

INTRODUCTION

Praise is an effective classroom management strategy that has been studied for more than four decades (Hall, Lund, & Jackson, 1968; White, 1975). In recent years there has been an increase in published praise research in the schools (Floress, Beschta, Meyer, & Reinke, 2017); however, there are gaps in the praise literature that are still unanswered. For example, it is unclear how knowledgeable those who intend to work in early childhood settings (i.e., pre-service, early educators) are regarding the effective use of praise. Furthermore, it is unclear whether pre-service, early educators' praise knowledge will correlate with their actual use of praise. The literature provides recommendations and evidence to support how praise should be implemented, but there is limited research on assessing pre-service, early educators' use and knowledge of effective praise.

Praise research has identified two praise categories: general praise (GP) and behavior-specific praise (BSP). Behavior-specific praise is praise which indicates approval of a student's behavior while specifying the behavior which warranted approval. An example of GP would be, "Good job!" while an example of BSP would be, "Good job lining up for recess!" Evidence suggests that BSP is a superior form of praise because students easily learn which behaviors lead to teacher approval (Brophy, 1981).

To date, one study has assessed teachers' knowledge of praise (Fisher, n.d.). The Praise Knowledge Assessment for Teachers (PKAT), is a 10 item, multiple choice assessment designed to be used with elementary school teachers; however, a pilot study suggested poor internal reliability between the PKAT items. For the current study, the PKAT was revised by first improving questions to improve internal reliability. Then the questions were adapted for the early childhood setting. The revised measure was renamed the Praise Knowledge Assessment for Teachers and Educators – Preschool (PKATE-preK).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to assess pre-service, early educators' knowledge of praise and determine whether more praise knowledge is related to more praise use in the classroom. No study has examined pre-service, early educators' (i.e., undergraduate students who intend to work in an early childhood setting) praise knowledge. Furthermore, no study has examined whether preservice, early educators with more praise knowledge will also use more praise in the preschool setting.

Research Questions

1. How knowledgeable are pre-service, early educators regarding the use of praise as a classroom management strategy?
2. Do pre-service, early educators find praise to be an acceptable classroom management strategy?
3. Is there a relation between pre-service, early educators' knowledge and acceptability of praise?
4. Do pre-service, early educators who use more praise in the classroom, also have more praise knowledge?

METHOD

Participants & Setting

Fifteen pre-service, early educators participated in the direct-observation portion of the study. Thirteen of those same early educators also completed the rating scales (PKATE-preK and BIRS). The classroom used is run by Eastern Illinois University to train pre-service teachers and provide hands-on experience.

Table 1: Demographics

	N	%
Sex		
Male	1	8
Female	12	92
Race		
Caucasian	9	69
African American	3	23
Other	1	<1
Prior Experience w/ Children		
Yes	11	85
No	2	15

METHODS (Continued)

Procedures

- IRB approval was secured, and informed consent collected
- Pre-service, early educators were told that observers would be collecting data on teachers' classroom management strategies.
- Observations were conducted by two trained graduate students and one undergraduate student.
- Each participant was observed for approximately 20 minutes during small group instruction. Praise and reprimand rates were collected.

Instruments

PRAISE & REPRIMAND OBSERVATION FORMS: The form consisted of 20 columns (one for each minute interval). Observations were conducted in the manner of description interval recording. Observers collected the frequency of praise and reprimand considering type and delivery within 1 minute intervals for 20 minutes total. Verbatim statements were also included in the data. Observers wore discreet audio earpieces that cued them when 1 minute had elapsed.

PKATE-preK: The PKATE-preK (Praise Knowledge Assessment of Teachers and Educators in a preschool setting) is intended to measure educators' knowledge of praise. Prior to answering any questions related to praise, participants were provided a definition of praise. The PKATE-preK contains 10-multiple choice questions. Scenarios have been adapted to for the early childhood setting. The PKATE-preK is scored by summing the ranked multiple-choice responses for each question. Total scores can range from 10-40 with lower scores indicating more knowledge of effective praise use.

