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A Systematic Review of Positive Discipline and School Organization on School Climate

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Abstract

The management of problematic behaviors in schools is a growing challenge. Bullying and disruption negatively impact the educational community. In response, positive discipline methods are being implemented to improve the school environment. The aim of this study is to review and summarize the findings from recent research on this topic. To achieve this, 42 articles investigating the influence of positive discipline on school climate, specifically the Positive Behavioral Support (PBS) method, were analyzed following the PRISMA protocol methodology. It was found that the use of positive discipline measures positively impacts the classroom, reducing both disruption and school victimization.

Keywords

Positive discipline, positive behavior support, school climate

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Revisión Sistemática sobre la Influencia de la Disciplina Positiva y la Organización Escolar en el Clima Escolar

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Resumen

La gestión de las conductas problemáticas en las escuelas es un reto creciente. El acoso escolar y la disrupción afectan negativamente a la comunidad educativa. Como respuesta, se están implementando métodos de disciplina positiva para mejorar el ambiente escolar. El objetivo de este estudio es revisar y sintetizar los hallazgos de investigaciones recientes sobre este tema. Para ello, se analizaron 42 artículos que investigan la influencia de la disciplina positiva en la convivencia escolar, en concreto el método de Apoyo Conductual Positivo (PBS), siguiendo la metodología del protocolo PRISMA. Se encontró que el uso de medidas de disciplina positiva tiene un impacto favorable en el aula, reduciendo tanto la disrupción como la victimización escolar.

Palabras clave

Disciplina positiva, apoyo al comportamiento positivo, clima escolar

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In recent years, there has been growing concern about the social climate in educational institutions, particularly regarding problematic behaviors such as conflicts between teachers and students, classroom disruption, bullying, and expulsions. These issues have garnered considerable attention from the media (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019). The consequences of classroom disruption have negative effects on both the well-being and academic performance of students, and they can also increase the risk of marginalization for aggressors and create a negative social climate. This has prompted schools to seek interventions to reduce and prevent aggression and disruptive behaviors (Borgen et al., 2019). Historically, numerous disciplinary methods have been used to manage students' disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Models have evolved from punitive approaches, such as physical punishment or sanctions, to positive ones, such as positive discipline or positive behavioral support (Hirschi, 2015). Both positive discipline and positive behavioral support are positive approaches aimed at improving the social climate and reducing classroom disruption. They are related, as the philosophy of positive discipline supports the school-wide method of positive behavioral supports (Ren & Ma, 2017).

School-wide positive behavioral support involves all members of the school community, including students, teachers, and families, in creating a positive and supportive learning environment (Dumitru, 2022). Tyre et al. (2018) mention that school-wide positive behavioral support (PBS) restructures disciplinary systems by changing how problematic behaviors are addressed, providing universal and specific supports that foster students' positive emotional and social growth. To properly implement PBS, schools must work on establishing consistent positive discipline practices across the institution. When applied correctly, this method benefits academic outcomes, peer relationships, and the perceived social climate (Tyre et al., 2018).

Discipline and Positive Behavioral Support (PBS)

Students have changing needs, and to meet them, school practices must be restructured and establish consistent systems that support positive behavior for all students. Positive discipline is an educational method that seeks a balance between firmness and kindness. It was developed in the 1980s by Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott. It aims to connect with students by respecting their needs, setting limits, and jointly agreeing on consequences for potential conflicts.

In line with positive discipline, the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) method, developed in the 1990s by George Sugai and Rob Horner, originated from behavioral supports used for individuals with disabilities, later expanding to mainstream schools (Spring, 2003). PBS fosters mutual respect and proactive teaching of positive behaviors to build a supportive school culture. Its goal is to promote positive attitudes among students and seek respectful solutions to conflicts. It seeks to change school disciplinary systems to create a positive environment with universal and specific support, fostering a positive social attitude. It is based on the following principles of school discipline:

- Create shared values for the entire school (students, families, and staff).
- Identify behavioral expectations for students in line with the school's values.

- Provide reinforcements (such as recognition and rewards) for positive behaviors.

Widely applied in the United States and gaining popularity in Europe (Borgen et al., 2019; Närhi et al., 2017; Tabacaru et al., 2022), it is an evidence-based system with three intervention levels: universal prevention for all students, targeted support for at-risk groups, and individualized interventions (Horner & Sugai, 2002; Borgen et al., 2019). Successful implementation requires a trained school team committed to positive discipline and reinforcement strategies (Feuerborn et al., 2014).

Social Climate, Disruption, and Positive Behavioral Support

Hirshi (2015) defines social climate as "the physical environment, the quality of the school, and the shared beliefs, values, and attitudes that shape the interactions between students, teachers, and school staff." Social climates can be categorized into peer relationships, personal growth, and system maintenance and change. Peer relationships involve participation, peer affiliation, and teacher support; personal growth refers to the development of all members; and system maintenance and change focuses on classroom order, rule clarity, and enforcement (Weissflug, 2009). Disrespect and mistrust hinders motivation and achievement, while a positive climate fosters safety, respect, and trust, boosting student motivation and academic performance (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009).

Positive behavioral support (PBS) aims to reduce disruptions and improve the classroom climate. It has been shown that clear, consistent rules and reinforcement of positive behaviors promote a positive environment (Dimitru, 2022). The success of PBS depends on teachers' ability to implement it effectively, as their responses shape the climate (Dimitru, 2022). Disruptive behaviors negatively impact learning and peer interactions, while also contributing to teacher stress, burnout, and low self-efficacy (Ingemarson et al., 2020; Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

Evertson et al. (2013) define classroom management as creating favorable learning environments, including academic and socio-emotional aspects. However, teacher training often overlooks managing disruptions (Evertson et al., 2013). Simonsen et al. (2008) emphasize key strategies such as clear expectations, structured environments, and behavior reinforcement. Therefore, clear rules and positive reinforcement improve the classroom climate, emphasizing the need for teacher training to address disruptive behaviors.

