Research Article https://doi.org/10.12973/ejper.7.4.191

European Journal of Psychology and Educational Research
Volume 7, Issue 4, 191 - 205.
ISSN: 2589-949X
https://www.ejper.com

Identifying Troublesome Behavior in the Classroom: Greek Teachers' and Parents' Views

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Received: August 28, 2024 ▪ Revised: October 21, 2024 ▪ Accepted: November 14, 2024

Abstract: According to the systems perspective, the influence of various systems (e.g., family, school, community) on children's behavior at school is highly acknowledged. It is therefore accepted that problem behavior in the classroom originates from social interactions, providing a conceptual framework where problems are seen as indicative of dysfunction within the school system, thus removing blame from the individual child, the teacher, or the parents. Addressing the importance of interactions among students, teachers, and parents in this system, the present study aimed to identify and compare the types of behaviors that Greek primary and secondary teachers and parents view as problematic in the classroom. A sample of 378 teachers and 69 parents were asked to identify which behaviors were considered troublesome. Exploratory factor analysis revealed five categories of behaviors perceived as problematic by parents and teachers: Externalizing behaviors, School Difficulties, Internalizing behaviors, Attention seeking behaviors, and Hyperactivity/attention difficulties. Both teachers and parents considered externalizing behaviors to be more troublesome than other types of behavior. Teachers tend to worry less than parents about all types of children's behaviors, except for school difficulties. The findings highlight the importance of considering diverse perspectives within the school system when designing interventions to address the specific needs of school communities while also promoting collaboration among all members of the school system.

Keywords: *Children's behavior, family and school, systems theory, teachers, parents.*

To cite this article: Kouimtzi, E. M., Frosi, L. & Kolias, P. (2024). Identifying troublesome behavior in the classroom: Greek teachers' and parents' views. *European Journal of Psychology and Educational Research*, *7*(4), 191-205. https://doi.org/10.12973/ejper.7.4.191

Introduction

Troublesome behavior in the classroom provides a daily challenge for teachers, students, and the wider school systems as it affects classroom interactions, disrupts the learning process, interferes with teaching activities, and has an impact on teachers' efficacy beliefs, emotional exhaustion, students' wellbeing and on classroom climate (Aldrup et al., 2018; de Ruiter et al., 2020; Ottenheym-Vliegen et al., 2023; Ratcliff et al., 2010; Tsouloupas et al., 2010). Children considered disturbing underachieve academically, fail to maintain strong and satisfying relationships, and are often rejected by teachers and peers (Breslau et al., 2011; Reid et al., 2004; Van der Ende et al., 2016; Zimmermann et al., 2013).

The importance of teachers' views on children's problematic classroom behavior has been largely investigated in the last 40 years since the interactions established by teachers, both directly and indirectly, significantly affect the academic, social, and psychological development of their students. Teachers, as agents of perceptions and expectations concerning students, influence both their identities and their adaptation to the school context (Goodman & Burton, 2010; Scanlon & Barnes-Holmes, 2013).

A category of behaviors that teachers find disturbing has to do with school performance. These include students not doing their homework, not bringing the required classroom materials, indifference, lack of motivation, cognitive difficulties, and lack of attention (Bibou-Nakou, 2000; Houghton et al., 1988; Little, 2005; Sezer, 2018; Shen et al., 2009; Thanos et al., 2006).

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Teachers are particularly concerned about externalizing behaviors, whereas internalizing behaviors only draw their attention when they are either severe enough (Molins & Clopton, 2002) or easily observable (Zee & Rudasill, 2021).They seem to consider externalizing behavioral problems to be more bothersome than internalizing behaviors (Alter et al., 2013; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Kokkinos et al., 2005; Liljequist & Renk, 2007; Merrell, 2008; Splett et al., 2019), and they are more likely to refer students with externalizing behavior to mental health services (D. F. Chang & Stanley, 2003; Papandrea & Winefield, 2011; Rothi & Leavey, 2006). Splett et al. (2019) concluded that teachers were less concerned about the child's well-being when the child displayed internalizing behaviors rather than externalizing. According to Paulsen et al. (2006), teachers consider that internalizing behaviors are not an immediate problem for themselves or for the rest of the students, while L. Chang (2003), in his research, found that teachers were much less tolerant of aggression than of shyness. Liljequist and Renk (2007) also argued that teachers are bothered more by externalizing behavior because they believe that students have more control over this type of behavior.

