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Development and Expert Validation of a Behavioral Support Toolkit for Self-Contained elementary special education classrooms

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Abstract: Effective behavioral management is essential for creating supportive learning environments in self-contained elementary special education (SPED) classrooms. This study aimed to develop and validate a behavioral support toolkit integrating evidence-based strategies for addressing diverse behavioral and developmental needs. A developmental research design employing a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods approach was utilized. Ten purposively selected expert validators evaluated the toolkit in terms of alignment with evidence-based behavioral management practices, clarity, relevance, organization, and usefulness. Quantitative data were analyzed using means, standard deviations, and the Content Validity Index (CVI), while qualitative feedback was examined to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The developed toolkit comprised ten components encompassing positive behavioral support, visual systems, functional behavior assessment, intervention planning, reinforcement, self-regulation, data collection, crisis prevention, home-school collaboration, and progress monitoring. Results revealed favorable expert evaluations for alignment with evidence-based practices (M = 3.88), clarity (M = 3.90), relevance (M = 3.92), organization (M = 3.92), and usefulness (M = 4.00). All components achieved an Item-Level Content Validity Index of 1.00, with an overall Scale-Level Content Validity Index of 1.00, indicating unanimous agreement regarding content relevance. Expert feedback emphasized practical classroom materials and systematic organization while recommending clearer instructions, contextualized examples, and additional sensory regulation resources. The findings support the toolkit's content validity and perceived usefulness as a potential behavioral management resource. However, classroom implementation and effectiveness testing remain necessary to establish its impact on learner outcomes.

Keywords: behavioral support toolkit; content validity; expert validation; special education; behavioral management

INTRODUCTION

Behavior management is a crucial aspect of effective teaching in self-contained elementary special education (SPED) classrooms in the United States. Teachers require clear expectations, consistent routines, and supportive learning environments to facilitate student participation in classroom activities. Effective behavior management can enhance engagement and minimize instructional interruptions; however, inconsistent practices may disrupt lessons and diminish valuable learning time for both teachers and students (Lane et al., 2022; Simonsen et al., 2021). Students in self-contained SPED classrooms have diverse academic, behavioral, emotional, and communication requirements. Some may struggle with following instructions, completing tasks, managing emotions, or transitioning between activities due to communication difficulties, frustration, or challenges in understanding expectations. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023) identify developmental and behavioral concerns that may impact participation in everyday activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Special education teachers must balance instruction, classroom management, individualized support, behavior monitoring, and communication with families. Evidence-based practices, including reinforcement systems, visual support, and structured routines, can help establish clear expectations and encourage appropriate behavior (Simonsen et al., 2021; Maggin et al., 2023).

In the Philippine context, enhancing behavioral support is crucial for fostering inclusive and equitable education in schools. The Department of Education's Inclusive Education Policy Framework (DepEd Order No. 21, s. 2019)

underscores the importance of access and support for learners with diverse needs. The Second Congressional Commission on Education (EDCOM II, 2024) has identified ongoing challenges in teacher preparation, resources, and support services for learners with disabilities in the Philippines' educational system. These challenges underscore the necessity of practical resources to assist teachers in implementing consistent behavioral management. Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) focuses on understanding behavior and employing systematic strategies to encourage desired behaviors. Positive behavioral interventions and support (PBIS) promote positive behavior by establishing expectations and consistent support. The Universal Design for Learning (UDL) advocates flexible approaches to accommodate diverse learning needs. Integrating these frameworks may assist teachers in systematically applying their strategies.

Despite these approaches, teachers may encounter difficulties in integrating behavioral strategies into an organized system. Existing resources may necessitate multiple materials for planning interventions, documenting behavior, and monitoring student progress. This highlights the need for a structured, teacher-friendly behavioral support toolkit for self-contained elementary special education (SPED) classrooms. This study develops and validates the toolkit with expert input, examining its alignment with evidence-based behavioral management practices, clarity, relevance, organization, and usefulness. Expert ratings and the Content Validity Index (CVI) assess content validity, while qualitative feedback identifies strengths and areas for improvement. The study aims to provide a practical resource that integrates behavioral strategies, visual supports, reinforcement systems, behavior-monitoring tools, and implementation guides to support consistent systematic behavioral management practices. Further classroom-based research is necessary to determine the effectiveness and outcomes.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to develop and validate a behavioral support toolkit for self-contained elementary special education classrooms. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:"

