



Identification and Intervention of Children with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders: Practices and Challenges in Primary Schools

Temesgen Tawele¹, Tesfaye Basha², Muluken Tesfaye³

^{1,2}Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Arba Minch University, Ethiopia

²Department of Special Needs and Inclusive Education, Hawassa University, Ethiopia

Received date February 2, 2024

Accepted date March 22, 2024

Abstract

Identification and support of students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) in integrated schools is a complex and challenging process. Investigation of identification and intervention practices and challenges for children with EBD in primary schools of Boloso Bombe Woreda was the main focus of this study. An explanatory design (QUAN, qual) of a mixed research approach was employed. Purposive, available, and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 21 students with EBD, 21 parents, 50 teachers, 7 special needs education experts, and 7 principals. Data obtained through questionnaires, interviews, FGD, and observation were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The result of the study revealed that the identification and intervention practices were leveled as poor and very traditional. This low level of implementation manifested by lack of awareness on the identification and intervention techniques, knowledge gap on the types, causes, symptoms of EBD, problem in implementation identification and intervention techniques, lack of on-job training on how to identify and intervene students, absence of IEP teams, poor adaptation and modification of the instruction, negative attitude towards children with EBD, lack of effective monitoring and support by administrative, large number of students in a class, insufficient counselors and special needs education experts, and poor stockholders involvement. These results indicate identification and intervention practices for children with EBD lacks great attention. To ameliorate the problem contextualizing standard identification tools, organizing IEP teams, hiring well trained special needs experts and principals, creating attractive instructional environment, adaptation and modification of the curriculum, and monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's effectiveness are crucial.

Keywords: *Identification, Intervention, Emotional and Behavioral Disorder.*



1. Introduction

Emotional and Behavioral Disorder (EBD) is a condition exhibiting one or more of the characteristics such as an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, and a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems (IDEA, 2004). According to Smith (2011), EBD has two categories known as externalizing and internalizing disorders. Attention deficit hyperactive disorder, conduct disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, hyperactive, aggressive, etc...are categorized under externalizing disorders whereas, immaturity, anxiety, depression, withdrawal, difficulty in learning, childish and easily frustrated are categorized under internalizing disorders (Abraham, 2009). This type of children's behavior problems can pose tremendous challenges to families, schools, and society. Once established problem behavior tends to persist (Kara, 2017). Left untreated children's behavior problems typically multiply, intensify, and diversify over time, thus putting the child at increased risk for academic failure, social isolation, and peer rejection. These, in turn,

accelerate the likelihood of school avoidance, alcoholism and drug abuse, and lifespan antisocial behavior. Given the pernicious effects of children's behavior disorders, early intervention to prevent the development of such disorders is a judicious alternative to intervening after the behavior is well entrenched (Feleke, 2010). Regarding prevalence, the U.S. Department of Education and National Center for Education Statistics, (2015) showed that from the percentage of students identified for special education supports and services under the classification of emotional disturbance has remained constant at approximately 1% of the school-age population. In relation to this, a local study conducted by Tirussew (2005) revealed that from the profile of the specific disabilities in Ethiopia 2.4% are persons with behavioral problems. It has been estimated that 43% to 56% of students with EBD drop out of school, a rate almost twice that for all students with disabilities. Despite a significant number of students experiencing emotional and behavioral problems in the school, the majority of these students remain unidentified and consequently untreated. By most accounts, early detection/intervention is the most powerful course of action in ameliorating lifelong problems associated with children at risk for emotional/behavioral disorders. Indeed, a growing body of empirical research supports the positive impact of early intervention (Kara,



2017). Most experts agree that prevention of children's with emotional and behavioral disorders requires intervention in multiple environments, by multiple agents over time, with continued intervention, support, and transition services as children move from setting to setting (Hamblin-Wilson, & Thurman, 1990; Hester & Kaiser, 1998; Rule, Fietchl, & Innocenti, 1990; Rous, Hemmeter, & Schuster, 1994), cited in Feleke (2010).