Studies have elicited varying degrees of concern that teachers have about specific types of behavior in the classroom (Splett et al., 2020). The most common finding concerns aggressive, violent and delinquent behavior (Bibou-Nakou, 2000; Ding et al., 2008; Houghton et al., 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Little, 2005; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Stephenson et al., 2000; Thanos et al., 2006), which may be the most troublesome type of behavior. Other types of problematic behaviors include disregard, disobedience, laziness, lack of attention, and talking out of turn (Ding et al., 2008; Houghton et al., 1988; Little, 2005; Malete, 2007; Stephenson et al., 2000). These may be of minor nature, but they still disrupt the order of the classroom and affect teaching (Samuelsson, 2018), which is why teachers find them so annoying (Didaskalou & Millward, 2001). Studies on incidence rates from several countries largely agree that the most frequent forms of problematic student behavior are relatively minor misbehaviors, whereas aggressive and dissocial behaviors are less frequent (Beaman et al., 2007; Caldarella et al., 2009; Crawshaw, 2015; Samuelsson, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2014). In a review of the literature on troublesome classroom behavior, Beaman et al. (2007) concluded that talking out of turn was consistently the most disruptive behavior reported by teachers, irrespective of country or education level, and Samuelsson's research (2018) confirmed the consistency of this finding over the years. Teachers view these behaviors as intolerable as they disrupt teaching and student learning (Robers et al., 2012; Sun & Shek, 2012), and they report spending a significant amount of time dealing with such behaviors (Reynolds et al., 2011).

Consistent with international research, Greek studies indicate that teachers within the Greek educational system identify similar behaviors as problematic. In Greece, education is highly centralized and hierarchical; the government shapes educational policy, monitors its implementation, and administers the system across all schools, from pre-primary to adult education (Dimopoulos et al., 2015; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2020). Education is highly valued and is still seen as a pathway to social mobility. Entry to Higher Education Institutes, achieved only through the highly competitive National Exams, is a central goal for Greek families, who invest substantial resources in their children's education (Danchev et al., 2023). Within this context, the education system remains highly academic, emphasizing exam performance, while teachers' roles are largely limited to transmitting knowledge according to the relatively rigid national curriculum.

Greece's education system was severely impacted by the financial crisis that began in 2009, resulting in reduced funding and teacher shortages, which have exacerbated socio-economic disparities among students (Kakana et al., 2017; OECD, 2018; Vergeti & Giouroglou, 2018). Additionally, the financial crisis has significantly affected the mental health of children and adolescents (Anagnostopoulos & Soumaki, 2013), contributing to an increase in behavioral problems (Hatzichristou et al., 2017). Recently, school-based psychological services have become available, aiming to improve students' mental health and enhance their overall school experience.

Aggressive behavior, poor relationships with peers, indifference and lack of motivation to learn are among the main problems identified by Greek teachers (Bibou-Nakou, 2000). Disobedience and indifference to classroom activity are also specific examples of disruptive behaviors reported by Greek teachers (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2000). Poulou and Norwich (2000) reported that teachers considered behaviors such as 'work avoidance', depressive mood', 'negativism', 'school phobia' and 'lack of concentration' to be more severe. In a sample of 600 Greek primary school teachers, behavior problems, cognitive difficulties and lack of students' attention and motivation were identified as the most challenging issues that teachers face in their classroom. Moreover, these problems seem to be important sources of anxiety and stress for Greek teachers (Thanos et al., 2006). Koutrouba (2013) reported that frequent misbehaviors identified by teachers in primary education were laziness, speaking without permission, inattention, bothering or hindering their peers during the lesson, arriving late, making noises and other types of minor behaviors. In studies by Hatzichristou et al. (2000) and Hatzichristou et al. (2011), teachers reported students' learning problems in reading, writing and math as more important problems in the classroom, followed by behaviors that disrupted their lesson, such as lack of discipline and inattention. The authors argue that Greek teachers consider learning problems and forms of behavior that hinder the learning process to be of major importance, as in the Greek education system, the emphasis is mainly on the child as a student and not on other areas of his/her development (Hatzichristou et al., 2000).

While there is abundant research on teachers' views regarding troublesome behaviors, data on parents' perspectives is limited. Research has long highlighted the positive outcomes of parental involvement in school life (Epstein, 2010; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). As meaningful stakeholders, parents' views and attitudes significantly influence their

children's perspectives (Hogg & Vaughan, 2010) and can shape classroom social interactions (Sosu & Rydzewska, 2017). Parents influence their children's peer relationships both directly and indirectly through their guidance, beliefs, and interventions (Ladd & Parke, 2021; Mounts, 2011).

