



Original Article

# The effectiveness of school-wide anti bullying programs on teachers' efficacy in dealing with students' bullying behavior

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Bullying in schools is a complex phenomenon. Teachers' ability to manage bullying behavior is closely related to the occurrence and continuation of bullying in classes. This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of School-Wide Anti Bullying Programs (SWABP) on classroom behavior management strategies and teachers' perceived self-efficacy in classroom behavior management.

**Materials and Methods:** The statistical community of this clinical trial consists all of women teachers in elementary schools in Ahar city (western part of Iran) during 2014-2013. The sample included 40 teachers that were chosen through random sampling and divided into two equal experimental and control groups. In order to measure the research variables, the classroom behavior management strategies scale and perceived self-efficacy of teachers were used. The program was designed to recognize and dealing with students' bullying was performed for experimental group during the six 90 minute's sessions. Data analyzed by ANCOVA and SPSS software version 15.

**Results:** The results indicated that the treatment was able to create significant changes in the choice of advocate assertion strategies ( $P=0.005$ ), avoidance ( $P=0.00$ ), parents involvement ( $P=0.001$ ) and in teacher's efficiency in classroom behavior management compared to the control group.

**Conclusion:** It seems that anti-bullying program could be effective on bullying behavior management strategies and teachers perceived effectiveness in classroom management so it emphasizes the need to implement programs to prepare and promote the professional skills of teachers and school counselors to deal effectively with behavioral problems of students.

**Keywords:** Behavior, Bullying, Efficacy, Student, Teacher

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## Introduction

Today new researches emphasize that field of educational psychology should pay enough attention to teachers as much as it does to the students. Educational psychology should pay further considerations to design and implementation of preparation courses in technical and professional skills. This need is clearly felt in educational circles (1). One of class complex's phenomena is bullying another student, where a student repeatedly repeats negative behavior towards a student or several other students. Negative behaviors include a wide variety of non-verbal behaviors such as gazing, pulling hair, labelling others, ridiculing one another, and

relational harassment to physical attacks (2). Ecosystem theory is among the theories that have explained bullying. According to this theory, bullying behavior have been opened or strengthened as a result of the complex relationships between family, school, peers, society and culture and it shows every day experiences of students from the school environment as a basis for understanding the dynamics of bullying in school (3,4).

Based on the available theoretical and empirical findings, many school-wide anti-bullying programs are designed and implemented that their main goal is training all school staff about the principles of dealing with bullying in schools. Part of this program is called a targeted anti-bullying program which its main focus is on education and assessment of behavior management strategies that teachers use in

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class bullying management (5,6). Class behavior management includes of all aware behaviors that is applied by the teachers in order to increase the probability of student's individual and group desired behavior (7). Teacher's attitudes and beliefs about bullying by students makes them apply different management strategies (8,9). In the model presented by Troop and Ladd (2002) four general categories of behavior management strategies have been considered in the class.

These strategies have been conceptualized on the base of the beliefs of teachers about bullying. In this category, teachers with assertive belief tend to refrain from direct intervention in situations and instead they ask the students to solve their own problems (advocate assertion strategy). Teachers with normative beliefs are less likely to punish student's aggressive actions and because they believe there is no fault and mistake, they do not see the intervention necessary so they use involving parent's strategies less. Teachers with these beliefs are more willing to use passive strategies such as advocate avoidance. Finally avoidance beliefs lead to teachers managing the class using strategies such as separating bully and victim students from each other. In this study the above model has been also used (10). Perceived self-efficacy of teachers that arises from their positive and negative experiences in the management of the specific situation in class is related to teacher's efficiency in overcoming class behavioral problems. Therefore, when counselors and teachers are encountered with bullying students they experience high level of anxiety (11- 13). Teachers often ignore this phenomenon because they lack the necessary skills, don't have enough training in the field of bullying and have poor assessment of their own efficiency (6,11).

