



Research article

Teachers' views about school students' behavioral problems in the Emirate of Sharjah: An exploratory study

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ABSTRACT

This study explored teachers' views on the behavioral problems among school children in the Emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The population comprised cycles one (grades 1–4) and two (grades 5–8) teachers in the Emirate. In collecting data from the teachers, a survey questionnaire was administered, and a total of 378 were returned. After analyzing the major scales using SPSS version 26, the findings suggest no critical concern on behavioral issues for students in the study. However, further analyses of the subscales reveal students finding it challenging to concentrate, lateness in assignment submission, and less motivation concerning students' behavioral problems. Drawing on the results, we conclude that students' behavioral issues in the Emirate are surmountable with active collaboration and involvement of school leaders, the Ministry of Education, teachers, and parents.

1. Introduction

Studying students' behavioral problems is vital to educators as an educational procedure is not limited to leading students' learning and providing them with information. Instead, as a process, it ensures the stability of students' behavior and their emotional, spiritual, cognitive, and social wellbeing. It is also concerned with finding solutions to possible students' behavioral problems, which may negatively impact their education and relationships with others. Besides, our experience as parents and educators led us to believe that exploring students' behavioral issues is an indispensable enterprise for educators as the longer they are left untreated, the worse they become.

In ensuring smooth learning processes for students with behavioral problems, stakeholders, including parents, government, and schools, play significant roles in setting and enforcing rules to instill conforming values in students. This is essential as undesirable actions such as aggression, disobedience, and destruction of properties cause disruptions at schools, homes and may even impact the local community. Students' behavioral problems have also been reported to cause other social and emotional issues, including suicide, depression [1], and impairments [2]. Furthermore, these problems negatively impact students' psychological and social development, which may be detrimental to their learning and academic progress and their ability to engage in positive interaction with

others [3]. Not surprisingly, a study concluded that behavioral problems among children could have both immediate and remote negative consequences [2]. In this sense, behavioral issues may affect school children from learning effectively at their formative stages in schools within the immediate context [1], which may hinder them from developing skills for thriving as adult learners and professionals in the future remote context.

From our experience, learning environments for promoting general and customized learning experiences require systematic planning, implementation, and monitoring process where potential learning obstacles and behavioral issues are addressed. It might be safe to assume that students cannot overcome their behavioral problems alone, hence the need for constant guidance and support from their families and teachers. However, practical guidance and care for students' academic and wellbeing might be a lofty and tall dream without a contextual evidence-based approach to understanding behavioral problems and strategies for reducing them. The literature indicates that young children are socially vulnerable and efforts should be intensified to understand issues capable affecting their wellbeing and future growth, including behavioral and emotional problems [1]. In our view, this moral enterprise is of particular importance now since these problems have taken various forms and pose severe challenges to all the stakeholders involved in the educational processes of young people. As such, we conducted this

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study to determine the magnitude and possible impacts of behavioral problems among young school children to reduce the issues and promote their wellbeing using a research-informed practice. We relied on the views of teachers being the front liners spending more time with the school-aged children in the Emirate of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), including behavioral and emotional problems [1, 4]. In particular, we focused on the experience of teachers leading students' learning in cycles 1 and 2, being those in grades 1–4 and 5–8. Based on these views, the study highlights the importance of exploring the patterns of negative behaviors exhibited by students and the methods of dealing with them, especially among primary school students who have their first schooling experiences. Thus, the study offers insights into measures to reduce behavioral problems among young school children within a specific cultural context and complements the international literature.

2. Theoretical background and related literature

Several psychological theories attempted to explain the causes and motives behind students' engagement in abnormal behaviors and suggest ways to measure them, as will be discussed subsequently. Generally, human behavior is divided into normal and abnormal behavior [5], which may be linked to mental health [6]. Most people display normal and acceptable behavioral patterns, which reflect their individual's ability to effectively adapt to their social environment and conform to societal norms. An abnormal behavior, in contrast, signifies internal and social discord experienced by individuals in society. Some proponents of this perspective studied the effect of physiology on the adaptive behavior of individuals through the study of hormones present in the endocrine system, which have a significant and direct impact on the bloodstream. They also observed the effect of the pituitary gland as the link between testosterone and behavioral problems in several studies. Others focused their studies on neurotransmitters as catecholamine and cholinergic neurotransmitters have long been associated with behavioral issues.

