

THE EFFECTS OF A SHORT-TERM TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING INDIVIDUALIZED FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOR PLANS (IFBP) IN NORTHERN TAIWAN

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ABSTRACT

In Taiwan, the provision of individualized functional behavior plans (IFBP) focused on the behavioral problems of students with disabilities that are developed by school staff has been legislated since Nov. 2012. Teachers need in-service training about developing IFBP because of this legal requirement. The purpose of this study was to work out the appropriate methods of preparing special education teachers for the new legal requirements and to examine the effects of a short-term IFBP training program for them. The first part involved surveying the psychological preparation for IFBP. Another section ran a single group pretest-posttest design to evaluate the change in the amount of pre-post psychological preparation, the perceived benefit scores, and the satisfaction scores with this training program. The results indicated that weak preparation of special education teachers for applying the new policy is a universal problem. The training program did indeed improve trainees' psychological preparation for IFBP, especially for those teachers from a basic training background. Most trainees felt they had benefited and were satisfied with the training program.

(Key Word: behavior problem, Functional Behavioral Assessment, behavior intervention, teacher training)

Introduction

Foundation of the Legislation Shift on Behavior Management

Theories on the management of problematic behavior emerged from Behavior Modification

(BM) theory since the 1960s. Further, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) was promoted as a science that could verify the relationship between behavioral variables via experimental manipulation among 1970s. As the development of inclusion education, Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) was established as a distinct approach in the 1990s. Its core features include non-aversive, even positive, normalized, proactive, preventive, educational and considering ecological system in school context. Until the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA 97) which addressed issues about the discipline of behavioral problems of students with disabilities was held in the United States, the law officially emphasizes the use of positive intervention and the development of behavior intervention plan based on the scientific evidence. This major change is that it requests schools to provide functional behavioral assessments (FBA) to confirm the function of an inadequate behavior and develop behavior intervention plans (BIPs). IDEA 97 specifies the discipline actions that trigger a review of the FBA or BIP if they have been conducted and developed as well as a request for an IEP meeting regarding the FBA or BIP within 10 business days if a student is considered for removal from their current placement.

As for Taiwan, there has been also a crucial shift regarding legislation on behavior management for students with disabilities since November 2012. Before this amendment, the laws only required IEPs to include administrative support and management procedures in respect of behavioral problems which affect education outcomes. Lately this rule was revised such that students with behavioral problem need to be provided with Individualized Functional Behavior Plans (IFBP) and the related administrative support through the IEP process. IFBPs have become one of the key components of IEPs.

The Debate about Weak Teacher Preparation

Not long after the announcement of IDEA 97, concern regarding how important school staff should be prepared for the public policy was raised by some scholars and practitioners in the United States. Actually, BIPs were often omitted in the IEPs of students with significantly challenging behaviors or, when included, were often vague, inadequate and poorly implemented (Smith, 1999). Yell & Katsiyannis (2000) indicated the knowledge of methods for training teachers to conduct FBAs was limited. Van Acker, Boreson, Gable & Potterson (2005) founded out school BIP team members had perhaps less experience of FBA/BIP, and only 29.2% of trainees had participated in a seminar or had related training exposure.

O'Neill and Stephenson (2009) examined literature published from 1997 to 2009 on FBA and BIP involving school-based personnel. The results indicated that indirect assessment and hypothesis formation were both high but data collection, BIP formation and experimental manipulation were lower, suggesting that teachers preferred the less time-consuming and knowledge-based procedure. Teachers could collect data via simple scatterplots during routines and often held negative attitudes toward complicated procedures (Gunter, Callicott, Denny &

Gerber, 2003).

Within the program of compulsory credits of pre-service education for special education in Taiwan, there is only one course (2 credits), Behavior Modification (BM), related to challenging behavior management with students with disabilities. It is probable that teachers who have only learned about behavior modification in their pre-service education might use reactive rather than proactive or preventive methods. It would also be expected that teachers with such a limited experience of behavior management training might have certain difficulties with assessing the function of challenging behavior and developing IFBP.