Moreover, scientifically supported intervention practices for EBD includes using teacher praise for positive reinforcement; providing opportunities for students to respond during instruction and using positive behavior support such as functional behavior assessments, social skills instruction, teaching for desired replacement behaviors and self-management and school-wide systems of positive behavior support. In addition, decreasing disruptive classroom behavior in the classroom the interventions include group contingency, self-management, differential reinforcement, and token economies. Therefore, critically investigating the identification and intervention of children with EBD is important to understand the recent practices and predict for future alteration. The researchers assumed that this study may show favorable conditions and paves the way for students with EBD best placement opportunities and equal access to education.

2. Statement of the Problem

Identification and assessment of students with disabilities or suspected disabilities are evaluated by schools to determine whether they are eligible for special education services and, if eligible, to determine what services will be provided. In contrast, the majority of students with disabilities are initially referred for evaluation by their classroom teacher or parents because of severe and chronic achievement or behavioral problems. Children with EBD in regular schools, especially on the aspect of identification and intervention, remain a major challenge not only in Ethiopia, but also around the world. They are considered as the most under-identified and underserved of all the disability groups (Forness & Kavale, 2001; Gresham, 2005, 2007; Merrell & Walker, 2004), cited in Kara (2017).

Simple logic suggests that failing to identify students early and circumscribing the population to include only those with the most extreme and protracted problems do not portend success (Kauffman, 1999 & Walker, 2004). Early identification is crucial for students with EBD to get supports that match their individual needs in order for them to be successful. To get the required supports they need identification of the problem and assessments need to be done promptly and if this is not done it delays the interventions and individual education plan for

that student and it can cause the student to fall behind academically and to have behavioral issues consistently in the classroom (Kauffman, 1999). Without proper identification and treatment, such students pose substantial challenges to their teachers, administrators, and peers, including classroom disruptions and school safety issues. Moreover, longitudinal studies indicate that, compared to their non-disabled peers, youth with emotional and behavioral disabilities experience higher rates of delinquency, juvenile incarcerations, school dropout, teen pregnancy, suicide, and substance abuse (Wagner & Cameto, 2004; Wagner, Kutash, Duchnowski, & Epstein, 2005). Surprisingly, the researcher's vast observation and ample experiences in the study area also align with the majority of indicated problems that come in the identification and intervention of children with EBD in primary schools. To show the problems and possible solutions in detail the researchers were engaged in conducting this study. Therefore, this study intended to identify how primary schools practiced identification and intervention for children with EBD to obtain equal access to educational opportunities as other children and to identify the challenges which interfere on the practices of identification and intervention for children with EBD guided by the following basic research questions: How the identification

and intervention practices being does implement?

1. What are the challenges that interfere with the identification and intervention services?
2. What are the possible solutions to be taken for the encountered challenges?

The general objective of this study is to investigate the identification and intervention practices and challenges of children with EBD in selected primary schools of Boloso Bombe woreda, Wolaita Zone of South Ethiopia. More specifically the study intended

1. To assess the existing practices of identification and intervention being implemented for students with EBD in the in primary schools.
2. To identify the existing challenges that interferes with the identification and intervention of students with EBD.
3. To suggest possible solutions to address the encountered challenges of identification and intervention for students with EBD.

Regarding the significance, this study helps to create better awareness for the school principals, teachers, and individualized education program teams on how they can carefully identify and manage the behaviors of students with EBD. It also helps to know the prevalence and to enable the placement of this group student. The study

provides feedback for educational leaders, teachers, students, and other stakeholders on the current practices and challenges in the identification and intervention of students with EBD in primary schools. Moreover, it paves a way for researchers who want to study the related problems of students with emotional and behavioral disorders and it may serve as a reference for researchers and policymakers.

