



Teachers' Attributions and Intervention Strategies for Students' Classroom Misbehaviours: Evidence from Senior High Schools in Komenda Edina Eguafo Abrem Municipality

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author VAM designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Authors MOA and BYD managed the analyses of the study. Author BYD managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The study explored teachers' attributions in addressing misbehaviour of students in the classroom. To achieve this, a descriptive survey was adopted through the use of quantitative approach. A sample size of 140 teachers was selected for the study using cluster sampling technique. Questionnaires were used to elicit responses from the selected teachers. Inferential statistics and descriptive statistics were used to analyse the research questions. The findings from the study revealed that generally, teachers in the Komenda Edina Eguafo Abirem Municipality attribute students' disruptive behaviours to blame and intentionality of the students. Again, in the quest for managing these attributed behaviours, supportive measures were identified by the teachers to be very effective. It was recommended that teachers' beliefs about causality with reference to student misbehaviour be improved by training teachers to embrace controllable as opposed to non-

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controllable attributions. Teachers who might otherwise embrace unsupportive interventions may be more open to implementing research-based interventions for students who exhibit problem behaviour.

Keywords: Teachers'; attributions; students'; classroom; misbehaviours; intervention strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students misbehaviour has been a major concern for both teachers and students Little, [1]. According to Kyriacou and Martin (2010) student misbehaviour is “any behaviour by pupils which interferes with smooth running of a lesson” (p.415). Studies have shown that misbehavior has far-reaching negative effect for both instruction and learning outcomes Kendziora & Osher, [2]; Oshen, Bear, Sprangu & Doyle, [3]. While the precise nature of the relationship between academic deficits and problem behaviour remains unclear, indeed presenting a chicken-or-the egg conundrum, we do know with some certainty that each influences the other in a reciprocal way (Scott, Nelson, & Liaupsin, 2001).

In addition, Landrum, Tankersley and Kauffman [4] remarked that pupils who display problem behaviour are hard to teach, often segregate and are prone to school failure. Attribution theory asserts that people seek to understand the causes of specific events, and it is the interpretation of an event that is most significant, rather than an event itself Riley & Ungerleider, [5].

The attributes an individual use to explain event outcomes will often reflect the attitudes an individual hold Weiner, 1984, as cited in Riley & Ungerleider, [5]. Teachers' beliefs about the causes of student misbehaviour might be influenced by what they have observed and experienced in their classrooms, as well as their educational backgrounds, values, and cultural beliefs Erbas, Turan, Aslan, & Dunlap, [6]. Heider's (1958) research led him to understand how people perceive interactions between each other. He explained that people analyse their interactions with others, and practice at least some amateur form of psychology. This amateur form of psychology was described as naive psychology. Heider (1958) asserted that every person acts and reacts like a naive psychologist and makes reasonable explanations for his or her behaviours and feelings. This study explored how teachers' “naive psychology” explained student behaviour. Weiner (1974) further extended the meaning of the attribution theory

developed by Heider (1958) to include how perceptions of other people are formed. Weiner's (1976) theory of motivation highlight three causal dimensions of behaviour: 1) locus of control, 2) stability and 3) controllability.

Weiner argued that the first dimension of behaviour is locus of control which deals with the location of cause of the behaviour and reiterated that the location could be internal or external to the individual. For example, a student failing a test (classroom assessment) may be viewed as internal locus control if the teacher believes that the students did not try enough while external locus control might arise when the test material was too difficult for the student.—This dimension of locus of control, is linked to Heider's (1958) earlier premise that people make internal and external attributions for the behaviour of others. Causal dimension of stability which is the second dimension of Weiner theory gives an account that the cause of a behaviour, situation, or event would change. For example, causal attributions that relate to an individual's disposition are often perceived as stable causes, while causal attributions related to environmental factors are often perceived as unstable causes (Weiner, 1983). The third dimension which is causal dimension of controllability point out whether a cause attributed to an occurrence is within the control of the individual. Aptitude is often classified as an uncontrollable attribution as opposed to effort which is viewed as a factor that is within an individual's control (Weiner, 1983).

