# Pupil's Individual Behavior and Its Impact on Classroom Management

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**Abstract**

Various social changes have influenced family and school, these two important institutions, reducing in this way the efficacy of the strategies implemented by teachers in achieving a successful management of the classroom. This is the reason why conducting research on *individual's behavior* is being paid more attention recently, as a key element but also as a possible strategy which would guarantee efficacy during the lesson. The purpose of this research is pointing out and highlighting some of the factors that cause problematic behaviors, the theoretical approaches that treat person's behavior and its influence, as well as the discussion of strategies implemented by teachers in reducing disruptive behaviors of the pupils. Considering pupils as unique individuals, characterized by unique behavioral patterns requiring featured classroom strategies could lead to classroom management success as well as higher pupils' school progress.

**Keywords:** pupil's individual behavior, classroom management

## Introduction

Lack of respect, disagreements, bullying, use of indecent vocabulary, lesson abandonment, lack of motivation, etc. constitute some of the most typical forms of undesirable behaviors reflected by pupils which considerably influence not only the process of classroom management but also the efficacy in the achievement of high results during the teaching process.

Problematic behaviors inside the school environment are not a new, unprecedented phenomenon. However, it is to be highlighted that the frequency of the occurrence of such behaviors, and their complexity has been increasingly requiring attention over the last years by the educational institutions. A great variety of social changes reflected in our schools and families have dramatically decreased the efficacy of the managing strategies implemented by the teachers during the teaching process. In most of the cases, educators try to address and solve undesirable instantaneous behaviors of the pupils, without reflecting over the reasons that lead to such pupils' reactions.

Pupil's behavior, or the individual's one, a key element that highly influences the teaching process, and the classroom management constitute an essential stimulus in writing this paper.

## Methodology

The writing and preparation of this paper has been based on the consultation of different resources, mainly in English language. There have been considered not only different scientific

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theoretical materials but there have also been used the results of the observations conducted in different classes of the 9th grade system school, as well as the results of the student-teachers' observations during their 5-week teaching practice at Master level studies. The paper has been focused only on the 9th grade system schools (pupils belonging to ages 10-15 years old) and not secondary ones (students aged 15-18 years old), in order to avoid misconceptions of pupils' behavioral impact on classroom management between these two age groups, since they do reflect a variety of fundamental behavioral differences. Teachers' opinions over this topic have been of great support in the realization of this paper too.

## Defining the term "Behavior"

What does "*behavior*" mean? Why do educators or teachers stick so much on this element considering it as a key feature of the teaching process that highly influences classroom management? How important is managing disruptive behaviors among pupils in the classroom in increasing teaching efficacy? Can pupil's behavior be considered as a regulator or stabilizer of the classroom climate encouraging a positive pupil-pupil or pupil-teacher interaction? Providing answer to these questions as well as others too, it is worth continuing this topic by first citing a definition on the word "*behavior*" mentioned by Bardhyl Musai (2003) in his book *Metodologji e Mësimdhënies* (Teaching Methodology):

"The word "*behavior*" is accompanied by the word objective, and consequently pupil's learning is defined as a change of continuous behavior." (Musaj, 2003, p.35). The reason in citing this sentence as a definition of the term "behavior" focuses exactly on the use of the three words included in it: "*objective*", "*change*", and "*continuous*". According to this definition, pupil's behavior is described as an objective reaction, a visually measurable change of attitude easily perceived and observed by the teacher which directly influences classroom climate and environment. It is precisely the observation of these pupils' behavioral demonstration that enables the gathering and generation of concrete data from the teachers. The results of these data contribute in reviewing the pros and cons of the teaching process and classroom management, as well as the establishment of classroom discipline.

In our society there are present two different contradictory views regarding the management of the individuals' undesirable behaviors. On one side there are specialists who study children's general development, who categorically oppose the use of physical punishment as a preventive means of disruptive attitudes, and the problems derived from them. What these experts recommend is discipline achieved through close cooperation between teachers and pupils, or parents and children through explanation and positive attitude reinforcement instead of verbal intimidation or application of physical punishment.