1. What materials and components are needed to develop a behavioral support toolkit for self-contained elementary special education classrooms based on classroom needs and established frameworks?
2. How do experts evaluate the Behavioral Support Toolkit in terms of its alignment with evidence-based behavioral management practices, clarity, relevance, organization, and usefulness?
3. What is the level of content validity of the Behavioral Support Toolkit based on expert ratings using the content validity index (CVI)?
4. How do experts describe the strengths and areas for improvement of the Behavioral Support Toolkit?
5. Based on the evaluation results and qualitative feedback from expert validators, what revisions or enhancements can be integrated to finalize the Behavioral Support Toolkit for classroom suitability?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a developmental research design using a quantitative-dominant mixed-methods approach to develop and validate a behavioral support toolkit for self-contained elementary special education (SPED) classrooms. The design was deemed appropriate as the investigation focused on developing an educational resource and evaluating its content validity through expert judgment. Toolkit development was informed by classroom behavioral support needs, related literature, and established frameworks, including applied behavior analysis (ABA), positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), universal design for learning (UDL), and social learning theory. The quantitative component involved structured expert ratings of the toolkit's alignment with evidence-based behavioral management practices, clarity, relevance, organization, and usefulness, as well as its content validity. The qualitative component examined experts' written observations and recommendations to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Both forms of evidence contributed to the evaluation and refinement of the toolkit. The study was limited to development and expert validation and did not involve classroom implementation or measurement of student behavioral outcomes.

Participants and Sampling Technique

Ten (10) expert validators were thoughtfully selected through purposive sampling based on their professional knowledge and experience in special education, behavioral management, inclusive education, and instructional support. This sampling technique was deemed appropriate as evaluating the toolkit required specialized professional judgment rather than a representative sample of the general teaching population. The inclusion criteria specified at least five years of relevant professional experience and direct involvement in implementing or supervising behavioral management strategies in educational settings. The intended expert panel included practicing SPED teachers, SPED master teachers or coordinators, and at least one qualified school psychologist or behavioral specialist. This study focused exclusively on expert evaluation; therefore, elementary learners were not recruited as research participants. It would be beneficial to document the professional composition of the actual panel and verification of eligibility criteria in the final publication.

Research Instrument

This study used a researcher-developed behavioral support toolkit and a structured expert validation questionnaire. The toolkit was developed through a synthesis of classroom behavioral support needs, related studies, and established behavioral and instructional frameworks. It contains ten major components: classroom-wide positive behavior, visual support system, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plan, token economy system, self-regulation skills, behavior data collection, crisis prevention and management, home-school collaboration, and progress monitoring. These components included instructional guides, visual schedules, reinforcement materials, behavioral assessment forms, intervention templates, and progress monitoring resources. The Expert Validation Questionnaire assessed the toolkit across five dimensions: alignment with evidence-based behavioral management practices, clarity, relevance, organization, and usefulness. Responses were recorded using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The instrument also provided opportunities for experts to describe the toolkit's strengths and recommend improvements. Content validity was assessed through expert judgments using the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI) and Scale-Level Content Validity Index (S-CVI). Separate evidence of pilot testing or questionnaire reliability coefficients was not clearly established in the thesis.

Data Gathering Procedure

The research process involved identifying key behavioral support components, developing the toolkit, obtaining expert evaluations, and determining revisions based on the findings. Initially, the researcher reviewed the relevant literature, established behavioral management frameworks, and assessed classroom support needs to identify the materials required for the toolkit. The identified components were organized into a structured collection of classroom-oriented resources, including visual support, reinforcement systems, behavioral assessment forms, intervention guides, and monitoring tools. Ten purposively selected experts evaluated the developed toolkit using the Expert Validation Questionnaire, providing quantitative ratings and qualitative feedback. This thesis outlines the procedures for obtaining institutional permission and informed consent, distributing the toolkit and questionnaire, reviewing the completed responses, and organizing the data for analysis. It also specifies confidentiality and voluntary participation as ethical safeguards for the study. However, the methodology describes several of these procedures prospectively and does not establish the actual dates, duration, distribution medium or institutional setting of the evaluation. These details require confirmation from the researchers' records before the final publication.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data from expert evaluations were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly the mean and standard deviation, to summarize ratings across the five evaluation dimensions. Mean scores were interpreted using the following four-point scale: 3.26–4.00 (strongly agree), 2.51–3.25 (agree), 1.76–2.50 (disagree), and 1.00–1.75 (strongly disagree). Content validity was examined using the Item-Level Content Validity Index (I-CVI), representing the proportion of experts who judged each evaluated component as relevant, and the Scale-Level Content Validity Index using the averaging method (S-CVI/Ave), which represents the average of the I-CVI values across the evaluated components.