3. Theoretical Framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory about the ecology of human development reflects the influence of several ecological systems. The ecological system theory describes the difference in behavior of the child in different environments and how the environment influences their development and grows up the child into an adult (Bronfenbrenner,1979)

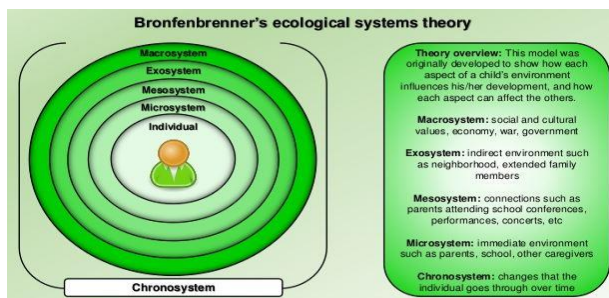


Figure 1: Source: Ecological System Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

Bronfenbrenner divides the environment into 5 different levels and the point of an ecological model in each level interacts with others. The

child at the center of the model interacts directly with the people in the microsystem and the effects of the interaction go both ways. As people affect the child, so the child influences them. As a result, the child, the system, and the environment are an ever-changing milestone and life events occur as time passes, the child grows, and the context change. The school setting, classroom environment, and interaction with teachers and peers is placed in the first closest system to the child called microsystem. The people and institutions of the child interact within that environment make up the microsystem, give norms and rules. Hence the whole school environment is one of the closest environment systems individuals interacts with and that influence and affects the development. Additionally, it is the macro system that includes official regulation and cultural traditions, and that indirectly affect ever Microsystems (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Therefore, the ecological system theory is a conceptual framework used to interpret school dynamics and its direct implication for practices of identification, assessment, support provision, placement, and teaching with long term relationships between children and parents, students and students, students and teachers, and teams. In this study, it was helped to investigate the practices and challenges in the identification and intervention of children with EBD in primary schools of Boloso Bombe Woreda.

4. Methodology

The design for this study was selected on the bases of the theory that it helps to gather adequate information from participants in line with basic research questions. To this end, an explanatory design (QUAN- qual) of a mixed research approach was employed by giving priority on quantitative data collection/analysis and using the qualitative data to explain the results of the quantitative one. In supporting this approach Louis, Lawrence and Keith, (2011) stated this research method helps to gather data at a particular point in time to describe the nature of the existing condition, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared, or determining the relationships exists between specific events.

The target population of the study incorporated all students with EBD, teachers, principals, school special needs education experts, and parents of students with EBD in seven primary schools which were found in Boloso Bombe woreda namely: Bombe Limat, Bombe Idiget, Adila, Farawocha, Gido Ambe, Kuto Ambe and Bombe Tekli Dingayi. Indicated schools were selected through purposive sampling based on having a large number of students with EBD. As can see in Table 1 the sample consisted of 7 primary schools (19.4 %) out of 36 public primary schools, 21 students with EBD (13.3%) out of 158 students, 50 teachers (30.5%) out of

164 teachers, 7 principals of the school, 7 special needs education experts from schools and 21 parents of sampled students' with EBD (13.3%). Sampled students with EBD and their respective parents were selected purposively by considering the severity level of the behavior problem and being parents/caregivers of students who have EBD respectively:

Table 1: Summary of Study Population and Sample

R.no	Participants	Total Population	Sample		Sampling Technique
			N	%	
1	Students with EBD	158	21	13.3	Purposive
2	Principals	7	7	100	Available
3	Teachers	164	50	30.5	Simple Random
4	Parents of students with EBD	158	21	13.3	Purposive
5	Special Needs Education Expert	7	7	100	Available
Total Participants		494	106	21.5	

To collect the required data on the current practices and challenges of identification and intervention of students with EBD; questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion, and observation instruments were employed. The questionnaire was prepared in English

language, tested, and administered to sample teacher participants. Semi-structured interview guide questions were designed in Amharic language and conducted with school principals; school special needs education experts to secure information. Focus group discussion was the other data gathering tool utilized in this research. It was carried out between parents of sampled students with EBD in three groups. The information obtained through qualitative data collection tools were analyzed and triangulated with information gathered through the questionnaire. Analysis of collected data was done using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative data via a close-ended questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics; frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The mean score of the questionnaire rated Likert scale result of quantitative analysis determined as $< 2.5 =$ low, $2.5 - 3.5 =$ medium and $>3.5 =$ high (Berahane, 2014). The data obtained from the FGD, observation, and interview was analyzed qualitatively by narrating under categories with reference to the research questions.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Identification Practices Being Implemented for students with EBD

Many educators recognize the need to identify young children who may require intervention. To this purpose, the results of this study revealed

by teachers implied that the current practices of identification of children with EBD were poor in primary schools of Boloso Bombe woreda.

