# Exploration of factors influencing teachers' responses to student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary education

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#### ABSTRACT

This study examines teachers> responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary schools. The study was guided by two research questions that explored the disciplinary strategies teachers use and how these strategies influence student behaviour. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was employed, collecting data from 141 secondary school teachers through online questionnaires. These participants were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different school settings. The findings indicate variability in teachers> intervention methods, with reinforcement emerging as the most used strategy. These results highlight the need for teacher training programs that emphasize effective classroom management techniques. Additionally, the study suggests policy-level interventions to support evidence-based discipline strategies in Maldivian schools. Further research with a larger sample size is recommended to gain deeper insights into the effectiveness of various disciplinary approaches.

**Keywords:** behvaiour management styles, secondary schools, students, student misbehaviours, teachers

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of students> misbehaviour in the classroom has raised concerns among main stakeholders in the education sector around the world (Mwaniki, 2018). One of the most difficult tasks that teachers have to cope with, is managing students behaviour in the classroom (Caner & Tertemiz, 2015). Although differences exist between societies, student misbehaviour has always existed in all teaching processes, in all levels of schooling (Mahvar et al., 2018; Mehmet, 2015). These behaviours occur regularly making it difficult for teachers to manage; hence. teachers employ strategies to deal with such ineffective behaviours (Sullivan et al., 2014). However, there is immense evidence that teachers> perceptions of learner>s behaviour can impact teachers' responses especillay to those misbehaving learners (Malak

et al., 2018). The findings also provide strong evidence that most of the misbehaviour in the classroom is environment-specific phenomena (Malak, 2019), which occur regularly (Karaj, 2012), and due to factors associated with schools (Ibrahim, 2017). According to researchers, students> misbehaviour has been correlated to teachers) emotional exhaustion and decreased work passion (Aldrup et al., 2018), teachers' mental exhaustion and stress (Aloe et al., 2014; Hanson, 2013), teachers> infuriation (Hagenauer et al., 2015), and determinants of teachers> well-being (Karaj, 2012). Misbehaviour among students is becoming more diverse and serious and it is deemed important to investigate how teachers respond to students> behaviour in the classroom (Sueb et al., 2020).

Students' misbehaviour has been described in the literature using variety of terms. As an example, actions that denigrates others, infringe classroom laws, or else conflicting with societal rules or, legitimate rules is known as misbehaviour in school (Charles, 2014). Misbehaviour refers to any behaviour that is off task in a classroom enough to distract the teacher or classmates from the task (Nash et al., 2016). Misbehaviour is defined as any activity that prevents students from learning (Onasanya, 2020). According to (Menikdiwela, 2020) there is no precise definition of students' misbehaviour. The ability of the teachers to effectively control the school environment is one of the most important factor that leads to meaningful and effective learning (Korb et al., 2016). Misbehaviour by students reduces the success of teaching and learning mechanisms as well as causing disruption in the classroom (Menikdiwela, 2020). This issue continues to be a source of concern for both new and experienced teachers, as well as to the school staff (Tarman, 2016). Misbehaviour of students can be addressed through the teacher's preparedness, stimulating students, having an affirmative learning ambience, boosting students> self-esteem, and being inventive and innovative in everyday lessons (Chandra, 2015).

When attempting to investigate students> misbehaviour, it is critical to first identify the source of the problem (Mwaniki, 2018). Misbehaviour in the classroom can be viewed as a sign of a crisis in the teaching process (Oliveira & Graça, 2013). The leading reasons of misbehaviour in schools include lack of parental care, peer influences, lack of consistency in punishments measures in schools, drug abuse and colloquial speaking (Mwaniki, 2018). Disciplinary problems in schools are also caused by the unclear boundaries, therefore, before they>re violated teachers must inform students clearly and specifically about school rules, and boundaries (Gyan, 2015). There is no specific method to educating children because each child is unique and may necessitate a different level

of attention (Tarman, 2016). To comprehend misbehaviour and teachers> responses to it, one must investigate teacher's attributions or beliefs about the causes of misbehaviour (Kulinna, 2008).