Weiner [7] in his later work came out with a fourth dimension which is closely related to the third dimension (controllability) and named as blame and intentionality. Literature have shown that researchers sometimes referred to the four dimensions as intentionality. He suggested that causal attributions influence the placing of blame or the drawing of conclusions about responsibility. For example, when failure is attributed to lack of effort, controllable causality is assumed, and the individual is responsible for the occurrence. In this case, the person making the judgment is inclined to be angry and favour punishment as a justifiable consequence. On the other hand, when failure is attributed to lack of

ability, uncontrollable causality is assumed, and the individual is not perceived as being responsible. Therefore, the person making the judgment is likely to express sympathy and opt for no punishment.

Although there is a relatively large body of literature examining teacher attributions with regard to academic achievement, investigation into teacher attributions for misbehaviours is relatively limited. Research conducted in various countries and cultures have illustrated that teachers tend to attribute the cause of misbehaviours to pupil factors and factors outside of the school environment Andreou & Rapti, [8]; Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, [9]. Researchers have also begun to establish links between teacher attributions for misbehaviour and choice of intervention Andreou & Rapti, [8], teacher attributions and referral to special education Poulou & Norwich, [10] and teacher attributions and perceptions of perceived control in interpersonal relationships in the area of misbehaviours Mavropoulou & Padeliadu, [9]. However, there is paucity of study on teachers' attribution and students' misbehaviour in the Ghanaian context and among Senior high school teachers. This paper therefore seeks to close this contextual gap. The study is informed by three objectives: 1) to explore the cause of students' misbehaviour, 2) examine the factors teachers assign to students misbehaviour in classroom and 3) to find out management strategies teachers use when dealing with students' misbehaviours. Having in mind these objectives, three research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What are the causes of students' misbehaviour?
2. What factors do teachers assign to students' misbehaviour in the classroom?
3. What management strategies teachers use when dealing with students' misbehaviours?

1.1 Teachers Attribution for Students' Misbehaviour

Attribution is an explanation for the cause of a person's behaviour. Psychologists employ the concept of attribution to explain how people make sense of their own behaviour and that of others. Gibson and Dembo [11] notes that teachers were most successful in demonstrating a strong internal control of locus. Conversely, teachers who attributed student behaviour problems to factors beyond the teacher's control,

had lower expectations for both student change and the teacher's ability to manage behavioural difficulties. According to Bandura [12,13], and Weiner (1985) personal explanation for an event (attribution), and their future behaviour may be mediated by self-efficacy.

Given the link that Bandura proposed between attributions and self-efficacy Bandura, [11], it is surprising that attributions for misbehaviours have not been examined systematically in relation to teacher self-efficacy with students who exhibit misbehaviour.

1.2 Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study

Attribution theory was adopted by the researchers as a lens to explore teachers' attributions and intervention Strategies for students' classroom misbehaviours in three Senior high school in Ghana. Attribution theory suggests that an individual's responses are based on the causes that are attributed to the behaviour or intentions of others (Bar-Tal, 1978; Weiner, 1976). In 1958, Heider an Austrian psychologist proposed the attribution theory to explain how people perceive behaviour in others and eventually attribute meanings to those behaviours. Attribution theory asserts that people seek to understand the causes of specific events, and it is the interpretation of an event that is most significant, rather than an event itself Riley & Ungerleider, [5]. The attributes an individual use to explain event outcomes will often reflect the attitudes an individual hold (Weiner, 1984, as cited in Riley & Ungerleider, [5]. According to Erbas, Turan, Aslan and Dunlap [6] teachers' beliefs about the causes of student misbehaviour might be influenced by what they have observed and experienced in their classrooms, as well as their educational backgrounds, values, and cultural beliefs. It is worth noting that attribution theory helps to explain not only what an individual says but also how they response to the question posed such as their tone and body language. Researchers of attribution theory argued that an individual responsible for a negative event will exhibit anger and aggressiveness in his or her response.