Table 2: Teachers Response on identification practices for students with EBD

N	Items	Level of Agreement						M	SD
		Low		Moderate		High			
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	Organization of Individualized Education Program teams	3	7	12	24	-	-	1.84	.79
2	Functionality of Individualized Education Program	4	8	10	20	-	-	1.80	.75
3	Awareness on the identification techniques/ strategies	3	6	19	38	-	-	2.24	.74
4	Implementation of different identification techniques	3	7	10	20	4	8	1.94	.98
5	Knowledge on the causes, types, and symptoms of EBD	3	6	15	30	5	10	2.10	1.05
6	Receiving on-job training on how to identify these students	3	6	13	26	4	8	2.02	1.00
7	School administrative support for effective identification	3	7	13	26	-	-	1.92	.78

f= frequency; M= Mean; and SD= Standard Deviation

In Table 2 the low level of implementation practices of identification manifested by teacher response for the question related to awareness on the identification techniques/strategies with (M=2.24, SD=.74), knowledge on the causes, types, and symptoms of EBD with (M=2.10, SD =1.05), implementation of different identification techniques with (M=1.94, SD=.98), receiving on-job training on how to identify these students with (M=2.02, SD= 1.00), organization of individualized education program teams with (M=1.84, SD=.79), the functionality of individualized education program with (M=1.80, SD=.75), and school administrative support for effective identification with (M=1.92, SD=.78). In supporting the importance of improving awareness Tirussew (2005) suggested that awareness-raising programs should involve parents, family, community members who need to be enforced and convinced to develop their contribution in promoting special needs. Interviewed school principals also said most of the school communities in general, have no enough awareness and involvement in the identification of children with EBD. Parents' in FGD added that "we have no knowledge on types, cause and symptoms of behavioral problems, lack of awareness on how the school identify and leveled children as a behavioral

disorder, and the school did not invite us to participate in the identification process. Most of the time the principal call and told us, your child has very challenging behavior and follow him/her seriously." Thus, early and proper identification is crucial for students with EBD to get and provide supports that match their individual needs in order for them to be successful in their school career. If this is not done it delays the interventions and individual education plan for that student and it can cause the student to fall behind academically and to have behavioral issues consistently in the classroom (Kauffman, 1999).

5.2.Intervention Practices Being Implemented for students with EBD

The effectiveness of intervention strategies applied in managing emotional or behavioral problems depends upon the proper identification process (Alberto and Troutman, 2010). According to the results in the previous section of this study addressed the big gap in the identification of students with behavior problems in the study area. In the table below the intervention practices are treated accordingly:

Table 3: Teachers Response on intervention practices for students with EBD

N	Items	Level of Agreement						M	S
		Low		Mode		Hig			
		f	%	f	%	f	%		
1	Understanding on the intervention strategies/techniques	3	6	1	3	-	-	2.1	.75
2	Motivation and commitment to use different intervention techniques	3	6	1	3	3	6	2.2	.84
3	Getting on-job training on how to handle students with behavior problem	2	5	1	3	5	1	2.38	.88
4	Making the classroom attractive and least restrictive environment	3	7	1	2	4	8	1.98	.96
5	Direct involvement	4	8	7	1	2	4	2.14	.71

of teachers in providing intervention /supporting students with EBD

6 Stakeholder's involvement during intervention process

7 Monitoring and follow up student's behavioral problems

f= frequency; M= Mean; and SD= Standard Deviation

As can see in Table 3, the intervention practices being implemented for students with EBD according to the respondent teachers response was measured as low level with (M=2.18, SD=.75) for the question related to their understanding on the intervention strategies, (M=2.22, SD=.84) for their motivation and commitment to using different intervention techniques, (M=2.38, SD=.88) for getting on-job training on how to handle students with a behavior problem, (M=1.98, SD=.96) for making the classroom more attractive and least restrictive, (M=2.14, SD=.71) for their direct