The previous findings showed teachers used various strategies to respond to students' misbehaviour. There are variations in the recommended strategies. E.g. two styles by (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Marciniak, 2015), three styles (Kyriacou, 1980; Lewis et al., 2011), four styles (Latack & Havlovic, 1992), and six styles (Ningsih et al., 2019). Generally building and implementing rules in a school environment in order to enhance learning opportunities is a huge challenge for teachers (Caner & Tertemiz, 2015). Teachers> classroom management strategies play an important role in an learning progress of children, success in life, healthy education process, and children gaining essential skills (Mehmet, 2015). Although the use of such effective strategies can avoid misbehaviour, students can still disturb lessons and require teachers to respond and handle their behaviour (Glock & Kleen, 2019). Effective class management not only means identifying successful ways to respond to the problems, but also avoiding problems seen even before they arise (Mehmet, 2015). It would also be useful to question whether teachers use different tactics to address the same pupils misbehaviour (Glock & Kleen, 2019). As a result, understanding teachers> responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour in secondary school is critical.

Research repeatedly indicates that misbehaviour among students hinders the teaching atmosphere and adversely effects on scholastic outcomes of students (Sun & Shek, 2012). Teacher is the one who is accountable for what happens in the classroom, including the classroom activities and student's behaviour (Onasanya, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to differentiate between preventive and reactive management techniques in classrooms (Korpershoek et al., 2014). For instance, setting up rules, guidelines and foster healthy relations between teachers and students are regarded as preventive strategies, while disciplinary initiatives such as warning or punishing are seen as reactive strategies (Korpershoek et al., 2014). While it is widely believed that preventive strategies are more efficient than reactive strategies, reactive strategies are sometimes required to minimize disruptive or other undesirable student behaviour when preventive strategies fail(Marzano, 2003).

According to studies, teachers> reactions to students> misbehaviour in the classroom are evolving. For example, previous research has found that a majority of teachers employ punishment to respond to students' misbehaviour (Elbla, 2012; Feinstein & Mwahombela, 2010; Lewis et al., 2005; Mweru, 2010). However, later research strongly supports the use of alternative approaches to responding to students> misbehaviour. For instance consider the use of mild punishment (Cheah, 2015), reward recognition, hinting and discussion (Tran, 2015), supportive strategies (Mensah et al., 2020), after class conversation (Ding et al., 2010), rewards and preventive practices (Tekindal et al., 2017; Tulyakul, 2019). Punishment is a response to correct misbehaviour (Sadik, 2018). Even so, it only has a short-term impact on students> behaviour (Sadik, 2018; Sun, 2015). In contrast, positive discipline emphasizes the prevention of recurrence and the resolution of issues. This approach emphasizes the importance of educators comprehending the fundamental causes of misbehaviour and taking proactive measures to mitigate them. Additionally, they assist children in understanding the repercussions of their actions on others (Sadik, 2018). Therefore, in an education system, proper discipline is a fundamental requirement for learners to feel secure, to be protected from harms, and to show due regard to their peers (Onasanya, 2020).

In short, the research focused on two main aspects. Firstly, teachers' response to classroom discipline, secondly, the relationship between students' misbehaviour and classroom discipline, in relation to the Maldivian context could be examined. Students' misbehaviour can negatively impact on the effectiveness of a learning environment. The concern of how to efficiently control the students in classrooms is of a continuous worry to the community (Lewis et al., 2005). Creating a safe classroom ambience is a crucial skill for teachers. This teaching skill provides students with a learning environment that they can benefit the best (Mehmet, 2015).

Research on teachers' responses to classroom discipline has been widely explored in various educational contexts (Glock & Kleen, 2019; Hughes, 2017; Korpershoek et al., 2016; Menikdiwela, 2020; Mensah et al., 2020; Okigbo & Okoli, 2016; Paramita et al., 2020; Sueb et al., 2020), Similarly, studies on student misbehaviour have been conducted by (Crawshaw, 2015; Henry, 2019; Mahvar et al., 2018; Mareš, 2018; Mwaniki, 2018; Riley et al., 2012). However, teachers' responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary schools remain an unexplored area of research.

In the Maldivian education system, secondary education consists of Grades 7 to 10, with students aged approximately 12 to 16 years, followed by higher secondary education (Grades 11 and 12). Public secondary schools in the Maldives face unique challenges, including large class sizes, diverse student backgrounds, limited resources, and a growing concern over behavioural issues. While the 2014 curriculum reform aimed to improve student engagement and holistic development, misbehaviour among students continues to be a pressing issue, affecting both classroom management and learning outcomes. Given the lack of systematic research on how Maldivian secondary school teachers manage student misbehaviour, this study is the first attempt to examine teachers' responses to classroom discipline and student misconduct within the Maldivian educational landscape.

