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THE MANAGEMENT OF DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS IN THE CLASSROOM

Cristina Ispas (a)*, Alina Dana Vişan (b), Alina Cristina Constantin (c),
Gabriela Lungu (d)
*Corresponding author

(a) Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, University Centre of Resita, Piața Traian Vuia, Nr. 1 –
4320085, Reșița, cristina.ispas@ubbcluj.ro
(b) Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, University Centre of Resita, Piața Traian Vuia, Nr. 1 –
4320085, Reșița, alina.constantin@ubbcluj.ro
(c) Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, University Centre of Resita, Piața Traian Vuia, Nr. 1 –
4320085, Reșița, cristina.ispas@ubbcluj.ro
(d) Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, University Centre of Resita, Piața Traian Vuia, Nr. 1 –
4320085, Reșița, gabriela.lungu@stud.ubbcluj.ro

Abstract

The crisis provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic has generated new challenges concerning the students'
education and formation everywhere. Regardless of the form of the instructional-educational process, in
the classroom or online, the behavioural problems of some students or teachers tend to linger, seriously
affecting the quality of the didactic act. The online school allowed the parents to effectively participate in
the online lessons of the students and in this way to easily observe some inappropriate behaviours either
of their children or other children, or of the teachers. The present study highlights the parents' point of
view regarding the students' discipline problems during the online school. The purpose of the research
supposed the identification of the discipline problems, of the causes which determined their occurrence
and the most effective ways of their management during the online school for the primary grades. In this
research, there were 104 people (88 parents, 14 grandparents, 2 tutors) who take care of children who
attend primary grades. The research results have indicated that the active participation of the primary
grades students during the online synchronous courses has led to the decrease of the incidence of
discipline problems. Likewise, the involvement of the family in the supervision and support of the child
during the online classes had positive consequences regarding the decrease of the frequency and
seriousness of the school indiscipline acts. Nurturing an educational climate based on mutual respect,
understanding and collaboration leads to the reduction of discipline problems.

Keywords: Active participation, discipline problems, online school, pupils, parents

1. Introduction

Human society is constantly evolving, sometimes with faster steps, sometimes facing various problems and crises. An important field is education. The school, as the main institution involved in organizing and carrying out the educational act, needs a permanent renewal of its own components, in order to adequately meet the current requirements of society and prepare children and young people to actively integrate into social and personal life.

The crisis situation caused by the Covid 19 pandemic has highlighted older and newer problems facing the school. In this sense, there was a need for a radical change in the education system (Cerbușca, 2020. p. 4). Most schools have quickly begun to offer some type of virtual education (Hamilton et al., 2020; Lake & Dusseault, 2020), called online education. At the same time, researchers' concerns for identifying the effects of implementing this unprecedented change have intensified (Malkus, 2020; von Hippel, 2020).

The element that led to a major pressure on the education system and society as a whole was the exclusive use of distance media for the development of the educational act. In the pandemic context, the education system was only partially prepared, some teachers did not have enough information and skills specific to computer-assisted training; school pupils and students, as well as parents, were not sufficiently informed about the online education system. There were real difficulties in carrying out teaching activities in the online environment due to the lack of technical tools corresponding to the teaching activity carried out. The online school activity had both obvious advantages and limitations in the teacher's relationship with the school pupil or student, with negative effects on effective learning. The sudden transition to online activity, in addition to the difficulties related to technology, was doubled by a series of difficulties regarding the behaviour and attitude of those involved in the teaching act, difficulties felt both by teachers and pupils, even their parents, difficulties that they often led to strained relations between them. Passing to online classes, by the use of digital technologies, has brought into focus the requirement to form and develop some effective abilities to manage the discipline problems which occur in the online education.

Education is a vivid process, which takes into account the individuality of pupils and their training / development needs. The class of students or pupils is the formal group in which teachers and pupils perform specific roles designed to provide pupils with life skills that facilitate their integration into society. The art and science of the teacher are put at the service of the pupils. Discipline is an essential condition for achieving pedagogical goals. The great challenge of today's teacher is to transform disciplinary methods into viable learning messages, accepted by pupils and integrated into the behavioural routine. Unfortunately, there are still enough situations in which teachers either fail to maintain discipline in the classroom or maintain in the classroom a genre of discipline anchored in the past, based on domination, fear and threats, ineffective approaches to the specifics of today's education.

