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Classroom Management Challenges Encountered by Novice Teachers: Insights from Experienced Teachers

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Abstract

Classroom management is one of the most prominent challenges that teachers in general, particularly novice teachers, face in teaching. Classroom management means having an environment in class that is controlled by the teacher and s/he directs the whole class towards a common goal or activity. Many principles for classroom management are proposed by different people. Classroom management can be attributed to “*your attitude, intentions and personality and your relationship with the learners*” (Scrivener, 2012, p.54). The main objectives of the research are to identify some techniques and strategies that teachers use to manage their classes effectively and to shed light on the most prominent challenges in classroom management. A mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative is used to obtain experienced teachers’ insights through a questionnaire which is designed and distributed to illustrate how to manage classes successfully. In addition, a semi-structured interview is conducted with novice teachers (who have less than three years of teaching experience). The most prominent findings are: that establishing rapport or healthy relations with students has a positive impact on classroom management, and using reward and punishment techniques for classroom management can set a good standard. It is concluded that for some teachers classroom management means all the students equally participate in and engage with the activities while for others it means all the students sit idly in class.

Keywords: *classroom management, motivation, rapport, reward.*

1. Introduction: Theoretical background

Maintaining control of the classroom is crucial for all teachers. Without it, students’ misbehaviors will negatively impact the way of teaching and will distract other students from learning. Effectively managing the classroom enables teachers to organize, manage, and facilitate the learning process. An important part of classroom management involves “*your attitude, intentions and personality and your relationship with the learners*” (Scrivener, 2012, p.54). In other words, students’ misbehaviors might be a result of the teachers’ teaching procedures including how they conduct themselves in class.

Classroom management is everything that the teacher does and prepares to organize students, space, time, and materials so that student learning can take place (Wong and Wong, 2009). This is important because “*student perceptions of their learning environment and emotions experienced within the subject*” will result in positive performance and achievement. These perceptions include teacher enthusiasm and elaborative instructions, which will eventually boost students’ enjoyment and pride of being and learning in the class (Frenzel, Pekrun & Goetz, 2007, p. 480). In brief, the psychology of the students plays a role in their management in a class. After all, a class can be managed more easily if the students have a positive outlook or perception of it.

As a teacher, you have to abide by some principles to effectively manage your class which entails ensuring a successful process of learning and teaching. The principles are building a good relationship with students, setting rules and procedures, good social relation management, constant vigilance over and monitoring of the students and fostering motivation amongst them (Goetz, et al as stated in Frenzel, Pekrun & Goetz, 2007). In other words, teachers need to create a healthy and safe environment in class and foster motivation and a sense of responsibility along with providing continuous feedback to the students to develop personally and academically.

Everyone wants to be a good and successful teacher. However, very few know the characteristics of effective teachers. Wenglinsky (2000) believed that classroom practices are important to learning. In his research, he found that what happens in the classroom is critical and that how a teacher teaches is important. Practices that promote higher-order thinking and active participation are most successful. The problem is to translate this knowledge into an acceptable evaluation procedure.

Clark (1993) pointed out that “One area that was avoided by most authors was the idea of using student achievement as a measure of effectiveness” (p. 12). Researchers appear to have taken student achievement for granted; they believe that effective teaching techniques would automatically yield positive student achievement. Only recently has research seriously begun to look at achievement data. Both Sanders (1999) and Wenglinsky (2000) asserted that teacher effectiveness is the single biggest contributor to student success. Teacher effectiveness outweighs all other factors, such as class size, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Harmer (2012) proposes eight strategies for successful Classroom Management which are creating an effective learning environment, establishing classroom procedures, creating a motivational environment, making every minute count, keeping everyone engaged, teaching life skills and good learning habits, being creative, and use project design and management techniques. In short, the strategies are about preparation and planning, creating a safe environment, and knowing about teaching and management skills. You can always learn from others’ experiences. Consulting a more experienced teacher can give you a lot of options on how to manage your class more effectively.