Until now, parents' views on behaviors they identify as problematic have been researched exclusively regarding their children's mental health in studies comparing multi-informant assessments in clinical or general populations (e.g., Achenbach et al., 2008; Bibou-Nakou et al., 2019). In the present study, however, we are not interested in parents' assessments of their own children's behaviors but in parents' identification of what consists of troublesome behavior in school. Due to the lack of relevant data, we can draw from research findings on parents' views and attitudes toward the inclusion of children with several educational needs and disabilities. While their views on inclusion of children with a variety of disabilities seem to range from neutral to positive (de Boer et al., 2010; Kalyva et al., 2007; Paseka & Schwab, 2020), in most studies they reported being less tolerant towards children with behavioral and cognitive difficulties (de Boer et al., 2010; Kalyva et al., 2007; Kniveton, 2004; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Schwab, 2018; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2003). Parents' main preoccupation involves their child's physical and emotional well-being in the classroom (Coldron & Boulton, 1996), and parents tend to worry if these are at stake. Their concerns, therefore, when it comes to having children with behavior or cognitive problems in the classroom are related to the teacher's practices, as they doubt the teacher's efficacy in attending to all children's needs and they fear that this will affect their child's educational progress (de Boer et al., 2010; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2003).

A systems perspective of troublesome behavior at school takes into consideration the context in which the behavior occurs (Cooper & Upton, 1990; Dowling, 2003; Koskela & Lanas, 2016), since contemporary researchers diverge from children's individual social development to a social development that involves children's active relationships with the adult groups (e.g., teachers, parents) with whom they interact (Corsaro, 2005; Mayall, 2001). It is therefore accepted that problem behavior in the classroom originates from social interactions (Cooper & Upton, 1990), providing a conceptual framework where problems are seen as indicative of dysfunction within the system, thus removing the blame from the individual child, the teacher or the parents (Dowling, 2003). It is well known that different informants can provide varying reports about a child's behavior, as their views and perceptions of what constitutes troublesome behavior may differ (De Los Reyes, 2013; De Los Reyes et al., 2015; Splett et al., 2020). This perspective has led to a shift in interest from the actual behavior to what members of the school system – teachers, students and parents – identify as troublesome student behavior (Kourkoutas, 2012) and has dictated school-based interventions (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016; Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015; Michael et al., 2023) addressing the needs of all members of the school system and working towards an inclusive school where parents teachers and students work together avoiding simplistic practices such as labelling and blaming (Cooper & Jacobs, 2010; Kouimtzi & Stogiannidou, 2006). As important members of the school system, parents and teachers affect classroom learning, children's relationships and social interactions. Therefore, in the present study, we wish to provide insight into what Greek parents identify as troublesome behavior in the classroom and compare their views with the views of the teachers.

The research questions are as follows:

1. Which types of behaviors in the classroom are identified as troublesome by teachers and parents?
2. Are there differences between these two groups in terms of the behaviors they identify as troublesome?

Methodology

Procedure

The research took place in public and private schools in the prefecture of Thessaloniki, Greece, between January and March 2020. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Primary Education of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece, while the authorization to carry out this research within the schools was obtained from the Greek Ministry of Education. Participating schools were selected using the cluster sampling method to ensure the representation of both the urban center and the semi-urban and rural areas of the Prefecture of Thessaloniki. Teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and were invited to participate on a voluntary basis by completing the self-report questionnaire. The school principals forwarded the questionnaires along with a cover letter and a consent form to the parents of their students. All participants submitted their free informed consent to participate in the study. The parents' response rate was approximately 35% since out of the 220 questionnaires administered, only 76 were completed, 7 of which could not be used due to missing data. Additional data collection was not possible due to the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in schools closing down.

Participants

The participants in the study were 378 primary and secondary education teachers (Table 1) and 69 parents of children attending primary and secondary education in Thessaloniki, Greece (Table 2). Among the teachers, 75.7% were women and 69.6% were primary education teachers. A total of 46.6% of teachers were over 50 years old and almost half of the participants (47.4%) had been teaching for more than 20 years. Parents who participated in the research were mostly women (75.4%) and were living in urban areas (72.5%). Almost half of the respondents were working in the public sector

(50%), and 33% had a university degree. The vast majority were living in a nuclear household consisting of two partners and one or more children.