Qualitative feedback was analyzed thematically to identify recurring observations concerning the toolkit's strengths, limitations, and suggested improvements. These findings were considered alongside quantitative evaluations to guide toolkit refinement. No inferential statistical tests were required because this study did not examine causal relationships, compare experimental groups, or test intervention effects. Although inter-rater agreement and questionnaire reliability measures were discussed in the original methodology, their completed calculations were not clearly documented and, therefore, are not presented as performed analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Development of the Behavioral Support Toolkit

The development of the Behavioral Support Toolkit led to the identification of ten key components designed to address behavioral management needs in self-contained elementary special education (SPED) classrooms. These components include classroom-wide positive behavior, visual support systems, functional behavior assessment, behavior intervention plans, token economy systems, self-regulation skills, behavior data collection, crisis prevention and management, home-school collaboration, and progress monitoring. These components were identified through synthesizing classroom behavioral support needs, established behavioral management frameworks, and related empirical literature. Together, they provide a structured approach that encompasses behavioral prevention, assessment, individualized intervention, reinforcement, self-regulation, collaboration, and progress monitoring.

The toolkit included practical materials such as classroom behavior expectations, visual schedules, first–then boards, antecedent–behavior–consequence (ABC) recording forms, behavior intervention templates, token boards, self-monitoring forms, crisis prevention guides, home–school communication sheets, and progress-monitoring tools. These resources were systematically organized to facilitate the identification of behavioral concerns, selection of appropriate interventions, and monitoring of learner responses. The integration of these components aligns with the positive behavioral support literature discussed by Beqiraj et al. (2022), which emphasizes preventive, individualized, and function-oriented strategies for addressing challenging behaviors. Similarly, Samudre et al. (2024) underscored the importance of teachers' implementation of behavioral support practices, while Nesselrode et al. (2022) advocated the use of systematic functional assessment in educational settings. The resulting toolkit aims to translate established behavioral principles into an integrated, classroom-oriented resource.

Expert Evaluation of the Behavioral Support Toolkit

The Behavioral Support Toolkit was assessed by ten expert validators across five dimensions: alignment with evidence-based behavioral management practices, clarity, relevance, organization, and usefulness of the tool. Table 1 presents the overall mean ratings and standard deviations as reported in the original study.

Table 1. Expert Evaluation of the Behavioral Support Toolkit

Evaluation Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Alignment with evidence-based practices	3.88	0.14	Strongly Agree
Clarity	3.90	0.32	Strongly Agree
Relevance	3.92	0.14	Strongly Agree
Organization	3.92	0.19	Strongly Agree
Usefulness	4.00	0.00	Strongly Agree

The results indicated positive evaluations across all five dimensions. Usefulness achieved the highest overall mean of 4.00 (SD = 0.00), reflecting unanimous strong agreement among validators regarding the toolkit's practical value. Experts found the materials beneficial for classroom behavior management, instructional support and teacher decision-making. Relevance and organization both received overall means of 3.92, followed by clarity (M = 3.90), and alignment with evidence-based behavioral management practices (M = 3.88). Although alignment had the lowest overall mean among the five

dimensions, all ratings remained within the Strongly Agree category. The favorable alignment ratings suggest that experts recognized the integration of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles within the toolkit. Its behavioral assessment procedures, reinforcement systems, individualized intervention guides, and monitoring materials reflect the systematic application of behavioral management concepts. These findings align with the evidence-based behavioral support approaches discussed by Beqiraj et al. (2022) and Samudre et al. (2024), respectively.

The findings on clarity and organization revealed that experts found the toolkit understandable and logically structured. It is organized sequentially, beginning with the identification of behavioral concerns and assessment of behavioral functions, followed by planning interventions, implementing strategies, and monitoring progress. However, expert feedback indicated that there was room for improvement in terms of technical terminology, classroom examples, and navigation features. The findings also showed that the toolkit effectively addressed common behavioral concerns in self-contained SPED classrooms. Nonetheless, the item regarding its applicability to real classroom settings received a relatively low rating of 3.80 (SD = 0.42), highlighting the need for additional contextual examples and practical implementation guidance.