In summary, just as what most teachers know about behavior management is Behavior Modification, the researcher believes that there is a key point in teacher training that links previous experiences to new concepts such as FBA and PBS. On the other hand, because of insufficient teacher training background and possibly negative attitude to FBA, the important foundation that simplifying procedures and saving teachers' time should be taken into consideration in any related teacher training programs.

Research on the Effects of the Preparation Provided on Individualized Functional Behavior Plans (IFBP)

Van Acker and his colleagues conducted a state-wide survey across Wisconsin of efforts made in developing FBA and BIP and undertook a critical review of the quality of the FBA/BIP submitted by trained school teams. The highest proportion variable of the adequate quality of BIP was defined target behavior but this was still low (30%). The second was Indication of hypothesised function (20.4%). It is worth noted that positive strategies chosen by the FBA/BIP team were rare and 79% of BIP teams still used aversive consequences strategies (Van Acker et al., 2005).

Under the mandate of IDEA 97, most state education agencies (SEAs) had to provide relevant resources. Killu, Weber, Derby & Barreto (2006) conducted an examination of the resources established by SEAs in 50 states of America and compared this with standard practice for BIP/PBSP. Most SEAs resources addressed that “an FBA should be completed prior to a BIP”, “the teaching of alternative skills or a replacement behavior to the problem behavior”, “the need to identify and define the target behavior”, “developing an intervention strategy based on a hypothesis derived from the results of an FBA”, and “the manipulation of strategies”. The least addressed was “completing a task analysis for the instruction of alternative skills”, “the development of goals and objectives with specific mastery criteria”, and “procedural integrity concerns”.

Could higher education provide a better preparation course to deal with students' challenging behaviors? Fallon, Zhang & Kim (2011) provided a 14-week ABA program to 59 participants in full-time programs of graduate special education students. Results show the significant differences across the years of implementation of the study regarding course of

assessment of BIP task quality. Authors believed long-term training could be effective for prepared-teachers.

Although long-term training in special education teacher education may be helpful to strengthen teachers' preparation for FBA/BIP, working teachers have little time to undergo such intense training. This means that short-term training is perhaps the most feasible but effect-limited model for city-wide or state-wide support. As Van Acker et al. (2005) and Killu et al. (2006) concluded, training or resources provided in the early period of the implementation of this policy prioritised focusing on FBA core components, including defining behaviors, conducting functional assessments, selecting strategies based on behavioral function, and the concept of alternative behavior.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the preparation of special education teachers for developing IFBP and to work out how to provide preparation for them. In order to promote teachers' preparation for dealing with the requirements of the new act, our research team developed a city-wide on-the-job training program for teachers working with students with special needs, which instructed them on the core procedures of developing IFBPs during a limited number sessions.

Method

Research design

This study consisted of two sections of research conducted via a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The first survey investigated the preparation of special education teachers for the requirements of the new IFBP act. A single group pretest-posttest design was also used to evaluate the effects of the training program offered. The dependent variables were the amount of pre-post differences of psychological preparation, the perceived benefit, and the satisfaction with the program. The relationship of the preparation scores and the background variables of participants regarding professional behavior training, teacher's educational background, and working situation characteristics were analysed as well.

Participants

There were 247 special education teachers who worked at elementary or junior high schools in northern Taiwan participated in this study: 137 were from Taipei City, and 110 from New Taipei City. Background characteristics of the participants are listed in Table 1.

Table 1 Background characteristics of participants

Background characteristic		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	27	10.9%
	Female	220	89.1%
City	Taipei	137	55.5%
	New Taipei	110	44.5%
School	Elementary schools	154	60.2%
	Junior high schools	93	36.3%
Position	Administrative staff	30	12.1%
	Head teacher	42	17.0%

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	Faculty teacher	173	70.0%
	Other	2	0.8%
Class pattern	Non-inclusive schools	4	1.6%
	Self-contained class	52	21.1%
	Resources class (disability)	175	70.9%
	Resources class (gifted)	3	1.2%
	Itinerant class	7	2.8%
Sp. seniority	Regular class	6	2.4%
	Less than 1 year	11	4.5%
	1~5years	77	31.2%
	6~10years	61	24.7%
	11~15years	78	31.6%
	More than 16years	20	8.1%
Teacher Qualification	Yes	232	93.9%
	No	15	6.1%
Ed. Background	University	144	58.3%
	Elective program	91	36.8%
Behavior Ed.	None	12	4.9%
	None	64	25.9%
	Behavior modification	142	57.5%
Other Ed.	Applied behavior analysis	41	16.6%
	Workshop/ coursework (more than 12hrs)	15	6.6%
	Assessment and identification	135	54.7%
	EBD/AUT program (10 credits)	7	2.8%
	None	90	36.4%
Total		247	100%