Table 1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Teachers Participants (N=378)

Demographic characteristics	Teachers	
	Total	%
Gender		
Female	286	75.7
Male	93	24.3
Age group (N=368)		
-30 years old	22	5.8
31-40 years old	67	17.7
41-50 years old	103	27.2
51 + years old	176	46.6
Educational level of their school (N=364)		
Primary School	263	69.6
Secondary School	111	29.4
Type of School (N=363)		
Public School	329	87.0
Private School	34	9.0
Years of teaching experience (N=360)		
1-5 years	58	15.3
6-10 years	1	0.3
11-20 years	122	32.3
21+ years	179	47.4

Table 2. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Parents Participants (N=69)

Demographic characteristics	Parents	
	Total	%
Gender		
Female	52	75.4
Male	17	24.6
Marital status		
Married/partnered	63	91.3
Divorced/widowed	5	8.7
Level of Education		
Secondary Education	8	11.6
Vocational education	9	13.0
Higher Education	35	50.7
Post-graduate studies	17	24.6
Employment		
Employed public sector	31	44.9
Employed private sector	13	18.4
Self-employed	12	17.3
Unemployed/retired	13	18.8
Residence		
Urban area	50	72.5
Semi-urban area	19	27.5

Research Instrument

For the purposes of the present study, a self-report questionnaire for parents and teachers was developed. Participants were presented with 105 items related to children's behaviors. For each behavior, participants were asked to rate children's behaviors on a 4-point Likert scale (0=not at all troublesome, 1= somewhat troublesome, 2= moderately troublesome, 3=very troublesome).

The 105 items (see appendix) came from three valid and reliable instruments widely used in scientific research:

The Greek standardization of the Teacher Report Form-TRF (Achenbach, 2009; Roussos et al., 1999). It consists of 120 problem behavior items rated on a 3-point scale (0 = not true, 1 = somewhat or sometimes true, and 2 = very true or often true), and it is appropriate for children aged between 6 and 18 years.

Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a research instrument measuring mental health problems in children aged 4–17 years old that can be administered to parents, teachers and young people aged 11 years or older. (Goodman, 1997, 2001). It consists of 20 items relating to emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and peer problems. The Greek translation of the scale (Bibou-Nakou et al., 2002) was used in this study.

Standardized Test of Psychosocial Adjustment (Hatzichristou et al., 2008, 2011). This is a 112-item rating scale completed by teachers, which identifies skills or deficits in the social and emotional domains and the personal, interpersonal, and school adaptation of a child.

Statistical Analysis

To identify a set of factors that fit the items well, exploratory factor analysis (PCA) was applied using oblique rotation of the components. Factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 and items with communalities greater than 0.4 were included in the final model. After the analysis, 33 items were removed since they did not show adequate loadings with the factors. For the remaining 72 questions, the parallel analysis method was used, which indicated that the five-factor solution, which explained 54.9% of the total variance, was appropriate and the factors, in increasing order, explained 30.7%, 12.3%, 6.1%, 3.0%, and 2.9% of the total variance.

The final five-factor model was tested for sample adequacy using the KMO statistics (KMO = .954) and showed satisfactory correlations between items, through Bartlett's test ($\chi^2(2556) = 22339.54$, $p < .001$). Each factor was assigned a title and description based on the items it contained that yielded the highest loadings, and the final factor labels were externalizing behaviors, school difficulties, internalizing behaviors, Attention-seeking behaviors, and Hyperactivity/attention difficulties. All the loadings in the final factor solution were above .4, and cross loadings were lower, attaining a maximum value of .30 (Schreiber, 2021).

The factors showed moderate degrees of correlation, and the strongest correlations occurred between factor Externalizing behaviors and factor Internalizing behaviors (r = -.401, 95% CI [-.472, -.335]) and between School Difficulties and Internalizing behaviors (r = -.308, 95% CI [-.396, -.223]). The factor scores for each participant were estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, where the independent variables in the regression equation are the standardized observed values of the items weighted by regression coefficients. The coefficients were obtained by multiplying the inverse of the observed correlation matrix by the factor correlation matrix (DiStefano et al., 2009). By following this approach, the computed factor scores are standardized to a mean value equal to zero, and the standard deviation of each factor's score will be 1 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The internal consistency of each factor was tested with Cronbach's α coefficient, which indicated satisfactory values (Table 3).