A lot of research has shown that class behavior management strategies and self-perceived efficacy of teachers are variables that are influenced from the amount of awareness and teacher's skills (8, 11, 14-18). In reviewing anti-bullying strategies from the perspective of students, it was revealed that they have tendency for their teachers to pay attention to this situation, get involved and give the necessary training to victims and provide them on how to solve a problem (19), while teachers are not often equipped with a deep understanding of bullying and strategies for dealing with it are not correct (6,20). Teacher's heavy-handed intervention occasionally causes the continuation of disagreement among peers. Since the cognitive and behavioral patterns of teachers have a vital role in bullying students (14,15) so it is essential for teachers to obtain more

information and get to know the nature of bullying (21). Evaluating the efficiency of programs to increase knowledge and skills of teachers about bullying are designed to show that without this training, teachers understanding of bullying and its management is weak (5,16,22).

Courses of raising skill are effective on the views of teachers towards classroom behavior and their efficiency in classroom behavior management. It reduces potential negative consequences of bullying and victimization in school years such as depression and future delinquency (23-25). Studies that have used anti-bullying programs show that training has caused cognition, teacher's awareness of bullying, improvement of their management strategies, increase in the efficiency of teachers, improvement in stress management and increase in student's participation in class activities (5). However, studies have not shown clearly what impact these training and programs have on choosing bullying behavior management strategies in class. It is essential to get more experimental intervention done in order to show how the nature of the impact of programs on behavior management strategies looks like. Therefore, the general purpose of this study is to determine what effects the performance of understanding bullying and raising skill in bullying behavior management strategies has on the choice of either a 4-storey bullying behavior management strategies (separating the students, advocate avoidance, parents involvement, advocate assertion) based on Troop and Ladd (2002) using the teacher-centered school anti-bullying program. On the other hand, other previous research has paid attention to general self-efficacy of teachers and has not examined the perceived self-efficacy of them in the management of bullying behavior. Therefore, determining the effect of the program on perceived self-efficacy of teachers in classroom behavior management is also part of the research objectives.

### Materials and Methods

The study population of the study consisted of all female teachers in primary schools in Ahar which were employed in the 91-92 academic year and their total number was 200. The statistical sample consisted of 40 teachers who were selected by simple random sampling method. The first sample was a list of teachers from the department of education which was given to the researcher. 40 patients were selected by simple random. After that a letter which introduced the researcher was issued to schools that the considered teachers were working at. The number of these schools was 9 primary

schools. At the next stage the researcher referred to the related schools in order to explain the process and satisfy the teachers and speak to them about it. Teachers from different elementary base made up the sample group; their education was associate and master's degree. In the final stage the sampling of the sampled groups were matched according to criteria, educational grade, and work experience and education level. They were randomly assigned to experiment and control groups.

### **Research instruments**

- *Classroom behavior management strategies*: This questionnaire was adapted from the Classroom Management Policies Questionnaire (CMPQ) Troop and Ladd (2002) and was designed by the researchers to measure the intended variable. The scale includes 18 items that the 4-storey classroom behavior management strategies measures (advocate assertion, engaging parent's involvement, separating students from each other and advocate defense). In this questionnaire the teachers were questioned in a 4-point scale (I never use this strategy) "1" I've used this a couple of times so far, "2", sometimes I use this strategy "3", this is the method that I usually use "4") and the use of these strategies were shown. Corresponding scale items have been conceptualized with teacher's bullying beliefs. In this scale 4 items have been considered for subscale of separating students from each other, 5 items for advocate assertion scale, 5 items for advocate avoidance and 4 items for the scale involvement of parents. Therefore, every teacher has 4 scores on this scale that these scores are calculated by the sum of the scores of the corresponding items. The reliability of the Thorpe and Ladd (2002) and Kuchendar-Ladd and Peltier test (2008) was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. For the subscale is as follows: Separating student's strategies 80.0, advocate assertion 75.0, parent's involvement 80.0 and advocate avoidance 85.0. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the subscale of separating strategies, advocate assertion, parent's involvement and advocate avoidance are 70.0, 68.0, 80.0 and 68.0, respectively, which shows the reliability of the tool (9). The content validity of the test was also approved by experts within the country (Dr.Vahedi and Dr. Fathiazar) and elementary school teachers in Ahar and Tabriz.

