

Teachers Lived Experiences in Applying Behaviorist Principles to Classroom Management

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ABSTRACT

This study addressed the limited understanding of how teachers experience and make sense of applying behaviorist principles in real classroom contexts, a gap often overlooked in outcome-focused research. The objective was to explore teachers' lived experiences in using reinforcement, clear expectations, consequences, and other behaviorist strategies in classroom management. Using a phenomenological design, the researchers conducted face-to-face, open-ended interviews with seven teachers aged 30–60 from a public secondary school in Davao Region. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, consistent with phenomenological research, which emphasizes depth of experience over large sample size. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality, were strictly observed throughout the study. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed following Creswell's (2009) steps, involving transcription, coding, categorization, and thematic development.

The analysis generated four major themes: (1) behaviorist strategies as foundations for structure, order, and motivation; (2) perceived effectiveness and limitations of these strategies; (3) challenges in implementing behaviorist approaches, especially with diverse learners; and (4) insights and realizations gained from practice. Results show that teachers heavily rely on positive reinforcement, clear routines, and consistent expectations to maintain discipline and enhance engagement. However, they also observed issues such as reward dependency, surface-level compliance, and difficulty sustaining reinforcement systems due to workload and changing learner behavior. Teachers noted that diverse cultural and socio-emotional backgrounds influence how students respond to rewards and consequences, revealing limits to one-size-fits-all approaches. Across accounts, teachers emphasized flexibility, consistency, and the integration of behaviorist strategies with relational, humanistic, and socio-emotional practices.

The findings conclude that while behaviorist principles remain valuable in establishing structure and shaping desired behaviors, their effectiveness increases when combined with holistic, context-responsive approaches. Teachers' experiences highlight the need for professional development focused on consistent implementation, culturally responsive practices, and reinforcement-fading techniques to support long-term student self-discipline.

Keywords: Behaviorist principles, Classroom management, Lived experiences, Phenomenology, Reinforcement

INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Teachers recognize that effective learning is built on a foundation of order, clarity, and trust. For decades, behaviorist principles, including reinforcement, conditioning, and systematic feedback, have guided teachers in shaping student behavior and maintaining productive learning environments. Recent research underscores that structured behavioral management approaches such as positive reinforcement, clear expectations, and consistent consequences foster student engagement and minimize disruptive conduct (Wilkins, 2022; Clark, 2023). Through these strategies, behaviorist applications remain relevant in contemporary classrooms where student diversity and behavioral challenges continue to evolve.

Behaviorist strategies encompass a range of classroom practices such as token economies, praise, behavior charts, and systematic reinforcement schedules. Current findings suggest that interventions based on Applied

Behavior Analysis (ABA) and self-management procedures lead to significant reductions in disruptive behavior and improvements in on-task performance when implemented consistently (Smith, 2022; National Association of Special Education Teachers [NASET], 2024). However, the success of these practices depends largely on how teachers interpret and adapt theoretical behaviorist principles in authentic classroom contexts.

While quantitative research has illuminated the measurable outcomes of behaviorist approaches, qualitative inquiries have increasingly emphasized the experiential dimensions of teaching. Emerging studies reveal that teachers navigate both benefits and challenges when applying behaviorist principles, balancing the clarity of structured reinforcement with the emotional and ethical dimensions of classroom management (Catulpos et al., 2024). Teachers' lived accounts capture the realities of managing diverse learners, aligning discipline with care, and reconciling institutional expectations with personal teaching philosophies.

Despite the abundance of outcome-focused research, there remains a limited understanding of how teachers experience and make sense of applying behaviorist principles in everyday teaching. Existing studies seldom explore how educators modify, resist, or sustain these approaches amid contextual pressures such as shifting school policies, cultural differences, and post-pandemic adjustments (Anwar, 2024). Examining teachers' perspectives is therefore essential to understand how theory translates into practice and to identify areas for professional growth.

Teachers were chosen as participants because they are the primary agents who interpret, implement, and adapt behaviorist principles in daily classroom practice. Their firsthand experiences provide critical insight into how theoretical behaviorist strategies are translated into real-world classroom management, particularly within diverse and culturally situated learning environments.

Consequently, this study seeks to explore teachers' lived experiences in applying behaviorist principles to classroom management. By focusing on the voices and reflections of educators, this research aims to provide deeper insights into the practical, emotional, and ethical realities of using behaviorist strategies in real-world classrooms. The findings may inform future training programs, enhance teacher preparation, and support context-sensitive behavior management practices that combine structure with empathy (Edutopia, 2025).

Research Question

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of teachers in applying behaviorist principles to classroom management. Through this inquiry, the researcher seeks to understand how teachers utilize behaviorist strategies, the challenges they encounter, and the insights they gain in managing student behavior effectively. The following research questions are formulated to guide the investigation and provide a structured focus for data collection and analysis:

How do teachers describe their experiences in applying behaviorist principles in managing their classrooms?