Training Program

The core components of IFBP were extracted according to the results in Van Acker et al. (2005) and Killu et al. (2006). The program schedule is listed in Table 2. The short-term 8-hr training program is described below:

- Emphasize the differences between BM and FBA
- Introduce preventive and positive strategies
- Provide instruments to simplify FBA procedures e.g. Motivation Assessment Scale of Behavior Problems (Lin,2000), Function-Strategy Reference Chart (Revised from O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Sprague, Storey,& Newton., 1997), etc.

Table 2 Training program and schedule

Session	Title	Key components	Hours
1	Introduction	1. Meaning of the new act1 requirements 2. Concepts of positive behavior support	
	Definition of Target Behavior	1. Choosing target behavior 2. Defining target behavior	1
2	Development of IFBP	1. Functional behavior assessment 2. Developing IFBP step by step	2
3	Treatment Strategies I	1. Antecedents strategies 2. Crisis management	1.5
4	Treatment Strategies II	1. Behavior training strategies 2. Consequences arrangement	1.5

5 **Case Demonstration** A real case of the application of IFBP

Instrument

The questions of the pre-training questionnaire involved the ability to deal with IFBP, such as: a) “Do you know about the new IFBP requirements?”, b) “Are you capable of developing and implementing IFBP?”, c) “What is your experience of IFBP in practice?”, d) “How much confidence do you have about completing this request?”.

Another three questions involved feelings about IFBP’s demand, e.g. “Do you feel worried-easy, pessimistic-optimistic, evasive-accepted at the mention of IFBP”. In addition, the expectation of the training program was checked in this questionnaire.

The post-training questionnaire had two parts. The questions in Part 1 were similar to the pre one, added the item, “Using IFBP could improve behavior problems, agree or not?”. Part 2 asked the trainees to rate their benefit and satisfaction with the training program.

Likert’s type 4-point or 10-point compulsive design were applied in both pre and post questionnaires to avoid a central tendency bias or vague responses.

Procedures

The pre-questionnaires were delivered at the check-in time before all training sessions and collected at the beginning. Post-questionnaires were delivered during the break between Session 4 and Session 5 and collected at the end. Although the post-questionnaire was delivered early, 13 participants still dropped out and did not complete the investigation.

Results and Discussion

Teacher Preparation for IFBP at the Beginning of the Policy

54.5% of Special Ed. teachers had known about the new requirements for IFBP and 52.3% were confident with this request (above 3 points). 78.9% of participants thought it was difficult (less than 2 points) to develop IFBP by themselves; 92.2% had little experience of developing IFBP, and 92.6% had little experience of carrying out IFBP. The results are listed in Table 3.

Even among the participants who had received ABA training, only 17.3% had actually developed more than 2 IFBPs by themselves and only 10.3% had carried out more than 2 IFBPs. Most special education teachers indeed had difficulty developing IFBP. Weak preparation for this new policy is a universal problem in northern Taiwan.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of the preparation variables

	Have Known IFBP	Capable	Experience-developing	Experience-carrying out	Confidence
Mean	2.58	1.85	1.47	1.42	2.53
S. D.	.92	.78	.69	.72	.70
Frequency	1*	1	1	1	1
Distribution	11.7%	36.3%	25.0%	25.8%	43.0%
	2	2	2	2	2

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	34.8%	43.0%						
3	3	3	4.7%	3	3.1%	3	44.9%	
34.0%	19.1%	4	2.7%	4	3.9%	4	7.4%	
4	4							
19.5%	1.6%							

Note: *These codes (1,2,3,and 4) were the points that participates had rated1.