Effective management of school pupils' or students' behaviour in the classroom is the basis of successful teaching and learning. For example, studies in the UK show that primary schools that report good or outstanding pupil behaviour have higher percentages of pupils with better learning outcomes than schools that report satisfactory or inappropriate pupil behaviour. (Department for education, 2014).

2. Problem Statement

Over the years, the literature (Algozzine et al., 2011; Alter et al., 2013) has cited the detrimental effects of pupil misbehaviour and inefficient behaviour management on classroom dynamics, pupil effectiveness, and involvement, motivation and academic success. However, in more recent years, other research studies (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2014; Parsonson, 2012) have also shown that when teachers take a strong, evidence-based theoretical approach to behaviour management, they can successfully manage classrooms and create positive learning environments.

The behaviour policy, ethical and behavioural regulations established on the level of a school play an essential role in achieving an optimal behaviour of pupils throughout the school. According to Steer (2009), for a school behaviour policy to be meaningful, it must be reviewed regularly and often communicated to pupils, staff and parents / carers. If this does not happen, the policy imposed is unlikely to have an impact. This policy should include the nature of the negative behaviours displayed by pupils; details and characteristics of the responsible persons; the location of incidents and; an evaluation of the success of the implemented interventions.

Effective classroom management is essential for managing pupil behaviour. According to the survey *Managing Challenging Behaviour* (Office for Standards in Education, 2005), the most difficult behaviour is almost always well managed in schools where teachers provide clear direction and reassurance to pupils. It is important that classroom behavioural difficulties be observed in order to establish appropriate interventions that can be applied throughout the school.

Effective management of pupil behaviour is based on the teacher's ability to successfully create a well-managed and structured classroom environment so that learning can take place. Teaching a number of children with different needs, behaviours and attention can be a challenging setting. However, when a positive learning culture is created, children will learn better because they will know what is expected of them (Niculescu, 2016).

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, many countries around the world have closed schools, colleges and universities to stop the spread of the virus. According to UNESCO data, the peak of school closures was recorded in early April 2020, when approximately 1.6 billion pupils were affected in 194 countries, representing over 90% of all enrolled pupils (UNESCO, 2020). Once the educational process is transferred to the online environment, is the classroom framework maintained and within the online environment, are the rules applied in the classroom the same for managing pupil behaviour?

In order for primary school pupils to carry out activities effectively, it is recommended that the teacher (Lopes & Santos, 2013).

• to start each lesson with a set of rules and routines that are understood by all children;

• to use the system of positive rewards and reinforcements;

• to establish sanctions for misconduct;

• to have a selection of options for resolving disciplinary issues;

• to use the space at hand;

• to have well-planned lessons;

• to encourage respect and develop positive relationships.

The rules create clear expectations for children and must be defined to clearly specify what is acceptable behaviour. They must be reinforced regularly and placed in a visible place. Pupils may be included in the development of the rules, as this will give them ownership and they will be more likely to accept the terms and conditions and therefore comply.

Routines help minimize behavioural challenges in the type of lesson, either in the classroom or online, and are the key to a well-managed and organized classroom. Children enjoy routines that are easy to understand and easy to accomplish, but flexible enough to change if circumstances change. Research shows that most behaviour problems result from a lack of consistent class routines.

Praise is an effective way to encourage children to engage in the desired behaviour because it focuses on the child's effort rather than what is actually being done. When educators offer authentic, specific, spontaneous and well-deserved praise, it encourages lifelong learning and decreases competition among children.

Rewards, when a behaviour is observed, cause that behaviour to reappear. They form the basis of human behaviour and motivation and can be used effectively to encourage children to acquire skills and develop appropriate behaviour (Payne, 2015).

But the basis and heart of effective behaviour management is building a positive relationship with children. This allows the teacher to connect with the children forming a solid foundation from which behavioural change can take place.