The PBS approach is based on a proactive strategy to manage challenging behaviors. It seeks to build a community of students united by shared values and school support. Feeling connected to the school and its members facilitates students' positive social development (Tabacaru et al., 2022).

Bullying and Positive Behavioral Support

Olweus (1998) defines bullying as a form of intentional violence that is repeated over time, where a student is intimidated or victimized by peers, leading to negative consequences for the

victim, such as psychological or physical harm. The behavior must be intentional and involve an imbalance of power, whether physical, social, or age-related. Bullying is differentiated from other types of violence by the context in which it occurs, which is typically within the school and among peers.

Over the past two decades, programs like OBPP, KiVa, and TEI have emerged (Bellido, 2015; Kärnä et al., 2013; Olweus & Limber, 2010), focusing on whole-school approaches, teacher and family training, and student support. While effective, challenges like time, resources, and sustainability hinder implementation. Though PBS is not specifically designed for bullying prevention, it can integrate anti-bullying guidelines, as seen with OBPP, fostering a respectful school culture (Ross et al., 2014). Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Support (BP-PBS), implemented in U.S. schools, reduces bullying by discouraging social reinforcement, decreasing incidents and bystander responses (Ross, Horner, & Higbee, 2009).

This highlights the need for global school-wide interventions that are sustainable. PBS creates enduring supports that can be adapted to meet the individual needs of students. By promoting respect among peers and establishing clear consequences for inappropriate behaviors, this intragroup dynamic can be disrupted. Furthermore, by applying multiple levels of intervention, schools can create a sense of safety and ensure that everyone is familiar with the approach (Sugai & Horner, 2008). Given the absence of comprehensive research addressing this issue, this review seeks to fill that gap by systematically analyzing the influence of positive behavioral support (PBS) on school climate outcomes. Specifically, we aim to answer how does positive behavioral support (PBS) impact outputs such as disruptive behavior, and bullying in formal educational contexts?

Method

Search Strategies

To achieve the objective of the systematic review, a search was performed in the Scopus and Web of Science databases. between October and November 2024. The complete search syntax was as follows: (("positive discipline" OR "positive behavior support") AND ("bullying" OR "school climate" OR "disruptive behavior" OR "school environment")). Grey literature, reviews, and meta-analyses were excluded in order to ensure the methodological quality of the included studies, which were limited to peer-reviewed articles.

Inclusion Criteria

These search limits generated 2,312 results, which included the following results in each database: Scopus (1,123) and Web of Science (1,189). After applying the filter for scientific articles and removing duplicates, this was reduced to 168 articles. The studies were selected according to the following inclusion criteria: (a) articles with published empirical data, (b) the described programs must be applied in formal education, specifically Preschool Education, Primary Education, and/or Secondary Education, (c) articles that do not consider populations with learning difficulties, neurodevelopmental disorders, or psychiatric conditions as their

main study objective, (d) articles published in English or Spanish and (e) original studies with quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methodological approaches. In addition, review articles, meta-analyses, and non-peer-reviewed studies were excluded. A total of 42 studies were considered eligible for this review after meeting all the above criteria. Although an attempt was made to conduct a meta-analysis with the longitudinal studies, this was not possible due to the lack of empirical data provided.

Coding Strategies

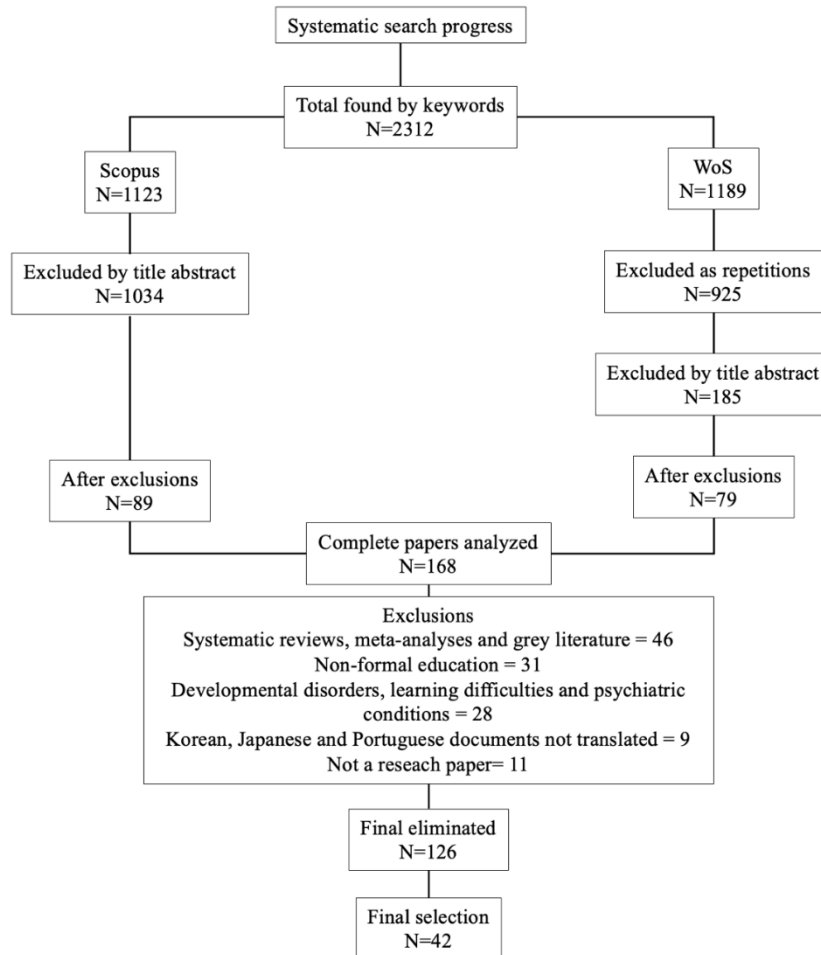
To develop the analysis of the finally obtained articles, the following categories were considered: (a) authors of the article, (b) year of publication of the article, (c) country of origin of the sample, (d) sample size, (e) instruments used to obtain results, (f) type of article design, and (g) main findings of the research h) quality score.

