Prismatic Horizons
Journal of Social Science and Humanities
www.phjssh.lexarcheus.com
Vol.-03, Issue-04 (Oct-Dec, 2025)



Impact of Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) Strategies on Classroom Behaviour of Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Vandana Singh Thakur[1], Manish Kumar Meena[2]

[1] Dean, University of Technology, Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, Vatika, Jaipur
[2] Assistant Professor, University of Technology, Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation Sciences, Vatika, Jaipur

*** Corresponding Author:**

Vandana Singh Thakur
vandana03thakur@gmail.com
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18791282

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received	10 Oct, 2025
Revised	19 Nov, 2025
Accepted	25 Dec, 2025
Available Online	30 Dec, 2025

ARTICLE ID
PHJSSH0304002

KEYWORDS

Intellectual Disabilities, Classroom Behaviour, Inclusive Education, Behaviour Intervention, On-Task Behaviour, Social Engagement

ABSTRACT

Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) offers a practical, research-backed way to encourage good behaviour while cutting down on disruptions mostly by teaching skills ahead of time and adjusting the environment rather than just reacting. In this study we looked at how PBS strategies actually played out in inclusive classrooms for students with intellectual disabilities. We used a quasi-experimental setup with pre- and post-tests to track changes in three main areas: how often students stayed on task, how frequently disruptive behaviours (like refusing instructions or getting aggressive) happened, and how well they engaged socially with classmates. The results were pretty clear. After putting structured PBS interventions in place—things like consistent reinforcement, smart classroom tweaks, and proper functional behaviour assessments students participated much more actively. Problem behaviours dropped noticeably, and interactions with peers improved in meaningful ways. Overall, the findings show that PBS isn't just theoretical; it's a realistic, long-term option for building better classroom climates and making inclusion work better for students with intellectual disabilities.

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Prismatic Horizons: Journal of Social Science and Humanities
ISSN: 2583-9284
Vol. 03, No. 04, Oct-Dec, 2025
www.phjssh.lexarcheus.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Around the world, schools are pushing harder for inclusive education making sure every student, including those with intellectual disabilities, gets a fair shot at learning. According to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2021), intellectual disability involves major limits in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours, which cover things like conceptual understanding, social skills, and everyday practical abilities. For these students, the classroom can be tough. They often struggle with communication, interacting with others, managing their own emotions and actions, or keeping up academically. That can show up as refusing to follow directions, avoiding tasks, outbursts of aggression, pulling away completely, or other disruptive stuff. It doesn't just hold back their own progress it can throw off the whole class dynamic and make it harder for everyone to stay engaged. A lot of traditional ways to handle classroom behaviour have been reactive: call-outs, punishments, sending kids out of the room. Those can stop the behaviour in the moment, sure, but they rarely dig into why it's happening. Often, the "problem" behaviour actually serves a purpose for the student maybe getting attention from adults, dodging something hard, or just seeking some kind of sensory input. If we ignore that function, fixes tend to be short-lived at best. That's why more educators and researchers have shifted toward approaches that are proactive, focused on prevention, and built around actually teaching better ways to behave. Positive Behaviour Support or PBS stands out as one of the strongest options here. It's a well-researched framework (not just a collection of tricks) that draws from applied behaviour analysis and ideas about how environments shape behaviour. At its core, PBS is about teaching the right behaviours, tweaking the setting to make success easier, using reinforcement to build good habits, and making decisions based on real data. The big idea? Behaviour is learned so it can be unlearned or reshaped with consistent, positive support. More than that, it's grounded in respect: treating people with disabilities as deserving of dignity and real inclusion, not just control. In actual classrooms, PBS looks like setting clear expectations everyone understands, teaching them directly (not assuming kids will "just know"), using visual aids, setting up simple reward systems like tokens, and doing Functional Behaviour Assessments (FBA) to figure out what a challenging behaviour is really communicating. Often this rolls out in a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS): universal strategies for the whole class (Tier 1), more focused help for students who need it (Tier 2), and intensive, personalized plans for those with bigger challenges (Tier 3). The tiers make sure support scales to what's actually needed preventive first, but ready to step in when required.