1. What specific behaviorist strategies do teachers commonly use to manage student behavior?
2. How do teachers feel about the effectiveness of these strategies in maintaining classroom discipline?

What challenges and insights do teachers encounter when implementing behaviorist principles in classroom management?

1. What difficulties do teachers face when applying behaviorist techniques with diverse learners?
2. What lessons or realizations have teachers gained from using behaviorist approaches in their teaching practice?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Teachers' Lived Experiences

Teachers' application of behaviorist principles in the classroom is more than simply adopting token economies or behavior charts; it is deeply tied to how they experience and interpret the role of teacher, student behavior, and

routines in their everyday environment. For example, Anwar, Sultan, Ali, and Hayat (2024) explored the use of behaviorist strategies (token economies, behavior-contracts, reinforcement) among public-school teachers in Pakistan and found that teachers were aware of classical and operant conditioning ideas but also reported challenges in consistent implementation (Anwar et al., 2024). Such findings highlight that lived experience involves negotiating between theoretical knowledge and daily constraints: what the teacher knows versus what the teacher does. In this way, understanding teachers' lived experiences offers insight into how behaviourist principles are mediated by real-world classroom contexts.

In addition to awareness of behaviorist strategies, teachers' lived experience often surfaces the emotional and ethical dimensions of applying such principles. Behaviorist approaches focus on observable behaviors and manipulable consequences (e.g., reinforcement, punishment) (Dellap Rez Project, 2023). But when teachers live this experience, many reflect on tensions: for example, how to maintain student dignity, how to adapt reinforcement so it does not feel arbitrary, and how to balance structure with relationship-building. This suggests that lived experience research helps us move beyond what works to how it feels for the teacher to enact behavioural strategies day after day, especially in diverse classrooms.

Turning to the Philippine context, local studies provide textured accounts of how Filipino teachers enact behaviour-management and classroom routines that align with behaviourist ideas, even if the term "behaviourist" is not always explicitly used. For instance, Hermoso, Erlano Jr., Gonzaga, Lepasana, Lumen, and Sanchez (2022) described how science teachers in Cebu navigated online and blended teaching by retooling behaviour-management routines (e.g., clear behavioural expectations, positive feedback, monitoring) in remote classrooms (Hermoso et al., 2022). In another study, Mananay and Sumalinog (2023) reported that novice English teachers described "classroom management dilemmas" and "emotional-psychological encounters" in their first years, suggesting that living the teaching role meant minding behaviour, instruction, and identity (Mananay & Sumalinog, 2023). These studies show that in the Philippines, the lived experience of behaviour-oriented classroom management is shaped by technology, resource constraints, cultural norms, and teacher identity.

Finally, synthesizing international and local literature, we can see that teachers' lived experiences in applying behaviorist principles oscillate between structure and flexibility, between theory and context. Internationally, the focus tends to emphasize the efficacy and challenges of behaviourist strategies (Anwar et al., 2024), while locally, the focus tends to emphasise teacher identity, adaptation to context, and emotional/relational dimensions (Hermoso et al., 2022; Mananay & Sumalinog, 2023). What remains under-explored is how teachers interpret the underlying behaviorist assumptions (stimulus-response, reinforcement schedules, extinction) in their unique cultural and classroom settings, and how that interpretation shapes what they do. This gap suggests that research that attends specifically to the lived experience of applying behaviorist principles rather than simply documenting behaviorist techniques can yield rich insights into professional learning, teacher support, and context-sensitive classroom management.

While international studies largely emphasize the effectiveness and implementation challenges of behaviorist strategies, they often prioritize observable outcomes over teachers' interpretive experiences. In contrast, Philippine-based studies foreground teachers' emotional labor, identity formation, and contextual adaptation but rarely situate these experiences explicitly within behaviorist theory. This divergence reveals a gap in the literature: limited attention is given to how teachers actively negotiate behaviorist assumptions within culturally diverse and resource-constrained classrooms. Addressing this gap requires a phenomenological approach that centers teachers' meaning making rather than merely documenting instructional techniques.

Behaviorist Principles

Behaviorism has played a foundational role in shaping contemporary classroom practices and instructional design. Grounded in the work of B. F. Skinner emphasized that learning occurs primarily through direct experience and the systematic use of reinforcement (Slocum, 2014; Watson, 2013). Classical conditioning illustrates how learners form associations between stimuli and responses (Mackintosh, 2003), while Thorndike's law of effect suggests that behaviors followed by positive outcomes are more likely to recur (Nelson, 2008; Frese & Keith, 2015; Martin & Pear, 2019). Building on these ideas, operant conditioning demonstrates how educators can deliberately use rewards and consequences to shape student behavior, creating routines that support productive learning habits.