- *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale*: In the current study the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk, 2001), was translated by Hossein Chari, Samavi and Mohammadi and used. The questionnaire's psychometric indices have been measured by factor

analysis. The final form of the questionnaire has 24 questions and overall it measures three sub-scales "involving the learners", "teaching methods" and "classroom management". In this scale, these questions 1, 3, 5, 13, 15, 16, 19, 21 are used for measuring class management subscale. In the current study these items have been used to measure perceived self-efficacy of teachers in classroom management. The total scores of each teacher in the related items, is considered as the self-efficacy of teachers scores in classroom management. Hossein Chari and colleagues in 1389 have checked the validity of the test content. They have reported the reliability of the subscales of self-efficacy of class behavior management as 0.73 using Cronbach's alpha (12).

The study was carried out using pre-test and post-test along with the control group. After random assignment of subjects in to experimental and control groups, at the pre-test stage, both groups responded to questionnaires of class behavior management strategies and self-efficacy of teachers. Afterwards educational intervention was performed for the experimental group. During the intervention by the teachers, the control group did not participate in any of the raising skills. After the intervention both groups participated in the post-test.

In this study, the content of the program that was presented during the sessions for groups, was designed and set up by the researcher using the available anti-bullying program with the content of identifying and dealing with bullying. In this intervention, particularly of the program and the anti-bullying teacher oriented booklet as "teacher's guide to help bullies, victims, and the audience" which was provided by Newman and colleagues was used (6). Validity of the content of the programs that the available training package was designed base on them, are approvable according to its efficiency and credibility of them in research and previous intervention. Content and face validity of the designed training package, was approved after several stages of study and review of expert professors in this field who had the responsibility of supervising the current study. While the program framework was provided to teachers before running the sessions and its overview in terms of ability to understand and efficiency were approved by them. The corresponding author of the article who is the main interferer had the needed skills based on the previous and similar research to intervene and perform the training package. It was also supervised by the professors all through the intervention. Subjects received 6 sessions of necessary training,

each session lasting 90 minutes. The intervention lasted 6 weeks. The sessions were held at the conference hall of one of the Ahar high school and group discussion approach was also considered during the meeting.

In this study, the mean and standard deviation were used to describe the variables in both the control and experimental groups. In order to determine the efficiency of the intervention itself, multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was used after reviewing its assumptions that include the independence of the participants, the homogeneity

of variance-covariance matrices, multivariate normality and linearity.

This research proposal has been approved by the Tabriz University and the department of education at university of Tabriz, located at East Azerbaijan province. Before the intervention, the consent of all the teachers participating in the work has been caught. In order to reduce the probable damages in the control group after the completion of intervention while explaining the course of intervention the content of the writing was also provided for the control group.

**Table 1.** Summary of the content of the programs in training sessions of recognizing and coping with bullying

Sessions	Intervention objectives
1	Understanding bullying This session includes providing definitions of bullying, introduction and explaining the characteristics of bullying behavior. And the criteria for separating it from other forms of aggression and abuse among students. Description of different bullying in relationships between students; Such as verbal, relational, emotional, social bullying and more. Theoretical approaches in the field of bullying were also partly explained.
2	Recognizing the characteristics of bullies The content of this meeting contained personal and social characteristics of students who showed more bullying behaviors, it was referred to family and class and social factors that lead to the continuation of such behaviors. Part of the meeting was assigned to the relationship between bullying and other behavioral problems such as crime in future may be the result of bullying behaviors. Teacher's approaches and strategies for this type of behavior was followed by group discussion.
3	Recognizing the characteristics of the victim The content of this meeting contained personal and social characteristics of students who were more vulnerable victims than their peers. It was referred to family and class and social factors that lead to the continuation of this situation in students. Different types of stress and learned helplessness was mentioned as the possible consequences of not paying attention to the statues of bullying victims. Teacher's approaches and strategies for this type of behavior, was followed by group discussion.
4	Dealing and managing bullying behavior (behavioral approach) In this meeting to enhance teachers' skills in behavior management class, the behavioral approach was used. And parts of the principles and methods such as behavior modification and reinforcement, ligation of contracts with students, compensation practices and shaping appropriate behaviors was considered rather than undesirable behavior. It was emphasized on developing clear norms and classroom rules as environmental stimuli. Part of the session was dedicated on features of effective dialogue between a teacher and student and avoidance of students labelling each other, which followed observational learning of others.
5	Dealing and managing bullying behavior (cognitive approach) In this session to enhance the teacher's skills in managing, class behavior cognitive approach was used. Training in this session included individual and group problem solving training, behavioral monitoring and studying the importance of causal attribution of teachers in explanation of the student's behavior.
6	Teaching the skills of interaction in class The first meeting was paid to aspects of the bully and the victim and skill training in expressing oneself like saying no to each other against an unpleasant request, how to criticize each other, promoting a culture of altruism in class and desensitization strategy was highlighted. As they went on in this meeting, a group discussion took place about both positive and negative comments about the intervention of the student's parents dealing with behavioral problems in class discussions and the strengths and weaknesses of this approach was examined.