Table 3. Internal reliability (Cronbach's α) for the five-factor solution

Factors	Cronbach's α	# items
Externalizing behaviors	.963	28
School difficulties	.919	15
Internalizing behaviors	.939	20
Attention seeking behaviors	.716	4
Hyperactivity/Attention difficulties	.775	5

The descriptive statistics of items and total factor scores are presented with mean values and standard deviations. In order to compare the total factor scores between parents and teachers, Welch's ANOVA was used, as the assumption of homogeneity of variances was violated, as assessed with the Levene's test ($p < .01$). For the effect size of the differences, partial eta-squared was used (η_p^2). The statistical analysis was performed with IBM SPSS (Version 28). The significance level for all statistical tests was set at .05.

Results

Types of Behaviors Teachers and Parents Identified as Troublesome

The first research question wished to identify which types of behaviors in the classroom teachers and parents identified as troublesome. The mean scores and SDs of teachers' and parents' scores are shown in Tables 4 to 8.

Generally, teachers rated very few behaviors as very troublesome (mean scores above 2), but they rated all behaviors in the Externalized Behaviors Subscale with a mean score of 1.5 and above (Table 4). The most troublesome behaviors for teachers were "Breaks school rules". Other troublesome behaviors in the Externalizing Behaviors Subscale with a mean score of 2 and above were "Disrupts class discipline", "Physically attacks people", "Screams a lot", "Gets in many fights" and "Defiant, talks back". Teachers also rated moderately to very troublesome other Externalizing Behaviors such as "Temper tantrums", Destroys property", "Explosive or unpredictable behavior", "Threatens people", "Bullying others". In the School Difficulties Subscale (Table 5) teachers rated almost all behaviors with a mean score of 1 and above. The most

troublesome behavior was "Not paying attention to teachers' instructions". In the Internalized Behaviors Subscale behaviors (Table 6) were rated as a little to moderately troublesome, with "Picked or bullied by other children" and "Gets teased a lot" being the ones rated as most troublesome. Teachers rated all behaviors in the Attention Seeking Behaviors Subscale (Table 7), with "Demands a lot of attention" getting the highest score. In the Hyperactivity/Attention difficulties Subscale (Table 8) the most troublesome behavior with a mean score of 1.97 was "Talks too much in class", while all behaviors were rated with a mean score of 1.4 and above.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' and Parents' Scores in Externalized Behaviors Subscale

	Teachers		Parents	
Externalized behaviors	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
5. Defiant, talks back to staff	2.01	1.18	2.22	.99
12. Bullying to others	1.90	1.22	2.46	.93
16.Destroys property belonging to others	1.92	1.24	2.28	1.01
21. Breaks school rules	2.23	.97	2.04	1.08
26. Gets in many fights	2.02	1.15	2.13	1.09
28. Hangs around with others who get in trouble	2.02	1.15	2.13	1.09
35. Physically attacks people	2.11	1.22	2.50	.89
42. Disrupts class discipline	2.21	.99	1.88	1.07
43. Screams a lot	2.01	1.22	1.79	1.14
48. Explosive or unpredictable behavior	1.97	1.11	1.87	1.09
49. Demands must be met immediately, easily frustrated	1.61	1.12	1.62	1.17
54. Swearing or obscene language	1.83	1.22	2.29	1.05
58. Temper tantrums or hot temper	1.99	1.10	1.94	1.02
59. Threatens people	1.93	1.26	2.47	.94
61. Smokes	1.27	1.38	2.13	1.18
63. Truancy or unexplained absence	1.11	1.22	1.62	1.28
66. Usually loud	1.79	1.11	1.13	1.10
76.1 He/she just won't listen	1.78	1.16	1.98	.88
83 Speaks badly	1.79	1.22	2.19	1.00
84. Has unpredictable behavior	1.76	1.16	1.80	1.13
86. Overreacts when scolded	1.51	1.12	1.30	1.03
87. Spoils other children's games	1.84	1.15	1.94	1.08
88. Doesn't respect me	1.67	1.25	2.12	1.14
89. Doesn't care about other peoples' feelings	1.68	1.13	2.10	1.07
93. Often has temper tantrums or hot tempers	1.72	1.15	1.90	1.05
95. Generally disobedient, usually does not what adults request	1.57	1.10	1.72	1.10
102. Often lies or cheats	1.72	1.19	2.23	1.05
104. Steals from home, school or elsewhere	1.74	1.38	2.56	.90

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' and Parents' Scores in School Difficulties Subscale

