

## School Teachers' Perceptions of Most Troublesome Pupil Behaviour

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### Abstract

*A questionnaire based on Wheldall & Merrett's survey, using a non-random sample was carried out among primary schools in Libya. The study intended to investigate the Libyan teacher's perceptions of the most troublesome pupil behaviour commonly experienced. Of 89 questionnaires distributed to six primary schools, 84 were returned. The result showed that more than 85% of Libyan teachers spend more time on problems of order and control than need be. Behaviours such as lack of concentration, followed by out of seat, and talking out of turn were regarded by overall teachers as the most troublesome. This result was based on the first and second choice of each question. The average of class size was 23.70% of whom 3.88% were troublesome children, and of these 2.46% were boys. However, male teachers found that girls were more troublesome than boys in their classes compared with female teachers.*

### Keywords

Teaching; children;  
classroom; troublesome  
behaviour



### I. Introduction

There has been more research done related to primary schools considering behaviour / misbehaviour than ever in the last few years (Bennett 1988, Galton and Simon, 1980, Sharp and Green, 1975). However, the nature and the incidence of classroom behaviour problems is still a matter of concern to every individual: parents, teachers and psychologists. It has been said that problems concerning behaviour / misbehaviour vary from individual to individual and school to school simply because everyone has different points of views of what constitutes disruptive behaviour (Hutton, 2012; Ibrahim 2011). The aggressive behaviour (acting out) appeared from the literature concerning the perception and management of troublesome behaviour as the behaviour which most teachers found uncontrollable (e. g Algozzine, 1980, Coleman and Gilliam, 1983, Gadour, 2009; Hutton, 1984, Safran, 1984, and Li, 1985).

Hutton (2012) found after an investigation was made into a great number of children referred to school psychological services, that problems arose because of poor peer relationship and not because of some aspects of troublesome, aggressive behaviour as might be expected. Safran (1986) arrived at a similar finding which was in contrast with his previous work (Safran and Safran, 1985). He conducted research involved with the perceptions of mainstream and special teachers about the manageability of misbehaviour. Safran 1986 reported that: "perhaps the most surprising finding is that both groups rated the more inner-directed and non-disruptive behaviours, e.g. socially withdrawn, inattention, and work - disorganisation, as the most difficult to manage. The conventional wisdom suggests that professional educators have generally equated manageability with reduction of acting-out and aggressive behaviour. In contrast, this data indicates that teachers believe they are less able to influence the behaviour of their more withdrawn

students". It may be worthwhile considering the contrast between the two results. Referring the children to school psychologists may reflect teachers growing concerns about the most difficult behaviours (see for example, Gadour, 2009), while some may be disturbed, on a day to day level, with aggressive behaviour. Much the same research implemented by Safran 1986, could be seen as a somewhat biased attitude that as teachers sampled were partaking in INSET courses, the same teachers attending such special educational training, would be more probably concerned with personality problems than behavioural ones. Alternatively, the differences could come from varying interpretations of research questions and concluding whether they are 'concerned' or disturbed by different conducts.

Mortimore (1983) cited from DES research, the definition of disruptive behaviour as that hindering the learning process as well as reducing other children's opportunities of learning and imposing undue stress on teachers. While Galloway et.al (1982) defined disruptive behaviour as any behaviour which appears problematic, inappropriate and disturbing teachers. Also it was regarded by Algozzine (1980) as any threatening behaviour to the teacher's control and generally disturbing. Undoubtedly such behaviour will be bound to interfere with the learning of all the children in the classroom if it is not controlled. Such problems are believed by some researchers to be inherited biologically or acquired from the environment children live in. However, Weiner (1970) pointed out the concern about behaviour problems have always existed since man's early recorded history. He cited from the great scholar Socrates: "Children now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority. They show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise; children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households".