BIRS-P: The BIRS-P (Fisher, n.d) is a measure that is intended to assess acceptability of praise and questions have been adapted for the early education setting. The BIRS-P is a 12-item measure where respondents are asked to rate each question from 1 to 5, (1 indicating "Strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "Strongly agree"). The BIRS-P is scored by adding the ratings for the 12 items. Scores can range from 12-60 with higher scores indicating higher acceptance of praise. Finn and Sladeczek (2001) found the BIRS to be a reliable measure (i.e., Cronbach's alpha was .97). Using an early elementary teacher sample, Fisher (n.d.) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .89 with the BIRS-P.

Operational Definitions for Teacher Praise

General Praise: Any specific verbalization that expresses a favorable judgment on activity, product, or attribute of the student. Example: Great, Thank you, Perfect.

Behavior Specific Praise: Any nonspecific verbalization that expresses a favorable judgment on an activity, product, or attribute of the student. Example: I like how you are sitting still.

Operational Definitions for Teacher Reprimand

Mild: Any verbal comment in a normal speaking tone that indicates disapproval. Example: No thank you.

Medium: Any verbal comment using a sarcastic or critical tone that indicates disapproval. Example: Is that your best work?

Harsh: Any verbal comment using a louder than typical tone for the setting that indicates disapproval. Example: I won't tell you again.

Gesture: Any gesture without speaking that indicates disapproval of a student behavior. Example: Teacher shakes their head at a student when the student disrupts class.

Observer Training

- A total of 3 observers were trained
- Training included learning operational definitions, discussing examples and non-examples, coding teacher praise training videos, and demonstrating 80% IOA with the PI for three different observations for both praise and reprimand.
- Praise IOA: Collected during 67% of observations by calculating interval-by interval percent agreement. Total study IOA = 97.8% (range 93-100%) across the 10 observations where two observers were present.

RESULTS

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER OBSERVATIONS

Total Observations: 15 total participants were observed; 13 participants were observed for 20 minutes and 2 participants were observed for 15 minutes

- Total Observation Time: 290 minutes (4.83 hours)

RESULTS (Continued)

Table 2: Participant Average use of Praise and Reprimand per 20 Minute Observation

	Mean	Range	Average Rate per hr
BSP	1.46	0-8	4.38
GP	6.23	1-26	18.69
Total Praise	7.69	1-34	23.07
Mild	3.46	1-10	10.38
Medium	-	-	-
Harsh	-	-	-
Gestural	.08	0-1	0.24
Total Reprimand	3.54	1-10	10.62

R1: How knowledgeable are pre-service, early educators regarding the use of praise as a classroom management strategy?

- The mean PKATE-preK score was 20 (scores range from 10-40, with lower scores indicating higher praise knowledge).
- 77% of participants correctly answered this question: "The group of students you are supervising are more disruptive than usual. Which of the following is an example of using encouragement to promote appropriate behavior?"
 - Answer: "I see that Student A, Student B, Student C, and Student D are sitting quietly. Nice job!"

R2: Do pre-service, early educators find praise to be an acceptable classroom management strategy?

- The mean BIRS-P score was 49.15 (scores range from 12-60, with higher scores indicating higher acceptance of praise).
- 100% of participants answered yes to the question "In your opinion, is encouragement an effective classroom management tool?"

R3: Is there a relation between pre-service, early educators' knowledge of praise and their acceptability of praise?

