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RESEARCH PAPER

Strategies and Challenges of Novice Public-School Teachers related to Classroom Management at the Elementary Level in Lahore

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study aimed to explore the perceptions of novice teachers about classroom management and the importance of classroom management at the elementary level in Lahore. Specifically, this study explored the challenges novice teachers faced in their early days and the strategies they have used during class management. A qualitative case study research design was used. Twenty teachers participated in the study who were selected through a purposive sampling technique. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the challenges and strategies of classroom management. It was revealed that all novice teachers considered classroom management critical all of them firmly believed that only a well-managed classroom ensures an effective teaching-learning process. The study's findings suggested that despite their pedagogical approach, novice teachers found classroom management an arduous task owing to several factors: overcrowded classrooms, lack of training, support, and guidance, and the absence of facilities.

Introduction

A typical novice teacher is said to have just started the career. Literature on novice teachers is rather indifferent on the number of years a teacher should possess to fall into a novice teacher category (Collins & O'Brien, 2011). For some, a teacher bearing an experience of less than a year, while others consider any teacher bearing an experience of fewer than five years, is a Novice teacher (Curry, Webb, & Latham, 2016). Teaching in classrooms is different from studying it as a subject. Every day is different and hence keep novice teachers dubious about their performance (Awan, 2015). They don't feel accomplished, satisfied, and highly uncertain about their management skills (Wolff, Jarodzka, den Bogert, & Boshuizen, 2016). Thus initial few

years of teaching are somewhat speculative for novice teachers (Thompson, Hagenah, Lohwasser, & Laxton, 2015).

Challenges, which a novice teacher usually faces are multidimensional (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a, 2020b). Classroom management is by and large the most challenging of all (Barkauskaitė & Meškauskienė, 2017). Classroom management can rightly be put as having the right relationships and not just the rules. It is essential and refers to a teacher's managerial prowess while keeping students organized, orderly, enthralled, and academically thriving in class (Hue & Li, 2008). Since classroom management ensures optimal learning in class, it is vital for students and teachers equally (Laslett & Smith, 2002). However, a classroom manager is not limited to managing the behaviors only (Beaty-O'Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2010). It deals with everything a teacher does in the classroom to facilitate students and may be extended to activities such as fostering positive attitudes for learning in students, providing students with an encouraging yet fair and justified feedback, espousing a welcoming and intellectually stimulating environment conducive to their overall growth, defining objectives with clear instructions embedded in, planning and executing lesson plans (Beaty-O'Ferrall et al., 2010; Bluestein, 2014; Cummings, 2000). Scared resources, non-supportive administration, discouraging parents, and excessive workloads usually cost a teacher her mental peace; consequently, the teacher felt distracted (Dahar, 2011). Such teachers are generally are unable to engage the students to their maximum intellectual potential and hence have mismanaged classrooms (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 2013). Classroom management becomes rather laborious for teachers (Al-Zu'bi, 2013) when they are unable to manage students' behavior in a way that supports their learning (Al-Zu'bi, 2013; Ismail & Abdullah, 2019; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

Effective classroom management is by and large crucial for teachers regardless of their experience and qualification. Resilience, however, is consequential in surviving the challenges. Teachers adopt different strategies to manage their classrooms as per the strength, level of their class, content to be taught alongside considering the physical and mental health of the students (Cummings, 2000). Apprehending the stakeholders and the roles they have to play in the classroom is said to have been the nexus of effectively organized classrooms (Zoromski, Evans, Owens, Holdaway, & Royo Romero, 2020). Besides, modeling is an effective way of teaching almost anything; teachers who involve students in setting classroom expectations generate more buy-in than ones who believe in explaining to students the undesired behavior. Having said that, the mutually respected guidelines are futile if they go undocumented. Therefore, class rules should be posted in a class by all means. (Korpershoek, Harms, de Boer, van Kuijk, & Doolaard, 2016). Fostering an engaging culture that allows students to participate either by partaking in presentations or by participating in debates and discussions followed by praise and tangible rewards is said to have been linked with more managed classrooms.