Safran and Safran (1985) stated that because of the time consumed dealing with disruptive behaviour, teachers began to be more concerned about the time available for teaching children i.e. a concern associated with academic standards. More recently Wheldall and Merrett (1984), carried out a survey in the West Midlands area trying to identify the most disruptive behaviour which junior school teachers found most troublesome. They sent questionnaires to 29 junior schools and about 62% of teachers were found to be spending more time than need be on control and order. Behaviours such as disturbing others (30%), talking (28%), non-attending and disobeying (14%) were selected as the most troublesome behaviours which perturbed teachers. Talking (43%) was followed by non-attending and disobeying (18%) were picked as the most frequent misbehaviours. In addition to that they found boys more troublesome than girls within an average class size of 30.5 overall.

In a similar survey by the same researchers, Wheldall and Merrett (1988) implemented in the same area using a (25%) random sample of 32 schools (infant, junior and infant/junior schools) revealed that more than (51%) of the primary school teachers were found to be spending more time dealing with problems of order and control than they ought. Behaviours such as talking out of turn (47%) followed by hindering other children (25%) were recognised by teachers as the most common and the most troublesome classroom behaviours. Further to that they discovered that within an average of class size 27, 2.97 boys were more troublesome than girls out of a total average 4.29 of troublesome of children. Supporting the above two surveys, another study by Laing (1982) proved that existing behaviour problems among nursery-aged children yielded an average of boys exceeding girls of 4-1.

In Libya as in many other African countries, attention is rarely given to disruptive children and their problem behaviour. Unfortunately such children are sometimes sent back home and even excluded from schools as a result of disturbing the teachers in the classroom. However, this is not the right way of solving the problem. There is a growing

need to consider classroom behaviour in the Libyan context, and this has led to carry out this study. Thus the primary aim of this study is to investigate teachers' perception of the most troublesome behaviour commonly experienced with respect to primary school children. Also there is a need to identify whether Libyan teachers perceive the same categories of misbehaviour as those identified by teachers in England.

## II. Research Methods

The questionnaire used in this study was based on that of Wheldall and Merrett (1988). It was initially translated from English to Arabic language. An accurate revision of the translation was made by an expert in Arabic and English. Obviously the questionnaire needed some form of adaptation to meet the Libyan context. The translated questionnaire was administered in a pilot study for these two reasons. Firstly to look at the suitability of the terms used such as; infant, junior, most troublesome behaviour, next troublesome and most trouble frequent troublesome behaviour. Secondly to detect other local categories of misbehaviour. The result of the initial study showed that there were some terms that had to be changed e.g. infant to junior and junior to senior, because the Libyan Education system considers primary school from ages (6 - 11) and infant school from (4 - 5). Further categories were added by teachers; for example, categories K (Lack of concentration), and L (Doodle - Graffiti), to the previous questionnaire which was as follows:-

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| A (Eating)                   | B (Making unnecessary noise - nonverbal) |
| C (Disobedience)             | D (Talking out of turn)                  |
| E (Idleness/Slowness)        | F (Unpunctuality)                        |
| G (Hindering other children) | H (Physical aggression)                  |
| I (Untidiness)               | J (Out of seat)                          |

Primary school teachers were selected as the sample of this study which aimed to recognise the most troublesome children and their behaviour. They were chosen because of their responsibility of teaching one class throughout the week. The study used a non - random sample of primary schools in the city of Derna - Libya. Six schools which are funded by the state were selected to provide the population of teachers. There are more than twenty primary schools in Derna. Only six of them, mixed children (boys & girls) were selected. A meeting was held with the head teachers of the schools in each case, to explain the nature of the study, and how it is valuable. All head teachers welcomed the research and co-operated very well. Then it was decided to make sure teachers of both sexes would complete the questionnaire, and whom would base their answers on their regular teaching experience. Thus the results would include something for comparison. It was agreed that the questionnaires should be collected back after two weeks. A note for guidance was attached to the questionnaire to explain the steps that every teacher should follow. Teachers were requested to rank the categories which suited each question. The questionnaire consisted of 4 questions starting with some personal questions. Each question has two parts except question 4 which comprised of six parts. The first question concerned whether teachers spent too much time on control and order than might be expected. The second one considered the behaviour which teachers found most troublesome. Question three was related to the most frequent misbehaviour. And lastly, question four concerned the most troublesome child and his/her misbehaviour which disturbs teachers most. The number of questionnaires distributed was 89, eighty four were returned. Among those who responded were eight teachers who did not answer all the questions. Of the total number of teachers who responded (42.85 %) were in their thirties,