For students with intellectual disabilities in particular, PBS feels especially fitting. These kids can find abstract thinking or self-control really hard, so clear routines, visual schedules, and steady positive feedback make a huge difference. Reinforcement builds motivation and confidence, which in turn helps with staying engaged in lessons and connecting with peers. Instead of punishing mistakes, the focus stays on building skills that carry over to home, community, and beyond. Plenty of studies in inclusive and special ed settings show PBS can cut disruptive behaviours, boost time spent on-task, and improve how students get along with classmates. When schools go school-wide with PBS, things like overall climate get better, teachers report higher satisfaction, and office referrals drop. Still, while the evidence keeps growing, we need more targeted looks at how PBS works specifically for students with intellectual disabilities especially across different cultural and educational contexts. With inclusion now a real priority and classrooms needing better ways to manage behaviour without exclusion, it's time to look closely at what PBS can do here. How do these structured supports

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

actually change things like staying focused, reducing challenges, and building social connections for students with intellectual disabilities? That's the gap this study aims to help fill. Ultimately, findings like these can give teachers, school leaders, and policymakers practical guidance for creating environments where every student not just the ones who fit the mold can learn, participate, and grow.

2. Literature Review

This section presents a review of five important research studies that explored how Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) strategies influence classroom behaviour, particularly among students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The studies collectively highlight how proactive and supportive approaches can transform classroom environments and improve student outcomes.

2.1 Horner et al. (2010) A landmark study conducted by **Robert H. Horner** and his colleagues examined the long-term effects of School-Wide Positive Behaviour Support (SWPBS) across several elementary schools in the United States. The researchers followed schools over a four-year period using a randomized control trial design, which strengthened the credibility of their findings. The results showed a clear and consistent decline in office discipline referrals in schools that implemented PBS effectively. Students demonstrated better classroom engagement and improved academic participation. Although the intervention was applied to entire school populations, students with disabilities including those with intellectual disabilities benefited significantly. These students showed noticeable improvements in following classroom rules, participating in activities, and interacting positively with peers. The study emphasized that when schools adopt a preventive and structured behavioural framework, the overall classroom climate becomes more supportive and less disruptive.

2.2 Dunlap et al. (2006) In another influential study, **Glen Dunlap** and his team focused specifically on students with developmental and intellectual disabilities who exhibited severe challenging behaviours. Rather than applying general strategies, the researchers designed individualized Positive Behaviour Support plans based on Functional Behaviour Assessments (FBA). These assessments helped determine why students were engaging in particular behaviours whether to gain attention, escape tasks, or meet sensory needs. After implementing personalized interventions, the researchers observed substantial reductions in aggression, self-injurious behaviours, and task avoidance. Teachers reported that classrooms became calmer and more structured, allowing more time for instruction and meaningful learning. The study strongly highlighted that understanding the purpose of a behaviour is essential for creating lasting behavioural change. Proactive and individualized supports were shown to be far more effective than reactive disciplinary measures.

2.3 Luiselli et al. (2005) A study conducted by **James K. Luiselli** and colleagues examined the direct application of PBS strategies within classroom settings serving students with special educational needs. The researchers carefully observed student behaviour before and after implementing structured reinforcement systems and environmental modifications.

Their findings revealed a significant increase in on-task behaviour and a noticeable decline in disruptive incidents. Students became more engaged in lessons and demonstrated improved compliance with classroom expectations. Importantly, teachers reported feeling more confident and competent in managing classroom behaviour when PBS strategies were consistently

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

applied. The study concluded that classroom-level PBS interventions not only improve student behaviour but also strengthen instructional effectiveness and teacher morale.

2.4 Simonsen et al. (2008) In a comprehensive review of classroom management research, **Brandi Simonsen** and her colleagues identified practical strategies aligned with PBS principles that consistently produce positive behavioural outcomes. The review analyzed multiple empirical studies to determine which classroom practices were most effective.

The authors found that clearly teaching behavioural expectations, maintaining structured routines, actively supervising students, and consistently reinforcing positive behaviour were key components of successful classrooms. These strategies were particularly beneficial for students facing cognitive and behavioural challenges, including those with intellectual disabilities. The review emphasized that when such evidence-based practices are integrated into daily instruction, they create stable, predictable, and inclusive learning environments that support long-term behavioural development.

2.5 Bradshaw et al. (2010) A longitudinal study led by **Catherine P. Bradshaw** explored the broader impact of Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) in elementary schools over several years. The research examined behavioural data from schools that consistently implemented PBIS frameworks. The findings indicated significant reductions in disruptive behaviours and meaningful improvements in prosocial skills such as cooperation and peer support. Students with disabilities showed even greater behavioural progress compared to similar students in schools that did not implement PBIS. Teachers also reported that classrooms felt safer, more orderly, and more conducive to learning. The study highlighted the importance of sustained, school-wide commitment to PBS practices to achieve meaningful and lasting improvements.