In practice, teachers apply behaviorist principles through their daily classroom interactions and management styles. Walker (2008) categorizes these styles as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive, reflecting different balances of control and support. The authoritative style—combining clear expectations with warmth and responsiveness—aligns well with behaviorist thinking, as it provides students with consistent rules and predictable reinforcement while fostering a positive teacher-student relationship. By using reinforcement effectively, teachers guide students toward desired behaviors while maintaining a supportive learning environment. Discipline and feedback should be consistently tied to specific student behaviors to encourage positive learning habits.

Research continues to support the effectiveness of behaviorist strategies in enhancing student engagement and classroom order. Research shows that timely and specific reinforcement enhances both academic participation and behavioral compliance (Akin, 2017; Cardenas & Fernandez, 2018). In the Philippine context, Membrano (2025) observed that at Bustamante National High School in Tibungco, Davao City, operant conditioning techniques—such as targeted praise, small tangible rewards, and structured programs like the Good Behavior Game—successfully reduced classroom disruptions and increased student involvement. Complementing these findings, Cabañes and Jiao (2021) emphasize that reinforcement is most effective when immediate, precise, and aligned with clear learning objectives, functioning as feedback that links effort to outcomes.

Moreover, while behaviorist strategies help manage student behavior and establish routines, they are most effective when teachers also consider students' individual needs and feelings. Wadesango (2022) notes that combining reinforcement with supportive relationships, regular feedback, and opportunities for students to take responsibility helps them develop self-discipline. In this way, teachers do more than control behavior—they guide students in building good habits and staying motivated for long-term learning.

Despite strong empirical support for behaviorist strategies, critics argue that over-reliance on external reinforcement may foster compliance without cultivating intrinsic motivation or self-regulation. This limitation is particularly salient in culturally diverse classrooms, where students' responses to rewards and consequences vary widely. Thus, contemporary scholarship increasingly calls for integrating behaviorist principles with relational, humanistic, and culturally responsive practices to ensure that classroom management supports both behavioral order and students' holistic development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Behaviorist Learning Theory, particularly the principles of classical and operant conditioning as developed by Watson, Thorndike, and B. F. Skinner. Behaviorism emphasizes that learning is manifested through observable changes in behavior, shaped by systematic reinforcement, stimuli, and consequences. In the classroom, these principles are operationalized through strategies such as positive reinforcement, token economies, behavior charts, and structured feedback, which aim to encourage desirable behaviors and minimize disruptions.

While behaviorist theory traditionally focuses on observable behavior and measurable outcomes, this study contextualizes it within the lived experiences of teachers. Teachers interpret, adapt, and apply behaviorist principles according to the realities of their classrooms, balancing theoretical prescriptions with students' individual needs, cultural norms, and emotional well-being. Operant conditioning serves as a practical lens to understand how teachers use reinforcement, punishment, and feedback to shape student behavior, while also reflecting on the ethical, relational, and emotional dimensions of classroom management.

By sitting in teachers' experiences within behaviorist theory, this framework bridges the gap between theory and practice. It allows for an exploration not only of the effectiveness of behaviorist strategies but also of how educators experience, negotiate, and adapt these principles in real-world classrooms, ultimately providing insights into context-sensitive, empathetic, and effective behavior management practices.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A phenomenological qualitative research design was used to understand the experiences of the teachers in applying behaviorist principles to classroom management. Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative

research that focuses on the commonality of a lived experience within a particular group. The principal objective of the methodology is to arrive at a description of the nature of the specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Research Locale

This study was conducted in a public secondary institution in a rural barangay within Unit 3 – Cluster 5 of Davao City, serving Grades 7 to 12. Located about 30 kilometers from the city center on an approximate 10,000 m² site, it began as an annex of a nearby national high school and later became an independent campus through cooperation among barangay officials, the local government unit, and parents. The current population is 474 students, supported by twenty-one (21) teaching personnel and three (3) non-teaching staff. Facilities are basic and appropriate for secondary education; the surrounding community is chiefly residential with small-scale farming and local enterprises. Many families have lower-to-middle income, and parents' educational attainment is often limited. Rural roads and limited public transport affect accessibility and access to urban educational resources.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were seven (7) public secondary school teachers from a public school in the Davao Region. All participants were between thirty (30) and sixty (60) years old and had at least three (3) years of continuous teaching experience, ensuring that they had sufficient exposure to classroom management practices and sustained application of behaviorist principles.

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. Teachers were included if they (1) were currently teaching at the secondary level, (2) regularly applied classroom management strategies grounded in behaviorist principles such as reinforcement, routines, and consequences, and (3) were willing to participate in in-depth interviews.

Teachers who had less than three (3) years of teaching experience or who were not directly involved in classroom management were excluded from the study. The selected number of participants is consistent with phenomenological research standards, which emphasize depth of experience rather than breadth of representation.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of this study. Before data collection, the researchers secured permission from the school administration and informed all participants of the purpose, procedures, and scope of the research. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant before the interviews were conducted.