3. Research Questions

The present study advanced the following research questions:

Question 1 – What is the parents' view of the most common forms of indiscipline during online primary school classes?

Question 2 – What is the opinion of the parents participating in the research about the main causes responsible for the occurrence of disciplinary problems during online courses at the primary school level?

Question 3 – What is the parents' perception regarding the most effective ways to manage the disciplinary problems registered during the online school for primary school pupils?

4. Purpose of the Study

In accordance with the research questions formulated, the present study aimed at: *identifying parents' perceptions of disciplinary issues (in terms of their form and frequency, potential causes, and effective intervention strategies) of primary school pupils during online schooling*. The aim of the research was achieved through the following specific objectives (SOs):

- ➢ SO1- identification of the forms of discipline problems that appeared and their incidence during the online school at the primary cycle;
- ➢ SO2- highlighting the possible causes responsible for the occurrence of disciplinary problems during online courses at primary school level;
- ➢ SO3- identifying the most efficient ways to manage disciplinary issues registered during the online school period with primary school pupils.

5.   Research Methods

The ascertaining research was performed using the method of sociological survey based on questionnaire. The research was conducted between October 2020 - May 2021. The target group consisted of 104 parents (in this study, with the term parent we generically named the person who participated in the research and cares for a child in the primary cycle; this person in relation to the child has the role of: parent or grandfather or guardian / legal representative) of the pupils from the primary classes from the "Mathias Hammer" High School Anina. The group of 104 people participating in the research had the following structure:

- depending on the role / capacity within his family: 88 parents; 14 grandparents, 2 guardians / legal representatives.

- by gender: 23 men and 81 women;

- depending on age: 17 people aged between 25-30 years; 52 people aged between 31-40 years; 22 people aged 41-50 years; 9 people aged between 51-60 years and 4 people older than 60 years.

- depending on the insertion on the labour market: 35 persons employed in the public or private domain; 4 pensioners, 5 socially assisted persons, 58 persons without occupation; 1 unemployed person, 1 independent entrepreneur;

- depending on the level of education; 12 persons with primary education, 18 persons with secondary education, 55 persons with high school education, 4 persons with post-secondary education; 15 people with university level studies

depending on the class in which their child is: 22 persons have a child in the preparatory class, 20 persons have a child in the first class, 20 persons have a child in the second class, 14 persons have a child in the third class, 28 people have a child in the fourth grade.

6.   Findings

In the present study we opted for the presentation and interpretation of data based on the research objectives pursued.

SO1- identifying the forms of discipline problems that have arisen and their incidence during online schooling in primary school

The development of online courses has determined teachers, pupils and their families to adapt as soon as possible to the specifics of this type of education. In this context, disciplinary problems that arose during the online teaching activity took different forms, intensities and frequencies. The way in which the online activity was organized and carried out by the teachers was reflected in the degree of effective involvement of the pupils in the instructive-educational process. As the present research focused on disciplinary violations during online courses, the starting point was the perception of parents about the *active participation of pupils in online courses.* According to the data obtained in this research (and summarized in Table 1), 72.11% of those participating in the research confirm that pupils participated in online courses "to a very high extent", half of the parents surveyed stating that they supervised "to a very high extent" their own children during online courses and thus found that most of them keep their

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webcams open during the teaching activities carried out synchronously, respond to requests from teachers, do their homework. Table number 1 summarizes all responses received from parents on the issues mentioned above, ordered based on a 5-step scale that varies from behaviours that occurred „*to a very high extent*", down to the other extreme, namely that the respective behaviour did not occur *at all.* Regarding the perception of parents about the existence of disciplinary violations in their own children, 73,19% of them, they opt for the "not at all" variant, 15.38% consider that they took place "to a low extent", 9.61% of the respondents choose the "to a certain extent" variant, while 2.88% states that the disciplinary violations of their own children took place „to a very high extent".