(41.66 %) in their twenties, (15.47 %) in their forties and none of the teachers were in their fifties. The majority of teachers who replied were females (63.09 %), compared with (36.90%) male teachers. The percentage of male junior teachers (8.33 %) was small compared with female junior teachers (33.33 %). Whereas, the percentage of male senior teachers (28.57%) was mostly the same compared with women senior teachers (29.76%). The following table shows the composition of the sample of this study:

**Table 1.** The sample of the study

	Junior	Senior	Total
Male	7	24	31
Female	28	25	53
Total	35	49	84

### III. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

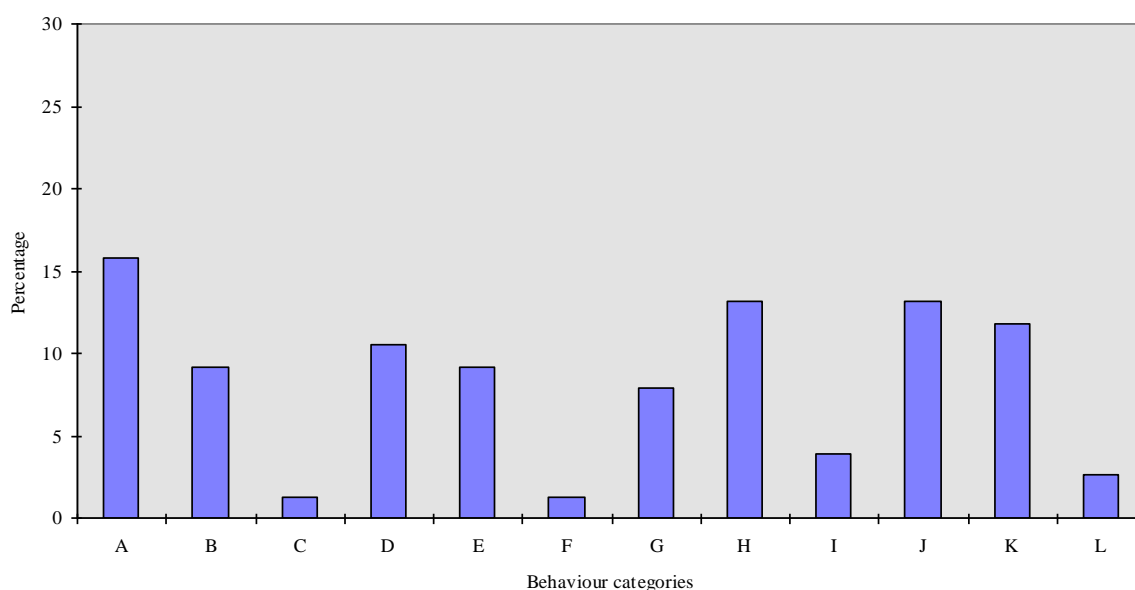
For ease of reading all percentages were rounded. The results of this study indicated that the overall percentage of the most troublesome children was (16%) among these (20%) were boys and 13 % girls. The average size of class was (23.70%), and on average (3.88%) of children were regarded troublesome, and of these (2.46%) were boys. Female teachers reported (59%) of children as troublesome. This was higher compared with male teachers (41%). This can be explained by the fact that the number of female teachers either as junior teachers or senior teachers was bigger than male teachers. Junior teachers stated (45%) of children are troublesome, that was lower compared with senior teachers (55%). According to question 4 relating to the most troublesome child, this study confirmed that boys are more troublesome than girls. While female teachers reported that boys are (87%) more troublesome in their classes than male (61%), girls were found more troublesome (39%) by male teachers compared with female (13%). Clearly, in answering the second part of question 4 (the next most troublesome child), again boys were picked out by female teachers as most troublesome (52%) compared with male teachers (38%). Once more, junior teachers presented less children as troublesome (42%) than senior teachers (49%). Male teachers observed girls were by no means more troublesome than boys in a ratio of (53% - 47%) respectively. Reflecting on this result, despite boys being regarded as most troublesome by almost all teachers, there some occasions when girls were believed to be more troublesome, this was especially true among male teachers.