In contrast, serotonin and GABA aminobutyric acid deficiencies have been linked to hyper-stimulation and affect psychological functions [7]. In his psychoanalytic theory, Sigmund Freud considered the origin of behavioral problems. He concluded that they were part of human psychology, which he called life instincts, a product of a force with which a person is born and directly attributable to the instinctive desire to destroy. Based on this view, he concluded that this intuitive destructive energy could be displayed as actions, games, or activities that conform to acceptable social values and mores or as undesirable behavior. In the same vein, it is asserted that indiscipline, and other actions that contravene school and social norms, are a mechanism used by the individual to overcome feelings of inefficiency and fear of failure [8]. The inability to overcome these feelings would make these negative behaviors the usual response to these feelings [9]. The behaviorist, B.F. Skinner based his theory of operant conditioning on the assumption that most behavior is learned and acquired through the individual's environment.

Consequently, behavioral problems result from watching the behavior of the individual's role models, such as the parents or film characters. Not surprisingly, teachers and parents are described as agents of socialization with significant influence on students' personality development [2, 6, 10]. Based on this view, it can be assumed that any unwanted behavior can be modified and corrected [11] through well-thought-out social learning processes and tools [12]. The social learning theory proposes that learning occurs through observing other people's behavior and reinforcements (rewards and punishments). Therefore, the acquisition of undesirable behavior is explained through the reinforcement type received from the family, peers, or even symbolic models. In addition, the theory proposes that behavioral problems may result from threatening or insulting a child, obstructing a purposeful behavior, or withdrawing reinforcement [8]. A study reported that behavioral problems are usually observed by the parents and other caregivers and require a unified approach to deal with them [13]. This is why modern psychology pays particular attention to the behavioral

problems displayed by students using systemic techniques to explore the roles of different agents of socialization in children's personality development. For example, a large-scale study examined the factors responsible for behavioral problems among school pupils and reported parents' marital status and health care as determinants of young children's behavioral issues [10]. Another study suggested a link between school start time and the rate of behavioral problems among primary school children [14]. In the research, it is further explained that an early start might reduce these children's sleep. The researchers collected all relevant behavioral problems related information, including school start time in the Kentucky area, USA, from school websites and offices and student demographics from the state's education office. This information confirmed the link between early school start times and severe behavioral issues such as harassment and school suspension or expulsion.

Another study compared the exposure rate to private and government school students' health, social, emotional, and behavioral problems [15]. The study sampled students from 58 government schools and five private schools, and found that students in private schools performed better on 23 of 32 indicators than their public school counterparts. On the other hand, government school students suffered from such problems as smoking, carrying weapons, and online bullying. Although these results may suggest that private schools are safer learning environments, students in these schools were also exposed to some problems related to their physical, social, emotional, and behavioral wellbeing. Therefore, the study recommended implementing preventative programs in both schools, just as other scholars indicate that schooling status determines children's behavioral problems [4]. A survey conducted and reported in 2017 focused on the link between the length of sleep primary school children in Japan get and the prevalence of such problems as snoring, obesity, and undesirable behavior [16]. The study concluded that there was a clear link between sleep-disordered breathing (SDB) and behavioral issues.

Scholars also explored the relationship between parental negligence and emotional and behavioral problems among school children in Tanzania [17]. The results of the study indicated that abuse results in negative emotional and behavioral patterns among the subjects. Reinforcing this result, a recent study found that the rate of scolding at home impacts children's behavioral problems [6]. Although child abuse is one of the most common types of parental negligence, it has received very little academic attention, especially in developing countries. In another study that focused on correcting undesirable behavior, the researchers concluded that participation in extra-curricular activities for 3–4 h per week might be a promising strategy to counter negative behaviors such as school violence and bullying [18].

The prevalence of behavioral problems among primary school students in Kuwait from the point of view of their teachers was also examined. Three sixty teachers completed a questionnaire that divided behavioral problems into five major areas: lack of attention, frequent absenteeism, fractious relationships with teachers and peers, disobeying teachers' instructions, and hyperactivity. The findings revealed that the students under study suffered medium-level behavioral problems. Essentially, behavioral problems were more prevalent among male students and those at the age of ten than 11 and 12 years old [19]. Similarly, scholars explored the behavioral problems suffered by primary cycle students and their link to some demographic factors such as gender and level of education [20]. The behavioral problem list for primary school students was applied to a systemically selected sample of 116 students. It was found that the subjects suffered mild behavioral problems, and there was a direct correlation between the gender and level of education of the students and the prevalence of behavioral problems among them.

Several other studies focused on the causes of behavioral problems. For example, the research found that psychological factors were among the leading causes of behavioral problems among primary school students: movement in the classroom, making loud noises, and speaking out of turn [21]. Another study aimed to identify the various forms of behavioral problems displayed by students from the point of view of 164 teachers. The study's findings indicated that the most common forms of

problematic behavior were verbal aggression (sarcasm, swearing, and shouting at others), vandalism, unruly behavior, and theft [22]. An attempt was also made to identify problematic behavior among primary school students from the point of view of 280 teachers in a study. It was found that the most common forms of inappropriate behavior were verbal, emotional, and aggression. It was also revealed that middle school students suffered these forms of behavior more often than students in other levels of schooling did [23]. In a similar study that involved 832 teachers, the following are identified as frequent manifestations of negative behavior: graffiti, speaking without permission, swearing, and kicking other students.