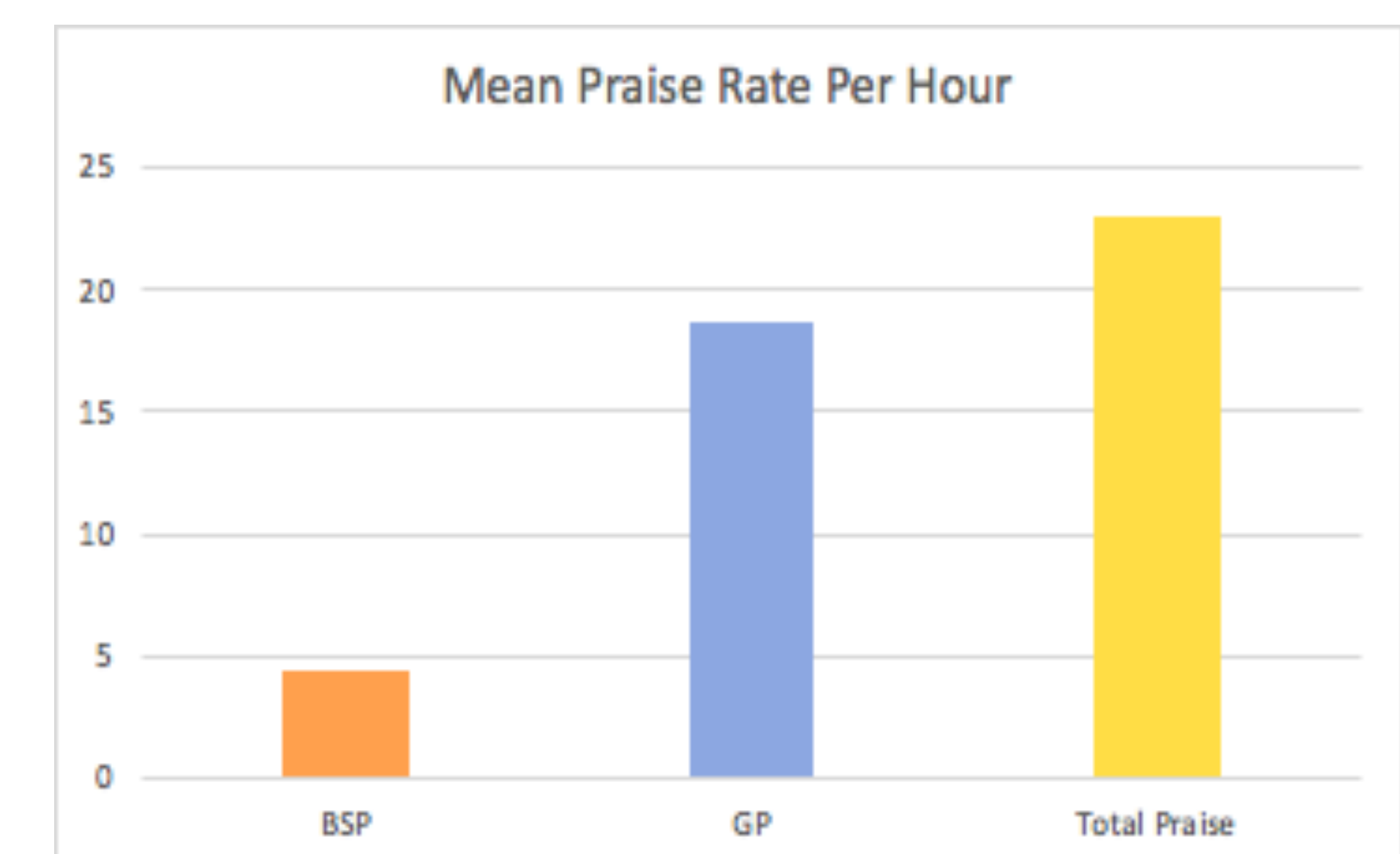
- There was not a significant correlation between praise knowledge (PKATE-preK score) and BIRS-P score, $r(11) = .03, p = .93$, (two-tailed).

R4: Do pre-service, early educators who use more praise in the classroom, also have more praise knowledge?

- There was not a significant correlation between total praise (GP + BSP) and praise knowledge (PKATE-preK score) $r(11) = -.34, p = .13$, (one-tailed).
- There was not a significant correlation between BSP and praise knowledge, $r(11) = -.14, p = .32$ (one-tailed).

DISCUSSION

- Average total praise rates per hour (23.07) were lower than previous studies examining the use of praise with young children. White (1975) found an average rate of 43.7 praises per hour among 1st and 2nd grade teachers and Floress and Jenkins (2015) found an average rate of 47.3 praises per hour among kindergarten teachers.



- General Praise was delivered more frequently than BSP. This may be because general praise is easier to use. General praise is convenient, is likely an automatic response to student participation, and teachers don't need to think strategically about who they are praising and why. Or, it may be that pre-service teachers praise less because they are still learning to teach and lead activities.