As a method of analysing the data, it was suggested to take the first optional answer to avoid any confusion that may occur, since some questions are similar. The analysis will mainly concentrate on the first part of each questions and will mention concisely the second parts as to support the analysis. In relation to question 1, this was looking at whether teachers spend more time on problems of order and control than teaching. Class problems appeared remarkably to wear teachers out, and made them spend much more time on discipline and control than need be. Most of the sample replied positively. Of male teachers (85%) said yes and (15%) no. Whereas, female teachers answered (86 % and 14 %) respectively. Junior teachers responded with a positive (97 %) and senior teachers (78 %).

Table 2. Percentage of most troublesome behaviours,														
Q2(M)														
Teacher categories			Behaviour categories											
	Total	Answer	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Overall	84	76	15.79	9.211	1.316	10.53	9.211	1.316	7.895	13.16	3.947	13.16	11.84	2.632
Male	34	32	12.5	15.63	3.125	12.5	12.5	0	3.125	9.375	9.375	9.375	6.25	6.25
Female	50	44	18.18	4.545	0	9.091	6.818	2.273	11.36	15.91	0	15.91	15.91	0
Junior	35	35	17.14	5.714	0	5.714	11.43	0	11.43	5.714	0	25.71	14.29	2.857
Senior	49	41	14.63	12.2	2.439	14.63	7.317	2.439	4.878	19.51	7.317	2.439	9.756	2.439

In answering question 2 about the most troublesome behaviour in the class, (16%) of the teachers selected category A (Eating) as most troublesome behaviour and categories H (Physical aggression) and J (Out of seat) being selected by (13%) of teachers. Following that category K (Lack of concentration) was regarded by (12 %) of all teachers as most troublesome behaviour. However, as table 2 and fig 1 show, none of the other categories reached to (11%). An analysis of the next most troublesome behaviour, category D (Talking out of turn), (21%) was chosen by teachers as being the most troublesome behaviour. Category K (Lack of concentration), was opted (14%) and category B (Making unnecessary noise - non verbal) and J (Out of seat) were both opted by teachers at (12%) respectively. Table 2 illustrates category A (Eating) only shows a slight difference between male and female teachers (12%) and (18%) respectively. Following this, senior teachers show a lower percentage of (15%) in comparison with junior teachers, (17%). Table 2 also illustrates that the percentage of male teachers selected categories H (Physical aggression) and J (Out of seat) is lower than female teachers (9%-16%) respectively. Category H (Physical aggression) appeared to be elected by (6%) of junior teachers while selected by (20%) of senior teachers.