involvement of teachers in providing intervention/ supporting students with EBD, (M=2.20, SD=.90) for stakeholders involvement during the intervention, and (M=2.38, SD=1.05) for monitoring and follow up students behavior. Similarly, interview result of special needs education experts' shows except very few committed teachers' majority of teachers follow punishment as an intervention mechanism. They don't know the importance to note that learners with EBD are managed by designing an individual curriculum program to suit their educational needs. But, Polloway, Patton, and Serna (2008) stated that teachers can minimize disruptive behavior during transition times by giving learners specific directions on how to move from one activity to another and by rewarding students for making an orderly and smooth transition. Scheurmann and Hall (2008) positive behavioral support include providing effective academic content and instructions to learners with EBDs. They also reflected on the lack of knowledge on providing appropriate intervention and poor parents' participation in the intervention of children with EBD in the majority of schools.

5.3. Encountered Challenges identification and Intervention of Students with EBD

In this study a number of challenges of identification and intervention practices were pointed out by respondent teachers of students

with EBD, school principals, and special needs education experts at Woreda level:

Table 4: Teachers Response on challenges encountered in identification and intervention practices for students with EBD

N	Items	Level of Agreement						M	S
		Low		Mode rate		High			
		f	%	F	%	f	%		
1	Absence of individualized education program teams	7	14	1	2	3	6	3.	1.
2	Poor instructional strategies to intervening the problem	4	8	1	3	5	5	3.	1.
3	Inadequate knowledge on the identification tools and intervention strategies	2	4	1	2	3	6	4.	.9
4	Problem in creating welcoming	8	16	1	3	2	5	3.	1.

5	Poor parents and stakeholder s' participatio n and contributio n	-	-	1	3	3	6	4	.8
6	Negative attitude towards children with EBD	-	-	1	2	3	7	4	.7
7	Poor on-job training on how to identify and intervene students in behavior problem	5	1	1	2	3	7	3	1.
8	Insufficient counselors and special needs education experts	3	6	1	2	3	7	4	.9
9	Poor	4	8	1	3	2	5	3	.8

1	Lack of monitoring and support by school administrati ve	1	2	1	2	3	7	4	.9
0		4	8	5	0	0	0	0	0
4									

f= frequency; M= Mean; and SD= Standard Deviation

In a brief discussion of Table 4, the quantitative result obtained by questionnaire identified the challenges as ; the absence of individualized education program teams (M=3.92, SD=1.24), poor instructional strategies to intervein the problem (M=3.84, SD=1.22), inadequate knowledge on identification tools and intervention strategies (M=4.12, SD=.96), problem in creating welcoming environment for all students with EBD (M=3.72, SD=1.11), poor parents and stakeholders' participation (M=4.02, SD=.89), negative attitude towards children with EBD (M=4.16, SD=.79), poor on-job training on how to identify and intervene students in behavior problem (M=3.98, SD=1.06), insufficient counselors and special needs education experts (M=4.06, SD=.98), lack of motivation, interest and commitment to support



($M=3.86$, $SD=1.03$), poor adaptation and modification of the instruction ($M=3.66$, $SD=.89$), and lack of monitoring and support by school administrative ($M=4.04$, $SD=.90$) were identified as a major challenges.

Moreover, the interviewees' school principal and special needs education expert said that stakeholder's poor awareness about types of behavior problems and identification process, having a large number of students in one class which is difficult to manage their behavior, insufficient special needs education expert and counselors, and less commitment to the schools' community especially, special needs and regular teachers to identify students with EBD were the major challenges. Moreover, in FDG majority of respondents said lack of training also hinders improving the abilities of teachers to identify and support students with EBD. Some of this finding agrees with Mckenzie and Schweitzer, (2001); Willeh, (2002) as mentioned that poor identification due to poor communication and information dissemination mechanisms, lack of clear guidelines on placement issues, inadequate and, in some cases inappropriate special support services, low level of awareness and negative attitudes were widely observed challenges in a school with students with EBD.