Literature Review

Having its nexus deeply rooted in orthodox religious beliefs, classroom management was once considered strict compliance with teachers' instructions in class. Thus an organized teacher was expected to maintain strict discipline in classrooms (Scarlett, 2014). Additionally, in the 19th century, it was used to control the behaviors of individuals for religious purposes. Failing to obey the rules was consequential to strict physical punishments (Diana, Muhammad, & Iftikhar, 2021; Lebor, 2017; Scarlett, 2014; Siddiqui, Arif, & Muhammad, 2020). However, the entire concept of classroom management evolved in the 1980s as fostering a safe and positive environment for the teaching-learning process (Brophy, 2013). Classroom management is now defined as upholding an environment propitious to students' academic achievements and socio-emotional cognition (Egeberg, McConney, & Price, 2016; Evertson & Weinstein, 2013).

A growing body of literature defines a novice teacher as having less than three years of experience. (Latimer, 2009) with an inherent assumption of them holding a professional teaching qualification (Collins & O'Brien, 2011). Usually, a typical novice teacher is concurrently teaching and learning to teach (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Although novice teacher has essentially served as an apprentice as the requirement of their degree program, they tend to undermine the dynamics and magnitude of challenges of an actual classroom (Davis, 2017). Henceforth are prone to the aftermaths of a disorganized classroom. Out of all the consequences, inapt behavior management is said to have been the most catastrophic (Ahmad, Hussain Ch, Ayub, Zaheer, & Batool, 2017; Burns & Darling-Hammond, 2014; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2015).

International studies provide evidence that novice teachers face challenges in classroom management, particularly related to physical facilities, administrational related support, student behavioral challenges, and teachers' self-created challenges in classrooms (Burns & Darling-Hammond, 2014; Mansfield, Beltman, & Price, 2014; Raba, 2016; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Emotionally challenged students are the most difficult to manage and usually are aggressive in behaviors. Since aggression is known as the sub-set of aggression gives rise to several problems, including bullying (Espelage et al., 2013; Thornberg, 2011). Since bully usually enjoys a superior status from the rest of the class, they usually are backed by such students who yearn for fame and authority over others (Garandeau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2014). This may create disturbance in class and usually distract the teachers. Classroom management hence becomes a strenuous task for the teachers (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013). Such students usually hinder teacher-learning processes by initiating activities that are captivating and can hold students' attention. Such students, if countered inaptly, can become violent. Teachers, therefore, should be appropriately trained to handle such issues. (Burkman, 2012).

To overcome the challenges, novice teachers need continuous help, support, and encouragement from their management especially. As to support their own learning, novice teachers can always join professional teaching clubs existing and operating online to support the community across the globe (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). These support groups are inclined to promote each other; best practices usually resolve most of the problems of novice teachers (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Similarly, another study revealed that novice teachers' relationships with the school environment and colleagues support them adjusting to the workplace (Johnson et al., 2014).

Attending the class with a positive mindset and welcoming all the students regardless of their issues and problem is the first step towards a more manageable and organized classroom (Cummings, 2000). Greeting students with a bright smile leaves a positive impact on the students. The happier they are, the less they disturb the class. (Beaty-O'Ferrall et al., 2010; Nilson, 2016; Rideout & Windle, 2017). Assigning students with little duties promotes a sense of responsibility in students (Beaty-O'Ferrall et al., 2010; Cangelosi, 2013; Dos et al., 2016; Zoromski et al., 2020). Teachers who put conscious effort while adapting to the suitable strategy are considered to be having more managed and organized classrooms (Ahmad et al., 2017; Bluestein, 2014).

Material and Methods

The case study method was used as the research design of the study (Stake, 2013; Thomas, 2021; Yin, 2018). A purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 participants for the study. All 20 teachers were employed in public elementary schools.

Participants were selected from schools located in Lahore. The researcher sought the opinions of the participants in one-on-one interviews. While selecting the participants, it was ensured that all the participants had faced challenges in classroom management. Prior consent of participants was taken on call.

Interview Guide

A self-developed, open-ended interview guide based on the areas identified in the literature was used to collect the data from the participants. (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, 2018).

After discussions with expert qualitative researchers with several publications in reputed journals, the interview guide was finalized (Seidman, 2019). Piloting it with a critical friend resulted in the removal of vague and ambiguous questions (Berg & Lune, 2017).

Interview Process

Interviews were conducted on scheduled dates and time and on the venue of participant's comfort. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on an individual basis. An audio recorder was used for recording the interviews with the consent of the participants. All interviews were transcribed and translated into the English language for later use.

Data Analysis Methods

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. This method of data analysis was used to make it easier to compare and contrast the data from twenty cases and to deduce meanings from this comparison. Coding helped create more manageable units to expedite the analysis process and stimulated the reflection on the data's essences (Saldaña & Omasta, 2017). After open-coding, sub-categories based on similarities, differences, and frequencies of occurrences in data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) were identified.