On the other hand, the least common forms of negative behavior were wandering around the classroom, calling other students, making disturbing noises, and using foul language. The study also found that the teachers employed social, psychological, and educational methods to deal with negative behavior. The teachers frequently ignored the misbehaving students, isolated or engaged them, used attractive teaching aids to attract their attention, and attempted to build interpersonal relationships. In addition, it was found that the teachers rarely resorted to joking, exploring the causes of the negative behavior, punishment, guidance, or cooperative learning [24].

Two leading schools of thought explain students' negative behavior from the literature reviewed. On the one hand, several scholars attribute undesirable behavior to natural causes: either instinctive or biological. On the other, some assert that negative behaviors are learned, and that modeling, reinforcement, observation, and imitation contribute to the display of undesirable behaviors. However, we believe that these two opposing theoretical explanations are complementary. This sentiment is because problematic behavior, like all other patterns of human behavior, is the product of the interaction of various psychobiological and environmental factors. That said, issues affecting school-aged children may be contextual, and generalization based on the existing literature may not help to understand and devise strategies to reduce behavioral problems fully. It is not a surprise that studies indicate the need for a regular examination of behavioral problems among young children to devise tailor-fit strategies for reducing them and strengthening children's wellbeing [2, 10]. And this explains why we undertook this research drawing on teachers' views as salient stakeholders in the educational processes of students in elementary and high schools.

3. Research problem and questions

This study aims to identify the behavioral problems among primary and secondary students in the Emirate of Sharjah and how to deal with them from the teachers' perspective. In this study, behavioral problems are defined as a group of adaptive behaviors viewed by the teachers as undesirable and find challenging to deal with. The current study aims to explore the extent to which these patterns of behavior are common among the students concerned and include academic problems, aggression, moral and behavioral problems, emotional problems, hyperactivity, impulsive behavior, and class interaction. These problems may disrupt students' education. In particular, this study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What behavioral problems do cycle one and two students in the Emirate of Sharjah exhibit from teachers' perspectives?
2. Are the teachers' perspectives of students' behavioral problems in the Emirate of Sharjah based on their demographic characteristics (gender, class taught, school type, and qualifications)?

4. Methodology

4.1. Method and instrument

This exploratory study was conducted using a survey method. We adopted the approach to seek an understanding of the behavioral issues

for students in cycles 1 and 2 in the Emirate of Sharjah. The approach was adopted to reach out to as many teachers as possible in cycles one and two in the Emirate of Sharjah's schools. The questionnaire used has three elements, and it was designed to identify the common patterns of problematic behavior among school students drawing on some publications and trustworthy tools [1, 14, 19].

To craft the questionnaire, we developed a working definition of problematic behavior. We clarified the various dimensions of its associated issues, which were then used to design the different articles of the scale to ensure coherence. The questionnaire includes 66 items under six sub-scales, i.e., unruly class interaction, impulsive behavior, hyperactivity, emotional problems, aggression, behavioral and moral problems, and academic problems. For participants to respond to the questions, they had options ranked 1 to 5, with five being highest and one being lowest in value.

4.2. Data collection procedure

To understand the teachers' views about school students' behavioral problems in the Emirate of Sharjah, we collected data for this research using a questionnaire sent to school teachers electronically and by research assistants who visited them at their schools. In completing the process, we followed the basic research ethical standards. For instance, we sought ethical clearance and approval from the Ministry of Education to reach out to and engage with school teachers in the Emirate during the fall semester of 2019/the 2020 session (pre-COVID 19 pandemics). Please see the research grant number in the funding section. We also informed the teachers that participation and completion of the questionnaire in the study indicate their consent for us to use the data collected for the research purpose alone. In addition, we did not mention their names or identify their schools in any parts of the report.

After the approval, the questionnaire was distributed electronically to the teachers through the Ministry of Education with 226 teachers responding to the questionnaire. An initial analysis of the demographic data indicates that most of those who responded are from the private schools. So, we administered the questionnaire manually to teachers in the public schools with the help of a research assistant. As parts of the ethical factors considered, the teachers were assured in the questionnaire written instructions that their responses would be treated confidentially and only used for the research purpose alone.

After the second round of the questionnaire administration process, the total response to the questionnaire is 378 with their demographics clarified in Table 1.

4.3. Validity, reliability, and trustworthiness

To ascertain the validity of the research instrument, we requested ten colleagues from the education and sociology departments at our university and experts from the Ministry of Education to review it. Based on their feedback, we amended the wording of some items and agreed on the language of the six primary subscales included. Also, the scale's construct

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to study variables (n = 378).