The screening and selection of studies were carried out by four reviewers working in parallel to ensure inter-rater reliability. Any discrepancies between reviewers were discussed and resolved through consensus. When consensus could not be reached, a fifth reviewer was consulted to ensure methodological rigor and transparency in the selection process.

Quality Score

This index was calculate based on the criteria established by Gersten et al. (2005) for systematic reviews of handwriting fluency interventions. The assessment considered the following aspects: (a) an appropriate description of study participants; (b) procedures with random assignment of participants; (c) clear information about professionals who implemented the intervention; (d) level of detail in describing the intervention and its evaluation; (e) verification of treatment fidelity; (f) documentation of comparison group conditions and their characteristics; (g) diversity of measurement instruments for the variables studied; (h) evidence of intervention effects; (i) appropriate use of statistical techniques for analysis; and (j) inclusion of inferential statistics and effect size calculations. Each fulfilled indicator received 1 point, with a maximum score of 10. For indicators containing two criteria, 0.5 points were awarded for partial fulfillment.

Figure 1
Selection Process of Articles for the Systematic Review on Positive Discipline and School Climate (PRISMA)



Results

Table 1 summarizes the most relevant characteristics of the 42 articles selected and analyzed in this systematic review.

Table 1

Articles included in the Systematic Review on the Influence of Positive Discipline on School Climate

Autors	Year	Country	Participants	Research design	Instruments	Results	Qualitative score
Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007	2007	United States	N= 100000 students	Cross-sectional	Direct observations	Examined the effects of a school-wide PBS program on elementary classroom ecology. Findings showed improved student behavior and supported teachers in implementing the program. Maryland schools reported significantly lower rates of ODRs compared to the national average, also, a comparison of preintervention and postintervention suspension data indicated a significant reduction in suspension rates following training in PBIS.	8.5
Barrett et al.	2008	United States	N = 467 schools	Cross-sectional	Team implementation checklist, coaches implementation checklist, SET, implementation phases inventory	Team implementation checklist, coaches implementation checklist, SET, implementation phases inventory	7

						The analysis identified key factors influencing PALS implementation, including alignment with school values, staff engagement, leadership commitment, resources, and positive feedback. PALS was well-received, offering a strong framework for relationship-based support, especially in primary schools.	5
Berg et al.	2024	Sweden	N = 22 teachers	Cross-sectional	Focus groups		
Bohanon et al.	2012	United States	N = 1738 students	Longitudinal	Change Point Test, analysis techniques	professional development to reduced office discipline referrals. Full fidelity was achieved in the final year. The study emphasized PBS's role in addressing	8

						behavior issues and highlighted the use of the ChangePointTest for time series analysis.	
Borgen et al.	2012	Norway	N = 2365	Longitudinal	Population-wide longitudinal register data	Following the implementation of Positive Discipline measures, a 7.5% reduction in classroom noise was observed (CI = -16.3 – +1.4; p < 0.05). The study found no indications that the Norwegian SWPBS affected short- and long-term bullying or youth crime outcomes.	8
Caldarella et al.	2011	United States	n1 = 106 teacher n2 = 2394 student	Longitudinal	PBS-SQ, ISQ, ODRs.	The school implementing PBS intervention showed statistically significant improvements in teacher ratings of school climate compared to the control school.	9
Cheney	2004	United States	n1 = 68 typically developing students n2 = 56 students at risk of developing	Longitudinal	Questionnaire assessment tools to evaluate school-level changes and student-level	The results or indicate that schools made consistent progress from 1999 to 2002 in implementing schoolwide	5.5

			emotional or behavioral problems.			changes in positive social skills behavioral and problem support behaviors. strategies.	
							8.5
Feuerborn et al.	2018	United States	N = 1210 school staff	Cross-sectional	SPBD survey	The study examined the psychometric properties of the SPBD survey using 1,210 school staff from 36 schools. Results supported internal validity through exploratory factor analysis and demonstrated concurrent validity with PBS implementation, staff knowledge, and training.	8.5
Flannery et al.	2014	United States	N = 36653 students	Longitudinal	Multilevel latent growth model	Significant decreases in student office discipline referrals in schools implementing PBS compared to comparison schools when controlling for enrollment and percent of students receiving free or reduced price meals.	8.5