3. Research Objectives

1. To assess the effect of PBS strategies on on-task behaviour of students with intellectual disabilities.
2. To examine the reduction in challenging behaviours following the implementation of PBS.

Research methodology

The researcher set up this study as a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test design with a control group to see how Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) strategies really changed classroom behaviour for students with intellectual disabilities. It took place in two inclusive elementary schools one classroom got the PBS intervention (experimental group), while the other carried on with standard behaviour management (control). Forty students aged 7–12 joined in, all diagnosed with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities per the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities guidelines. We started by gathering baseline data over two weeks through classroom observations using structured checklists, teacher rating scales, and simple frequency tallies of behaviours. Then the experimental group went through an eight-week PBS rollout: teachers got training to set clear expectations, use visual schedules, run token reinforcement systems, give immediate positive praise, keep routines predictable, and do Functional Behaviour Assessments (FBA) for kids with ongoing challenges—all implemented consistently with systematic tracking. After those eight weeks, we collected post-data with the exact same tools for fair comparison, measuring things like on-task time, non-

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

compliance, aggression, task avoidance, and peer interactions. We crunched the numbers with descriptive stats first, then paired sample t-tests to compare changes within and between groups. This approach let us get a solid, practical read on whether PBS made a noticeable difference in these students' classroom experiences.

5. Analysis and Results

The findings are laid out in the four tables below, comparing pre- and post-test scores for the experimental group (which received the PBS intervention) and the control group (which continued with standard practices). The numbers tell a pretty consistent story across the board.

Table 1: Comparison of On-Task Behaviour (%)

Group	Pre-Test Mean (%)	Post-Test Mean (%)	Mean Improvement (%)
Experimental (PBS)	72	88	+16
Control	73	76	+3

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Looking at Table 1, the difference is pretty striking. Kids in the PBS group went from being on-task about 72% of the time to 88%—that's a solid 16% jump. The control group barely moved, up just 3%. When you give students clear expectations, consistent reinforcement, and a more supportive setup, they actually stay engaged longer and participate more. For students with intellectual disabilities, who can find it hard to sustain attention, these kinds of structured supports seem to make a real difference in keeping them focused during lessons.

Table 2: Frequency of Disruptive Behaviour (Average Incidents per Week)

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Percentage Reduction
Experimental (PBS)	12	6	50%
Control	11	9	18%

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Table 2 tells a similar story. Disruptive incidents—like shouting out, getting out of seat, or refusing directions—dropped by half in the PBS classroom, from 12 to 6 per week on average. The control group only saw an 18% drop. That kind of change doesn't happen by accident. Things like visual schedules, quick positive feedback, and predictable routines cut down on those everyday disruptions far more effectively than waiting to correct them after they happen. It shows how much prevention and teaching better alternatives can shift the classroom dynamic.

Table 3: Incidents of Aggression and Task Avoidance

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Percentage Reduction
Experimental (PBS)	8	3	62%
Control	7	6	14%

Source: Computed from Primary Data

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Aggression and task avoidance took the biggest hit in the experimental group—down 62% from 8 to 3 incidents. The control side improved just 14%. When you target the function behind those tougher behaviours and reinforce the right alternatives, things change fast.

Table 4: Social Engagement Scores (Rating Scale 1–10)

Group	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Improvement
Experimental (PBS)	4.5	7.8	+3.3
Control	4.7	5.2	+0.5

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Social engagement climbed noticeably too from 4.5 to 7.8 on the 1–10 scale for the PBS students, a +3.3 boost. Peers interacted more, cooperation improved, and kids seemed more part of the group. The control group barely budged (+0.5). Beyond dialing down the negatives, PBS really seemed to build those positive social connections that matter in an inclusive setting.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to see how Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) strategies actually played out in inclusive classrooms for students with intellectual disabilities specifically, whether they made a real difference compared to the usual ways of handling behaviour. The numbers across the board were clear and consistent. In every area we tracked staying on-task, cutting down disruptive incidents, reducing aggression and task avoidance, and building better social connections—the students who got the PBS intervention showed meaningful gains. They participated more in lessons, followed expectations more reliably, and spent less time off-track or in conflict. At the same time, the challenging behaviours that can derail a class dropped noticeably. When teachers set clear expectations, taught them directly, reinforced the positives consistently, and made small but smart changes to the environment, these kids could regulate themselves better and actually engage in what's going on around them. One thing that really stands out is the boost in social engagement. Scores went up quite a bit, meaning more cooperation, more positive peer interactions, and kids feeling like they belonged in the group. PBS didn't just quiet the problems it helped build real social skills and confidence in a structured, supportive way. Shifting the focus from punishment to teaching and reinforcing the right behaviours created space for that kind of growth, which is huge in an inclusive setting where everyone needs to feel safe and valued. Another key takeaway was how useful the function-based side proved to be. Doing those Functional Behaviour Assessments let teachers figure out what was really driving the tough behaviours attention, escape, sensory stuff—and target strategies accordingly. That individualized, data-guided approach worked far better than just reacting with consequences after the fact. It reminds us that behaviours usually have a purpose, and once we understand it, we can teach better alternatives systematically. Zooming out, these results make a strong case for moving away from punitive discipline toward something more preventive and supportive. PBS lines up perfectly with what inclusive education is supposed to be: treating students with dignity, respecting their needs, and giving everyone a fair chance to learn and grow. When it's done consistently—with good training, admin buy-in, and follow-through it not only helps individual kids but improves the whole classroom vibe, makes teachers feel more capable, and strengthens the school environment overall. That said, PBS isn't a quick fix. It takes solid teacher training, ongoing support from school leaders, regular check-ins on how things are going, and teamwork with families to keep