## Results

In this study, 40 female teachers of the primary school attended as a participant. They were matched according to the criteria, educational grade, and work experience and education level. They got into the experimental and control groups. The mean and

standard deviation of pretest and posttest of both the experimental groups and control in variables of bullying behavioral management strategy and self-efficacy of teachers in behavioral management is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** The scores of control and experiment groups in pre-posttest of and behavior management strategies and self-efficacy of teachers

Control group				Treatment group				Scores
Posttest		Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		
SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	
3.37	10.30	3.73	10.45	2.35	12.45	2	10.85	Advocate assertion
2.25	9.45	2.39	9.40	3.77	10.50	3.18	9.70	Involving parents
2.03	8.05	2.35	7.75	1.98	6.45	2.66	6.80	Separating students from each other
3.50	11.40	3.28	11.50	1.90	9.40	3.75	12.35	Advocate avoidance
3.16	30.75	2.75	10.45	3.50	32.80	3.50	29.95	Self-efficacy in behavioral management

To study the effects of the experimental intervention, multivariate analysis of covariance was conducted on post-test scores with control and pre-test scores of the dependent variables of the research. So the pre-test was entered as a covariate variable into the analysis of covariance so its effect

could be removed on perceived self-efficacy variance and behavior management strategies. Thus, even after controlling pre-test between the two groups there is a significant difference in terms of the dependent variables. Table 3 shows the results of multivariate analysis of covariance.

**Table 3.** The results of multivariate covariance test on posttest scores with control of the pretest dependent variables

Partial Eta squared	Significance	Hypothesis df	Error df	F	value	test	effect
0.75	0.001	29	5	18.10	0.24	Wilks' lambda	group

As Table 3 shows, there is a significant difference between experimental and control groups between the dependent variables in the study. So to investigate this difference, one way variance

analysis in the MANCOVA content, was performed in the dependent variable. The results of this analysis are provided in Table 4.

**Table 4.** The results of differences between control and experimental groups in scores of teachers' self-efficacy and management strategies through multivariate covariance test

Partial Eta square	Significance	F	Mean square	df	Sum of square	dependent variable	Source
0.21	0.005	8.97	39.58	1	39.58	assertiveness	Group
0.03	0.29	1.23	10.39	1	10.39	advocate	
0.16	0.01	6.60	17.40	1	17.40	involving parents	
0.33	0.00	16.53	61.67	1	61.67	separating students from each other	
0.30	0.001	14.15	92.78	1	92.78	advocate avoidance	
						Self-efficacy in behavioral management	

As it is shown in Table 4, in variables such as advocate assertion ( $F=8.97$  and  $P<0.01$ ), separating the students from each other ( $F=60.6$  and  $P<0.01$ ), separating students from each other ( $F=6.60$  and  $P<0.01$ ), advocate avoidance ( $F=16.53$  and  $P<0.01$ ), also in teachers' self-efficacy in the management of class actions ( $F=14.15$  and  $P<0.01$ ). There is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Though, in the involvement strategy ( $F=1.23$  and  $P<0.01$ ), no significant difference was obtained between the experiment and control groups.

## Discussion

This study sought to determine the efficiency of anti-bullying program on management strategies and perceived self-efficacy of teachers. Based on these findings, when teachers' awareness increases about the nature of bullying and their skills to deal with it, their perceived overall efficiency in class management increases as well, which in turn makes them more willing to intervene in certain situations in class such as bullying.