Classroom management encompasses all the processes and procedures undertaken by a teacher to increase students' learning outcomes and improve their performance. Peace Corps states that " a *well-managed classroom increases learning because students spend more time on task ... the classroom is work-oriented, but relaxed and pleasant*" (and, pp. 6-7). So, in a well-managed classroom, the students cooperate with the teacher to facilitate the learning and teaching process and make it more work-oriented.

2. Methodology

To get insights from novice teacher who has less than three years of teaching experience, a semi-structured interview is conducted with 15 novice teachers (teachers who have less than three years of teaching experience at the college level). The objective of the interview was to get their opinion about the main challenges they face in classroom management. In addition, a questionnaire is designed and the items are derived from academic sources on how to manage classes effectively. The tool used for data collection is a questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was designed on a Likert scale, i.e. they graded the items on a scale (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree). The items are chosen based on the extensive literature review reading for the most prominent principles of classroom management proposed by other authors and researchers. In addition, we also included an open-ended question in the questionnaire in which we asked experienced teachers to identify the challenges they face when they try to manage their classes. The participants are the English language teachers of the College of Basic Education and College of Education of Salahaddin University – Erbil for the academic year 2024. Their teaching experience ranges from 10 to 25 years. They have been teaching in the English department and their insights might be for language teaching only. Furthermore, to assess the validity and reliability of the questionnaire it was shown to four university lecturers as jury members. They provided valuable notes and modifications to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by using Google Form Office 2010. The link to the Google form was sent to the participants on Viber. Google Forms can analyze the data and give us charts and tables. It also gave us a list of the challenges based on the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire.

3. Findings

The literature review and the interview with the novice teachers helped in finding some of the items for our questionnaire. The following challenges are identified for classroom management:

1. large classes: it is difficult to manage large classes because adult learning centers around helping adults find their voice. When you have about 50 students, which is the case in almost all the colleges of Salahaddin University – Erbil, it is a challenging task to manage the class easily but it is not impossible.

2. lack of facilities (technological infrastructure): To manage classrooms more effectively, teachers need to use a variety of activities that require technological support and visual aids. Lacking basic technological devices like projectors and visual aid cards is a big challenge for teachers.
3. Groupwork: As a teacher, you want to encourage students to work in small groups. However, one of the drawbacks of group work is losing control over the class. While doing group work, the teacher has to maintain a visual presence in class and monitor the group work activities closely and actively.
4. lack of cooperation with other teachers: classroom management is a difficult task and requires teachers to work together and assist each other. Nowadays, teachers are working individually most of the time and forget that if they cooperate, they can accomplish so much more. Just having another teacher with you, especially when you are doing a group work activity or any other activity, can be of great assistance for you to manage the class better.
5. students' different levels: another challenge of adult learning is the individual differences of the students. As a teacher, we have to take that into consideration when we are delivering a lecture or doing any in-class activity.

In the College of Education, the average number of students per class is (45 – 50). It is very difficult for instructors to manage their classes when they have a large number of students. The students cannot work in groups, are not given enough time to think and participate, and the gap of diversity is even more. All these have negative implications for classroom management by the teachers.

Based on the insights and responses of the participants of the questionnaire, we arrived at the following results and findings:

Being friendly can help teachers manage the class better.