Participants were assured that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To protect confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms were used, and no identifying information was included in the transcripts or final report.

All interview data were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers. The study adhered to accepted ethical guidelines for qualitative research and complied with institutional research ethics standards.

Data Collection

Qualitative research consists of relationship-building with the participants. The researcher conversationally gathered the data to encourage participants to respond openly and honestly. The study employed the Data Gathering Procedures by Creswell (2013), where the researcher:

1. Identify the purposefully selected sites or individuals for the proposed study.
2. Recognize the number of sites and participants to be involved in the study. Aside from small numbers that characterize qualitative research, how many sites and individuals will be there.

3. Indicate the type or types of data to be collected. In some qualitative studies, inquisitors collect multiple forms of data and spend considerable time in the natural setting gathering information. In this step, the researcher conducts a face-to-face interview with the participants. These interviews involve unstructured and semi-structured or generally open-ended questions that are few and intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants.
4. The discussion about the data collection forms, be specific about the types and include arguments concerning the strengths and weaknesses.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research generates a large and cumbersome amount of data. Data is usually generated from field notes, interview transcripts, focus groups, and observations. So, the researcher must guard against being captivated by the richness of the data and focus on carrying out a true analysis.

This study dealt with the experiences of the participants and was conducted through a face-to-face interview. This study exploited Data Analysis in Qualitative Research by Creswell (2009). The steps in analyzing the data are the following:

1. Organizing and preparing the transcribing interviews, sorting and arranging the data into different types depending on the source of the data;
2. Reading through all the data by obtaining a general sense of information, reflecting on its overall meaning, and identifying the general ideas the participant stated;
3. Coding the data, which entails reviewing transcripts and field notes. It also refers to the creation of categories in relation to data;
4. Generate a description and theme. Description involves a detailed rendering of information, and by the themes generated, these are the ones that appear as major findings and are used to create headings and subheadings in the findings and analysis chapter of the dissertation; and
5. Use a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the findings derived from the phenomenological analysis of interview data collected from seven teacher-participants. The results are organized according to the research questions and are presented through four major themes that emerged from the data. Each theme is supported by clustered themes, significant statements, and verbatim excerpts to capture the depth of teachers' lived experiences in applying behaviorist principles to classroom management. The discussion integrates participants' narratives with relevant literature to contextualize the findings and highlight their implications.

RQ1: How do teachers describe their experiences in applying behaviorist principles in managing their classrooms?

This theme addresses Research Question 1, which explores how teachers describe their experiences in applying behaviorist principles in managing their classrooms. Participants' accounts focused on the use of reinforcement, routines, and structured expectations as foundational elements of classroom order and motivation.

1.1. Teachers consistently described behaviorist strategies as essential tools in maintaining order and fostering an environment that supports learning. Many emphasized the importance of positive reinforcement, including praise, points, tokens, stickers, and group-based rewards, to encourage desirable behaviors. These reinforcements were viewed not only as motivational tools but as mechanisms that help students understand which behaviors are expected of them.

Table 1: Experiences on behaviorist strategies commonly used to manage student behavior.

Major Theme	Cluster Themes	Significant Statements
Behaviorist Strategies as Foundations for Structure, Order, and Motivation	1.1: Use of Positive Reinforcement and Rewards	“I reinforce positive behavior... giving immediate feedback.” “You can give extra points or recognition.” “Reward or praise... stickers or points if good ang behavior.” “I give power points—power stars, hearts, smiley.”
	1.2: Establishing Clear Expectations and Consistent Routines	“Maintaining routine ensures students know what’s coming next.” “Clear and consistent expectations lessen behavioral issues.” “Clear rules and consequences help them understand boundaries.”
	1.3: Application of Operant Conditioning and Behavior Shaping	“Reinforcement by BF Skinner... reward or praise.” “I use shaping by breaking tasks into smaller steps.”

In addition to reinforcement, teachers highlighted the role of consistent routines and clear expectations in promoting discipline. Establishing predictable transitions, structured classroom procedures, and step-by-step instructions helped minimize confusion and reduce misbehavior. Several teachers shared that these structured systems increased focus and engagement, enabling lessons to run smoothly.

Furthermore, Table 1 shows that teachers noted that many of their practices are grounded in operant conditioning principles, such as shaping, queuing, and systematic reinforcement. These behaviorist techniques allowed them to gradually build desired behaviors while providing immediate feedback.

Teachers’ narratives revealed that behaviorist strategies were not merely technical tools but integral to how they experienced authority, structure, and responsibility in the classroom. One participant shared, “*When I consistently praise good behavior, students feel seen, and discipline becomes easier to manage.*” Another teacher explained, “*The routine itself becomes a reminder—students already know what to do even before I say anything.*” These accounts illustrate how reinforcement and routine functioned as lived practices that shaped classroom climate and teacher identity, rather than as isolated techniques.