On the other side, there are few educators and parents who consider the use of physical punishment as the only manner in controlling and stabilizing children and pupils' problematic attitudes.

Therefore, the purpose is prevention of these disruptive behaviors, their positive transformation through what is known otherwise as "*assertive discipline*" (Zajazi, T. 2003, p.634). Assertive discipline, or otherwise known as behavioral firm control, is closely connected to a set of techniques educators, teachers or even parents use in order to prevent or correct pupils' undesirable reactions reflected in the school environment. However, what needs to be stressed is that the application of such techniques over individual's behavior modification does not always guarantee immediate positive results. Efforts by teachers and

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parents need to be continuous until a well-managed classroom environment is achieved which would not harm the teaching process.

## Factors that influence pupils' disruptive behaviors

In educational institutions, teachers as well as other school staff need to be aware of the factors that encourage pupils' problematic attitudes. Therefore, identification of these factors could serve as an initial crucial step towards the prevention of such behaviors inside the classroom or in other environments within the school.

Problematic behaviors can be caused by a number of reasons. Consciously or unconsciously most of us do attach the reasons of such attitudes to the family environment of the pupils, peers, media violence as well as many other factors beyond the teachers' activity spectrum in the classroom (Karaj, Th., (nd), p.1-2) But, it is to be highlighted that there are also factors directly related to the classroom activity, which can be treated or intervened by the teachers in collaboration with the school leaders too. Factors of these undesirable behaviors can be generally classified into six different groups (Flicker, E. & Hoffman, J.,2006, p.12-13):

*Emotional factors* (temperament, anxiety, fears, boredom, need for attention and care, low self-esteem, etc.)

*Family* (divorce, drug abuses, family violence, etc.)

*School* (overcrowded classrooms, noises, violent games, lack of clear instructions and rules in the classroom, etc.)

*Physical factors* (malnutrition, tiredness, hunger, illnesses, pains, etc.)

*Learning difficulties* (sometimes depending on the character of the pupils, etc.)

*Community factors* (peers' influence, poverty, media violence and community violence, etc.)

All this range of factors are present in our schools and the environment that surrounds us, considerably influencing the occurrence and frequency of the pupils' improper reactions. Consideration of the above mentioned factors, regarding individual general development too, constitutes an essential step towards the creation of a positive and supporting classroom climate for the pupils, avoiding to some extent the variety of difficulties teachers encounter with. Furthermore, a cooperative relationship between parents and teachers would consolidate a sustainable linking bridge between home and school, whose result would be children's successful educational background.

## Theoretical approaches on Individual's behavior and its impact

The famous researcher William Glasser (Tauber, R. 2007, p. 171-175 ) has broadly treated the concept of individual behavior. The theory elaborated by him is known otherwise as the *Reality Theory*.

"According to him, acting and behaving in a particular manner in a given situation, assessing the positive and negative sides of that attitude is fundamental and considerably influences the behavior of each of us." (Glasser, W. "Reality Therapy, n.d.) Connecting this theory with the teaching process, more precisely with the classroom management, it is to be mentioned that teachers need to encourage pupils to assess and judge their behavioral reflections in order to be able to distinguish acceptable behaviors from unacceptable ones.

For example those pupils, who reflect aggressive reactions in the classroom, they often damage classroom materials, cause conflicts among their peers, etc. Motivation and encouragement of this group of pupils in judging and reflecting over the negative and positive aspects of their attitudes offers them the possibility of making the right choices. Therefore, encouraging pupils to think in this way, by criticizing their wrong actions and stimulating or rewarding their proper behaviors whenever they occur, can undoubtedly help in minimizing problems or troubles in the classroom triggered by pupils themselves.