A review of the existing literature on teachers> responses to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour revealed some gaps that support the current study. The limited availability of literature on the correlated variables and factors influencing teachers> responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour is the first gap identified. No articles reviewed explicitly looked at factors that could affect the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour, particularly in the context of the Maldives. Furthermore, only a small number of theories-including the choice theory, reinforcement theory, and teacher selfefficacy theory employed in this study-could be relied upon to assess the factors associated with teachers> responses to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour as well as the construct that might explain its occurrences.

### **Objective of the Study**

The main aim of the study is to find the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour in secondary schools of the Maldives. The specific objectives of this study are:

- To find out the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour in secondary schools of the Maldives.
- To find out if there is any significant difference in teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour in secondary schools of Maldives with regard to their gender, educational qualification, and professional experience.

### **Research Method**

This study employed a quantitative, correlational, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationship between teacher characteristics, communication styles, and their responses to student misbehaviour in Maldivian secondary schools. The population included secondary teachers (teachers from 7, 8, 9, and 10) from government schools in the Maldives. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure balanced representation of male and female educators, and a sampling frame was a list of secondary teachers obtained from the Ministry of Education. The final sample size consisted of 141 teachers, determined to use a sample size calculator with a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence interval. An online questionnaire was used to collect data, with sections covering demographics, teacher traits (extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism), communication styles (assertive and responsive), and misbehaviour prevention responses. The questionnaire was disseminated via email, ensuring wide participation across various schools. Instruments were adapted from Oliver & Srivastava (1999), McCroskey & Richmond (1996), and Díaz et al. (2018), and responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The response rate was carefully monitored to ensure sufficient data representation. We used SPSS to look at the data and used correlational and regression to see how the variables were related and to see if teaching experience changed the relationship between communication styles and responses to stop bad behaviour. This methodological approach ensures empirical, generalisable insights into teacher behaviours and classroom management in the Maldivian education system.

# Results

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The respondents of this study included 141 teachers from secondary grades, whose ages ranged from 18 to 55 with a mean age close to 27. Twenty- six percent (26%) were males and 73.8% were females. In terms of teaching experience, 3.5% of teachers had 0-1 years of experience, 24.1% of teachers had 2–5 years of experience, 30.5% of teachers had 6–10 years of experience, 20.6% of teachers had 11–15 years of experience, and 21.3% of teachers had an experience of 15 years and above. In terms of educational qualification 0.7% of the teachers were certificate level, 36.9% of the teachers had bachelor's degree, 61.7% of

the teachers had master's degree and 0.7% of the teachers had other qualifications.

nographic Characteristic	s	Frequency	Percentage	
Gender	Male	37	26.2	
	Female	104	73.8	
Age	18-24 Years	6	4.3	
	25 - 34 Years	58	45.4	
	35-44 Years	52	82.3	
	45 - 54 Years	22	97.9	
	55 Years and above	3		
Teaching	0-1 Years	5	3.5	
Experience	2-5 Years	34	24.1	
	6-10 Years	43	30.5	
	11 - 15 Years	29	20.6	
	15 Years and above	30	21.3	
Academic	Certificate Level	1	0.7	

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the respondents (n = 141)

# Teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour

Master's Deg

This section describes how often the teachers use the given strategies as a response to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour. The teachers were presented with 13 Likert-scale statements to which they had to rate from 1 to 5, where 1 is never use the strategy, to 5 is always use the strategy, as a response to students' misbehaviour. The table 2 below shows the rubric used to identify the level of usage and the Table 3 shows the level of usage of the given 13 strategies as a response to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour.

Table 2 Mean score and Level of usage.

Mean Score	Level of Usage		
1.00 - 2.33	Rare		
2.34 - 3.66	Sometimes		
3.67 - 5.00	Often		