The teachers generally agreed that behaviorist strategies are effective in improving discipline, reducing disruptions, and increasing student engagement. Positive reinforcement, when applied consistently, was seen as a powerful motivator for learners. Teachers observed that students became more responsible, attentive, and eager to participate in class.

Table 2: Experiences on the Effectiveness of strategies in maintaining classroom discipline.

Major Theme	Cluster Themes	Significant Statements
Perceived Effectiveness and Limitations of Behaviorist Strategies	2.1: Improvement in Discipline, Engagement, and Classroom Climate	“Highly effective... students are more likely to repeat good behavior.” “Fewer disruptions and more responsibility for learning.” “They shape behavior through rewards and consequences.”
	2.2: Limitations Related to	“Students behave only when reward is needed.”

	Intrinsic Motivation and Surface-Level Compliance	“Overreliance on external rewards... class becomes dull without them.” “They do not always develop self-discipline.”
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However, based on Table 2, the participants also identified limitations in behaviorist approaches. A common concern was the development of dependency on external rewards. Several teachers shared experiences where students lost motivation when rewards were unavailable or became overly focused on accumulating points rather than learning. This raised concerns about weakened intrinsic motivation and surface-level behavioral compliance that may not lead to long-term behavioral change.

Although teachers acknowledged the effectiveness of behaviorist strategies, they expressed concern about students’ growing dependence on rewards. One teacher explained, “Some students only behave when they know there is a reward. When the rewards stop, their behavior changes.” Another participant noted, “They focus more on points than learning, which worries me.” These reflections highlight the tension between short-term behavioral compliance and the long-term development of intrinsic motivation and self-discipline.

1.3. Teachers reported significant challenges when applying behaviorist techniques with diverse learners. Cultural differences, varied learning styles, and personal backgrounds influenced how students responded to reinforcement and consequences. Strategies effective for one learner or group did not necessarily work for others, making classroom management more complex.

Table 3: Challenges and insights teachers encounter when implementing behaviorist principles in classroom management

Major Theme	Cluster Themes	Significant Statements
Challenges Encountered in Implementing Behaviorist Principles	3.1: Diverse Learners Respond Differently to Reinforcement	“Students may not respond equally or may ignore rewards.” “One-size-fits-all approach ignores individuality.” “IP students have culturally different behaviors.”
	3.2: Difficulty Sustaining Consistency and Maintaining Reward Systems	“Consistency is the key, but it is very tiring.” “Cannot sustain the reward system the whole year... becomes boring.” “Staying consistent is challenging when workload is heavy.”
	3.3: Reward Dependency and Unrealistic Student Expectations	“Students expect rewards every time they behave well.” “Students over-rely on points and tokens.”

Based on Table 3, another major challenge was maintaining consistency in implementing rewards and consequences. Teachers shared that heavy workloads, shifting class dynamics, and unpredictability in student behavior made it difficult to sustain reward systems or follow routines consistently. Over time, students began to expect rewards for every desired behavior, leading to unrealistic expectations and a lack of genuine motivation.

Teachers emphasized that student diversity significantly shaped their experiences in applying behaviorist principles. One participant stated, “*What works for one group does not work for another, especially with culturally diverse learners.*” Another shared, “*Some students, especially those from Indigenous communities, respond differently to rewards and consequences.*” These experiences illustrate the limits of a one-size-fits-all approach and underscore the need for culturally responsive adaptations in behaviorist classroom management.

This theme highlights the difficulty of applying a one-size-fits-all approach, particularly in classrooms with learners of varied needs, cultural identities, and behavioral patterns.

From their experiences, teachers gained meaningful insights that shaped their teaching practices. A key realization was the importance of flexibility. Participants acknowledged that while behaviorist strategies are helpful, they should not be used in isolation. Instead, teachers must integrate other approaches such as constructivism, humanistic, and culturally responsive strategies, to address diverse learners more holistically.

Table 4: Lessons and realizations teachers gained from using behaviorist approaches in their teaching practice.

Major Theme	Cluster Themes	Significant Statements
Teacher Insights and Realizations on Behaviorist Approaches	4.1: Need for Flexibility and Integration of Multiple Approaches	<p>“Most effective strategy is the mixture of all approaches.”</p> <p>“One-size-fits-all ignores learning styles.”</p> <p>“Requires flexibility and integrating intrinsic motivation strategies.”</p>
	4.2: Importance of Consistency, Clear Expectations, and Fair Implementation	<p>“Consistency is the key.”</p> <p>“Strategies should be implemented consistently and persistently.”</p> <p>“Students thrive when expectations are clear and consistent.”</p>
	4.3: Reinforcement as a Powerful Tool for Motivation and Relationship-Building	<p>“Positive reinforcement is powerful.”</p> <p>“Students want to feel noticed, loved, and appreciated.”</p> <p>“Helps develop self-discipline and ownership.”</p>

Consistency emerged as another central insight. Table 4 shows that teachers recognized that reinforcement systems only work effectively when expectations, rules, and consequences are consistently implemented. They also discovered that positive reinforcement is powerful not only for shaping behavior but also for strengthening teacher–student relationships. When learners feel valued, acknowledged, and appreciated, their engagement and behavior improve significantly.