Table 2. Content Validity of the Behavioral Support Toolkit Based on Expert Ratings

Toolkit Component	Mean	SD	I-CVI
Classroom-Wide Positive Behavior	3.60	0.52	1.00
Visual Support System	3.50	0.53	1.00
Functional Behavior Assessment	3.20	0.42	1.00
Behavior Intervention Plan	3.50	0.53	1.00
Token Economy System	3.70	0.48	1.00
Self-Regulation Skills	3.50	0.53	1.00
Behavior Data Collection	3.70	0.48	1.00
Crisis Prevention and Management	3.80	0.42	1.00
Home-School Collaboration	3.60	0.52	1.00
Progress Monitoring	3.80	0.42	1.00
Overall (as reported)	**3.59**	**0.49**	**1.00**

The content validity of the Behavioral Support Toolkit was thoroughly assessed by expert raters, providing substantial evidence of its relevance and suitability. Table 2 presents the mean ratings, standard deviations (SD), and item-level content validity index (I-CVI) scores for each component of the toolkit. Notably, all components achieved a perfect I-CVI of 1.00, indicating unanimous expert agreement on their essentiality and content relevance. Mean ratings ranged from 3.20 for Functional Behavior Assessment to 3.80 for Crisis Prevention and Management and Progress Monitoring on a typical 4-point relevance scale, reflecting strong overall endorsement with relatively low variability (SDs between 0.42 and 0.53). The overall mean rating reported was 3.59 (SD = 0.49), reinforcing the toolkit's comprehensive validity from the expert perspective.

This pattern aligns with established practices in content validation methods, where expert consensus ensures that items or components effectively represent the construct domains. High I-CVI scores, particularly perfect agreement, are considered gold standard indicators of content validity, and such results have been commonly reported across various behavioral and educational assessment tool development studies (Nguyen et al., 2025; Salokivi et al., 2023; Yoo & Han, 2024). The use of expert rating scales to calculate item-level indices and overall content validity reflects rigorous psychometric validation techniques consistent with the best practices outlined in the measurement literature (Pillet et al., 2025). Moreover, the toolkit's high consistency indices suggest that components such as classroom-wide positive behavior, visual support systems, and token economy systems comprehensively encompass the targeted behavioral support constructs. The unanimous content validity supports its suitability for implementation in educational or behavioral intervention contexts, providing confidence in the toolkit's ability to facilitate effective behavioral support strategies.

Qualitative Evaluation of Toolkit Strengths and Areas for Improvement

Qualitative analysis of expert feedback highlighted strengths related to the toolkit's systematic organization, positive behavioral orientation, evidence-based practices, practical classroom materials, individualized support, and potential contribution to teacher decision-making. Experts also identified opportunities to enhance the toolkit's clarity, accessibility, and classroom applicability. Table 3 summarizes the principal qualitative findings.

Table 3. Expert Feedback on the Behavioral Support Toolkit

Major Finding	Expert Observations and Recommendations
Systematic organization	Logical sequence of behavioral observation, assessment, intervention planning, implementation, and monitoring
Positive behavioral support	Emphasis on prevention, reinforcement, replacement behaviors, and individualized interventions
Evidence-based practices	Integration of functional assessment, behavioral data collection, reinforcement, and progress monitoring
Practical classroom materials	Value of visual schedules, ABC recording forms, intervention templates, and monitoring sheets
Individualized support	Need to consider learners' communication, developmental, sensory, and environmental needs
Clarity and accessibility	Simplification of technical terminology and provision of clearer explanations
Classroom application	Additional completed forms, realistic scenarios, quick-reference guides, and step-by-step procedures
Additional supports	Inclusion of sensory regulation, transition, communication, and self-regulation resources
Professional collaboration	Clarification of procedures requiring consultation with qualified specialists

Research has demonstrated that behavioral interventions can be effective for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBDs) across diverse educational settings, including self-contained classrooms and inclusive general education environments. Meta-analyses confirm that structured interventions incorporating relational support, such as consistent parent communication, produce meaningful improvements in student behavior in intensive settings (Gersib & Mason, 2023). Similarly, interventions such as the Good Behavior Game and Class-Wide Function-related Intervention Teams (CW-FIT) have yielded positive effects on academic engagement and on-task behavior in secondary and special education classrooms, respectively, and are generally viewed as socially valid by teachers and students (Ford et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2024). Evidence-based approaches, such as functional communication training (FCT), have consistently reduced challenging behavior among students with disabilities when thoughtfully adapted to educational contexts (Corr et al., 2025). Additionally, pilot studies of RUBI in Educational Settings indicate that paraeducators can feasibly implement adapted behavioral programs and report greater confidence in managing student behaviors, although further research is needed to establish efficacy (Bearss et al., 2025; Locke et al., 2026). Importantly, self-management interventions targeting prosocial behaviors and teacher efficacy have shown promise in general education upper elementary classrooms, highlighting a shift toward empowering students with behavior regulation skills (Smolkowski et al., 2022). Despite this progress, research reveals gaps in representation, particularly for Black male students, underscoring the need for culturally responsive behavioral interventions (Sidwell et al., 2025). Furthermore, incorporating mentalization-based techniques holds promise for addressing disruptive behavior and emotional dysregulation in schools, facilitating understanding between teachers and students (Chelouche-Dwek et al., 2026). Together, these findings emphasize the importance of employing evidence-based, contextually adapted, and culturally sensitive behavioral strategies supported by collaboration, ongoing training, and accessible implementation resources to effectively support diverse student needs

in various classroom settings.