Variable	Variable Levels	Number
Gender	Male	117
	Female	261
School Cycle	Cycle One	284
	Cycle TwoMissing	859
Qualifications	Bachelor Degree	226
	Postgraduate DegreeMissing	12428
Type of School	State	158
	Private	220

validity was checked. Each item was closely linked to its assigned sub-scale significantly more than other subscales.

On the other hand, the reliability coefficient of the sub-scale and the overall scale were calculated using the Cronbach Alpha method. The internal consistency coefficients for the subscales ranged between 0.905 and 0.958 and for the scale as a whole 0.98, which reflects the degree of its trustworthiness. In addition, we read and revised the initial draft at different intervals, which lends credibility to the study.

4.4. Data analysis

We calculated the Means, standard deviations, and the relative importance (rank) of response on the scale that measures students' behavioral problems to answer the research questions. In addition, we conducted a T-test for two independent samples by using SPSS version 26 to determine whether some behavioral issues should be considered concerning by stakeholders in the school students' attitudes and education. We decided that any mean score of 3 on the critical scale or subscale should be considered more seriously as a significant issue. We also paid attention to figures close to 3, which could also impact students' behaviors and teachers' responses even though they may not be as severe as those classified as 3. We presented the findings in tables and discussed the mean scores of 3 and above, highlighting their implications for reducing the behavioral issues among school children.

5. Results

5.1. Research question 1

The first research question was 'what behavioral problems do cycle one and two students in the Emirate of Sharjah exhibit from teachers' perspectives? In answering this question, we calculated the statistical averages, standard deviations, the percentage, importance, and the rank of performance for each of the items that comprise the sub-scales of the scale of the behavioral problems, in addition to the overall performance on the sub-scales and the broad scale.

We calculated the Means, standard deviations, and the relative importance (rank) of response on the scale that measures students' behavioral problems to answer the research questions. In addition, we conducted a T-test for two independent samples by using SPSS version 26 to determine whether some behavioral issues should be considered concerning by stakeholders in the school students' attitudes and education. We determine that any mean score of 3 in the critical scale or subscale should be considered more seriously. We present the findings in tables and discuss the mean scores of 3 and above, highlighting their implications for reducing the behavioral issues among school children.

As shown in Table 2, the mean score (M) on each sub-scale ranged from 2.05 and 2.94. As these Mean scores were below 3.0, the findings suggest that the areas covered by these sub-scales did not pose severe behavioral problems in the research context's schools. However, the issues ranked 2.50 to 2.94 call for some attention of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and school leaders, given that mean scores are close to 3.0. In fostering understanding of the issues and also promote

Table 2. Participants' response on the 6 sub-scales of the behavioral problems scale.

Sub-scale	M	S.D	Rank
Class interaction	2.68	0.93	2
Impulsive behavior	2.94	0.87	1
Hyperactivity	2.54	0.98	3
Emotional problems	2.05	0.87	6
Aggression, and behavioral and moral problems	2.14	0.95	5
Academic problems	2.50	0.87	4

evidence-based practices, we meticulously analyzed the subscales one after the other and reported the findings below:

An analysis of the participants' response on each of the sub-scales revealed that the overall Mean score on the class interaction score was 2.68, which indicates that cycle one and two students in the Emirate of Sharjah did not have serious problems in this area. Most problematic items under this sub-scale ranked as follows in the highest to the lowest average score: students find it difficult to concentrate for an extended period (M = 3.12), students find it difficult to complete assigned work on time (M = 2.81), and students have low levels of motivation to learn (M = 2.77). On the other hand, the items that received lower scores were poor class participation (M = 2.48), students find it difficult to follow the lessons (M = 2.49), and students mostly feel unenergetic in class (M = 2.63).

On the impulsive behavior subscale, the Mean scores ranged between 2.53 and 3.49, with an overall Mean score of 2.93. This indicates a low tendency for students in this context to suffer from this type of behavioral problem. The data also shows that the highest-scoring item (students need the teachers' constant guidance and supervision) received a Mean score of 3.49. The second-ranked items were 'students rush to answer the teacher's questions and 'students do not wait for their turns to answer questions' with a Mean score of 3.08 each. Another problematic area under this sub-scale 'consistently complaining about their classmates' (M = 3.02, rank = 4). In contrast, the following areas ranked low on this subscale: students annoy their classmates (M = 2.53), students display a selfish behavior (M = 2.62, rank = 8), and students do not regularly complete assigned tasks (M = 2.62, rank = 7).