Table 4 Expectation of program

Expectation	Num.	Percentage
Meaning of the new act requirements	133	53.8%
Procedures of developing IFBP	202	81.8%
More treatment strategies	208	84.2%
Total	247	100%

The issue that the participants were most interested in was “knowing about more treatment strategies” and the least interesting one was “meaning of the new act requirements” (Table 4). This indicated that teachers place more concern on practical problem-solving such as treatment strategies.

On the other hand, because more than half of the teachers had understood the meaning of the act (see Table 3), it is reasonable that they perhaps do not want to spend much time on this issue.

The mean of the feeling index on worried-easy was 5.64 (SD=1.92), of pessimistic-optimistic 5.96 (SD=1.87), and of evasive-accepted 6.21 (SD=1.95). The ratio of the worried tendency was 52%, easy 48%, pessimistic 43%, optimistic 57%, evasive 35%, and accepted 65%. A few more teachers were feeling accepted and optimistic, but still a good few teachers felt worried.

In conclusion, more than half of the participants knew and were confident about the IFBP requirements. They also trended to accept the task. However, the preparation for knowledge and ability in IFBP was weak among most special education teachers.

Further, an ANOVA was performed to test whether any differences of preparation between groups before the training program existed. There were some significant differences in factor of city, class, years teaching, behavioral training background, and other training background (see Tables 5a & 5b).

Table 5a ANOVA and comparison t-test on background factors (pre-training)

	Understandin g		Capable IFBP		to Have written		Have done		Confidence	
	F	Post Hoc	F	Post Hoc	F	Post Hoc	F	Post Hoc	F	Post Hoc
City ¹	2.62 9**	2>1 ^d	1.275	ns	1.65 4	ns	2.00 2*	2>1	-.836	ns
School	.169	ns	.460	ns	.044	ns	1.18 2	ns	2.07 3	ns
Class ²	.558	ns	2.052	ns	.551	ns	.403	ns	.277	ns
Sp. Ed Q.	1.16 7	ns	.086	ns	.082	ns	2.80 6	ns	.120	ns
Sp. Ed. degre e	1.57 3	ns	.298	ns	2.21 2	ns	.628	ns	.158	ns

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Years ³	2.114	ns	.228	ns	1.42	ns	1.96	ns	.300	ns
Behavior training ⁴	8.20	1<2,3	18.29	1<2<3	5.16	1,2<3	6.89	1,2<3	1.10	ns
Other training ⁵	1.58	ns	5.095	4<1,3	2.92	4<1,3	4.68	4<1,3	5.60	1,2,4<3

¹City : 1.Taipei 2.New Taipei; ²Class : 1.Special school 2.Special class 3.Resources class 4.Itinerant; ³Years : 1.Less than 5 2.6-10 3.11-15

⁴Behavior training : 1. None 2.BM 3.ABA; ⁵Other training : 1.12-hrs workshop 2.Assessment 3.10-credit program 4.None

Table 5b ANOVA and comparison t-test on background factors(pre-training)

	Worried-Easy		Pessimistic-Optimistic		Evasive-Accepted	
	F	Post Hoc	F	Post Hoc	F	Post Hoc
City ¹	.614	ns	1.628	ns	3.751	2>1
School Class ²	.133	ns	.890	ns	.071	ns
Sp. Ed. Q. degree ⁰	1.66	ns	1.532	ns	4.049	4>1,2,3
Years ³	.211	ns	.004	ns	.023	ns
Behavior training ⁴	3.49	ns	5.664	1>2	.706	ns
Other training ⁵	3.920	ns	2.079	ns	2.990	1>2,3
Behavior training ⁴	3.12	1<3	3.874	1<3	4.096	1<2,3
Other training ⁵	3.34	2,4<3	2.835	1,2,4<3	4.419	4<1,2<3

*p<.05, **p<.01

A LSD method post-hoc comparison yielded the fact that New Taipei City were significantly higher than Taipei City on some items (Tables 5a & 5b). Itinerant class teachers were significantly more accepting of IFBP tasks than any other class group (4>1,2,3; Table 5b). Those with work experience of less than 5 years were significantly more accepting than those with 6 to 15 years of experience (1>2,3; Table 5b). The ABA group was significantly higher than the BM and none groups (all p<.05, except for “confidence”). The 10-credit program group was significantly higher than the other groups on each item. The 12-hr workshop group was significantly higher than the no training group on “capable” (1>4); “written” (1>4) and “done”(1>4; Table 5a).