						The study found decreases in disruptive behaviors across three grade levels and increases in active teacher supervision due to the implementation of PBS on the playground.	7
Franzen et al.	2008	United States	n1 = 180 students n2 = 10 teachers	Longitudinal	Data collectors that record the frequencies of targeted behaviors		
Freeman et al.	2006	United States	n1 = 404 students n2 = 530 students	Longitudinal	SET, also individualized supports as part of the SWPBS approach.	The article highlights the importance of PBS in improving student behavior, especially for those with significant disabilities. Results suggest that schools implementing	4
Gage et al.	2018	United States	n1 = 98 schools in treatment group n = 98 in control group	Cross-sectional	Propensity score matching was used to examine differences in suspension and expulsion rates	PBS with fidelity have significantly fewer suspensions. No significant results were obtained regarding the intervention's effect on expulsions.	9
Hollingshead et al.	2016	United States	N = 31 students	Longitudinal	On-task behavior data, classroom observations and conversations with teachers.	The intervention of positive behavior supports-based strategies resulted in increased on-	7.5

						task behavior classwide in the seventh-grade urban classroom. The study also discussed implications for culturally responsive practices for students in an urban classroom setting.	
						Training and technical assistance in PBS were linked to better universal PBS implementation	10
Horner et al.	2009	United States	n1 = 33 schools in the treatment group n2= 30 schools in the control group	Longitudinal	SET, ODRs and state standardized test for academic achievement.	SSS, school safety, and improved third-grade academic outcomes. While office discipline referrals were low, the lack of experimental control limited definitive conclusions on PBS's impact.	
Jolstead et al.	2017	United States	N = 55 preschoolers	Longitudinal	Observations for teacher praise and group on-task behavior	of CW-FIT Tier 1 led to increased student group on-task behavior and improved	7.5

						teacher praise to reprimand ratios in four preschool classrooms. Both teachers and children viewed CW-FIT Tier 1 as socially valid.	
						The study developed an assessment guide for creating effective positive behavior support plans for students. It emphasized the importance of using positive behavior support strategies as recommended interventions for students with behavioral issues, in line with the 1997 IDEA amendment.	2
Kroeger et al.	2007	United States	N = 70 teachers	Cross-sectional	Positive Behavior Support Assessment Guide		
Kuswardani et al.	2023	Indonesia	N = 7 teachers	Longitudinal	Questionnaires	The Tier 1 PBS training program was effective in increasing the ability of teachers to use proactive classroom management strategies and reducing the use	7.5

						of reactive classroom management strategies.	
Lau et al.	2019	Singapore	n1 = 32 teachers n2 = 428 students	Cross-sectional	Direct observational methods	In the study, teachers frequently taught rules and expectations, used effective error corrections, and dedicated over 70% of class time to academics. None had a system for documenting or rewarding appropriate behavior, nor for addressing specific behavioral violations. Disruptive behavior was relatively high, linked to frequent reprimands, and one-third of the classrooms had low academic engagement levels.	8
Lloyd et al.	2022	United States	N = 45 students	Cross-sectional	Focus groups	Middle school students showed a limited understanding of PBS beyond the acknowledgment system but	5

						identified various impacts. They desired more transparent communication and opportunities for active involvement in their school's PBS program.	
						The study reported positive results over a 3-year period regarding PBS implementation . It suggested linking these efforts to intensive	7
Mass-Galloway et al.	2008	United States	N = 39 schools	Longitudinal	SET, Team Implementation Checklist, ODRs	individual supports. The study aimed to assess PBS's impact on preventing problem behaviors, promoting active instruction, and implementing research-based practices in schools.	
McCrary et al.	2012	United States	N = 793 students	Longitudinal	Descriptive data analysis	The study presented the first-year effects of PBS in four impoverished rural schools.	8

						Descriptive data showed positive outcomes, including decreased discipline referrals, lower suspension rates, and reduced failure rates. The authors suggested that PBS implementation mitigate the negative impacts of limited mental health services, leading to increased academic engagement and success.	
McCurdy et al.	2003	United States	N = 500 students	Longitudinal	ODRs	Significant reductions in office discipline referrals and student assaults were evident after implementing the positive behavior support model in an urban elementary school to prevent antisocial behavior.	8.5
McGill et al.	2006	United Kingdom	N = 79 students	Longitudinal	Questionnaires	The study found significant increases in students'	8.5

					<p>knowledge, with a decreased tendency to attribute challenging behavior to emotional causes. Negative emotional responses, especially related to depression and anger, also decreased. These changes are likely to improve staff performance and outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities.</p>		
McIntosh et al.	2021	United States	N = 34 students	Longitudinal	Standardized behavior rating scales, based on the rate of office discipline referrals	<p>The study assessed the effectiveness of a tier two daily behavior card intervention, finding significant differences based on the teacher-identified function of problem behavior. The results highlight the importance of considering behavior function when selecting tier</p>	8

						two interventions within a three-tier response model.	
						The study showed significant improvements in school outcomes, particularly in exclusionary discipline and school climate, in participating schools compared to nonparticipating ones. The results support using PBS with an equity-focused approach for school improvement.	9
McIntosh et al.	2021	United States	N = 494 students	Longitudinal	School Effectiveness Rating, School Climate Index and Exclusionary Discipline Index		
Medley et al.	2008	United States	N = 19000 students	Cross-sectional	BSP-QE	Support plans created at schools with PBS systems were more technically adequate than support plans produced at non-PBS schools. However, support plans from schools with PBS systems were still considered underdeveloped	8