**MOST TROUBLESOME BEHAVIOUR**

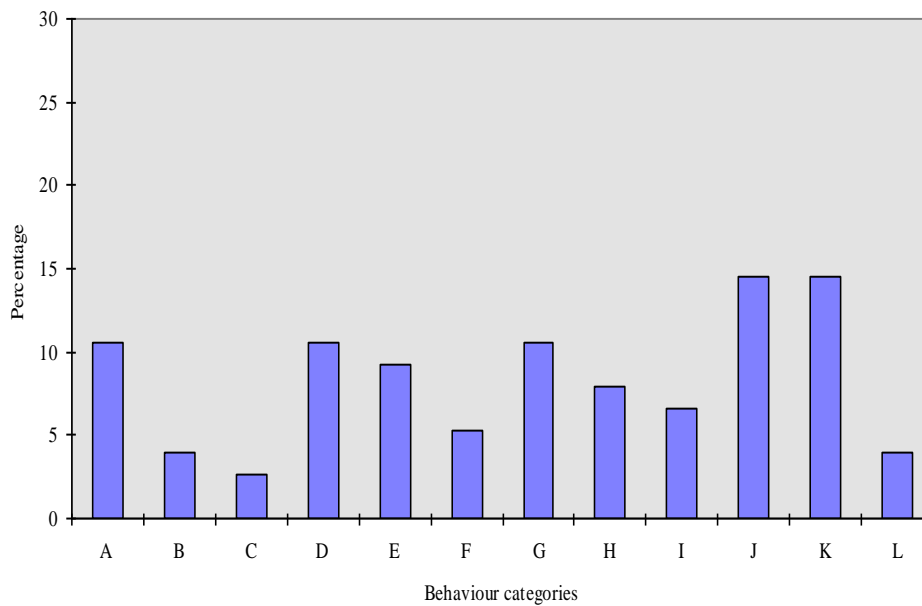


More junior teachers (26%) than senior teachers (2%) picked category J (Out of seat). The percentage of men teachers (6%) was less than women teachers (16%) opted category K (Lack of concentration). Junior teachers (14%) however selected more for category K (Lack of concentration) than senior teachers (10%). Question 3 of the questionnaire asked about the most frequent troublesome behaviour, the result again provided mostly the same information gained in the previous question. Categories J (14%) (Out of seat) and K (14%) (Lack of concentration) are chosen by over all teachers to be the most frequent troublesome behaviour. Following that category A (Eating) (11%) was not selected as high as in the previous question by over all teachers.

<b>Table 3. Percentage of most frequent troublesome behaviours,</b>														
Q3(M)														
Teacher categories			Behaviour categories											
	Total	Answer	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Overall	84	76	10.53	3.947	2.632	10.53	9.211	5.263	10.53	7.895	6.579	14.47	14.47	3.947
Male	34	32	12.5	3.125	6.25	15.63	3.125	9.375	9.375	3.125	6.25	9.375	15.63	6.25
Female	50	44	9.091	4.545	0	6.818	13.64	2.273	11.36	11.36	6.818	18.18	13.64	2.273
Junior	35	35	8.571	2.857	0	8.571	14.29	5.714	8.571	5.714	2.857	22.86	14.29	5.714
Senior	49	41	12.2	4.878	4.878	12.2	4.878	4.878	12.2	9.756	9.756	7.317	14.63	2.439

As table 3 and fig 2 show categories D (Talking out of turn) (11%) and G (Hindering other children) (11%) opted by over all teachers. However, none of the others categories reached (10%). Looking at the result which derived from the next most frequent troublesome behaviour, category I (Untidiness) was selected by (18%) of teachers overall. Following that, once more categories K (Lack of concentration) and J (Out of seat) were selected by over all teachers and even with an higher percentage this time (17%-16%) respectively. As table 3 shows, some conflicts appear when comparing the percentage between male teachers with female teachers and junior teachers with senior teachers. More junior teachers (23%) opted for category J (Out of seat) than senior teachers (7%). And since almost all junior teachers are female, this was reflected in the respective percentages of male teachers and female teachers. Men teachers selected category H (Physical aggression) less frequently (3%) than women teachers (11%). Category E (Idleness/slowness) was selected much more frequently by (14%) of female teachers than male teachers (3%).

#### MOST FREQUENT TROUBLESOME BEHAVIOUR



Turning to question 4 related to the behaviour of most troublesome child, the result revealed that categories K (Lack of concentration) and D (Talking out of turn) were regarded by teachers as most troublesome behaviour (21%) and (17%) respectively. Remarkably the percentage of category K (Lack of concentration) increased from (17%-21%).