It seemed that participants with ABA, or with long-term or intensive coursework such as a 10-credit program or a 12-hr workshop background were more prepared for IFBP. This finding

was similar to that of Fallon et al. (2011). However, costly long-term programs are not economic enough to popularise knowledge about IFBP. As known above, most special education teachers found it difficult to develop IFBP. Popular and low time-cost programs could perhaps be helpful for most teachers to deal with IFBP requirements, as more intense instruction may not be considered.

Another issue is that the proportion of the prepared group was so small (ABA 16.6%, Workshop 9.4%, see Table 1). This weak preparation for IFBP in Northern Taiwan was similar to American scholars' concern in the early period of 97' IDEA (Quinn, 2001; Yell et al., 2000; Van Acker et al., 2005).

Change after the Training Program

Overall, the distribution pattern of psychological preparation clearly changed after the training program (see Table 6). The proportion of higher preparation was larger than lower preparation on each item. The proportion knowing the meaning of policy change increased to 80.1%, and the proportion who had confidence with IFBP increased to 89.7%. The most dramatic change came on capability: previously 78.9% of participants had evaluated themselves as not capable of developing an IFBP, while 79.6% thought they were capable after participating in the program. Actually, 98.4% of teachers tended to agree that using IFBP could improve behavior problems (on 3~4-points) and the mean of this item was 3.36 (SD=.51).

Table 6 Descriptive statistics on preparation after training

	Have known	Capable	Confidence	IFBP- efficacy
Mean	3.19	2.89	3.03	3.36
S. D.	.82	.59	.48	.51
Frequency	1*	1	1	1
Distribution	2.7%	0.8%	0.4%	0%
	2	2	2	2
	17.2%	19.5%	9.8%	1.6%
	3	3	3	3
	36.3%	68.7%	77.2%	60.0%
	4	4	4	4
	43.8%	10.9%	12.5%	38.4%

Note: *These codes (1,2,3,and 4) were the points that participates had rated1.

Overall, each feeling index appeared to improve after the training program. The mean of worried-easy was 6.61 (SD=1.66), pessimistic-optimistic was 6.70 (SD=1.65), and evasive-accepted was 6.76 (SD=1.74). The percentage of positive tendency on each item all increased after training, e.g. worried-easy was 74%, pessimistic-optimistic was 76%, and evasive-accepted was 75%. In other words, participants seemed to feel more easy, optimistic, and accepting than their original status.

Added to the descriptive evidence as reported above, the results from the single-tailed t-test

on pre-post preparation variables demonstrated that the post-training preparation scores of trainees were significantly higher than the pre-training ones on all items ($p=.00<.01^{**}$). It was concluded that this training program indeed improve special education teachers' psychological preparation for IFBP.

An ANOVA and t-test comparison using the LSD method were performed to test whether any differences existed in the change amounts of pre-post preparation (see Table 8). There were some significant differences in the factor special educator degree in the case of the feeling indexes Pessimistic-Optimistic ($F(2,242)=6.301, p <.01$) and Evasive-Accepted scores ($F(2,242)=5.590, p<.01$): the university degree group was significantly smaller than those who were merely selective program qualified or had a non-special educator background. A significant difference on the behavior training background in the case of the capable scores ($F(2,244)=6.732, p<.01$) was also found: in particular, the changes in the those only took Behavior Modification training (BM) and none behavior training group were significantly larger than the group who once took Applied Behavior Analysis(ABA)training.

Based on the results, it could perhaps be inferred that teachers who have undergone basic training such as BM or only obtained the degree of selective program on special education seemed to benefit more from this IFBP training program, or that this kind of short-term training could manifest a better specificity with those teachers. This finding corresponded to the concern of program design which emphasizes the difference and connection between BM and FBA, so that teachers with basic training backgrounds were affected more.