							Positive outcomes of PBS implementation included a reduction in office referrals, fewer rule violations, less punitive consequences, and improved academic achievement for third-grade students on state assessments.	7
Menendez et al.	2008	United States.	N = 652 students	Longitudinal	ODRs			
Muscott et al.	2008	United States	N = 28 early childhood education programs	Longitudinal	UTC, SET	EBS,	Schoolwide positive behavior support implementation led to a reduction of 6,010 office discipline referrals and 1,032 suspensions, with middle and high schools benefiting the most. Academic gains in math were seen in most schools with faithful implementation, while improvements in reading/language	7.5

						e arts were less widespread.	
Nelen et al.	2020	Netherlands	N = 117 schools	Cross-sectional	TFI, SET	The study assessed Tier 1 fidelity in 117 schools using the TFI and SET. Results showed core features were present, with mean scores of 60% for TFI and 70% for SET. Most schools had leadership teams, taught expectations, provided acknowledgment, and collected discipline data, but annual evaluation, data-based decision making, and stakeholder involvement were less consistent.	6.5
Nocera	2014	United States	n1 = 300 students n2 = 4 teachers	Longitudinal	School climate and student resilience survey	The implementation of PBS at a low-performing middle school resulted in a reduction in teacher discipline referrals, student suspensions,	8.5

						and improvement on 30 of 47 items of a school climate and student resilience survey.	
Nylén	2021	Sweden	N = 59 professionals	Cross-sectional	Focus-group interviews	During PBS implementation, themes were identified from the perceptions of the implementation team, focusing on Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation. Core features included knowledge of similar programs, process orientation, time, manual content, team functioning, leadership, alignment with staff beliefs, and emotional reinforcement.	7.5
Olçay et al.	2019	Turkey	n1 =16 students in treatment group n2 =15 students in control group	Longitudinal	Behavior Observation Form, Social Skills Assessment Scale, Social Validity Questionnaire	The class-wide PBS intervention improved second-grade students' social skills, including rule compliance, group work, and initiating	9

						relationships. These skills were maintained three weeks post-intervention, and students had positive views on the skills, intervention, and their performance..	
Oswald et al.	2005	United States	N = 950 students	Longitudinal	ODRs	The 5-week intervention led to a 42.36% reduction in problematic hallway behaviors among 950 middle school students. The study shows that cost-effective PBS techniques can improve safety and order in school common areas.	6.5
Reinke et al.	2013	United States	n1 = 1128 students n2 = 33 teachers	Cross-sectional	Direct observations. SET, MOOSES, Teacher Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale, Inventario de burnout de Maslach.	Teachers provided more punishments than positive reinforcements, with a ratio of 10:1 compared to the expected 1:4. A negative correlation was found between classroom	8.5

						disruption and teachers' self-efficacy in management ($\beta = -0.34, p < 0.05$), while higher positive reinforcements were positively related to self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.22, p < 0.05$).	
Richter et al.	2012	United States	n1 = 415 students in treatment group n2 = 441 students in control group	Cross-sectional	Questionnaires	Principals in PBS-implementing schools received higher ratings for behavior management effectiveness. PBS-certified staff in these schools reported greater job satisfaction compared to those in non-PBS schools. However, principals from both groups had similar ratings for transformational and managerial skills.	8.5
Ross et al.	2009	United States	N = 6 students	Cross-sectional	Observation, SES, Acceptability Questionnaire of the BP-PBS.	The intervention was linked to a decrease in bullying incidents for all	9

					6 observed students, along with reduced social responses from victims and bystanders. School staff implemented the program with high fidelity and rated it as effective and efficient.	
					Schools that implemented PBS with SET, ODRs, fidelity showed total number improved social outcomes and academic outcomes in math over time. Most schools maintained or improved student performance.	8.5
Simonsen et al.	2008	United States	N = 428 schools	Longitudinal	suspensions and out-of-school suspension days, ISAT	
					The study evaluated the scale-up of the Safe & Civil Schools Foundations PBS initiative in a large urban school district over four years. Results showed moderate, steady improvements in school discipline, student safety policies, staff	8.5
Smolkowski et al.	2016	United States	N = 54 schools	Longitudinal	Safe & Civil Schools Foundations training program	

						perceptions of student behavior, and student suspension and tardiness rates.	
						The study analyzed Office Discipline Referrals (ODRs) and administrative decisions from 1,510 schools nationwide. It found that most elementary, middle, and high school students had zero or one ODR for the year. ODR patterns varied by school level, with suspensions and detentions being the major consequences for middle and high school students, and different consequences for elementary students.	8
Spaulding et al.	2010	United States	N = 1510 students	Longitudinal	School-Wide Information System, which collected ODRs from the participating schools.		
Van Camp et al.	2021	United States	N = 782 students	A-B-BC-B-BC design	MoBeGo, CW-FIT	The combined Tier one + Tier two intervention led to an increase in the student's academic engagement.	9