Table 1. Active participation of pupils in online courses

Answer variants	To a very high extent	To a high extent	To a certain extent	To a low extent	Not at all
	% Respondents	% Respondents	% Respondents	% Respondents	% Respondents
Pupils participated in online courses	72.11% 75	13.46% 14	4.80% 5	6.73% 7	2.88% 3
The pupils were supervised	50% 52	13.46% 14	16.34% 17	9.61% 10	10.57% 11
They keep the webcams on	72.11% 75	13.46% 14	5.76% 6	3.84% 4	4.80% 5
They respond online to teachers' requests	66.34% 69	17.30% 18	5.76% 6	6.73% 7	3.84% 4
They solve the topics received in the online courses	67.30% 70	14.42% 15	9.61% 10	5.76% 6	2.88% 3
They had infringements of discipline	2.88% 3	1.92% 2	9.61% 10	15.38% 16	70.19% 73

According to the data obtained from the parents participating in the research, the forms of discipline problems identified by them during the online courses were:

- Absenteeism (pupils' refusal to participate in online courses) – 10.57% (11 respondents);
- Pupils' refusal to open the webcam - 6.73% (7 respondents);
- Refusal of pupils to answer teachers' questions online - 1.92% (2 respondents);
- Refusal of pupils to solve the tasks received – 2.88% (3 respondents);
- Inappropriate / malicious comments of pupils addressed to colleagues during online courses - 2.88% (3 respondents);
- Threatening other colleagues - 0.96% (1 respondent);

- Threats received by pupils from other colleagues - 0.96% (1 respondent);

- Others. Which? - 0%

- Don't know / don't answer - 81.6% (85 respondents).

From the analysis of the obtained data it is observed that a consistent majority (81.6%) of the parents did not indicate any form of disciplinary violation. This does not mean that the facts themselves do not happen, but only reveals that most parents do not comment on them, either because they do not know the phenomenon very well (especially in the case of parents who never supervise their children during activities online and do not even discuss this topic with their children), or avoid explicitly assuming any point of view.

The identification and description of problematic behaviours under a disciplinary aspect can be complemented by the exploration of their causes in order to develop an effective intervention strategy.

SO2- highlighting the possible causes responsible for the occurrence of disciplinary problems during online courses at primary school level

The disciplinary problems manifested during the online courses among the pupils from the primary classes usually represent the answer that the pupils offer to certain deficiencies appeared in the organization and development of the situations and learning experience. Knowing the causes that generate disciplinary problems helps teachers, pupils and parents to identify the difficulties faced by those involved in the educational act and the need for collaboration to find the best intervention solutions designed to contribute to the proper management of this type of problem.

Identifying the causes of problematic behaviours from a disciplinary point of view, as well as understanding how they contribute to maintaining and amplifying the phenomenon of indiscipline among primary school pupils has been a starting point for us in analysing this phenomenon. In this sense, the way in which parents maintain or not the connection with the school, with the class teacher, more or less observe (depending on the time available) their own children during online activities, have realistic expectations regarding the children's school performance, are using ways of rewards, punishments, encouragement to increase pupils' learning performance.

Violent pupil behaviour can occur for a variety of reasons, which can be individual, family, social or school. *Individual causes* can take the form of difficulties in adapting to school discipline, low tolerance for frustration, low self-esteem, egocentrism etc. *Family causes* are based on tense relations between parents, lack of parental affection, type of family (single parents, disorganized) or its size, those in which there are many siblings or those in which there is only one), the material situation, etc. *Social causes* mainly originate from the media, the influence of colleagues or a group of friends outside the school. School causes refer to poor communication between pupils and teachers, imposing the authority of teachers, some more authoritarian styles, less objective evaluation of some teachers etc. (Iucu, 2006).