Table 3	Level of	Agreement	among	Teachers
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Construct	Ν	Mean	SD	Level of Usage
I involve students in establishing rules and procedures.	141	4.39	0.73	Often
I share with students the reasons behind the disciplinary approach(es) I use.	141	4.50	0.63	Often
I provide positive reinforcement to students for appropriate behaviour (e.g. special helper, extra computer time, tangible rewards)	141	4.55	0.64	Often
I make students aware of consequences for misbehaviour (e.g. loss of break time, extra classroom time).	141	4.42	0.72	Often
I use class time to reflect on appropriate behaviour with students as a group.	141	4.28	0.75	Often
I redirect inappropriate behaviour on the spot, using loud voice.	141	2.86	1.34	Sometimes
I ignore misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class.	141	2.66	1.17	Sometimes
I use short verbal cues to stop misbehaviour (e.g. say student's name aloud, use "shh" sound).	141	3.77	1.11	Often
I use nonverbal signals to stop misbehaviour (e.g. make eye contact, approach and touch disruptive students).	141	3.92	1.21	Often
I use self-assessment forms for students to evaluate their own behaviour (e.g. checklists).	141	3.43	1.19	Sometimes
I inform parents about classroom expectations.	141	3.84	1.04	Often
I send for parents to report inappropriate behaviour.	141	3.45	1.20	Sometimes
I send for parents to report good behaviour.	141	3.96	1.11	Often

The results in table 3 show that four statements received relatively low rating from the teachers. Amongst these four items, the item "I ignore misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class" received lowest rating with a mean value of 2.66 showing that this is the least used strategy by the teachers. This finding is consistent with the findings of previous researches ( for exmaple, Nasey, 2012; Powell, 2014; Wirawan, 2019).

The strategy that is mostly used by the teachers and hence most popular among Maldivian teachers to avoid misbehaviour in their classroom is, the strategy of providing reinforcement. That is, the statement "I provide positive reinforcement to students for appropriate behaviour (e.g., special helper, extra computer time, tangible rewards)" received highest mean value with M=4.55, SD = 0.64, indicating that this strategy is widely used among Maldivian teachers. This finding is

consistent with the findings of previous studies (For example, Leonidou & Kartasidou, 2019; Powell, 2014; Quinn, 2017). This result was also in agreement with (Rahimi & Hosseini K., 2012) findings. The result indicated that, rewarding strategies were found to be the most common classroom discipline strategies of teachers. This outcome also supports the Ningsih and Ramendra (2019) findings. This finding revealed that when dealing with misbehaving students, teachers used reward and recognition as coping strategies. According to (Korb et al., 2016) positive behaviours should be praised because praise motivates students. Furthermore, praising other students for good behaviour can encourage the entire class to behave well.

### Teachers' Response Based on their Gender

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the difference between gender (male and female) and the teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour. Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in teachers' response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour between male and female teachers of the Maldives. A t-test failed to reveal a statistically reliable difference between the Male (M = 49.84, SD = 6.18) and females (M = 50.11, SD = 6.21); t (139) = -.226, p = .822,  $\alpha$  = .05. This shows that both male and female teachers' response to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour is the same.

Table 4 Result of t - test comparing Male and Femaleteachers on their Response to classroom Discipline.

Gender	n	Mean	SD	Т	df	р
Male	37	49.84	6.18	226	139	.822
Female	104	50.11	6.21			

# Teachers' Response based on their Educational Background and Professional Experience

A one-way between groups analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was conducted to analyze the difference between educational qualification, professional experience of teachers and their response to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour. For educational qualification, the teachers were divided into three groups according to the type of qualification they have attained. That is, Group 1: Degree level; Group 2: Masters level; Group 3: Others (including certificate, diploma and PHD). For professional experience, the teachers were divided into five groups based on the years of experience they have attained. That is, Group 1: 0 to 1 Years; Group 2: 2 to 5 Years; Group 3: 6 to 10 Years; Group 4: 11 to 15 Years; and Group 5: 15 Years above.

Table 5 and shows that there was no statistically significant difference at p < 0.05 level between the teachers' response to classroom discipline and the educational qualification, F (2, 138) = 1.143, p = 0.322 and professional experience, F (4, 136) = 0.705, p = 0.590. This result indicates that there is no difference in how teachers with any type of educational qualification (i.e. degree, masters or any other) respond to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour, i.e. they all respond in similar manner irrespective of their qualification levels. Moreover, teachers with various years of professional experience in their field also respond in a similar manner to classroom discipline and student misbehaviour.