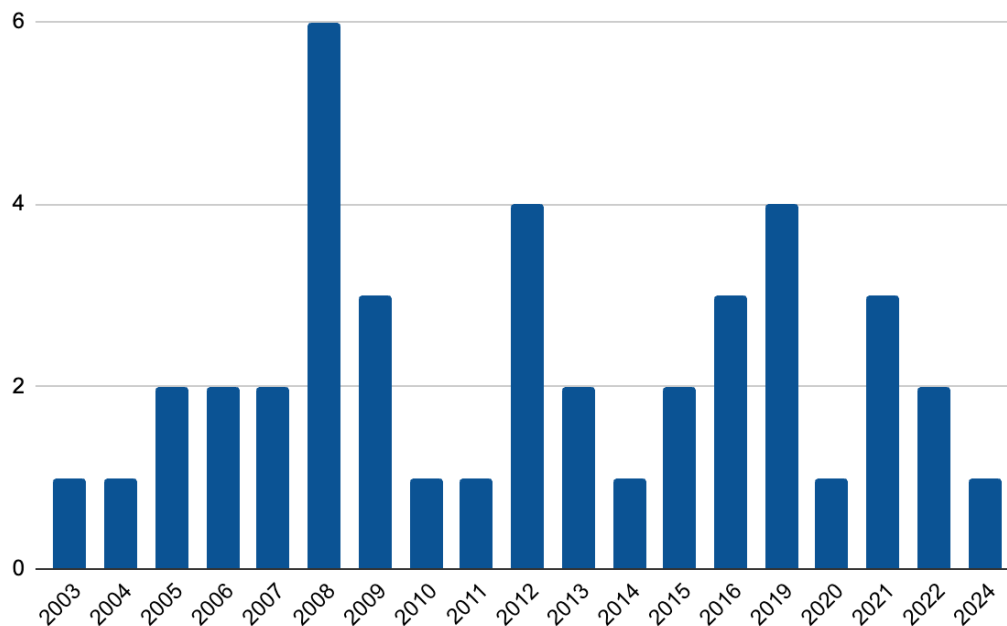
Vincent et al.	2011	United States	n1 = 72 schools in treatment group n2 = 81 schools in control group	Longitudinal	ODRs	The study examined the impact of school-wide positive behavior support on disciplinary referrals for culturally and linguistically diverse students, with and without disabilities. Results showed that schools using positive behavior support had a smaller discipline gap, though African American students were still overrepresented among those with office discipline referrals.	8
Walker et al.	2005	United States	N = 72 students	Cross-sectional	Systematic Screening for Behavior Disorders, Social Skills Rating System, office discipline referrals	Students at risk for school failure are best identified by monitoring office discipline referrals and using a systematic schoolwide screening process.	9.5

Number of articles per year

In the last twenty years, research on positive discipline and school climate has been scarce, with 2008 standing out as the year with the most publications, totaling six articles [Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007](#) ; [Barrett et al., 2008](#); [Franzen et al., 2008](#); [Menendez et al., 2008](#); [Muscott et al., 2008](#); [Mass-Galloway et al., 2008](#)) (see Figure 2).

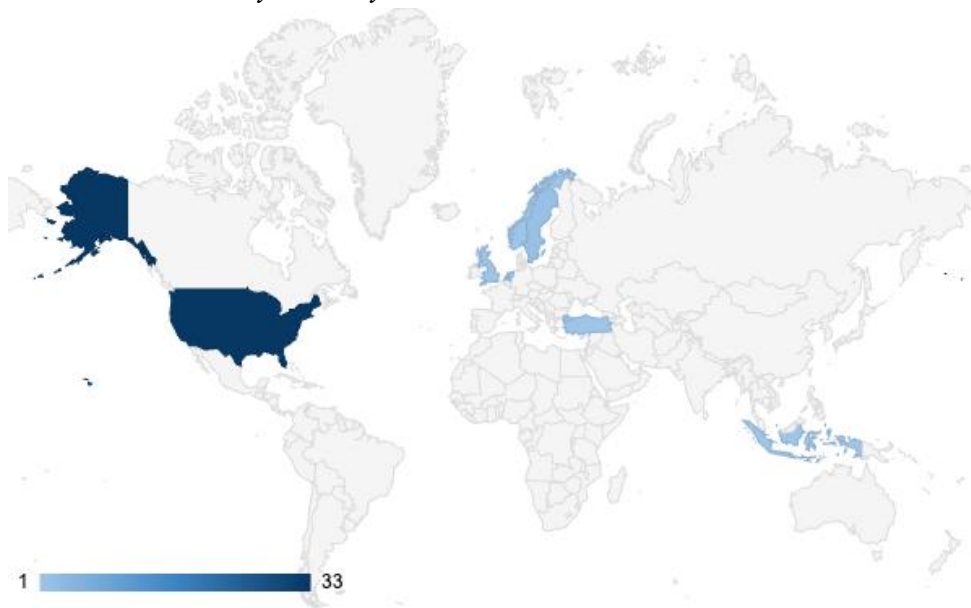
Figure 2

Number of Articles Published by Year



Number of Articles by Country

The total number of articles is concentrated in three continents (America, Europe, and Asia), with 78.57% involving American samples, exclusively from the United States ([Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007](#); [Barrett et al., 2008](#); [Bohanon et al., 2012](#); [Caldarella et al., 2015](#); [Cheney, 2004](#); [Feuerborn et al., 2018](#); [Flannery et al., 2014](#); [Franzen et al., 2008](#); [Freeman et al., 2006](#); [Gage et al., 2018](#); [Hollingshead et al., 2016](#); [Horner et al., 2009](#); [Jolstead et al., 2017](#); [Kroeger et al., 2007](#); [Lloyd et al., 2022](#); [Mass-Galloway et al., 2008](#); [McCrary et al., 2011](#); [McCurdy et al., 2003](#); [McIntosh et al., 2009](#); [McIntosh et al., 2021](#); [Medley et al., 2008](#); [Menendez et al., 2008](#); [Muscott et al., 2008](#); [Nocera, 2014](#); [Oswald et al., 2005](#); [Reinke et al., 2013](#); [Richter et al., 2012](#); [Ross et al., 2009](#); [Simonsen et al., 2008](#); [Smolkowski et al., 2016](#); [Spaulding et al., 2010](#); [Van Camp et al., 2021](#); [Vincent et al., 2011](#); [Walker et al., 2005](#)); 14.28% involved European samples, primarily from Sweden ([Berg et al., 2024](#); [Nylén, 2021](#)), Norway ([Borgen et al., 2019](#)), the United Kingdom ([McGill et al., 2006](#)), the Netherlands ([Nelen et al., 2020](#)), and Turkey ([Olcay et al., 2019](#)); and 4.76% involved Asian samples, specifically from Singapore ([Lau et al., 2019](#)) and Indonesia ([Kuswardani et al., 2023](#)) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3*Articles Published by Country*