	Teachers		Parents	
School difficulties	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
3. Fails to finish things he/she starts	1.09	1.04	.64	.95
13. Daydreams or gets lost in his/her thoughts	1.01	1.03	.45	.78
31. Has difficulty learning	1.31	1.10	.21	.53
38. Poor school work	.99	.99	.60	.92
45. Messy work	.93	.96	.38	.81
55. Underachieving, not working up to potential	1.15	1.05	.45	.82
62. Fails to carry out assigned tasks	1.14	1.03	.60	.89
72. School performance below his/her potential	1.14	1.03	.45	.82
74. Needs pressure to do schoolwork	1.10	1.00	.31	.66
75. Is not punctual in his/her schoolwork	1.42	1.02	.83	.93
77. Coming unprepared to class	1.29	1.08	.75	.95
78. Quits easily when encountering difficulties in class	1.36	1.00	.65	.98
79. Not paying attention to teachers' instructions	1.80	1.01	1.22	1.14
80. Makes careless mistakes	1.09	1.03	.36	.73
81. Easily distracted, concentration wander	1.47	1.02	.25	.59
85. Needs help to complete schoolwork	.92	1.04	.21	.54

The most troublesome behaviors for parents were "Steals from home, school or elsewhere". Parents rated most behaviors in the Externalized Behaviors Subscale with a mean score of 2 and above (Table 4). Other troublesome behaviors for parents in this Subscale were "Physically attacks people", "Bullying to others", "Threatens people", "Swearing or obscene language", "Often lies or cheats", "Destroys property belonging to others", "Defiant, talks back", "Gets in many fights" , "Hangs around with others who get in trouble", 'Smokes", "Speaks badly", "Doesn't respect me", "Doesn't care about other peoples' feelings", and "Breaks school rules".

In the School Difficulties Subscale (Table 5), the Internalized Behaviors Subscale (Table 6), and the Hyperactivity/Attention Difficulties Subscale (Table 8), parents rated almost all behaviors as not at all troublesome to a little troublesome. In the Attention Seeking Behaviors subscale (Table 7) they rated "Bragging, boasting", "Easily jealous" and "Showing off or clowning" with means scores of 1 and above.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' and Parents' Scores in Internalized Behaviors Subscale

	Teachers		Parents	
Internalized Behaviors	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
8. Complains of loneliness	.92	1.06	.49	.85
9. Confused or seems to be in a fog	1.39	1.17	1.10	1.07
10. Cries a lot	1.10	1.08	.75	.95
23. Feels or complains that no one loves him/her	.96	1.07	.68	.92
27. Gets teased a lot	1.64	1.17	.70	1.03
32. Too fearful or anxious	.91	.98	.63	.88
34. Overtired with no good reason	.85	1.01	.43	.78
44. Self-conscious or easily embarrassed	.53	.79	.21	.53
65. Unhappy, sad or depressed	1.15	1.17	.76	.99
67. Overly anxious to please	.75	.97	.51	.86
69. Afraid of saying something wrong and avoids participating in the lesson	.90	1.00	.33	.73
73. Does not take part in school events for fear of exposure to classmates	.86	1.04	.31	.66
91. Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or sickness	.88	1.02	.40	.79
94. Rather solitary, tends to play alone	.88	1.04	.58	1.01
96. Many worries, often seems worried	.99	.99	.74	.92
98. Has at least one good friend	1.24	1.20	.81	1.03
99. Cries often	1.12	1.10	.75	.98
100. Generally disliked by other children	1.27	1.11	.64	.93
103. Picked on or bullied by other children	1.77	1.29	.58	.96
105. Many fears, easily scared	1.13	1.14	.61	.97

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' and Parents' Scores in Attention Seeking Behaviors Subscale

	Teachers		Parents	
Attention-seeking behaviors	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
6. Bragging, boasting	1.05	1.04	1.85	1.15
14. Demands a lot of attention	1.24	1.06	.86	.88
20. Easily jealous	1.04	1.04	1.65	1.18
46. Showing off or clowning	1.00	1.00	1.31	1.12

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations for Teachers' and Parents' Scores in Hyperactivity/Attention Difficulties Subscale

	Teachers		Parents	
Hyperactivity/attention difficulties	***M***	***SD***	***M***	***SD***
56. Talks too much in class	1.97	.99	1.27	1.06
90. Restless, overactive, cannot stay still for long	1.48	1.10	.55	.94
97. Constantly fidgeting or squirming	1.40	1.07	.85	.98
101. Easily distracted, concentration wanders	1.50	1.05	.35	.73

Differences between Parents and Teachers

The second research question tested differences between the groups of teachers and parents in terms of the behaviors they identified as troublesome. Due to the unbalanced sample size of the groups (378 teachers and 69 parents), Welch's ANOVA with Bonferroni correction was applied to compare the mean scores between parents and teachers. Results are presented in Table 9. Parents scored significantly higher scores on all subscales than did teachers ($p < 0.05$), except for the subscale "School Difficulties". Although the comparison was significant across all subscale scores, the effect size (η_p^2) for subscales 1, 3, and 4 was small ($\eta_p^2 < 0.03$), while the effect size was moderate for subscale 2 ($\eta_p^2 = 0.11$) and subscale 5 ($\eta_p^2 = .113$).