6. Conclusion

Proper identification of children with EBD leads to get eligible children for intervention services.

In contrast to this in this study, it was observed a poor identification practice of children with EBD in primary Schools. In addressing the need of students with EBD the study also revealed low-level intervention practices with ineffective and inefficient treatment. The poor level of identification and intervention practices manifested by lack of awareness on the identification and intervention techniques/tools, knowledge gap on the types, causes, symptoms of EBD, a problem in the implementation of different identification and intervention tools, lack of on-job training on how to identify and intervene students, absence of individualized education program teams, problem in creating welcoming classroom environment, poor adaptation and modification of the instruction, negative attitude towards children with EBD, motivation and commitment gap to use different techniques, lack of effective monitoring and support by school administrative, large number of students in a class, insufficient counselors and special needs education experts, and poor stockholders involvement were the major challenges addressed by this study. This indicates identification and intervention practices for children with EBD in primary schools of Boloso Bombe woreda lacks great attention.

7. Recommendations

Depending on the findings drawn from conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are forwarded to improve the practices of identification and intervention of students with EBD in primary schools:

- The schools should facilitate short-term capacity building training for teachers and parents on identification techniques and intervention practices for students with EBD.
- The schools need to organize individualized education program teams and need to follow its functionality closely.
- The school should create a conducive least restrictive school environment and attractive instructional strategies by modification and adaptation of curriculum.
- The schools should give due attention to stakeholder's participation in identification and intervention approaches
- The Woreda Education office must train or hire sufficient special needs education experts and counselors.

Acknowledgments

It gives us great pleasure in acknowledging the School of Pedagogical and Behavioral Sciences

of Arba Minch University for financial support in which allocated for the MA study. We also thank study participants namely school principals, Special needs education experts, teachers, and students with EBD. Without your persistent supports, this paper would not have been realized.

References

- Abraham, T. (2009). Identification and Intervention of Adolescents with the Manifestation of Conduct Disorder in School Setting: A Study of three cases in Arsi Zone, Sirre Town. Unpublished Masters of Arts' thesis, at Addis Ababa University.
- Alberto, P. A. & Troutman, A.C. (2010). Applied behavior analysis for teacher (7thed.) Merills: Prentice Hall.
- Bronfenbrenner, U.(1979).The Ecology of Human Development. Cambridge, US: Harvard University Press
- Feleke, T. (2010). Conducted a study on the assessment and intervention practices for children with conduct disorder at Finfine primary school in Addis Ababa. Unpublished Masters of Arts' thesis, at Addis Ababa University.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of (2004) P.L. 108-446,



- 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. (Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990).
- Kara, P.(2017). Cognitive Assessment in Emotional Disturbance Evaluation: School Psychologists' Practices and Perspectives. PhD Dissertation. University of Findlay College of Education.
- Kauffman, J. M. (1999). How we prevent the prevention of emotional and behavioral disorders. *Exceptional Children* 65, 448–468.
- Smith, D.D. (2011). Emotional or Behavioral Disorders Defined. Pearson Allyn Bacon Prentice Hall. Posted on <http://www.education.com>
- Tirussew T. (2005). Disability in Ethiopia: Issues, Insights and Implications: Contextualizing, Disability, Early intervention, Inclusive education, Gender and Disability, Resilience and Success. Addis Ababa University printing press.
- U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). Statistics of Public Elementary and Secondary School Systems. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d15/tables/dt15_204.30.asp
- Wagner, M. & Cameto, R. (2004). The characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of youth with emotional disturbances. NLTS-2 Data Brief 3(2). Minneapolis, MN: National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.
- Wagner, M., Kutash, K., Duchnowski, A. & Epstein, M. (2005). The special education longitudinal study and the national longitudinal transition study: Study designs and implications for children and youth with emotional disturbance. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, 13(1), 25-41.
- Walker, H. M. (2004). Commentary: Use of evidence-based interventions in schools: Where we've been, where we are, and where we need to go. *School Psychology Review*, 33, 398-408.