Positive Behavioral Support, Behavioral Problems, Disciplinary Referrals, and Disruption

All studies in this review focused on PBS-based interventions, which emphasize positive behavioral expectations in different school environments (classroom, hallway, playground, etc.). Out of the 42 studies reviewed, 17 analyzed the relationship between the implementation of PBS-based interventions and the reduction of behavioral problems, disciplinary referrals (ODRs), and disruption in the school environment. Findings indicate that PBS strategies effectively decrease office referrals and disruptive behaviors across various educational contexts. (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007; Barrett et al., 2008; Bohanon et al., 2012; Flannery et al., 2014; Franzen et al., 2008; Freeman et al., 2006; Gage et al., 2018; Hollingshead et al., 2016; Horner et al., 2009; Mass-Galloway et al., 2008; McCrary et al., 2011; McCurdy et al., 2003; Menendez et al., 2008; Muscott et al., 2008; Oswald et al., 2005; Simonsen et al., 2008; Spaulding et al., 2010).

One consistent result in previous studies is the significant reduction in disciplinary referrals (ODRs) and the implementation of PBS. Barrett et al. (2008) found decreased ODRs in 467 Maryland schools, correlating with staff training. Bohanon et al. (2012) found similar results, a decrease in ODRs as teaching staff gained more experience and training in implementing PBS. On the other hand, Algozzine & Algozzine (2007), studied 100,000 students, finding that PBS improved behavioral indicators, and reduced disciplinary referrals. McCurdy et al. (2003), in a longitudinal case study with 500 students, observed that PBS prevented antisocial behaviors and significantly reduced ODRs in primary school students.

Several studies found a significant impact of PBS on the overall reduction of behavioral problems. It improves the behaviors of students with significant disabilities (Freeman et al., 2006). Franzen et al. (2008) observed a reduction in disruptive behaviors across three

educational levels after its implementation in school playground areas. It also improved the students' compliance with rules after the application of a PBS program (Menendez et al., 2008).

Regarding classroom disruption, several studies indicated considerable reduction in disruption levels (Flannery et al., 2014; Hollingshead et al., 2016). Flannery et al. (2014) found fewer disciplinary referrals and a more organized environment among 36,653 students. On the other hand, Hollingshead et al. (2016) reported improved behavior and increased time on task. These findings highlight PBS's role in fostering structured, positive learning spaces.

Positive Discipline, School Climate, and Bullying

17 out of 42 studies focused on analyzing the effects of PBS on school climate and its relationship with levels of bullying. Most of these studies suggest that the implementation of PBS not only improved the school environment but also reduced the incidence of aggressive behaviors and peer bullying (Borgen et al., 2019; Caldarella et al., 2011; Cheney, 2004; Feuerborn et al., 2018; Gage et al., 2018; Horner et al., 2009; McIntosh et al., 2021; Nocera, 2014; Nylén, 2021; Olcay et al., 2019; Reinke et al., 2013; Richter et al., 2012; Ross et al., 2009; Smolkowski et al., 2016; Spaulding et al., 2010; Van Camp et al., 2021; Vincent et al., 2011).

Research highlights PBS's positive impact on school climate. Caldarella et al. (2011) found significant improvements in teacher-reported climate assessments in PBS schools. Feuerborn et al. (2018) emphasized the role of staff training in enhancing perceptions of school climate. Nocera (2014) observed reduced suspensions and referrals in a low-performing school, reinforcing PBS's lasting effects on safety and cohesion. This reinforces the idea that a more positive school environment, promoted by the positive discipline of PBS, has lasting effects on students' perceptions of safety and cohesion. Finally, McIntosh et al. (2021) found that equity-focused PBS improved disciplinary outcomes and fostered inclusivity.

In regards to bullying, several studies demonstrated that PBS is related to a reduction of aggressive behaviors among students (Oswald et al., 2005; Reinke et al., 2013; Ross et al., 2009). Ross et al. (2009) found a decrease in bullying incidents and negative bystander responses. Reinke et al. (2013) reported decreased classroom aggression with PBS strategies, promoting a more controlled environment. Oswald et al. (2005) observed a 42% drop in aggression and increased cooperation among 950 adolescents. Vincent et al. (2011) linked PBS to a decrease of the prevalence violence rates in diverse school settings.

Effects of PBS on Academic Performance

9 out of 42 studies investigated the relationship between the implementation of PBS and improvements in student academic performance, particularly in areas such as mathematics and reading (Algozzine & Algozzine, 2007; Bohanon et al., 2012; Horner et al., 2009; Mass-Galloway et al., 2008; McCrary et al., 2011; Muscott et al., 2008; Simonsen et al., 2008; Smolkowski et al., 2016; Spaulding et al., 2010).

Simonsen et al. (2008), studied across 428 schools longitudinally, reporting improvements in mathematics academic outcomes over time in those institutions that implemented PBS.

Muscott et al. (2008) found similar results in elementary schools implementing PBS not only reduced disciplinary referrals but also observed increases in academic achievements, particularly in mathematics. Findings in reading and language were less consistent, which may be attributed to the more complex nature of teaching these subjects compared to mathematics. On the other hand, McCrary et al. (2011), analyzed the impact of PBS in rural schools, finding that the implementation of the program was associated with increased academic engagement and reduction in suspensions rates. Although PBS initially is designed to address school climate aspects, its impact extends to academic performance. likely by creating a more structured and less disruptive environment.