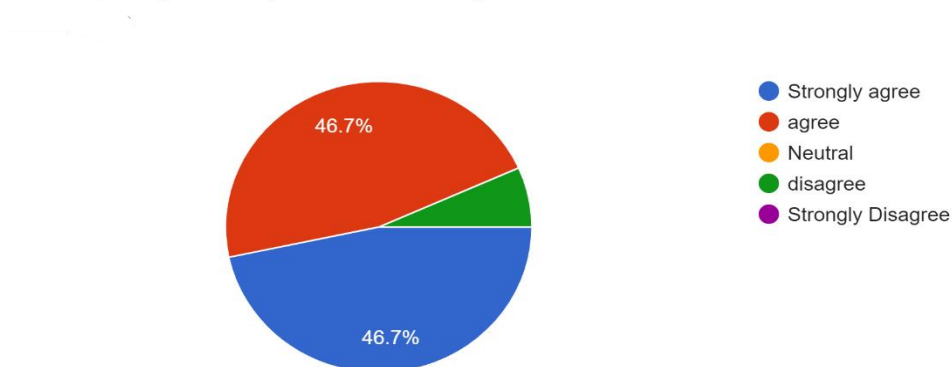


Figure 1 being friendly with students

The majority of the participants (93%) think that being friendly with students and having a good relationship with them can facilitate the management of the class. It makes sense that students respect the class more if the teacher has a strong relationship with them. However, a few of them (7% of the participants) disagree with that view and think that being friendly with students is not helpful for classroom management and even makes the students take advantage of the class and the teacher. As a teacher, you have to draw a line and know the extent to which you can befriend students. The students, on the other hand, need to recognize the lines drawn by the teacher and respect them. In short, teachers are required to keep a professional relationship with the students to arrive at better performance as students would be encouraged to participate more and perform better if they have a good relation with the teacher.

The use of communicative approach, which focuses on students' engagement and participation can help teachers manage their classes better.

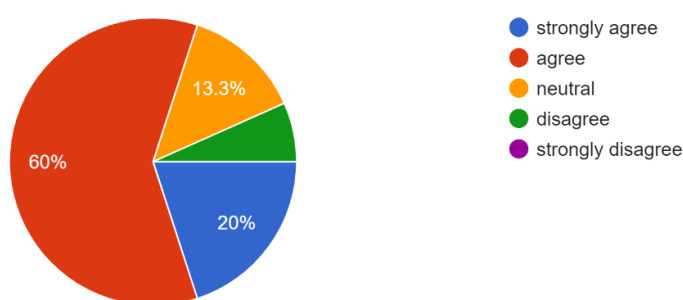


Figure 2 the use of a communicative approach

The results show that % 60 of the teachers agree with the idea that the communicative approach helps them keep students focused on the in-class activities and not give them time to be distracted. When there is nothing to do in class, the students get distracted by other small things like friends. And when two students are talking, the whole class gets distracted. As a teacher, you want your students to feel that they are part of the class. This sense of ownership makes the students feel responsible and pay attention more. However, a small percentage (about 7%) believe a communicative approach cannot help them in their classroom management. There are some modules, like grammar and syntax, that do not necessarily require students' participation that much, though it is up to the teacher to decide what technique he uses in delivering his class. In brief, the communicative approach of teaching focuses on the element of communication which requires active participation of students. The communicative approach is a useful tool; if it is used properly, it can help teachers manage students and the whole class better by engaging all the students with the in-class activities.

If you prepare well, you can manage and control your class well.

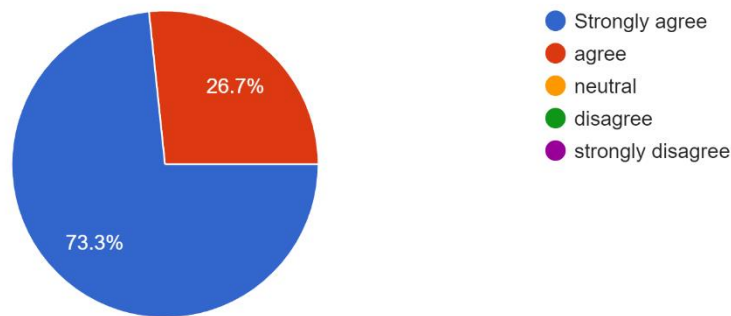


Figure 3 teachers' preparation

All the participants think that the key to successful classroom management is preparation. Preparation by the teachers means having a lesson plan that includes the objectives and activities along with a time management scheme. If teachers prepare well, the class time goes smoothly. The students will have no chance to get distracted. Preparation helps the teacher plan every detail for every minute. On the other hand, if a teacher does not prepare well, his/her classes will be chaotic and students cannot be controlled in a chaotic class. In other words, if a teacher has a clear plan for the class, it can be used as a roadmap and the students will be given a chance to be distracted.

Groupwork is one of the best techniques to get all the students engaged and keep the class under control.