Results and Discussion

Importance of Classroom Management

Almost all the participants considered classroom management as a significant aspect of classroom management and agreed that even a well-articulated lesson fails if a teacher has mismanaged classrooms. For most of the participants, classroom management is fostering such an environment that supports students' learnings. For example, a participant stated,

> Classroom management, though it supports students' learnings yet is the most tedious task for a teacher. It requires teachers to be patient, quick-witted, and efficient multi-tasker. Skilled communication serves as an additional quality as classroom management is all about communicating with the students about what is expected of them. No matter how skilled a teacher is, unless she masters the art of classroom management, she is most likely to fail teaching. (Participant 4)

Another participant put it rather the other way around and regarded classroom management as fostering the environment that encourages students to participate in class in order to acquire survival skills.

> Well, communication is always done through a channel. Noise is likely to hamper the process of communication. The classroom is the channel that supports communication between teachers and students. A mismanaged classroom is considered the noise that hinders accurate communication. The first five minutes of the lecture set the level of management a teacher might be having in the classroom. It is by far the most important task a teacher

undertakes and unquestionably forms the foundation of smooth class procedures. (Participant 15)

Challenges of Classroom Management

The majority of the participants reported that managing the behaviors of students was very challenging during classroom management. Pointing fingers at each other, talking to their class fellows, making noise, fighting, presenting excuses for not learning, verbally abusing each other and disturbing others are some of the behaviors, teachers think, are a challenge to class decorum. For example, a participant stated,

> Not always do students do it on purpose; not always do students intentionally disturb the class. Sometimes it's simply them being children, doing their things. Still, these behaviors, whether intentional or not, are always difficult to manage. Impetuous teachers are likely to lose the trust of the students, which ultimately results in distracted classrooms. (Teacher 4)

Classrooms are a heterogeneous collection of all races and locally varied cultures; teachers face language barriers while communicating with students. Students enrolled in public schools usually belong to humble backgrounds and usually use Punjabi and its dialect, the use of which is not appreciated in schools. For instance, a participant stated,

> Students can only understand Punjabi at times, so speak in class with their class fellows. Often goes too casual in class to be ignored. Students replicate their parents and often become abusive in class. I have spent a lot of time teaching them morals; still, the results are not encouraging. Students need individual attention, and teaching to a class of 52 makes it next to impossible to focus each student individually. I found it very difficult to work on their morals while trying to explain in language which they barely understand. (Participant 16)

Teachers, though, complain about students disturbing the classrooms by seeking permission either to go for drinking water or for using the restrooms. A little more probing with the teacher revealed that teachers have never set their classrooms, let alone discussed it with their students. For example, the same participant stated,

> Students are such a nuisance. You name it. They make noise; they either are thirsty or in a rush to go to the loo. If nothing else, they will break into a fight for literally no reason. And they are never satisfied with their sitting plans. With such a happening going on in class on a daily basis, achieving our teaching objective is a challenge. On top of that, we are being asked to set the class rules for them. (Participant 16)

Wider yet overcrowded classrooms are yet another challenge for classroom management. Teachers cannot be impactful managers unless they understand every single student. Additionally, it is expected that teachers must be audible to every single student in the classroom. For instance, a participant stated,

We have large classrooms. I teach class 4th and have 62 students in my class. Despite how loud I become in class, I still am inaudible at the opposite ends of the class. Availability of teaching resources and at least a helper will compensate the issue to some extent. (Participant 2)

Teachers, on the other hand, find it difficult to manage different intellectual statuses in their classes and label 'slow learners as the irritating students of the classroom. For instance, a participant stated,

Basically, a classroom has students of the different intellectual ability which is, although very natural, still, a teacher and intelligent students both can get irritated because of their slower pace. They would rather be grouped in a different section under the supervision of a separate teacher. (Teacher 13)

Some teachers don't find class management challenging at all. However, unaware of the reason, they credited having fewer students in classes as the reason for more managed and civilized classrooms. For instance, a participant stated,

As a matter of fact, no, I have not ever faced any problem while managing the classrooms. I can't, however, comment on why other teachers do. There may be involved a number of factors, such as having a larger number of students. I have only 10 in my class. (Teacher 18)