Overall findings of the research are explained based on self-efficacy theory of Bandura. According

to this theory, in order for people to carry out their duties, they are in need of positive sense of self efficacy. The formation of self- efficacy, takes place, so it is partly determines their decisions and choices of using classroom management strategies (25). Recent research after the current study has also confirmed the findings of this study. It emphasizes on the need for anti-bullying training for teachers and other school members as well as the importance of Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale to handle situations of bullying in schools (26,27). Evidence shows that teachers often estimate their ability to manage bullying, more than it really is, and this has led them to apply strategies that create more problems. For example, in dealing with the situation, they try to separate the bully and the victim students from each other. This strategy causes the victim student not to learn the proper way of dealing with the problem and the bully students does not get aware about his/her behavior.

Separating the students from each other, insistence on ignoring the persecution, and avoidance of advocacy and confrontation of the problem can be a result of teacher's lack of sufficient knowledge of the nature and consequences of bullying and the lack of adequate skills in the use of appropriate solution in the class room. As it was observed, after the intervention, the experimental group were more likely to use defend assertion strategy to the students. While their tendency to use strategies like separating students from each other and advocate avoidance had decreased compared to the pre-test and control group. Thus providing training in recognizing and dealing with bullying, have been influencing in the selection of each of the strategies from the teachers so it has reduced using of passive strategies in class and has increased their efficiency to use active strategies such as confronting with the problem. Recent research carried out by Depaolis, Williford and Hawley and Schad, which emphasize on providing the necessary training for teachers in this regard, support the findings of this research (26,27).

In contrast to the above findings that were presented to explain the results of the study, a number of studies have reached different conclusions, indicating that teachers who use separating students from each other strategy, experience lower prevalence of bullying in their class and on the contrary, teachers who encourage victims to defend themselves, have higher levels of bullying (8,28). It seems more reflective is needed at evaluation of the recent findings, because they have been criticized of the researches on the mental and

psychological status of bullying victims who were not able to defend themselves (11,17,18).

The results show that when teachers learn problem-solving techniques themselves, they are more willing to use them. After the intervention, the teachers of the experimental group compared with the control group teachers, were less likely to use a separating strategy and were more willing to use active strategies to manage bullying in their class. Using these strategies, teachers teach students to stand up for themselves and solve their own problems.

In support of these researches, findings have shown that the use of assertive and active strategies, allows teachers to intervene in bullying situations and to educate students and to use separating students strategy less, regardless of its necessity (16,18,20). Based on bandura's self-efficacy theory in which teachers perceived self-efficacy affects their management behaviors, it was observed that after the intervention, an increase in the perceived self-efficacy of teachers to change their management behavior was along with a change in their management behavior. This was because when teachers achieved success in the management of bad behaviors in students, their perceived ability of themselves with reduced anxiety was increased. Thus they were more likely to intervene in class issues and manage risky behaviors. These findings, confirms different results of the below research, each with its own methodology have examined the available variables (4,6,8,10,29-32).

Since the study has been carried out with female teachers, it is suggested in order to achieve a more general framework of teacher's beliefs and approaches about bullying and their perceived self-efficacy of their teachers, similar research is done with male teachers, so we can reach to more comprehensive results achieved for the primary school teachers.

Correcting class behavioral problems becomes important where several studies have shown that this is an important predictor of future risk of some anti-social disorders (26,30). With regard to the status of teachers in the implementation of anti-bullying programs in the classroom, the importance of specialized courses for those who comply with the new scientific findings in the field of behavioral disorders and ways to deal with the students as it was did in the study conducted, needs attention and planning. Each study has its limitations, since this study was designed as the first in the country, it has no internal records. With the importance of bullying and victimization issues, awareness and

empowerment of teachers in this area, it is proposed a similar research should be conducted with male teachers at different levels, so we can achieve more comprehensive results about the efficiency of interventions for teachers of both sexes at different levels. Doing longer follow-up is recommended in future research. It is hoped that the current study could be an effective step in the aspect of paying expertise and professional attention to the subject of teacher's training while in service and the way to design and implement them.

### Conclusion

Based on the results it seems that management skills and self-efficacy training lead to more use of assertiveness strategies while teachers' strategies about separating and avoidance decrease among trained teachers compared to pretest and the control group. In addition, when teachers' awareness increases about the nature of bullying and their skills to deal with it, their perceived overall efficiency in class management increases as well, which in turn makes them more willing to intervene in certain situations in class such as bullying.

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