Table 2. Ways to identify the main causes of disciplinary violations of pupils during online courses

Answer variants	To a very high extent	To a high extent	To a certain extent	To a low extent	Not at all
	% Respondents	% Respondents	% Respondents	% Respondents	% Respondents
Maintaining contact with the teacher during online courses	54.80% 57	25.96% 27	9.61% 10	7.69% 8	1.92% 2
Assisting children with parents during online classes	49.03% 51	22.11% 23	13.46% 14	13.46% 14	1.92% 2
Realistic expectations of parents regarding pupils' school results during online schooling	56.73% 59	25% 26	13.46% 14	3.84% 4	0.96% 1
The presence of rewards offered by parents	23.07% 24	22.11% 23	23.07% 24	15.38% 16	16.34% 17
Establishment of sanctions / punishments by parents for disciplinary violations during the pandemic	7.69% 8	11.53% 12	29.80% 31	27.88% 29	23.07% 24
Encourage pupils to behave in accordance with school rules	55.76% 58	21.15% 22	15.38% 16	6.73% 7	0.96% 1

Maintaining contact with the teacher during online courses, against the background of *realistic expectations of parents regarding pupils' school results during online schooling* and the ongoing concern of parents to motivate their children to learn, including through *offering rewards by parents* or *setting sanctions / punishments for disciplinary violations* or *encouraging pupils to behave in accordance with school rules* are ways in which the family identifies in advance the main causes by which they can disrupt the educational act and distract the pupil from learning. Data obtained from parents participating in the research (Table 2) show the degree of family involvement in knowing and supporting the child's online activity. The correlation of the data confirmed the hypothesis that the higher the degree of family involvement, the lower the incidence of disciplinary offenses among primary school pupils.

The child is the bridge between school and family. The quality of the child's school performance both in online education and in classical, traditional education, in the physical classroom, is directly

influenced by the characteristics of the educational climate in which the didactic act takes place. The educational climate of the pupil class is an essential variable that influences the quality of pedagogical activity as a whole, but especially the performance of pupils and even teachers. The construction of a participatory educational climate, based on humanistic values, meant to support the formation of the harmonious development of the pupils' personality is one of the preoccupation of each teacher. Conducting online activity with pupils during the Covid 19 pandemic stimulated teachers to look more closely at the virtual environment and to ensure pupils a supportive educational climate, based on respect, understanding, flexibility, empathy, collaboration, mutual help etc.

The climate of the pupil class is defined as "the intellectual and moral environment that reigns in a group, the set of collective perceptions and emotional states existing within it" (Păun, 1999, p.8). At the level of the pupil class, the climate represents the intuitive reality, a specific seal of the respective school group.

A positive educational climate can provide pupils with a sense of emotional security and control of the educational environment (Ștefan et al., 2015; gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-12/practical-approaches-to-behaviour-management-in-the-classroom-a-handbook-for-classroom-teachers-in-primary-schools.pdf).

The school climate is the product of a multitude of factors, such as *structural factors* (class size of pupils, structure according to age, gender of pupils, teachers, background: urban / rural etc.), *instrumental factors* which ensures the conditions and means of achieving the educational objectives (school resources: material, human, informational, financial, temporal etc.), *socio-affective factors* which often have a *motivational* effect. In the present research 62.50% of respondents say that the *endowment with devices for online school* influence *to a very high extent* the educational climate of the class and implicitly the behaviour of the pupils during these activities. 51.92% of the parents participating in the research consider that the pupils *participate, to a very high extent, in the online classes,* which decreases the incidence of disciplinary violations. *Attractive online lessons,* together with the attitude of teachers who formulate teaching tasks in accordance with the abilities of pupils are effective ways to strengthen an educational climate conducive to learning and which decreases the rate of incidents or disciplinary violations. Data on some of the aspects that influence the educational climate during online teaching activities, obtained from the target group participating in the research, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Aspects that influence the educational climate during online teaching activities

Answer variants	To a very high extent	To a high extent	To a certain extent	To a low extent	Not at all
	% **Respondents**	**%** **Respondents**	**%** **Respondents**	**%** **Respondents**	**%** **Respondents**
Endowment with devices for online school	62,50% 65	25% 26	4,80% 5	3,84% 4	3,84% 4
Participating with pleasure in online courses	51.92% 54	21.15% 22	15.38% 16	7.69% 8	3.84% 4
Organizing attractive online	63.46% 66	22.11% 23	9.61% 10	2.88% 3	1.92% 2

lessons					
Requesting pupils to actively participate online	48.07% 50	29.80% 31	12.50% 13	2.88% 3	6.73% 7
They cope with online tasks	40.38% 42	33.65% 35	16.34% 17	5.76% 6	3.84% 4
They love teachers	66.34% 69	23.07% 24	3.84% 4	2.88% 3	3.84% 4
Divergences with teachers online	1.92% 2	2.88% 3	9.61% 10	14.42% 15	71.15% 74

SO3- identifying the most effective ways to manage disciplinary issues recorded during online schooling with primary school pupils.