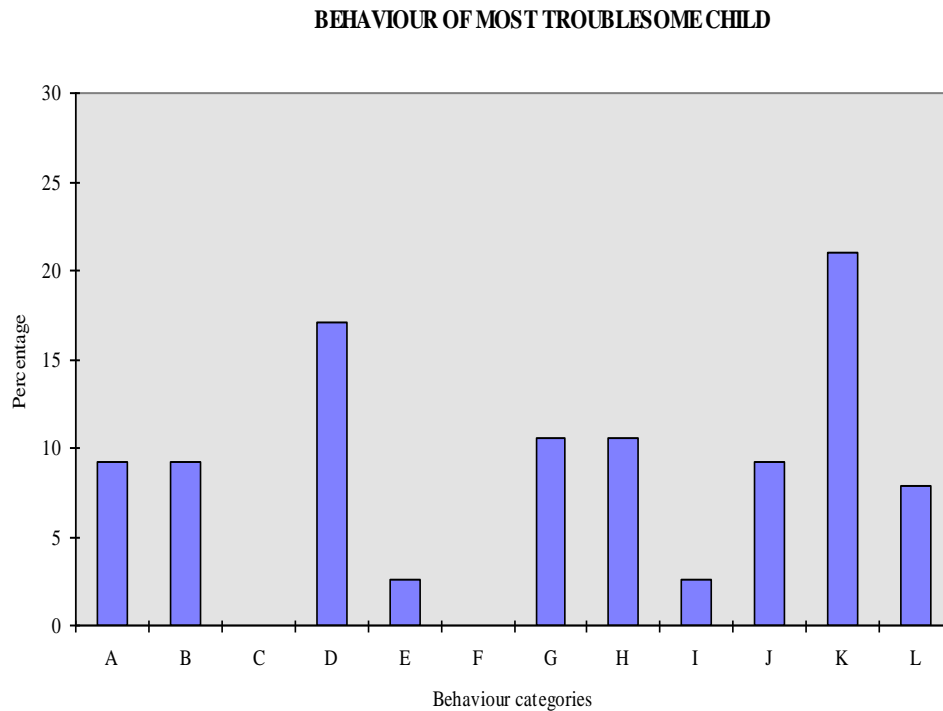
**Table 4.** Percentage Behaviour of most troublesome child,

Q4 (A . M)														
Teacher categories			Behaviour categories											
	Total	Answer	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Overall	84	76	9.21 1	9.21 1	0	17.1 1	2.63 2	0	10.53	10.5 3	2.63 2	9.21 1	21.0 5	7.89 5
Male	34	33	12.1 2	15.1 5	0	21.2 1	3.03	0	3.03	12.1 2	3.03	3.03	18.1 8	9.09 1
Female	50	443	6.97 7	4.65 1	0	13.9 5	2.32 6	0	16.28	9.30 2	2.32 6	13.9 5	23.2 6	6.97 7
Junior	35	35	11.4 3	8.57 1	0	8.57 1	5.71 4	0	8.571	5.71 4	2.85 7	17.1 4	22.8 6	8.57 1
Senior	49	41	7.31 7	9.75 6	0	24.3 9	0	0	12.2	14.6 3	2.43 9	2.43 9	19.5 1	7.31 7

Following that category G (Hindering other children) regarded by 11% of teachers as well as category H (Physical aggression) with the same percentage (11%), but nevertheless none of the others reached to (10%). Likewise, from the outcome of the next most troublesome behaviour, the result assures that category K (Lack of concentration) 18% was the most troublesome behaviour selected by over all teachers. Category D (Talking out of turn) (13%) was regarded by over all teachers as the behaviour of the most troublesome children. As table 4 and figure 3 show, when the result is broken down into different parts,

differences of opinion were reflected in the percentage answers given by teachers e.g. male teachers and senior teachers chose category D (Talking out of turn) (21% - 24%) which is a much higher percentage than female and junior teachers (14%-9%) respectively.

Figure 3



The result of the second part of question 4 related to the next behaviour of the next most troublesome child shown in table 5 and fig 4, illustrates that overall, teachers regard categories J (Out of seat) 21% and K (Lack of concentration) 18 % as the most troublesome behaviour.