Perceptual Benefit and satisfaction

Almost 90% of trainees felt they had benefitted from the overall program and each session, e.g. 96.9% on the overall program, 89.8% on Session 1, 93.6% on Session 2, 93.0% on Session 3, 91.6% on Session 4, and 88.5% on Session 5 rated above 3-point beneficial scores (see Table7a). More than 90% of trainees felt satisfied with the overall program and each session as well: 97.9% on overall, 95.3% on Session 1, 96.0% on Session 2, 96.5% on Session 3, 94.2% on Session 4, and 91.4% on Session 5 rated above 3-point satisfaction scores (see Table7b).

Table7a Descriptive statistics on perceived benefit scores

	Overall	S1 Mean & definition	S2 IFBP procedures	S3 Strategies I	S4 Strategies II	S5 Case demo
Mean(S.D.)	3.44(.61)	3.29(.66)	3.44(.63)	3.39(.63)	3.39(.64)	3.44(.65)
Frequency	1*	1	1	1	1	1
Distribution	0.4%	0.4%	2 5.9%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
	2	2		2	2	2
	1.6%	9.8%		6.6%	7.5%	6.8%
	3	3	3 44.0%	3	3	3
	46.9%	49.6%	4 49.6%	46.9%	45.1%	39.7%
	4	4		4	4	4
	50.0%	40.2%		46.1%	46.5%	48.8%

Note: *These codes (1,2,3,and 4) were the points that participates had rated1.

Table7b Descriptive statistics on satisfaction scores

	Overall	S1 Mean & definition	S2 IFBP procedures	S3 Strategies I	S4 Strategies II	S5 Case demo
Mean(S.D.)	3.50(.55)	3.40(.58)	3.53(.57)	3.49(.57)	3.46(.59)	3.68(.58)
Frequency	1	1	1	1	1	1
Distribution	0.4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	2	2	2 3.9%	2	2	2
	1.6%	4.7%		3.5%	5.7%	4.3%
	3	3	3 38.7%	3	3	3
	47.9%	50.8%	4 57.3%	44.5%	44.2%	37.5%
	4	4		4	4	4
	50.0%	44.5%		52.0%	50.0%	53.9%

A single tailed t-test on the benefit scores was executed in order to compare each session one by one. The results yielded the facts that Session 1 and Session 3 were significantly lower than Overall ($t=5.12$, $p<.01$ former; $t=2.14^*$, $p<.05$ latter). Session 1 was even significantly lower than any other session. In the case of the satisfaction scores, Session 2 was significantly higher than Overall ($t=1.93$, $p<.05$), but Session 1 was lower than Overall ($t=3.066$, $p<.01$). The satisfaction with Session 1 was still significantly lower than any other session.

In summary, teachers rated “Meaning/Behavior Definition (S1)” as the least beneficial and satisfied. IFBP Procedures (S2) was rated as the most beneficial and satisfied. Considering the lower expectation about learning about the meaning of the new act in the beginning of training, the poor evaluation of benefit and satisfaction of Session 1 was predictable. High benefit and satisfaction with the IFBP Procedures reveals that our program that provide instruments to simplify FBA procedures successfully helped trainees to learn about the core concepts and implementation of FBA.

Conclusions

In northern Taiwan, more than half of the participants in the study already knew about the new IFBP requirements. Most participants had difficulty developing IFBP. Weak preparation for this new policy is a universal problem. They trended to accept this new rule, even if they still felt a little worried about IFBP issues. Participants with an intensive special education coursework background seemed be more prepared for IFBP. However, the proportion of this group was small.

This training program did indeed seem to improve special education teachers’ psychological preparation for IFBP. Compared with original status, there were much more trainees who perceived themselves prepared for developing IFBP. The post-training preparation scores of the trainees were significantly higher than their pre-training ones. Besides, teachers with only BM training changed more than those with ABA training experience on some preparation variables. Most of trainees felt they benefitted from this program and they were

satisfied with it.

Because there was a limit of time to practice for this popularity as research colleagues had originally predicted, the suggestion was proposed that an advanced workshop inclusive of more performance or discussion sessions may be held for volunteer teachers who have participated in basic training.

The focus of this study was perceived preparation reported by teachers rather than real performance on IFBP development and implementation. Further research is needed on practical implementation, the quality of IFBP, or the effects on improving behaviour problem in the school setting.

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