Table 5 One-way ANOVA test comparing Teachers' Educational Qualification and Professional Experience on their Response to Classroom Discipline

Variable	Groups	N	Mean	S.D	Df	F	sig
Educational Qualification	Degree level	52	49.04	5.99	2,138	1.143	.322
	Masters level	87	50.66	6.25			
	Other	2	49.00	8.49			
Professional Experience	0 to 1 Years	5	49.40	3.04	4,136	.705	.590
	2 to 5 Years	34	51.38	5.68			
	6 to 10 Years	43	50.05	7.33			
	11 to 15 Years	29	49.79	5.02			
	15 Years above	30	48.83	6.36			

Significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$ 

### DISCUSSION

We conducted this study to investigate the relationship between teachers> response to classroom discipline and students> misbehaviour in secondary schools in the Maldives. The overall pattern of results suggests that teachers employed a wide range of strategies to respond to classroom discipline and students> misbehaviour. Some of the strategies were very often used, and others were rarely used. It is fascinating to examine the most frequently ranked, as well as the least frequently ranked strategies. All these approaches guide teachers and encourage them to demonstrate and maintain a positive way to respond to student>s misbehaviour.

The current study aims to understand student misbehaviour about teachers> intervention strategies. The results show that the top five ways teachers deal with bad behaviour from students are: letting students help make rules and procedures; explaining why certain behaviours are punished; rewarding good behaviour; enforcing consequences for bad behaviour; and using class time to talk about good behaviour as a group. Among these, reinforcement emerged as the most widely used strategy in Maldivian secondary schools. These findings align with previous literature emphasizing the effectiveness of positive reinforcement and student involvement in behaviour management (Korpershoek et al., 2016; Hughes, 2017). Studies have shown that engaging students in rule-setting fosters a sense of ownership and accountability, thereby reducing disruptive behaviour (Glock & Kleen, 2019). Thus, the findings of this study are supported by existing research, reinforcing the importance of structured, student-centred disciplinary strategies in secondary education.

Findings of this study indicate that teachers frequently use short words and body language signals to stop inappropriate behaviour. If nonverbal techniques seem ineffective and insufficient, the teachers should use verbal methods. One way to alleviate the problem is to call out the disruptive student's name during class to get the student to focus on the teacher and the subject (Marciniak, 2015). This finding backed up the findings and recommendations of (Marciniak, 2015). Researchers found that nonverbal techniques, like maintaining eye contact and looking at the student, were more effective than verbal techniques in reducing misbehaviour. Moreover, the result has shown that all respondents admit that, while solving the behavioural problems, they use nonverbal techniques. Onasanya (2020) found that a teacher's nonverbal behaviour has a substantial influence on students' misbehaviour.

The present study also discovered that, addressing in an inappropriate behaviour on the spot, using loud voice, ignoring misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class, using short verbal clues to stop misbehaviour, using self-assessment forms for students to evaluate their own behaviour and sending for parents to report in appropriate behaviour are the top five least common strategies used by the Maldivian teachers to respond to classroom discipline and students' misbehaviour. Ignoring misbehaviour that is non-disruptive to class is the least strategy among all. Koran and Koran (2018) made some recommendations on preventive strategies for managing student's misbehaviour, including the use and impact of efficient rules and practices, setting the expectations of teachers from pupils and involvement by parents to manage misbehaviour amongst students. Further Korb et al. (2016) found that teachers frequently used to set clear rules with the assistance of students and the majority of teachers would counsel students who frequently misbehaved. Furthermore, Korb et al. (2016) discovered that teachers discussed the consequences of violating the rules and misbehaviour.

In addition, this study confirms and demonstrates that teachers often report good conduct to parents and sometimes send for parents to report misbehaviour. This contradicted a study by Quinn (2017) which found that "sending positive behaviour notes to students' homes" and "calling parents to report good behaviour" are only used rarely. Parents and stakeholders should hold a discussion session to discuss the issues of misbehaviour and formulate corrective actions (Ababa & Eshetu, 2014). The main reason for the disciplinary problems in the secondary schools seems to be the lack of parents involvement (Ababa & Eshetu, 2014).

# CONCLUSION

To conclude, teachers employ a variety of strategies to manage classroom discipline and student misbehaviour, recognizing that each learner has unique needs and potential. The findings of this study contribute to existing theories and models by offering insights into teacher intervention strategies in Maldivian secondary schools. The results indicate that reinforcement was the most widely used strategy among Maldivian teachers, while ignoring non-disruptive misbehaviour was the least common approach. These findings align with prior research that has highlights the effectiveness of positive reinforcement in behaviour management. However, given the relatively small sample size (N = 141), these results should be interpreted with caution. Further research involving a larger sample across more schools in the Maldives is recommended to explore why teachers favor certain intervention strategies over others. A more comprehensive study could provide deeper insights into the factors influencing teachers' disciplinary choices and contribute to developing evidencebased approaches to classroom management.

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