Strategies of Classroom Management

Participants were found to be using a number of management strategies. All of them, however, agreed that activity-based learning was found to be most beneficial and was widely used by the participants. They think that it does ensure not only the students' engagement consequential to a rather managed classroom but also maximizes their learning. Motivating students' contingent to tangible rewards is yet another helpful and rewarding strategy. For instance, a participant stated,

Activity-based learning can be defined as engaging students in different activities rather than bombarding the content. I have not been provided with a lot many resources to make the most of this strategy. However, I use flashcards, posters, and AV aids. For instance, If I have to introduce them to numbers, I would rather show them the flashcards, which will engage them in making the shapes by using their body movement. I sometimes bring wooden letters with me in class. These are really helpful. (Teacher 1)

Teachers also endorsed that activity-based learning keeps the students busy with their assigned tasks, so they are not left with time to make any mischief. For instance, a participant stated,

Activity-based learning is helpful in innumerable ways. Students are busy with their studies. They are focused and thrilled. They enjoy doing things on their own. Activity-based learning just does not keep them on their toes only, but they feel fresh and active. For me, it's a total life-saving hack (Teacher 10)

Supervision is another important aspect that keeps the students busy with their work, but that requires cohesion in activities.

> Teachers, if they have not planned beforehand, won't be able to supervise their students in its true sense. Students cannot be multi-tasker, so a teacher should ensure that they must be dealing with just one task at a time. Teachers should always begin the lecture by introducing the topic to the students. Make a steady progression with the rest of the activities likewise. If students are writing something from the board, a teacher should take continuous rounds and should provide individual attention to all and to struggling students in particular. I never encourage my student to write when they are being explained a new topic or vice versa. (Teacher 20)

Peer tutoring, though, is an emerging concept across the globe and is found to be harboring 21st-century skills among students such as collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Teachers in our case, though they were teaching at the school level, have successfully been using the technique to cater to overcrowded classrooms, and they have found it extremely beneficial. For instance, a participant stated,

> I usually divide students into groups. Each group is led by a sharp and intelligent student. He is accountable for the progress of his group. Therefore, he ensures that he helps each of his group members grasp the concept if it goes unclear. Students feel motivated and thrive on coming at par with the group leader. Hence a lot of management issues are resolved on their own. I have found it extremely helpful in my case, and I would love to communicate with as many teachers as I can. (Teacher 13)

Though fewer in numbers, there are teachers who advocate keeping friendly relations with their students. They think friendly relations provide teachers deeper insights into their students, their intellectual capabilities, their moods, and motivation level. All this information definitely helps teachers to develop customized plans that are bound to bring forth fruitful results. For example, a participant stated,

> Managing students is easy. Be their friend simply! Get into their shoes. Consider their childhood, be at peace with their mischiefs, enjoy them, and you will find the pieces to the puzzle we call classroom management. Believe me; students listen. They are compassionate, eager to learn if they feel valued. (Teacher 17)

Discussion

The findings of the study are found to be in relevance with those of international studies and conclude that classroom management is an important skill and is a preface to a successful teaching career (Freiberg, Huzinec, & Templeton, 2009). Novice teachers are equally aware of its seminal importance. However, the challenges they face in their classrooms call attention to the gaps in teachers' curricula and practice (Aloe, Amo, & Shanahan, 2014). Additionally, the teachers-curriculum

does not support novice teachers' transition from a student to becoming a teacher in class. (Akdağ & Haser, 2016; Awan, 2015).

Teachers find student behavior most challenging of allowing to their limited knowledge of behavior management and classroom management. However, humongous strengths in classes accompanied by a shortage of facilities and resources worsen the problem. Teachers, though, were not practically trained to deal with the challenges, yet they have adapted to some of the management strategies on their own. However, training will go the extra mile while enabling teachers to effectively manage their classrooms.

Conclusion

Based on findings, this could be concluded that all interviewed novice elementary public-school teachers considered classroom management very important. All of them had an understanding that a teacher could not teach until a class was not properly managed. Several factors were found to be barricading effective classroom management, such as teachers' inapt behavior management, over-crowded classrooms, and shortage of facilities. Teachers are not ignorant of classroom management, however, need proper training to implement evidently successful strategies. Most participants of the study were found to be using activity-based learning. Teachers found peer-tutoring extremely beneficial in managing not just the behaviors but their academics. Some of the teachers advocated maintaining friendly relations with the students, which harbor consequently improving the behaviors of the students.

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