Table 9. Means, SD, and Welch's Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Parents' and Teachers' Scores in Each Subscale

	Teachers (N =378)		Parents (N = 69)		*F*	*p*	η_p^2
	M	***SD***	***M***	***SD***			
Externalized behaviors	-.05	1.01	.28	.93	99.43	.008	.014
School difficulties	.14	.96	-.77	.82	105.13	<.001	.11
Internalized behaviors	.07	1.01	-.41	.81	110.76	<.001	.031
Attention-seeking behaviors	-.06	1.00	.32	.95	97.14	.003	.019
Hyperactivity/attention difficulties	.14	.97	-.79	.78	110.50	<.001	.113

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate and compare the types of behaviors that members of the Greek school system, specifically teachers and parents, identify as troublesome, adopting a systems perspective in identifying and addressing school-related issues. The first research question focused on identifying which classroom behaviors teachers and parents considered troublesome. While teachers identified only a few behaviors as highly troublesome, they agreed that externalizing behaviors are the most problematic in the classroom (Alter et al., 2013; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Kokkinos et al., 2005; Liljequist & Renk, 2007; Merrell, 2008; Molins & Clopton, 2002; Splett et al., 2019). Specifically, teachers consistently expressed concern over externalizing behaviors characterized by disobedience and aggressiveness, rating behaviors such as "Breaks school rules" and "Disrupts class discipline" as particularly troublesome (Didaskalou & Millward, 2001; Ding et al., 2008; Houghton et al., 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Kokkinos et al., 2005; Liljequist & Renk, 2007; Little, 2005; Molins & Clopton, 2002; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Stephenson et al., 2000; Thanos et al., 2006). Additional externalizing behaviors, such as misconduct and antisocial actions, were also viewed as troublesome by Greek teachers (Bibou-Nakou, 2000; Ding et al., 2008; Houghton et al., 1988; Johnson & Fullwood, 2006; Little, 2005; Poulou & Norwich, 2000; Stephenson et al., 2000; Thanos et al., 2006). Although frequency was not examined in this study, previous findings suggest that aggressive and delinquent behaviors, while serious, are relatively infrequent in classrooms.

Behaviors associated with hyperactivity and attention problems were also considered troublesome, with "talks too much in class" rated as the most troublesome. Although this behavior is of relatively minor severity, it has consistently been reported as one of the most annoying behaviors for teachers (Beaman et al., 2007; Koutrouba, 2013; Samuelsson, 2018). Given that Greek teachers often manage large classrooms with a strong focus on academic achievement (OECD, 2018), behaviors that disrupt teaching—especially those that challenge authority—are particularly concerning.

Behaviors related to school attainment were of moderate concern for Greek teachers. Hatzichristou et al. (2000, 2011) argue that Greek teachers are more concerned with school-related difficulties due to the Greek educational system's emphasis on the child as a student, with less focus on other aspects of development. In contrast, internalizing behaviors appeared less troublesome for teachers in our study, as they do not directly interfere with classroom teaching (Paulsen et al., 2006). This finding aligns with the academically oriented Greek education system, where priority is given to behaviors that hinder academic progress over those that address students' emotional or psychological needs (Hatzichristou et al., 2000). However, the internalizing behaviors that teachers did find more troublesome were those requiring their intervention (Didaskalou & Millward, 2001) and those that are easily observed (Zee & Rudasill, 2021), such as "Picked on or bullied by other children" and "Gets teased a lot." These behaviors may be associated with bullying, which could make teachers more vigilant in identifying them. Similarly, in the category of attention-seeking behaviors, "Demands a lot of attention" was also considered troublesome, as it diverts the teacher's focus from the class.

