. Moreover, rhymes and stories promote emotional expression and communication among children ([Isbell et al., 2004](#)). The motivational and enjoyable nature of rhymes and stories fosters a positive classroom atmosphere conducive to learning and behaviour improvement ([Aprinawati, 2024](#)). Rhymes and stories are effective and developmentally appropriate for behaviour management strategies in the ECED classroom. Singing songs and telling stories develop children's social and emotional development.

Discussion

Classroom management plays a crucial role in maintaining children's behaviour and enables teaching and learning in the classroom ([Ozen & Yildirim, 2020](#)). A welcoming, safe

classroom fosters positive behaviour in children's lives. A supportive learning environment creates a more enabling environment for learning. A stimulating classroom fosters positivity in children's education. Positive reinforcement fosters positive behaviours in the children ([Aydın & Karabay, 2020](#)). A supportive classroom environment prepares students to be more disciplined and perform better in learning activities ([Bear et al., 2017](#)).

Praising the children for their positive behaviour fosters behaviour change. Praising is a form of positive reinforcement that makes children feel respected and valued ([Bear et al., 2017](#)). The use of positive words, words of affirmation, and rewards and prizes can make the child feel valued and cared for. Praise and rewards motivate children to learn and behave well both at home and school. Moreover, verbal praise and acknowledgement of desired behaviour support the management of positive behaviours ([Partin et al., 2009](#)). Consistent, genuine verbal praise promotes social-emotional development, which enhances the maintenance of positive behavioural patterns.

Children's participation plays a crucial role in the effective implementation of classroom rules. Participatory methods promote mutual understanding and respect, fostering cooperation among the children ([Sevon et al., 2025](#)). However, in the Nepali context, it seems to lack involvement and to encourage a participatory approach. Teachers tend to develop rules and apply them in the classroom, which can lead to misconduct in the ECED classroom. Classroom rules play a significant role, as young children can learn to obey them from an early age, so they can use them when they become adults ([Cooper, 2007](#)). Children's behaviour is shaped by home and family culture in Nepal. However, the school could balance them if the teachers involve the children in the formation of rules and regulations ([Boyce et al., 2025](#)). The study found that when teachers involve them in formulating the rules and make them clear about the classroom rules, it has a positive impact on children's behaviour.

Children love stories, songs, and rhymes, which create a fun, enjoyable environment. The songs and rhymes can develop children's happiness and joyful moments in the classroom ([Aprinawati, 2024](#)). Teaching songs and singing rhymes helped students to follow the rules. Applying rules helps children to regulate their behaviour. Similarly, telling stories to the class effectively regulates their behaviour by sensitizing them to and internalizing a sense of positive understanding, which helps them modify their behaviour. Teachers tend to use stories to shape students' behaviour through moral lessons and characters ([Aydın & Karabay, 2020](#)). Positive behaviour helps children learn better and impacts their lives in the future.

Conclusion

Effective counselling, scaffolding, and positive reinforcement can improve the children's behaviour. Classroom management, the learning environment, learning resources, and school rules are equally crucial for shaping behaviour. A supportive classroom learning environment, welcoming students with loving and positive language, and proper scheduling and planning create a friendly school environment. Similarly, praising the children, observing and listening to them, and identifying their positive behaviours support the regulation of their

behaviour. Appreciated verbal and nonverbal rewards foster children's confidence, make them feel valued, and help them develop socio-emotional skills. Moreover, singing songs, reciting rhymes, and dancing with their friends helped children express their emotions, which, in turn, helped develop their socioemotional behaviour. They learned socio-emotional skills by listening to the stories and getting involved in the follow-up activities. The study highlights the importance of continuous professional development for ECED teachers and the integration of developmentally appropriate, positive behaviour management strategies that provide ECED teachers with insights into children's behaviour management.

Strengthening institutional support and policy frameworks can enhance classroom practices and improve behavioural and learning outcomes for young children. Applying an appreciative culture helps teachers be purposeful and observant in identifying students' positive behaviours, which enhances their self-confidence, self-worth, and socio-emotional skills. Providing parenting awareness on early childhood behaviour issues encourages its application in the home to support children's behaviour regulation. This study is concerned only with ECEC innovation in education in the intervened school; thus, other community school practices need to be uncovered for border exploration.

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