Integration of Findings and Implications for Toolkit Refinement

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings provided a comprehensive assessment of the Behavioral Support Toolkit. The favorable expert ratings indicated that the toolkit was perceived as aligned with evidence-based practices, clear, relevant, organized, and useful. The content validity results further demonstrated unanimous expert agreement on the relevance of its ten major components. Qualitative feedback identified specific improvements needed to enhance accessibility and practical applications.

These findings support the complementary roles of ABA, PBIS, UDL, and social learning theory in designing the toolkit. ABA informed behavioral observation, reinforcement, and functional assessment; PBIS supported preventive and positive behavioral approaches; UDL informed accessible instructional materials and visual supports; and social learning theory provided a foundation for modeling and structured behavioral instruction. Their integration contributes to a comprehensive resource intended to support systematic behavioral management in self-contained elementary SPED classrooms.

This study also has implications for inclusive education and Sustainable Development Goal 4, particularly the provision of supportive and accessible learning environments for students with disabilities. However, its contribution remains in the developmental and content validation stages. Further investigation involving actual classroom implementation, teacher feedback, intervention fidelity, and measurable learner outcomes is necessary to establish the practical effectiveness and sustainability of the toolkit across educational settings.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that the developed behavioral support toolkit is a relevant, well-organized, and evidence-informed resource designed to support behavioral management in self-contained elementary special education (SPED) classrooms. Grounded in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Social Learning Theory, the toolkit integrates essential strategies for behavioral assessment, intervention planning, positive reinforcement, self-regulation, and progress monitoring. Expert evaluations indicated strong agreement regarding the toolkit's alignment with evidence-based practices, clarity, relevance, organization, and practical usefulness. The content validation results further demonstrated unanimous expert agreement on the relevance of its components. Qualitative feedback highlighted the toolkit's systematic organization, practical classroom materials, and emphasis on individualized behavioral support while identifying areas for further refinement. Overall, the findings support the toolkit's content validity and potential value as a supplementary resource for SPED teachers. However, its effectiveness in improving classroom behavioral management and learner outcomes requires further investigation through actual classroom implementation and evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing from the findings, it is advised that the behavioral support toolkit be further polished before it is used in the classroom. This involves simplifying the technical jargon, weaving in authentic classroom scenarios, offering completed assessment and intervention forms, and crafting quick-reference guides alongside step-by-step instructions. To cater to the rich tapestry of behavioral and developmental needs in self-contained elementary SPED classrooms, additional resources for sensory regulation, communication, transition, and self-management should be considered. Special education teachers and school administrators might view the toolkit as a valuable ally in behavioral support planning, provided its strategies are finely tuned to the unique needs of each learner and implemented under the watchful eye of qualified professionals when necessary. Future researchers are encouraged to embark on pilot implementation studies with SPED teachers and learners to explore the toolkit's feasibility, usability, fidelity in implementation, and its prowess in enhancing behavioral outcomes. Further validation with a wider and more varied group of experts and educational settings is also

suggested to bolster its relevance, sustainability, and potential to contribute to inclusive and equitable education.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study was limited to the development and expert validation of the behavioral support toolkit for self-contained elementary special education (SPED) classrooms. The evaluation involved only ten expert validators and did not include actual classroom implementation or measurement of learners' behavioral outcomes. Therefore, the findings reflect expert perceptions of the toolkit's relevance, clarity, organization, and usefulness rather than its demonstrated effectiveness.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future researchers are encouraged to implement and evaluate the Behavioral Support Toolkit in actual SPED classrooms to determine its effectiveness in improving behavioral management and learner engagement. Further studies should involve larger and more diverse groups of teachers and learners to assess the toolkit's usability, adaptability, and long-term sustainability.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study described ethical safeguards involving informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and protection of expert validators' responses. The research focused on the expert evaluation of the toolkit and did not involve elementary learners as participants. Institutional ethics approval details should be included if applicable and supported by the researcher's records.

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AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No AI Disclosure