Through sustained practice, teachers developed reflective insights about the nuanced use of behaviorist strategies. One teacher remarked, “*I realized that behaviorism works best when combined with care, patience, and understanding.*” Another added, “*Rewards are effective, but students also need to feel valued and understood.*” These realizations reflect teachers’ evolving understanding that effective classroom management requires flexibility, consistency, and the integration of behaviorist strategies with relational and humanistic approaches.

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study explored teachers’ experiences in applying behaviorist principles in classroom management through in-depth interviews with seven participants. The phenomenological analysis yielded four interrelated themes: (1) behaviorist strategies as foundations for structure and motivation, (2) effectiveness and limitations of these strategies, (3) challenges encountered in implementation, and (4) insights and realizations gained from using behaviorist approaches. It captured how teachers experience, evaluate, and adapt behaviorist principles in classroom management.

Teachers widely used positive reinforcement such as praise, points, tokens, and other reward systems to encourage desirable behaviors. They also emphasized the importance of clear expectations, consistent routines, and structured procedures to maintain order in the classroom. These findings align with recent evidence that structured environments and reinforcement systems increase student behavioral engagement (Patall et al., 2023).

Although behaviorist strategies were perceived as effective in promoting discipline and participation, teachers expressed concerns about reward dependency and diminished intrinsic motivation when extrinsic rewards were used excessively. Contemporary motivation research supports this view, indicating that an overemphasis on extrinsic rewards may undermine autonomy and deeper engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Teachers also identified challenges in applying behaviorist strategies with diverse learners. Differences in culture, learning needs, and socio-emotional backgrounds influenced students' responsiveness to reinforcement. This aligns with recent research emphasizing the need for culturally responsive management practices (Watson, 2023).

Furthermore, teachers found it difficult to implement reinforcement consistently due to workload, time constraints, and the unsustainable nature of reward systems. Recent studies highlight that without adequate institutional support, classroom management strategies are inconsistently applied and less effective (Kim et al., 2024).

Ultimately, teachers have come to realize that behaviorist strategies are most effective when combined with relational, humanistic, and socio-emotional approaches. Reinforcement was seen not only as a behavioral tool but also to strengthen teacher–student relationships and promote a positive classroom climate, consistent with recent findings connecting positive reinforcement with improved classroom belongingness (DeLuca et al., 2022).

Implications

1. Implications for Classroom Practice

Balanced use of reinforcement. The findings support the need to balance extrinsic rewards with strategies that nurture autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Contemporary research shows that carefully fading rewards while supporting student choice increases long-term behavioral commitment (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Culturally responsive reinforcement. Since students' cultural and personal backgrounds influence how they interpret rewards and consequences, classroom management must be culturally attuned. Studies confirm that culturally responsive reinforcement leads to better behavior and engagement (Watson, 2023).

Consistency is a key factor. Teachers' challenges with maintaining consistent routines echo evidence that inconsistent reinforcement weakens behavior change (Patall et al., 2023). This implies the need for classroom systems that support predictability and follow-through.

Integration of holistic approaches. Behaviorism alone cannot address deeper emotional or motivational needs. Recent literature stresses blending reinforcement with relationship-building, socio-emotional learning, and student-centered approaches (DeLuca et al., 2022).

2. Implications for Teacher Professional Development

Need for training on reinforcement schedules and fading techniques. Teachers require up-to-date training on how to gradually reduce rewards while strengthening autonomy-supportive practices. Studies show PD improves reinforcement fidelity (Kim et al., 2024).

Training in culturally responsive classroom management. Given learner diversity, teachers need competencies in culturally responsive reinforcement. Research from 2020–2023 stresses the importance of cultural sensitivity in managing behavior (Watson, 2023).

Support for consistency and workload management. Teachers struggle with sustaining reinforcement due to workload. Schools must provide structures that make consistent implementation feasible (Kim et al., 2024).

Implications for School Leadership and Policy

School-wide behavior frameworks. A unified school-wide reinforcement system can reduce inconsistencies and prevent reward inflation. Studies show that such frameworks increase behavioral gains and reduce teacher burnout (Kim et al., 2024).

Institutional support for sustainable reinforcement systems. Schools should ensure that reward systems are feasible and equitable to prevent students' reward dependency and teachers' exhaustion.