For the hyperactivity subscale, the mean scores range from 2.29 to 2.68 with an overall Mean score of 2.55, which indicates that the target students did not suffer from this problem. The item that ranked first under this subscale was 'students ask to go to the toilet when they do not need to' with a Mean score of 2.86, followed by 'students seem fidgety in class' (M = 2.71, and 'students are 'impatient' (M = 2.67). The lowest ranking item was 'students tend to move items and drop them' (M = 2.29), followed by 'students usually wander around the classroom' (M = 2.32), and 'students display signs of anxiety and worry' (M = 2.36).

Moreover, the analysis revealed that Mean scores on the emotional problems sub-scales ranged from 1.75 to 2.40 with an overall Mean of 2.05, which indicates that this is not a very common problem among the target student population. The most common problem in this area was that students seemed oversensitive with a Mean of 2.40, followed by that they felt inferior compared to their peers (Mean = 2.13), and they displayed poor personal hygiene (M = 2.09). The least common issues were 'many students sometimes practice finger sucking, nail biting, and lip biting' (M = 1.75), 'students often feel they are failing academically' (M = 1.96), and 'easily feel guilty for minor infractions' (Mean = 1.79).

The data showed that the Mean scores on items listed under the aggression and behavioral and moral problems subscales range from 1.53 to 2.80, with an overall Mean score of 2.19. This indicates that this was not a very common problem among cycle one and two students in Sharjah. Based on the analysis, the most common problem was that 'students tend to speak loudly when talking to their peers' (M = 2.80), followed by 'students tend to use illogical arguments when discussing any issue with their classmates' (M = 2.39), and 'use foul language' (M = 2.35). In comparison, the least common problems were 'students' interaction with their teachers is characterized by aggression' (M = 1.88), followed by 'students tend to clap their hands in class to annoy others' (M = 1.85).

As for the academic problems' subscale, the Mean scores ranged from 1.66 to 2.95 with an overall average score of 2.52, which is a low score. However, the following items ranked the highest in the subscale: 'poor parental supervision of the student's academic progress (M = 2.95), 'some of the students in class are slow learners' (M = 2.83), and 'students neglect their homework' (average = 2.80). In comparison, the following items ranked the lowest: 'students drop out of school' (M = 1.66), 'usually

fail exams' (M = 2.11, rank = 11), and 'inconsistent parental supervision at home and outside.'

Drawing on the above, it is clear that educators and other stakeholders like parents need to intensify efforts in ensuring that students are adequately supported, motivated, and guided. Doing this will suggest that the likely problems are not underestimated, reduce the possible impacts of the behavioral problems and enhance collaborative learning engagement with respect for one another considered by the students. In the subsequent portion, we present the findings related to the second research question.

5.2. Research question 2

The second research question is, Are the teachers' perspectives of students' behavioral problems in the Emirate of Sharjah based on their demographic characteristics (gender, class taught, school type, and qualifications)? To answer the second research question, we calculated the statistical averages, standard deviations, percentage, importance, and the rank of responses for each item concerning the teachers' demographic characteristics. The results are shown in the following four tables.

As shown in Table 3, there are statistically significant differences between the participants' responses to each of the sub-scales and the overall scale according to their gender. The T Values were found to be 4.10, 3.75, 4.42, 3.32, 6.14, 5.71, and 5.70, which are statistically significant at (α = 0.05). In general, the data indicate male teachers appeared to feel that students in their schools displayed undesirable behavior more than their female counterparts.

Table 4 shows how the teachers' responses on the scale of the behavioral problems and each of its sub-scales varied according to the school cycle they taught. As the data indicate, there are statistically significant differences between the responses of teachers of cycle one and cycle two as the T Values on each of the sub-scales and the Total scale were -4.63, -4.89, -3.76, -2.82, -6.02, -5.69, and -5.46 respectively; all statistically significant values at (α = 0.05). Overall, cycle two teachers believed behavioral problems were more common among their students than cycle one teachers.

As Table 5 revealed, there are statistically significant differences between teachers' responses on both the subscales and the overall scale according to the type of school they worked in (state or private), where the T Values were 7.22, 8.28, 7.08, 5.06, 8.70, 8.37, and 8.85 respectively; all statistically significant values at (α = 0.05). In this sense, the results indicate that teachers in state schools reported behavioral problems among their students more than their counterparts who worked in

Table 3. Teachers' response to the behavioral problems scale according to their gender.