Parents also recognize externalizing behaviors as moderately to very troublesome in the classroom, though they tend to be especially concerned about antisocial and delinquent behaviors, such as "Steals from home/school/elsewhere" and "Physically attacks people." Parents are generally less tolerant of behavioral problems in the classroom (de Boer et al., 2010; Kalyva et al., 2007; Kniveton, 2004; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Schwab, 2018; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2003), possibly viewing these behaviors as a negative influence on their children. Additionally, parents find certain behaviors in the Attention-Seeking subscale—such as bragging, jealousy, and showing off—troublesome, likely because they perceive these actions as potentially disruptive to their child's social and emotional well-being. Overall, Greek parents express concern over the impact of disruptive behaviors on their children's safety and social environment (Coldron & Boulton, 1996). They may feel that behaviors that disrupt the classroom or peer relationships could hinder their child's ability to succeed academically and socially, particularly as they may perceive teachers as unable to fully address the needs of all students (de Boer et al., 2010; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2003).

The second research question examined differences between parents and teachers in the behaviors they find troublesome. Overall, parents perceive most types of behaviors as more troublesome than teachers do, with the exception of behaviors in the School Difficulties subscale. This difference may be because parents are less familiar with the classroom and school environment, which may lead them to view incidents there as more serious than they actually are. In contrast, teachers tend to worry less, as the school and classroom are settings in which they have experience and control. Nearly 80% of teachers in the study had over 11 years of experience, which likely contributes to their confidence in managing classroom behaviors without feeling overwhelmed (Didaskalou & Millward, 2001). The only type of behavior teachers rated as more troublesome than parents was related to school difficulties, as children's learning and academic progress are primary goals of the teaching profession (OECD, 2018) and areas for which teachers are held accountable.

Conclusions

To reiterate, the present study aimed to investigate and compare which behaviors Greek parents and teachers perceive as troublesome. From a systems perspective, we focused on shifting the attention from individual behaviors to those behaviors that members of the school system—specifically parents and teachers—consider troublesome. Both teachers and parents identified externalizing behaviors as more troublesome than other types of behaviors, as these are more challenging to manage and can impact the entire classroom. For teachers, troublesome behaviors are primarily those that require intervention and disrupt classroom learning, while for parents, these are behaviors that may affect their children's safety or negatively influence them. Teachers generally tend to worry less than parents about various types of children's behaviors, with the exception of school-related difficulties. Consistent with previous research findings, similar types of classroom behaviors are commonly identified as troublesome over time and across different countries.

Recommendations

The systems perspective on troublesome behavior in schools (Cooper & Upton, 1990; Dowling, 2003) acknowledges that children's behaviors are not inherent to the child but rather develop through relationships and interactions within the school system. While Greek teachers and parents primarily focus on behaviors that disrupt learning or threaten safety, there is growing recognition of the impact of mental health issues on students' well-being. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating multiple perspectives within the school system when designing interventions tailored to the specific needs of students, teachers, and school communities and promoting collaboration among all system members (Kourkoutas & Giovazolias, 2015). Effective interventions should address the entire classroom system, aiming to avoid labelling or blaming individual children, teachers, or parents (Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016; Cooper & Jacobs, 2010; Kouimtzi & Stogiannidou, 2006; Michael et al., 2023).

Limitations

This study has several strengths and limitations. It reinforces previous research on teachers' views of troublesome behavior and adds new insights by exploring parents' perspectives on classroom behavior. Further research is needed to examine interactions and dynamics among school system members—such as parents, teachers, and children—regarding what constitutes troublesome behavior. Future studies should consider children's narratives on behaviors they perceive as problematic in the classroom, as these insights can deepen our understanding of their experiences. By combining

qualitative data from children with quantitative measures of teachers' and parents' perceptions, researchers can gain a comprehensive view of how children's experiences align with or differ from adult perceptions of problematic behaviors.

Another limitation of this study is the sample. Since all participants were from a single urban area, caution is advised in generalizing the findings. Additionally, the sample of parents was relatively small and somewhat homogeneous in demographic characteristics compared to the teacher sample. Future research should strive to include a nationally representative sample of teachers and parents, considering demographic factors such as parents' gender and socio-economic status, and teachers' gender, age, and teaching experience.

Ethics Statements

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Primary Education of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece. All participants submitted their free informed consent to participate in the study.

Consent for publication

All authors are in accordance with the content of the manuscript and have given their consent for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interests.

Authorship Contribution Statement

Kouimtzi: Conceptualization, design, data acquisition, data analysis/interpretation, drafting manuscript, writing. Frosi: Conceptualization, design, data acquisition, data analysis/interpretation, drafting manuscript writing. Kolias: statistical analysis, data analysis/interpretation, drafting manuscript, writing

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