Promotion of holistic classroom management models. Policies should encourage balanced models integrating behaviorism, socio-emotional learning, and culturally responsive practices (Watson, 2023).

Recommendations

Teachers are encouraged to use reinforcement strategically and gradually fade rewards to strengthen students' intrinsic motivation, consistent with principles outlined by Ryan and Deci (2020). Maintaining consistent routines and expectations is also essential, as predictable environments support better behavioral engagement (Patall et al., 2023). Since students differ in cultural backgrounds, learning needs, and socio-emotional contexts, teachers should adapt reinforcement strategies to ensure they remain culturally appropriate and responsive (Watson, 2023). It is likewise important for teachers to integrate socio-emotional learning, relationship-building, and autonomy-supportive practices with behaviorist strategies to create more holistic and meaningful learning experiences (DeLuca et al., 2022). Finally, teachers should regularly engage in reflective practice to assess whether their reinforcement systems remain effective, relevant, and supportive of students' long-term development.

School administrators should provide ongoing professional development focused on reinforcement fading techniques, consistent implementation of behaviorist strategies, and culturally responsive classroom management (Watson, 2023). Implementation of school-wide behavior frameworks is also recommended to promote consistency, equity, and shared expectations across all classrooms (Kim et al., 2024). Administrators should further support teachers through coaching, peer collaboration, and monitoring structures that ensure continuous improvement in classroom management practices. Additionally, the school must allocate adequate resources to support reward systems that are sustainable and do not place unnecessary financial or logistical burdens on teachers.

Future researchers may explore students' perspectives regarding reinforcement, classroom routines, and the consequences they experience, as these insights can enrich understanding of behaviorist strategies from the learner's viewpoint. Comparative studies examining long-term effects of behaviorist and non-behaviorist approaches on self-regulated behavior may also provide valuable contributions to the field. Researchers are likewise encouraged to investigate the interaction between reinforcement, socio-emotional learning, and intrinsic motivation within diverse classroom settings. Finally, future work should explore how the fading of reinforcement influences the development of students' self-discipline over time.

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APPENDICES

Letter Of Permission

November 17, 2025

EDGAR R. VILLASURDA
Principal I
Baracatan National High School

Dear Sir:

Mabuhay and Madayaw! The researcher enrolled at Davao del Sur State College will be conducting a research study entitled "**TEACHERS LIVED EXPERIENCES IN APPLYING BEHAVIORIST PRINCIPLES TO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT.**" This research will require data in the form of interviews from the teachers of Baracatan National High School.


Thus, the researcher respectfully requests your authorization to conduct this research. The data acquired will be protected in accordance with confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes.

Thank you, and God bless you.

Very truly yours,

The Researcher

Approved by:


EDGAR R. VILLASURDA
Principal I

Letter Of Consent**CONSENT FORM**

Known All Men of this Present

Informed Consent

I, _____ of legal age and resident of _____
depose and say that:

1. I have understood that all the information to be shared shall be done with my presence;
2. I have agreed to give each information with just, mental reservation and volition; and
3. Utmost confidentiality shall be observed, and information shall be utilized for academic purposes only.

I hereby affix my signature to certify my approval for these undertakings.

Interviewee

Letter Of Agreement

LETTER OF AGREEMENT

Known All Men of this Present

Agreement

We, _____ and _____ agreed to do
(Interviewer) (Interviewee)

the following in conducting the study:

1. To hold the interviewing session on November 20-21, 2025, at Baracatan National High School, as it is an ideal place to obtain and conduct necessary information regarding their experiences.
2. To be true in conveying their responses and experiences.
3. To utilize audio recording for the efficacy of conducting information.

We affix our signature to signify our agreement.

Signature of the interviewee

Signature of the interviewer

Interview Questions

Name (Optional): _____

Age: _____

Date Hired as a Public Teacher: _____

Teaching Position: _____

School Assigned: _____

Years of Teaching: _____

Subject(s) Taught: _____

TITLE OF THE STUDY: TEACHERS LIVED EXPERIENCES IN APPLYING BEHAVIORIST PRINCIPLES TO CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you describe your experiences in applying behaviorist principles in managing your classrooms?