Heider (1958) observed that attribution reflection for incidents is more likely to take place after a negative event has occurred. Fiske and Taylor [14] conceived that the process of causal attribution involves examining the information

gathered about an individual or situation and subsequently making causal judgments. Jones and Nisbett [15] posit that individuals are more inclined to make internal (or dispositional) attributions for the behaviour of others, but to make external (or situational) attributions for similar behaviour in themselves. This theory is used as a lens to unpack the three research questions which serve as an anchored for the study.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The design underpinning this study was descriptive survey. The researchers adopted descriptive survey design because the focus was to describe the intended variables of the population without manipulating it (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Descriptive survey according to Best and Kahn (1998) is concerned with the investigation of the conditions or relationships that exist, opinions that are plain, or movements that are building up. The descriptive survey method makes the research to get the opinion of a representative sample of the target population so that investigation can infer the perception of the population. In all a total of 150 teachers from three Senior high schools in KEEA Municipality were selected from a population of 221 teachers through cluster sampling technique. We adapted Simms [16] teachers' attribution for students' behaviour measure instrument to generate data. The questionnaire for this study had three sections and its items were structured on a four-point Likert scale. Section A had 11 items about teacher possible causal factors of student misbehaviour. These items were in four categories: student (items 1–5), family (items 6–8), teacher (items 9–10), and school (item 11). In particular, student factors included items about both effort and ability (Ho, 2004). For example, item 1, "low intelligence", was obviously about student ability, while item 2, "lazy, not making enough effort", was about effort. This requires respondents to show how frequent or less frequent a misbehaviour occurred. The responses were scored as follows: Most frequently=4; More frequently=3; frequently=2; Less frequently =1

Section B contained six brief descriptions of students displaying problem behaviours (e.g., hitting others, destroying property, being non-compliant). Teachers in this study were asked to imagine a student that they have taught performing the problem behaviour in each

situation. Teachers completed the questionnaire by reading each of the six situations presented, and then circling a number on each scale for each of the four causal statements following each situation. The number ticked indicated the extent to which the teacher disagreed or agreed with each statement. The rating scale was as follows: 1–disagree strongly; 2–disagree; 3–agree; 4–agree strongly. For section B, there were 30 items in total (5 per problem behaviour description) and three attributional subscales. The first subscale measured the extent to which the behaviour was blame-deserving and intentional; the second measured the extent to which the behaviour was stable and not likely to change; and the third measured the extent to which the cause of the behaviour was internal to the student. The minimum score and maximum score that could have been attained by participants for each attributional subscale in the TASBM were as follows: Blame and Intentionality—8 (minimum) and 48 (maximum), Stability—4 (minimum) and 24 (maximum), and Internal Causality—4 (minimum) and 24 (maximum). For the TASBM, an added feature was an open-ended question for each situation. For this question, teachers were asked to describe how they would respond in the situation presented.

Section C was added to the instrument to measure teachers' intervention strategies that would be effective not effective. The twenty-one items in this section were approaches for addressing misbehaviour. Six of these items were supportive teaching approaches suggested by Epstein [17] in their synthesis of research on effective behaviour management. The other six approaches listed in section C were common punitive, but typically ineffective, strategies used by teachers when managing problem behaviour. With regard to intervention strategies, I included 9 items. In general, these items reflected positive, negative and neutral intervention strategies, as proposed by Martin [18]. Martin's questionnaire has been adapted by other researchers for further studies Arbuckle & Little, [19] and thus is trustworthy. As a result, such items were used in my questionnaire. Based on Martin's general structure of intervention strategies (positive, neutral, and negative), for example, item 16 "Pulling the student's ears, or knocking on his/her head" was negative; item 1 "praising good students, and using stars, flowers, and other prizes as positive incentives" was positive ("good" in this context means "well-behaved"); and item 19 "getting in touch with

students' parent(s)" was neutral. We asked participants to select three items in order as their first three choices to each question.