The child's development in the family environment can have several major sources of risk for the development of behavioural problems: parents' disciplinary strategies, attitudes towards negative reactions of children or even the negative pattern of behaviour of parents (Caspi et al., 2004). Disciplinary strategies used by parents are one of the most frequently cited sources of risk for children's behaviour problems.

Regarding the most effective ways to manage disciplinary issues during online schooling with primary school pupils, the parents participating in the research have put forward the following proposals that can be grouped around the following topics: a) *establishing a regulation with clear provisions for carrying out online teaching* (with emphasis on: the obligation of pupils to participate in courses with the webcam open for the entire period of time; rules on communication (verbal, nonverbal, paraverbal) during online courses; specifying the duration of teaching activities and their timetable, prohibiting unauthorized registrations by pupils or other persons during online courses, participation in courses only by pupils of that class, not by other persons; b) *support and supervision of children by parents* („the child to be supported when he / she can't handle the tablet", "a greater involvement of the parents in the supervision of pupils with discipline problems"; c) *a better connection between the teacher and the parents* (more frequent online parent meetings; the school should be constantly concerned with maintaining a close relationship not only with the parents of good pupils at school, but also with the parents of undisciplined pupils; parents to show interest in how their child behaves during online teaching activities; *d) conducting activities at the online school* (attractive teaching activities, diversified by using modern, interactive teaching strategies; involvement of all teachers who teach in class, reducing the time of online activities by giving up certain disciplines; online communication devices for all children, facilities for internet access; e) *sanctioning pupils with discipline problems* (depending on the frequency and severity of the situation).

Online learning requires increased parental involvement, especially for children with disabilities" (Borup et al., 2013, p. 48). Despite the fact that a number of studies have demonstrated the importance of

parental involvement in their children's schooling and have made recommendations to parents to pay more attention during the pandemic with Covid 19 to guiding children in online learning, there are still many potential challenges that can prevent effective involvement of parents in online learning. At first, some parents do not seem to understand their role in this approach, their responsibilities and the level of involvement required of them.

Effective management of acts of indiscipline during online school emphasizes the importance of efforts to identify the difficulties faced by pupils and to support them during online teaching activities. In this regard Borup et al. (2020) who propose „two communities to help support pupil engagement: (a) the course community associated with course or school (teacher, peers, administrators, counsellors) and (b) pupils' personal community with long-standing relationships (parents, siblings, friends)". Within these communities, those involved can provide emotional, behavioural and cognitive support that facilitates learning in virtual environments and contributes to reducing acts of indiscipline during instructive-educational activities carried out online.

According to the parents participating in the research, most of the proposals from them regarding strategies for the effective management of disciplinary issues are among the strategies that teachers already apply in this atypical learning period in which online education replaced during the pandemic with Covid 19 classroom education.

7. Conclusion

The need to implement effective strategies for managing disciplinary issues becomes evident in the current context, marked by the experience of online school a real and new challenge for teachers, who in terms of discipline face a number of problems generated and maintained in the virtual environment. The causes of indiscipline behaviours are varied and depend both on the specific characteristics of the pupil's personality and on the environment in which the pupil is formed, especially family, school, community. Close collaboration between school and family remains the main way in which education can take place in the best conditions, and the level of acts of indiscipline is low / In general, primary school pupils enjoy a privileged relationship with the teacher (as the main reference figure in the school space) of the class, which makes the disciplinary deviations to be reduced when in the class of pupils is cultivated an educational climate based on respect, empathy, understanding, mutual support, etc. Only through a joint effort of effective collaboration of teachers, pupils and parents can be prevented or intervened in cases of school indiscipline in the physical space of the school and / or in the virtual space.

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