Sub-scale	Gender	N	M	S.D	T Value	df	P
Class Interaction	Male	117	3.03	0.89	4.10	376	0.00
	Female	261	2.52	0.91			
Impulsive Behavior	Male	117	3.19	0.79	3.75	376	0.00
	Female	261	2.83	0.88			
Hyperactivity	Male	117	2.87	0.10	4.42	376	0.00
	Female	261	2.40	0.94			
Emotional Problems	Male	117	2.25	0.81	3.32	376	0.00
	Female	261	1.97	0.76			
Aggression, Behavioral and Moral Problems	Male	117	2.60	1.04	6.14	186.348	0.00
	Female	259	1.93	0.83			
Academic problems	Male	117	2.87	0.85	5.71	375	0.00
	Female	260	2.34	0.83			
Total	Male	117	2.79	0.79	5.70	376	0.00
	Female	261	2.31	0.75			

Table 4. Teachers' response to the behavioral problems scale according to school cycle.

Sub-scale	School level	N	M	S.D	T Value	df	P
Class Interaction	Cycle 1	284	2.57	0.92	-4.63	367	0.00
	Cycle 2	85	3.09	0.87			
Impulsive Behavior	Cycle 1	284	2.83	0.86	-4.89	367	0.00
	Cycle 2	85	3.34	0.77			
hyperactivity	Cycle 1	284	2.45	0.97	-3.76	367	0.00
	Cycle 2	85	2.90	0.92			
Emotional Problems	Cycle 1	284	1.10	0.77	-2.82	367	0.00
	Cycle 2	85	2.26	0.77			
Aggression, and Behavioral and Moral Problems	Cycle 1	283	1.98	0.89	-6.02	365	0.00
	Cycle 2	85	2.66	0.94			
Academic problems	Cycle 1	283	2.37	0.85	-5.69	366	0.00
	Cycle 2	85	2.95	0.78			
Total	Cycle 1	284	2.35	0.78	-5.46	367	0.00
	Cycle 2	85	2.86	0.71			

private schools. This finding may be connected to the fact that the private schools may have been putting some disciplinary measures in place to ensure that students' behaviors are encouraging. This may be important to them as they need to keep their clients happy if they need more students in their schools to stay in business. On the other hand, the state schools do not need to be concerned about student numbers as the government fully funds them. That notwithstanding, the result has implications for school leaders and ministry officials. The need to ensure that all students conform and stay away from any form of behavioral problems is essential irrespective of their school type.

Table 6 illustrates teachers' responses to items included in each of the sub-scales of the behavioral problems scale according to their educational qualifications. From the data, it is clear that there are no statistically significant differences between the two groups of teachers as the T Values were 1.19, 1.54, 1.84, 0.97, 1.11, 1.71, and 1.60 respectively which are not statistically significant values at (α = 0.05).

Based on the findings reported above, the demographic characteristics of teachers in the Emirate of Sharjah impact their take on students' behavioral problems in the Emirate even if not in all ramifications. Thus, stakeholders need to have a good understanding of the students' behavioral issues considering teachers' demographics for effective

Table 5. Teachers' performance to the behavioral problems scale according to the type of school.

Sub-scale	Type of School	N	Mean	S.D	T Value	df	P
Class Interaction	State	158	3.06	0.84	7.22	376	0.00
	Private	220	2.40	0.90			
Impulsive Behavior	State	158	3.34	0.76	8.28	376	0.00
	Private	220	2.65	0.83			
Hyperactivity	State	158	2.94	0.90	7.08	376	0.00
	Private	220	2.26	0.94			
Emotional Problems	State	158	2.29	0.80	5.06	315.93	0.00
	Private	220	1.88	0.72			
Aggression, and Behavioral and Moral Problems	State	156	2.61	0.93	8.70	305.788	0.00
	Private	220	1.80	0.82			
Academic problems	State	157	2.91	0.79	8.37	375	0.00
	Private	220	2.21	0.81			
Total	State	158	2.85	0.71	8.85	376	0.00
	Private	220	2.18	0.74			

Table 6. Teachers' response to the behavioral problems scale according to their educational qualifications.

Sub-scale	Qualification	N	M	S.D	T Value	df	P
Class Interaction	B.Ed.	226	2.68	0.88	1.19	348	0.00
	Postgraduate	124	2.56	0.97			
Impulsive Behavior	B.Ed.	226	2.96	0.87	1.54	348	0.00
	Postgraduate	124	2.82	0.85			
Hyperactivity	B.Ed.	226	2.58	0.95	1.84	348	0.00
	Postgraduate	124	2.38	0.97			
Emotional Problems	B.Ed.	226	2.06	0.76	0.97	348	0.00
	Postgraduate	124	1.98	0.77			
Aggression, and Behavioral and Moral Problems	B.Ed.	225	2.16	0.93	1.11	346	0.00
	Postgraduate	123	2.04	0.95			
Academic problems	B.Ed.	226	2.53	0.83	1.71	347	0.00
	Postgraduate	123	2.37	0.90			
Total	B.Ed.	226	2.48	0.77	1.60	348	0.00
	Postgraduate	124	2.34	0.80			

planning and implementations to enhance pedagogical practices while students' behavioral issues are reduced.