Challenges and Key Factors in the Implementation of PBS

Ten studies addressed the challenges faced in implementing PBS and the key factors that determine its success, such as school leadership, staff training, and alignment with institutional values (Berg et al., 2024; Borgen et al., 2019; Cheney, 2004; Feuerborn et al., 2018; Jolstead et al., 2017; Kroeger et al., 2007; Kuswardani et al., 2023; Lau et al., 2019; Nylén, 2021; Smolkowski et al., 2016).

Berg et al. (2024) highlight key factors for PBS success, including strong leadership support, positive staff-student relationships, and alignment with school culture. Kuswardani et al. (2023) stress the importance of teacher training, while Nylén (2021) notes that PBS is more effective when it aligns with teachers' values. Overall, PBS's success depends on leadership, training, and integration into the school environment. In short, while PBS can be beneficial in many different contexts, its effectiveness often depends on supportive leadership, proper staff training, and how seamlessly it blends into the school environment.

Discussion

This review looks at studies on how positive discipline programs affect student behavior, disruptions, and the overall school environment. The findings show that research in this area is growing, with most studies coming from the United States, though European countries have recently started exploring its impact as well. This suggests that PBS research is expanding into new cultural and educational settings. Still, there's room to broaden research to other regions, which could provide valuable insights into how PBS works in diverse cultural contexts.

Looking at the publication years, there were noticeable spikes in 2008 and 2012, likely reflecting an increase in both academic and political interest in positive discipline and PBS (Positive Behavior Support) around those times. This may have been influenced by new educational policies that encouraged proactive behavior strategies in schools.

While research has focused on both primary and secondary education, studies in primary education are slightly more frequent. This could be due to the perception that early intervention in problematic behaviors is more effective and may prevent more severe behavioral issues in later stages. Studies such as those by Algozzine & Algozzine (2007) in primary education and

Reinke et al. (2013) with students aged 8 to 10 reinforce this idea by showing significant improvements in student behavior in early stages.

Studies reviewed in this work show that PBS has proven to be an effective approach for reducing ODRs, classroom disruption, and behavioral problems. Barrett et al. (2008) and Algozzine & Algozzine (2007) found significant decreases in ODRs in large and diverse school environments. This finding has direct educational practice implications, as a reduction in disciplinary referrals is typically associated with less instructional time lost. Additionally, another studies provided solid evidence that implementing PBS creates more organized and less conflictual environments (Flannery et al., 2014; Hollingshead et al., 2016). These results are similar in urban environments where disruption levels are traditionally higher (Hollingshead et al., 2016). The successful implementation of positive behavioral support strategies in these contexts underscores the need for an adaptability of PBS to various educational levels and contextual realities.

A relevant aspect of the review is the impact of PBS on improving school climate and the reduction of bullying. The reviewed articles that focused on improving the school climate found statistically significant positive results with large effect sizes, reflecting fewer conflicts and a safer, more inclusive environment among students (Caldarella et al., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2021). In the case of disruptive behaviors, it has been proven that implementing PBS strategies increases the safety of school environments and reduces disruptive behaviors and bullying (Oswald et al., 2005; Ross et al., 2009). Studies like those of Ross et al. (2009), which shows a decrease in bullying incidents, introduce specific responses to bullying situations. Having interventions specifically aimed at preventing and addressing bullying is associated with better outcomes in its reduction. Creating positive environments in the educational setting reduces negative behaviors among students, an important conclusion for educational policymakers seeking evidence-based solutions to combat bullying in schools.

Another interesting aspect to note is the positive impact on academic performance resulting from the implementation of PBS-based measures. The reviewed studies have shown sustained improvements in math outcomes (Horner et al., 2009; Muscott et al., 2008; Simonsen et al., 2008), likely due to the increase in effective classroom time resulting from the decrease in ODRs. At-risk student groups have benefited from the intervention, increasing their academic engagement (Van Camp et al., 2021; McCrary et al., 2011). The reduction in disruptions and behavioral issues might be related to more opportunities for both students and teachers to focus on academic goals.

Despite the numerous benefits documented in the reviewed studies, it is important to note some limitations emerging from the review. First, most research has been conducted in U.S. contexts, which limits the generalizability of the results to other cultural settings. Although countries like Sweden, Norway, and Turkey have begun to adopt PBS, more research is needed to fully understand how cultural and systemic variations may affect the implementation and outcomes of the model. Additionally, while several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of PBS in improving behavior and school climate, there is less consensus regarding its impact on academic performance, particularly in areas like reading and language arts, as mentioned by Muscott et al. (2008) and Simonsen et al. (2008). Future research should explore more deeply how PBS can be integrated with pedagogical strategies to maximize both academic performance and positive behavior. Another limitation to highlight is the lack of consensus in

the measures used for evaluation, as different qualitative and quantitative instruments are employed, many of which are self-developed. This makes it difficult to categorize and compare conclusions between positive discipline and school climate across different intervention variables (social climate, disruption, and bullying). Additionally, more research is needed to study the effect of third variables, as only two studies account for the effects of grade level and school size. There is a perceived gap in research that could provide more conclusive data on school-related variables such as size, grade level, and school location. It would also be beneficial to study the influence of gender or academic performance on student behavior. These variables may relate to fewer behavioral problems or play different roles in bullying and would be interesting to explore in terms of their influence on interventions.

In conclusion, the findings of this review underscore the potential of PBS to transform school environments by reducing behavioral issues and improving school climate. However, to optimize its global implementation, it will be crucial to continue adapting and evaluating the model in diverse cultural and educational contexts.

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