3. RESULTS

Research question one: What are the causes of students' misbehaviour?

Table 1 illustrates the means and standard deviation analyses of the causes of student misbehaviour. From the Table, the results generally, showed teachers' assigning causes for students' misbehaviour as student-related, family and teacher factors. Dwelling on the individual factors, the most prominent cause of student misbehaviour was Bad learning habits (M=3.82, SD=.702),

Family background with parent's poor academic background (M=3.64, SD=.492), Parents low expectation of the child (M=3.29, SD=.469), which was a family related cause of students' misbehaviour was seen second to the student related causes.

The fourth most mentioned cause was a teacher-related factor: Teachers own instructional method or classroom management needs to be improved (M=3.17, SD=1.01), students in a special physical and psychological development period (M=2.76, SD=.437). "busy parents with the child being spoiled by grandparents"

(M=2.64,SD=.931),is a typical phenomenon in the study area.

In contrast, very few teachers said the cause of student misbehaviour to their abilities, such as "low intelligence" (M=2.47, SD=.717) Lazy, not making enough effort (M=1.94, SD=.555). However, school factor lagged far behind "teaching for testing". Overlooking students feeling due to teaching for testing, Resulting from the high pressure of students' achievement accountability (M=1.64, SD=.785).

Research question two: examining the factors teachers attribute students' misbehaviour in the classroom on

The multiple regression was utilized to show the direction and magnitude of the effects and relationship between the variables. Prior to conducting multiple regression, certain assumptions might be met. This include normality test. The researchers checked for the assumption before treating main regression test. The graph below shows that normality test for the test variables.

Fig. 1 presents the normality of the study variables. The clustering of the variables at the centre of the normality curve shows that the data was normal and multiple regression could be performed. Table 2 presents the results of the mean and standard deviation of the predicted attribution factors.

Table 1. Means and standard analyses of causes of student misbehaviour

Nature of Student Misbehaviours	Mean	Std. D	Rank
Bad learning habits	3.82	.702	1 st
Family background with parent's poor academic background	3.64	.492	2 nd
Parents low expectation of the child	3.29	.469	3 rd
Teachers own instructional method or classroom management needs to be improved	3.17	1.01	4 th
Students in a special physical and psychological development period	2.76	.437	5 th
Previous teacher did not educate student well	2.70	.469	6 th
Busy parents with the child being spoiled by grandparents	2.64	.931	7 th
Low intelligence	2.47	.717	8 th
Not interested in learning	2.05	.899	9 th
Lazy, not making enough effort	1.94	.555	10 th
Overlooking students feeling due to teaching for testing resulting from the high pressure of student's achievement accountability	1.64	.785	11 th

Source: Field, Data, 2020

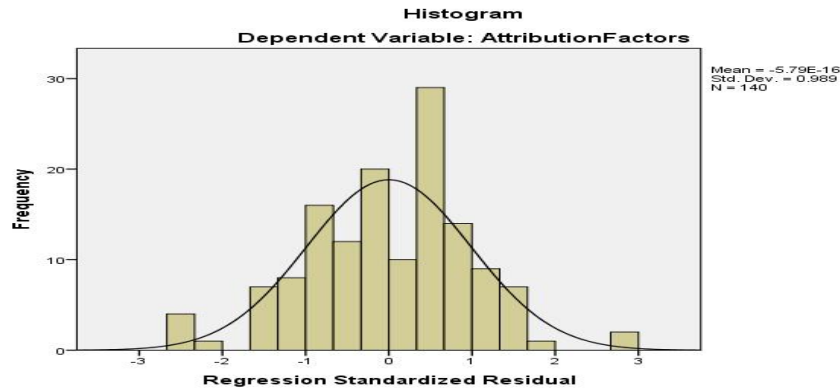


Fig. 1. Normality test

Table 2. Results of descriptive statistics of the attribution factors

Attribution Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Blame and Intentionality**	54.53	7.56	140
Stable**	36.34	4.09	140
Internal Causality**	30.78	3.87	140