6. Discussion

In this section, we discuss our findings in line with the research questions. So, for the first research question, we sought to understand the kind and magnitude of behavioral problems among school children in the Emirate of Sharjah in the UAE. The findings suggest non-prominent concerning behavioral issues among the school children in this context as all critical scales' mean scores are less than 3. Perhaps, this could suggest that the school children are well catered for by their parents and teachers are doing their best to ensure a safe learning environment for the pupils. As understood, home and parental guidance help children to develop normative and acceptable behaviors through a socialization process. That said, issues like hyperactivity, impulsive behavior, and unruly class interaction ranging from 2.50 to 2.94 need to be taken seriously by teachers and other stakeholders involved in the school children's education. This is essential; as earlier mentioned, if behavioral issues are not mitigated on time, it could lead to a more severe problem with catastrophic impacts. These issues may also be experienced due to inadequate guidance and insufficient knowledge to manage the behavioral problems among students by inexperienced or novice teachers and possibly young and inexperienced parents. It is also not a surprise that a further thorough analysis of the subscales of each significant scale indicates the need for attention to be paid in some spheres of students' behavioral attitudes. For instance, we found that students could find it challenging to concentrate for an extended period complete assigned work on time, and some are less motivated to learn in the class interaction spectrum. This finding reinforces the sentiment that some behavioral problems could result from teachers not having enough experience and skills to motivate students and personalize their learning experiences based on their personalities and needs. Judging from these findings, it is apparent that most of the students are intrinsically motivated, participated, and engaged in-class lessons. However, a few did not feel motivated or unenergetic to complete some tasks on time. The challenging aspects of the results align with previous studies problems common to children at this stage include shorter attention spans, difficulty concentrating and following instructions, boredom, and inability to complete assigned tasks [25, 26]. The findings, therefore, underscore the need for teachers to devise different strategies for stimulating students' interest and concentration in-class activities for a reasonably long period in their classes. It is also essential for parents to complement teachers' efforts in instilling values for developing positive attitudes into their wards and

reinforcing them to abstain from behaviors that can negatively impact them or their peers.

Additionally, teachers need to work with parents to ensure that students are regularly reminded to complete their assigned tasks on time in school or at home. This approach is essential as the literature indicates parents and caregivers easily detect behavioral issues, and therefore collaboration between schools and parents is indispensable [7]. Other scholars also found a connection between home activities, such as waking up time due to school start period and students' behavioral issues [8], and sleep disturbance and behavioral issues with school children [27]. So, teachers need to plan meaningful and authentic activities to motivate students to engage and learn from them with the active involvement of parents in supervisory roles for their wards. Perhaps, this explains why the highest score in impulsive behavior is that students need constant guidance and supervision in the impulsive behavior scale. In addition, we found students rushing to respond to teachers' questions, not waiting for their turns to answer questions, and always complaining about their classmates on the same scale. The data indicate that these students suffer from impulsive behavior. This can be attributed to the fact that children are generally overactive at this stage and try to assert themselves, copy others, and draw attention to themselves. In addition, this may result from social isolation, inadequate group activities in the school, or the inaccurate application of educational best practices in the classroom by teachers and adequate parental guidance. Not surprisingly, the literature suggests that the issues could be informed by upbringing style, parental neglect and emotional deprivation [11, 26], and feelings of depression [28, 29]. Thus, teachers need to strategize on the modalities for reducing the possible behavioral problems, including working with other stakeholders such as parents, school leaders, and classroom assistants. Also worthy of teachers' consideration to reduce behavioral problems among school children is well-thought-out and implemented extra-curricular activities for a reasonable timeframe [12]. Besides, teachers need to constantly provide clear guidelines [30] and remind students that the class is a safe learning space, and they should feel free to ask them for help at any time [31]. In addition to saying this, teachers need to demonstrate compassion by asking students how they feel and reassuring them of their support on any issues or concerns. For this to be done effectively, teachers and parents may need some short training on reducing violence, which may be orchestrated by problematic behaviors among school children [32].