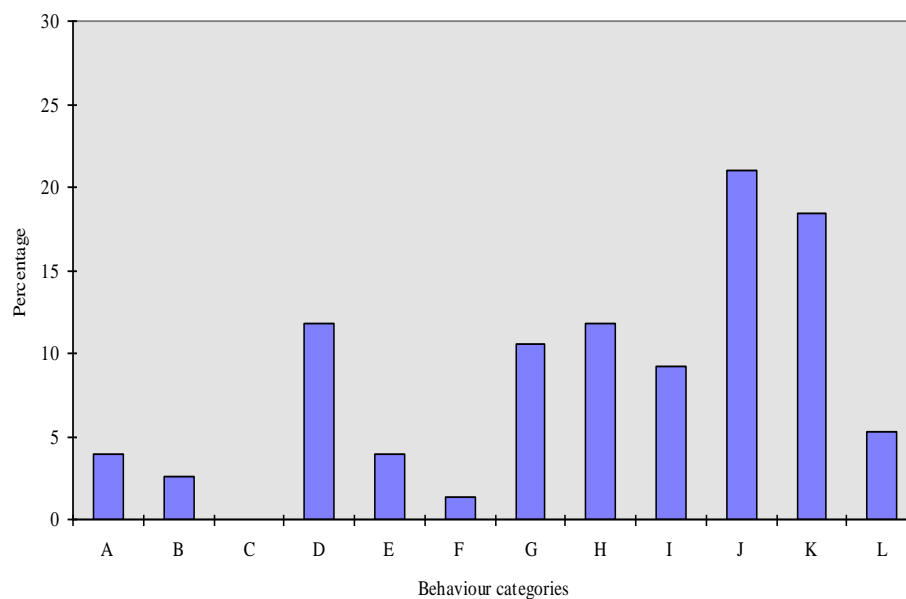
<b>Table 5. Percentage of most troublesome behaviours,</b>														
<b>Q4 (B . M)</b>														
Teacher categories			Behaviour categories											
	Total	Answer	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
Overall	84	76	3.947	2.632	0	11.84	3.947	1.316	10.53	11.84	9.211	21.05	18.42	5.263
Male	34	33	3.03	3.03	0	18.18	3.03	0	6.061	12.12	18.18	9.091	24.24	3.03
Female	50	43	4.651	2.326	0	6.977	4.651	2.326	13.95	11.63	2.326	30.23	13.95	6.977
Junior	35	35	5.714	0	0	2.857	5.714	0	17.14	5.714	11.43	31.43	14.29	5.714
Senior	49	41	2.439	4.878	0	19.51	2.439	2.439	4.878	17.07	7.317	12.2	21.95	4.878

Surprisingly category J (Out of seat) increased suddenly than in the previous question, however category K (Lack of concentration) continued with the same percentage (18%). While the percentage of category D (Talking out of turn) decreased this time,

category H (Physical aggression), in comparison rose to (12% and 12%) respectively. None of the others categories reached to (10%) except category G selected by over all teachers (see table 5 fig 4).

Referring to the second part of the last question (next most troublesome behaviour), the result revealed teachers over all selected category L (doodle - graffiti) and category K (Lack of concentration) as most troublesome behaviour (26% and 18%) respectively. Following that categories J (Out of seat) 12% and G (Hindering other children) (11%) were regarded as most troublesome overall by teachers. As shown in table 5, the result indicates some differences among female teachers, male teachers, junior teachers and senior teachers. Male teachers (6%) and senior teachers (5%) selected less frequently category G (Hindering other children) than female teachers 14% and junior teachers (17%). Category I (Untidiness) was chosen much more by male teachers 18% and junior teachers (11%) than female teachers (2%) and senior teachers (7%). Category J (Out of seat) was selected more frequently by women teachers (30%) and junior teachers (31%) than male teachers (9%) and senior teachers (12%). Male teachers (24%) and senior (22%) picked out more category K (Lack of concentration) than female teachers (14%) and junior teachers (14%).