Besides William Glasser's research on the topic, it is to be emphasized that studies conducted by Abraham Maslow too on individual's needs have significantly contributed upon the teaching process as well as the classroom management too.

Fig. 1 Maslow's Needs Hierarchy (Retrieved from:



https://medium.com/@jnnielsen/inverting-maslows-hierarchy-b2c32156f091)
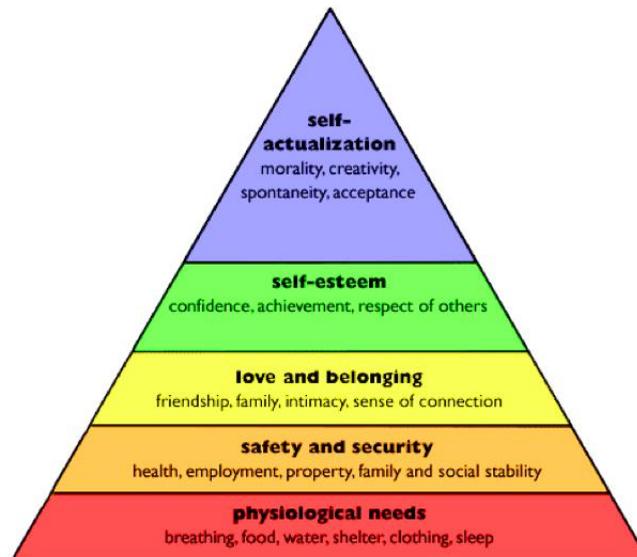
Individual's Needs Hierarchy consisting of needs ranked according to their importance (starting from biological or physical needs up to self-actualization), and the fulfillment of these needs highly influences pupils' behaviors. The more fulfilled or completed these needs are, the lower will problems be for the teachers and pupils during the teaching process; the easier will the prevention and elimination of improper behaviors be; and the easier will the achievement of a well-managed classroom be during the teaching process.

The first category of the above needs' hierarchy diagram, biological and physiological needs which constitute the bottom of the pyramid, are crucial since their fulfillment is fundamental not only inside the school environment but even outside it. The fulfillment of pupils' biological needs can be explained through pupils' feeding need during the 20-minute break after the third hour finishes. When the fulfillment of this need fails, which biologically guarantees the well-functioning of their physical body, pupils are not likely to be concentrated during the teaching process, consequently there is a higher probability that they cause improper behaviors for the teachers and their peers.

The second category of the needs' hierarchy consists of safety and security needs. Inside the classroom pupils need to feel secure, and not frightened or threatened. Teachers by realizing a well-managed classroom, they can offer pupils security and safety. The more fulfilled these two basic needs are, the fewer will disciplinary problems be for both teachers and pupils.

People are human species, consequently they require warmth, closeness, love in order to feel good in a particular environment. When pupils feel their teacher's care and attention, it means they have fulfilled the next hierarchical need of the pyramid, that of love and belonging. When the first three hierarchical needs of the pyramid are realized, the fourth one that of self-esteem may become dominant or obvious in pupils' character. Pupils will believe in themselves, they will believe in their skills and abilities, serving as an encouragement for further achievements in their life. The opposite is likely to happen when their self-esteem is low, they are going to experience an inferiority feeling, they are going to feel week, worthless, etc., influencing negatively in their attitudes versus their peers.

Finally, at the top of Maslow's pyramid stands self-actualization need, which naturally comes as a result of the realization of the other needs of this hierarchy. Hence, Maslow reinforces the necessity of fulfilling these individual's needs, since they directly and undoubtedly influence the individual behavior of each of us.

## Strategies used by the teachers in reducing pupils' problematic behaviors in the classroom

As mentioned above, the factors that lead to the occurrence of pupils' problematic behaviors are numerous. What needs to be highlighted is that teachers need to take into consideration a variety of elements before deciding upon the application of a specific strategy that would encourage the reduction of undesirable behaviors. It is essential that they consider pupils' age, their background, their family, financial situation of their families, parents and friends' educational background, pupil's individual temperament, etc. All these elements together seem to frame what is known in Applied Linguistics as "*the context*", (Miller, B. 2003, p.55) whose role is essential when it comes to the selection of the appropriate strategy in tackling with improper behaviors.