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

it sustainable. Without that consistency, the gains can fade. Looking ahead, it'd be great to see more work on longer-term effects, how well PBS adapts across different cultures or school types, and whether it works as well at secondary levels or with a wider range of disabilities. In the end, this study shows that PBS is a practical, effective way to improve classroom behaviour for students with intellectual disabilities. By prioritizing proactive teaching, positive reinforcement, and personalized support, it boosts engagement, steadies behaviour, and helps make inclusion more than just a goal it makes it workable and positive for everyone involved. Schools that take PBS seriously can create environments where these students thrive, not just survive.

REFERENCES

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. (2021). *Intellectual disability: Definition, diagnosis, classification, and systems of supports* (12th ed.). AAIDD.

Bradshaw, C. P., Mitchell, M. M., & Leaf, P. J. (2010). Examining the effects of schoolwide positive behavioural interventions and supports on student outcomes: Results from a randomized controlled effectiveness trial in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions, 12*(3), 133–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300709334798

Carr, E. G., Dunlap, G., Horner, R. H., Koegel, R. L., Turnbull, A. P., Sailor, W., Anderson, J. L., Albin, R. W., Koegel, L. K., & Fox, L. (2002). Positive behaviour support: Evolution of an applied science. Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions, 4(1), 4–16. https://doi.org/10.1177/109830070200400102

Dunlap, G., Strain, P. S., Fox, L., Carta, J. J., Conroy, M., Smith, B. J., Kern, L., Hemmeter, M. L., Timm, M. A., & Sowell, C. (2006). Prevention and intervention with young children's challenging behaviour: Perspectives regarding current knowledge. *Behavioural Disorders, 32*(1), 29–45.

Horner, R. H., Sugai, G., Smolkowski, K., Eber, L., Nakasato, J., Todd, A. W., & Esperanza, J. (2009). A randomized, wait-list controlled effectiveness trial assessing school-wide positive behaviour support in elementary schools. *Journal of Positive Behaviour Interventions, 11*(3), 133–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098300709332067

Kern, L., & Manz, P. H. (2004). A look at current validity issues of school-wide positive behaviour support. Behavioural Disorders, 30(1), 47–59.

Luiselli, J. K., Putnam, R. F., Handler, M. W., & Feinberg, A. B. (2005). Whole-school positive behaviour support: Effects on student discipline problems and academic performance. *Educational Psychology, 25*(2–3), 183–198. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341042000301265

Simonsen, B., Fairbanks, S., Briesch, A., Myers, D., & Sugai, G. (2008). Evidence-based practices in classroom management: Considerations for research to practice. *Education and Treatment of Children, 31*(3), 351–380.

Simonsen, B., Sugai, G., & Negron, M. (2008). Schoolwide positive behaviour supports: Primary systems and practices. Teaching Exceptional Children, 40(6), 32–40.

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Sugai, G., & Horner, R. H. (2002). The evolution of discipline practices: School-wide positive behaviour supports. Child & Family Behaviour Therapy, 24(1–2), 23–50. https://doi.org/10.1300/J019v24n01_03

Walker, H. M., Ramsey, E., & Gresham, F. M. (2004). Antisocial behaviour in school: Evidence-based practices (2nd ed.). Wadsworth Publishing.

Wehmeyer, M. L., & Shogren, K. A. (2017). Handbook of research-based practices for educating students with intellectual disability. Routledge.

© 2025 The Authors, Published by (PHJSSH). This is an Open Access Article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)