**MOST TROUBLESOME BEHAVIOUR**



In summarising the result, poor classroom behaviour appears to be a major factor preventing Libyan teachers from having control and order of troublesome children. That was clear (97%) among junior teachers who replied to question 1 with certainty. However, overall, category K (Lack of concentration) was presented by the teachers to be the most troublesome behaviour and most frequently encountered. Following that, categories J (Out of seat) and D (Talking out of turn) were the most troublesome behaviours.

### 3.2 Discussion

The result of this study confirms that Libyan teachers encounter within their classrooms a wide range of disruptive behaviours. Yet, teachers found it difficult to pick out the most troublesome behaviours in their classrooms. This fits with the researchers'

experience when they were dealing with primary school children, where they found the same problem, that one child can have a variety of misbehaviours e.g. aggressive, out of seat and also hindering other children. However, these behaviours do not seem to represent extreme behaviour, rather they are of a mild nature relating to lack of concentration, out of seat and talking out of turn. This is not to say these are the only behaviours which disturbed teachers, some other behaviours were found to be quite often disruptive such as eating, physical aggression and hindering other children. As previously explained these behaviours were not only selected frequently by teachers in their first choices but also in their second choices which acted as strong evidence of making them the most troublesome behaviours. If we could draw a comparison between the result extracted from this study and Wheldall & Merrett's survey (1988), we might have to consider so many variables which may rise to interfere with the two contexts. Both of the studies have found, to a large degree, much the same findings. Comparing the percentage of most troublesome behaviours obtained from this result and the previous one, they were almost the same, (16.37% and 16%) respectively. Nevertheless, the result of this study, irrespective of the percentages of most troublesome behaviours, indicated that teachers overall regarded lack of concentration as the most troublesome behaviour and more frequently, followed by out of seat and talking out of turn. In Wheldall & Merrett's survey teachers, found the most disruptive behaviours were talking out of turn and hindering other children. Thus troublesome behaviours can vary from child to child and from culture to culture as far as the assessor is concerned.

Moreover, the majority of the Libyan teachers feel that they spend too much time on problems of order and control than need be (junior teachers 97% and senior teachers 77%). Whereas, in Wheldall & Merrett's survey, a smaller percentage of teachers in comparison with this study admitted that they spend more time on problems of order and control than need be (infant teachers 44% and junior teachers 57%). Even though the questionnaires were completed anonymously, such findings baffled the researchers in arriving at a precise conclusion. It is possible that either Libyan teachers were honest in their answers, or that their parallels in the British study were more guarded in their responses. Another possibility is that Libyan teachers had high expectations of good behaviour and were less prepared to accept minor lapses of behaviour. As the result indicated, the average class size was (23.70%), of whom (3.88%) were troublesome children, and of these (2.46%) were boys. Class size was apparently not a significant factor in preventing teachers from having control and creating a good atmosphere for teaching the children. The real problem facing teachers appears to be troublesome behaviour. Considering generally the finding that boys are more troublesome than girls, this was not dissimilar with the findings of Laing (1982), Wheldall & Merrett (1984), and Wheldall & Merrett (1988). Interestingly, the analyses indicated that all male teachers in this study and in Wheldall & Merrett's survey (1988) found that girls were more troublesome than boys in their classes.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study found the majority of Libyan teachers (85%) spend more time on problems of control and order than actually teaching. Although this confirms the previous finding of Gadour (2009), this percentage was much higher compared with those teachers in the West Midland (51%) (Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). Category K (lack of concentration) 21% appeared clearly in (figures 2 & 3) as the most troublesome behaviour and more frequently regarded by teachers overall, followed by categories J (out of seat)

(14%) and D (talking out of turn) 17%. As previously explained, this result is not only based on first choice answers alone, but also supported by the second choice answers. Thankfully, behaviours such as physical aggression and hindering others children do not happen as frequently as initially expected. Finally the result of this study supports that of Wheldall & Merrett (1988) in that the most troublesome behaviours occurring in the primary schools as being of a mild nature and amenable to change. Thus the implication of this study suggests that teachers need to work in partnership with the school psychosocial services as well as with parents to address the problems encountered within their classrooms.

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