But what kind of strategies do teachers apply in order to reduce the problematic reactions of the pupils?

How effective are these strategies in avoiding them and creating a favorable climate in the classroom?

Does the same strategy work in the same way with the same age groups?

Is there an immediate positive reaction after the implementation of a particular strategy?

These and many other questions come naturally when it comes to the selection and application of various techniques which can be used aiming at reducing problematic reactions of the pupils. Teachers/ educators have the power to change the situation in the classroom in their favour, avoiding the use of physical or verbal punishment, considered to be as one of the most traditional behavioral control technique. It is to be emphasized that, verbally or physically punished pupils do have the tendency to respond rudely / impolitely not only versus their peers but also versus their parents and teachers. Instead of punishments teachers may encourage discussions and cooperation as a positive manner in increasing teacher-pupil

partnership. Observations have shown that when educators use this strategy with the most problematic group ages, such as the 7th, 8th , and 9th grade, the results have been promising.

The above mentioned list of factors influencing the frequency of improper behaviors,  also includes the *school factor*, which incorporates the establishment of clear instructions and rules that pupils need to follow. Sometimes, not compiling and presenting clear instructions to the pupils by the teachers or the school leadership can trigger various behavioral problems in the school or classroom environment. The clearer the school or classroom regulation is for the pupils, the lower will the frequency of improper behaviors reflected during the teaching process be (Cook, 2003, p.49-50)

Teachers' interviews have shown that an efficient way concerning this element is also setting and using Classroom Contracts/ Regulations, besides overall school ones which consist of general basic rules pupils have to obey or respect inside the educational institution.

Managing pupils' failures by helping them increase their self-confidence constitutes a positive way in avoiding undesirable behaviors too. Classroom diversity implies not only diverse pupils' backgrounds but also diversity in their learning skills/abilities. In cases when teachers apply *differentiated instruction*, they take into consideration the abilities and skills of each pupil, encouraging each of them. Otherwise pupils' failures, as well as the non-appropriate selection of techniques by the teachers might become a reason for encouraging instead of reducing these types of attitudes in the classroom.

In spite of the above mentioned strategies, there exist other techniques which can be implemented by teachers in order to avoid or reduce undesirable attitudes inside the school environment such as:

continuous participation and motivation of pupils,

assessment of pupils' achievements even when they are not frequent,

increasing cooperation between teachers and parents,

encouraging positive social behaviors inside the classroom environment, etc.

In the broad range of such strategies, teachers can select the most appropriate ones for their pupils, considering different elements such as the ones mentioned above. What is essential is the selection of a particular strategy whose result would be positive and effective during the teaching process.

**Conclusions**

This paper focuses on the treatment of individual behavior as a key feature in the achievement of a favorable climate during the teaching process, in order to guarantee a successful classroom management. Pupil's reactions, the frequency of pupils' improper attitudes, etc. constitute one of the challenges teachers encounter with nowadays. This paper presents a general picture of this topic starting with the definitions provided to the term "behavior", factors that influence the frequency of pupils' undesirable attitudes inside the classroom, finalizing with the strategies used by teachers in reducing them.

 Furthermore, the paper also discusses the approaches of two famous researchers W. Glasser and A. Maslow over this issue, providing assistance for teachers and parents in dealing with such challenges. Teachers and parents both struggle in attempting to reduce to some extent

these pupils' challenging behaviors, which often harm the teaching process and negatively influence pupils' academic achievements. However, frequent societal changes, as well as the surrounding environment outside the educational institutions are factors to be highly considered when talking about the frequency of such problematic behaviors.

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