Source: Field Survey (2020)

Table 3. Results of multiple regression analysis of the attribution factors

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Cal. t-value	p-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	14.31	.630	-	17.96	.000**
Blame and Intentionality	2.381	.009	2.26	3.77	.037(s)
Stable	1.685	.013	.394	4.89	.075(ns)
Internal Causality	2.344	.025	2.67	3.57	.067(ns)

Dependent Variable: Attribution Factors **. $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed),
Source: Field Survey, (2020)

Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) of the attribution factors. The results from Table 2 shows that blame and intentionality recorded the highest mean and standard deviation (M=54.53, SD= 7.56, n=140) and followed by stable with the mean and standard deviation (M=36.34, SD=4.09). The Internal Causality recorded the least (M= 30.78, SD= 3.87, n=140). From the descriptive analysis, it appears that, overall, teachers' rating scores for attributions of blame and intentionality were slightly higher than their mean rating scores for attributions of stability and their mean rating scores for attributions of Internal causality. In other words, teachers appear to be more likely to blame a student for their misbehaviour and to perceive student misbehaviour as being intentionally displayed by the student than to attribute the causes of a student's misbehaviour to stable factors.

Table 3 depicts the results for of the multiple regression analysis between independent variables (blame and intentionality, stable, and internal causality) and dependent variable (attribution factors). From the results, it is clear that one of the independent variables (blame and intentionality) is statistically significant at p -value of 0.05** indicating that the blame and intentionality predict attribution factors than all the other factors. From the Table, blame and intentionality is statistically significant (cal. t-value=3.778, n=140, Sig. =0.037**) and all of them are not statistically significant. Stable as one of the predictors produced insignificant results of (cal. t-value =4.897, n=140, Sig. =0.075).

As a way of achieving the purpose of the study, the researchers assessed management strategies teachers used when dealing with

student misbehaviour. The results from the study showed teachers perceived the most effective intervention strategy as “teach the student a different way to deal with his/her frustration or anger rather than hitting”. This strategy was thought significantly more effective than all other strategies. This recorded a means and standard deviation of (M=3.76, SD=.937). Asking the student to stand up at the seat, or in the front (back) of the classroom (M=3.64, SD=.631) was also identified as was one of the managing strategies. The third effective strategy in teachers’ perception was “Talking with the student after class and helping him/her to reflect on his/her behaviour” indicated by the teachers as one of the key strategies (M=3.64, SD=.992).

Interestingly, teachers did not really use this very often, praising good students, or using other prizes as positive incentives (M=2.82, SD=.702). Make changes to the routines, seating, schedule or instruction to prevent such behaviour from occurring again was also identified (M=2.82, SD=.702). On the contrary, kicking, or hitting the student if he/she makes me really angry (M=2.47, SD=.7171) was not identified as an effective managing strategy and finally, send the student to the school headmaster’s office (M=2.05, SD=.988) was also not recognised as an effective intervention strategy.

Table 4 sought to compare the management strategies that teachers use when dealing with student misbehaviour. To measure this, the teachers were to rate the management strategies as supportive or not supportive. From the analysis, it appears that, overall, teachers’ mean rating score on the Supportive scale was slightly higher than their mean score on the Unsupportive scale. Statistically, Supportive recorded the higher mean and standard deviation (M= 5.89, SD=1.34, n=140) while Unsupportive recorded the least mean and standard deviations (M=2.62, SD= .963, n=140).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Causes of Student Misbehaviour

The study established that bad learning habit was the most frequently reported cause of students’ misbehaviour. This finding is supported by Saleem and Mahmood [20] that student misbehavior is a strong predictor of how well students perform in school, there is therefore a positive relationship between behavior and learning. In contrast, very few teachers in this

study assigned students’ misbehaviours to their low intelligence. This result is consistent with Donga [21] who found that Chinese teachers in Hong Kong mainly attributed students’ misbehaviours to their effort rather than ability. The study also revealed that family factors was the second most important cause of student misbehaviour. Evans and Miguel [22] found similar view that Kenyan students who do not have the guardianship of biological parents had higher rates of misbehaviour in schools.