1.1. What specific behaviorist strategies do you commonly use to manage student behavior?

1.2. How do you feel about the effectiveness of these strategies in maintaining classroom discipline?

2. What challenges and insights have you encountered when implementing behaviorist principles in classroom management?

2.1. What difficulties did you face when applying behaviorist techniques with diverse learners?

2.2. What insights or realizations have you gained from using behaviorist approaches in your teaching practice?

NELLY ROSE C. MORTIZ

RESEARCHER

📍 Purok 2, Balasiao, Kiblawan, Davao del Sur

☎ 09813651729

✉ nellyrosemortiz709@gmail.com



PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Age: 24 years old
 Birthday: October 05, 2001
 Sex: Female
 Nationality: Filipino
 Height: 4'9
 Weight: 45 kg
 Status: Single
 Father's Name: Ricky P. Mortiz
 Mother's Name: Nila C. Mortiz

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

- Microsoft application
- Basic design and layout
- Watching K-drama
- Cooking
- Research and studies

Educational Attainment

Year Graduated

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| ○ Elementary:
Isabelo Calma Sr. Elementary School
Balasiao, Kiblawan, Davao del Sur | 2013-2014 |
| ○ Secondary:
Junior High School
Gov. Nonito D. Llanos Sr. National High School
Balasiao, Kiblawan, Davao del Sur | 2017-2018 |
| Senior High School
General Santos City National High School
Calumpang, General Santos City | 2019-2020 |
| ○ Tertiary:
Serapion C. Basalo Memorial Colleges, Inc.
Poblacion, Kiblawan, Davao del Sur | 2023-2024 |

Pre-Service Training Experience

Out-Campus Teaching Internship

Gov. Nonito D. Llanos National High School
 Grade 9 students

Balasiao, Kiblawan, Davao del Sur

WORK EXPERIENCE

Position: Head, Office of Student Affairs and Services (OSAS)

Year Hired: Present (4 months)

School: Serapion C. Basalo Mmemorial Colleges, Inc.

Address: Poblacion, Kiblawan, Davao del Sur

Position: Student Account In-charge

Year Hired: August 2024- July 2025 (11 months)

School: Serapion C. Basalo Mmemorial Colleges, Inc.

Address: Poblacion, Kiblawan, Davao del Sur

FRTZ DON P. GLARIAN

RESEARCHER

📍 Corokan Street, Prudential, Vill., Brgy. Daliao, Toril, Davao City

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PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Age: 28 years old
 Birthday: September 28, 1997
 Sex: Male
 Nationality: Filipino
 Height: 5'2
 Weight: 59 kg
 Status: Single
 Father's Name: Metsael Glarian
 Mother's Name: Rosebella P. Glarian

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

- Office 365
- Basic design and layout
- Cooking
- Reading books

Educational Attainment

Year Graduated

- | | |
|--|------|
| ○ Elementary:
Sta. Clara Elementary School
Juan dela Cruz St., Toril, Davao City | 2009 |
| ○ Secondary:
Doña Carmen Denia National High School
Toril, Davao City | 2014 |
| ○ Tertiary:
Davao Central College
Toril, Davao City | 2019 |

Pre-Service Training Experience
Out-Campus Teaching Internship

Doña Carmen Denia National High School
Grade 7 students
Toril, Davao City

WORK EXPERIENCE

Regional Trial Court Branch 14 Ecoland, Davao City

Auxiliary Service Worker September 2023 - May 2024

- Secured the privacy of litigants and litigators by implementing strict confidentiality protocols, achieving 100% compliance with legal standards, and safeguarding sensitive information;
- Maintained accurate and organized records for over 100 litigants and litigators, improving retrieval efficiency by 30% and enhancing overall case management processes;
- Facilitated effective communication with litigants and litigators, ensuring timely updates that improved response times by 25% and strengthened professional relationships.
- Assisted with administrative tasks such as scheduling, document preparation, and data entry, streamlining office operations, and increasing overall efficiency by 15%; and
- Executed ad hoc tasks as needed, demonstrating flexibility and productivity, contributing to the team's productivity and project success.

RAUIELA CELINE M. PADILLA**RESEARCHER**

📍 Chord Village, Glabaca, Brgy. Lizada, Toril, Davao City

☎ 09760817879

✉ padillarcn@gmail.com

**PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

Age: 26 years old
Birthday: January 27, 1999
Sex: Female
Nationality: Filipino
Height: 5'0
Weight: 60 kg
Status: Single

SKILLS AND INTERESTS

- Microsoft application
- Basic design and layout
- Watching K-drama
- Cooking
- Reading books

Father's Name: Raul S. Padilla

Mother's Name: Cecille M. Milgo

Educational Attainment**Year Graduated**

- Elementary:
Don Juan dela Cruz Central Elementary School
Juan dela Cruz St., Toril, Davao City
2010
- Secondary:
Davao Central College
Toril, Davao City
2015
- Tertiary:
Davao Central College
Toril, Davao City
2019

Pre-Service Training Experience**Out-Campus Teaching Internship****Talomo National High School**

Grade 8 students

Talomo, Davao City

WORK EXPERIENCE

Position: Teacher II

Year Hired: July 2024 to Present (1 year and 5 months)

School: Baracatan National High School

Address: Purok 6, Baracatan, Toril, Davao City

Position: Teacher I (LSB Teacher)

Year Hired: November 2022 to July 2024 (1 year and 8 months)

School: Crossing Bayabas National High School

Address: Neptune Street, Brgy. Crossing Bayabas, Toril, Davao City