In determining whether we can explain school children's behavioral problems in terms of the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study. We found a significant difference in the participants' responses based on gender, drawing on the analyzed data. Specifically, the male teachers expressed concerns more than their female counterparts. In a previous study, gender was reported as impacting behavioral problems among school children [14]. As for this study, this finding can be attributed to the intuitive, caring nature of the female teachers than their male counterparts being mothers. Based on this sentiment, the female teachers may easily detect and understand students' behavioral problems, hence finding it easier to deal with them than male colleagues. Perhaps, this explains why a few students exhibited behavioral issues, as earlier reported. With this sentiment in mind, male teachers may need more support in dealing with school children's behavioral problems. For this to happen effectively, they will need to indicate their willingness to attend professional development programs honestly. They also need to be supported by their school leadership, who may need to provide incentives for them to take development activities seriously, including funding, being freed from official duties, and providing teaching aids. Similarly, our findings reveal a significant difference in teachers' perceptions in cycle1 and cycle 2 in relation to students' behavioral problems. As the data indicate, the more mature students in grades 5–8 seem to have more behavioral issues than their counterparts who are much younger and are in grades 1–4. In alignment with this result, it was reported that behavioral problems are more prevalent among male students around age ten [13], falling in cycle 2 in this study. This finding may be unconnected

with students in cycle one more young, still understanding the school systems and easily controlled. Therefore, it could be fair to suggest that teachers in cycle two may need more training and support on managing challenging behaviors among school children. This finding correlates with the previous one related to the need for teachers to get assisted with professional development training to develop novel strategies for dealing with behavioral issues and promoting students' learning.

In the same vein, we found a significant difference in teachers' take on students' behavioral issues based on the type of school they teach. Essentially, the findings suggest that teachers in public schools expressed more concerns than their colleagues in private schools. Consistent with this result, the literature indicates that private schools are safer and have low behavioral problems among school children compared to their counterparts in public schools [9]. In our view, this finding may be connected to the fact that the private schools may have been putting some disciplinary measures in place to ensure that students' behaviors are encouraging. This may be important to them as they need to keep their clients happy if they need more students in their schools to stay in business. On the other hand, the state schools do not need to be concerned about student numbers as the government fully funds them. That notwithstanding, the result has implications for parents, school leaders and ministry officials. The need to ensure that all students conform and stay away from any form of behavioral problems is essential [1], irrespective of their school type. However, the data indicate no significant difference in teachers' perceptions of behavioral problems among school children based on their educational qualifications. This means that both groups of teachers hold the same views regarding the behavioral issues that their students experience. As such, teachers' academic qualifications do not impact thinking about students' behavioral problems, which needs to be considered when planning training programs for teachers. In this sense, it does not matter what educational qualifications teachers in the Emirate of Sharjah possess. They all need to be supported equally and provided with relevant resources to manage students' behaviors in their various schools. These include collaboration with other professionals, such as counselors and school health practitioners [4].

7. Conclusion and implications

In this study, we explored the behavioral problems among school students from teachers' perspectives. We contend that having knowledge about the issues has not been more critical given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' psyche well-documented in the literature. Our findings indicate no significant concerns on the critical scale measured in the study, such as class interaction, hyperactivity, and academic problems. However, further analyses of the subscales of each essential scale suggest the need for proactive attention to be considered by stakeholders to nip some issues before getting escalated. Thus, our study has implications for stakeholders, such as school leaders, teachers, and parents. For instance, school leaders need to constantly work with teachers to evaluate students' behavioral states and challenges to determine how to support them using an evidence-based approach. They also need to allow and encourage the establishment of the community of practice groups across the different spectrum in schools, e.g., women, men, cycle one teachers, cycle two teachers, and field of specialization/interest. Ministry of Education and school leaders should also provide in-house training or support teachers to attend external training programs.

On their part, teachers should constantly devise strategies for encouraging students' motivation and engagement using the community of practice models where experiences are shared. They need to involve parents in coordinating students' academic activities and development plans for strengthening their moral values. They should consider using extracurricular activities and gamification mapped to learning objectives. Additionally, they should regularly attend professional development events on strategies for regularly managing students' behaviors.

Besides, parents will need to volunteer time to work with children at home and some time in schools through collaboratively designed

activities and enroll children in extracurricular activities, including sporting activities and drama. They should also engage children in community-focused endeavors to enhance their knowledge of communal values and empathy for one another.

With the points above being considered by the salient stakeholders mentioned, we contend that behavioral issues among students can be mitigated and their learning and well-being enhanced. That said, we acknowledge that drawing on the number of teachers' sampled lenses alone without exploring reasons for their responses through a qualitative means and reporting based on quantitative data are limitations to the study. As a result, the findings cannot be generalized to the larger UAE population. Future studies may consider larger sample sizes and inter-Emirate contexts using a mixed-methods approach. Students' perspectives may also be considered in future studies and other stakeholders, including parents and school leaders, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Bushra Alakashee; Fakir Al Gharaibeh; Abdalla El-Mneizel: Conceived and designed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Performed the experiments; Analyzed and interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials, analysis tools or data; Wrote the paper.

Semiyu Aderibigbe: Interpreted the data; Contributed reagents, materials; Wrote part of the literature review for the paper.

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The authors do not have permission to share data.

Declaration of interest's statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Additional information

No additional information is available for this paper.

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