4.2 Factors Teachers Attribute to Student Misbehaviour

The results from the study give ample evidence to conclude that teachers attributed student misbehaviour to some factors in the school. The findings from the study give reasons to believe that among all the attribution factors (blame and intentionality, stable and internal causality), teachers attributed student’s disruptive behaviours or misbehaviour were largely attributed to blame and intentionality of the students. That is teachers believe that causal attributions influenced the placing of blame or the drawing of conclusions about the students’ responsibility. Findings agree with the fourth causal dimension of Weiner [23] which suggest that most students are responsible for their misbehaviour. The findings from the study again gives evidence to support the work of Dreikurs [24] who suggested that a student’s behaviour is a result of his/her individual’s purposes and their behaviours is the result of their biased interpretations of the world.

4.3 Management Strategies in Dealing with Student Misbehaviour

In the quest of controlling student’s misbehaviours in the KEEA Municipality, the study established that supportive measures were more effective than unsupportive. Teachers in this study showed more support for research-based strategies than they did for strategies that were not proven-effective by research. This result resonates with the findings of Poulou and Norwich [25] and Martin [18] whose studies found that teachers’ perceptions of effective intervention strategies predicted their actual managing behaviours, and this helped them in dealing with student misbehaviour. The study further established inconsistencies between teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ actions. In addition, teachers at all grade levels used strategies such as “calling the student’s name”

Table 4. Descriptive analyses of management strategies teachers' use when dealing with student misbehaviours

Management Strategies	N (observations)	Mean	Standard Deviation
Supportive	140	5.89	1.34
Unsupportive	140	2.62	.963

Source: Field Data, (2020)

However, none of these teachers viewed this strategy as effective at all. The possible reasons are that teachers often used these strategies that they did not think most effective but were just because these strategies were easy to use and time-saving.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study revealed that, teachers' causal attributions of student misbehaviour were predictive of teachers' intervention preferences. Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that senior high school teachers in the Komenda Edina Eguafo Abirem Municipality, attributed students' misbehaviour to blame and intentionality of the students. From the study, the results showed that senior high school teachers of these students used more positive than punitive strategies, as interventions for treating students' misbehaviours. From the study, it would seem logical that most of the casual attribution to students in the Komenda Edina Eguafo Abirem Municipality were related to student and home factors. In many of the cases, teachers believed that the home was the primary influence on a child's behaviour and as such contacting parents would be a primary strategy. On teachers' attributions and intervention strategies there is an inconsistency between teachers' perceived effective and actually used strategies. It would be misleading if we simply drew conclusions about teachers' causal attributions and recommended certain strategies to teachers without considering their grade levels and differentiating between teachers' perceptions and actions.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers recommend that students in the KEEA municipality should be given some counselling support to help reduce misbehaviour. Again, it is recommended that teachers' beliefs about causality with reference to student misbehaviour be improved by training teachers to embrace controllable as opposed to non-controllable attributions. Attribution retraining should be part of behavior modification

professional development initiatives. Attribution retraining is a strategy used to promote future motivation for achievement and to encourage individuals who are unmotivated to push towards successful outcomes. As a result, teachers who might otherwise embrace unsupportive interventions may be more open to implementing research-based interventions for students who exhibit problem behaviour.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

All ethical procedures required were followed. Participants were made to indicate their willingness to participate in the study and written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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