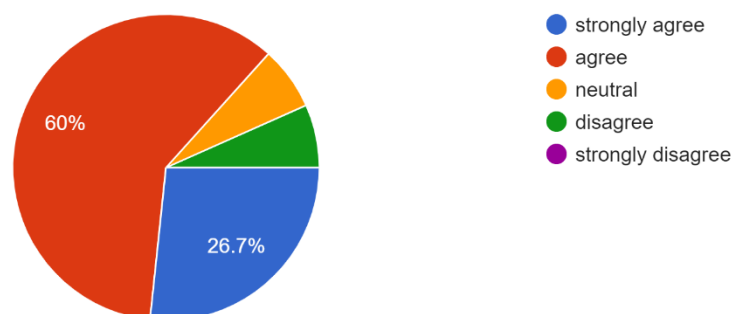


Figure 4 groupwork

Groupwork keeps the students focused and “busy” with the activities. However, the group work needs to be engaging. In other words, the teachers have to plan and prepare the activities well. As a teacher, you have to monitor the students when they are doing the group work as not all the students have the same level of knowledge and even mentality to work in a group. Group work sometimes motivates students to be undisciplined if it is not prepared well and if the students are not monitored and guided

through. That is why some teachers disagree with having group work. In brief, groupwork is a two-way street that leads to creating a controlled classroom environment if it is planned and monitored well by the teacher; or it can result in creating more disruption in class if it is used by the teacher just to kill some time in the class which is usually the case when there is no preparation or plan by the teacher.

Teachers need to build a connection and relationship with students

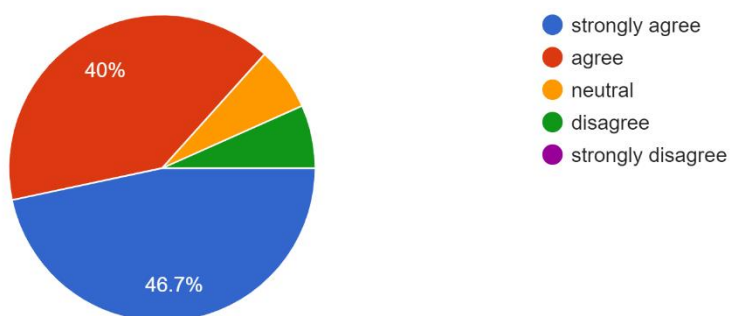


Figure 5 Maintaining a good relationship

It is always good to build a connection and relationship with the students. When there is a relationship, students try to keep and avoid the things that put that relationship in danger. However, as a student and teacher, you have to know the boundaries and try not to cross. The relationship starts with knowing the students' names and something about them. It also extends to outside the class and greetings and some light jokes. In short, teachers are required to build a rapport and relationship with students that can have a positive impact on the whole teaching and learning process.

Teachers have to reward the students who do the required tasks well to encourage others.

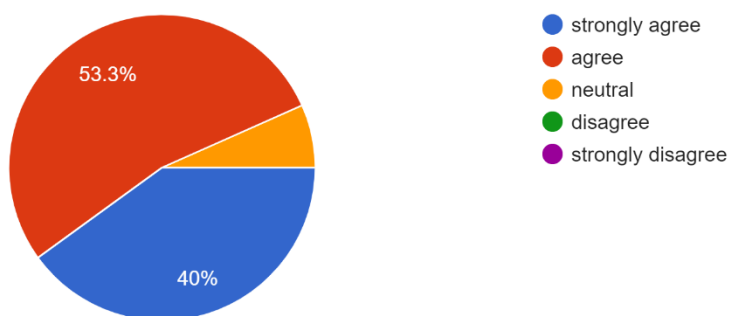


Figure 6 Rewarding and recognizing good work

You want to teach students accountability and taking responsibility. You have to lead by example. Hence, almost all the respondents believe rewards can help in classroom management. Rewarding can be giving marks, a treat, or any other thing. Verbal encouragement and support can be regarded as rewards too. In other words, rewards can take many forms varying from a verbal encouragement to physical gifts and giving extra marks to the students.

Teachers have to hold students accountable for breaking the rules (ground / punish them).

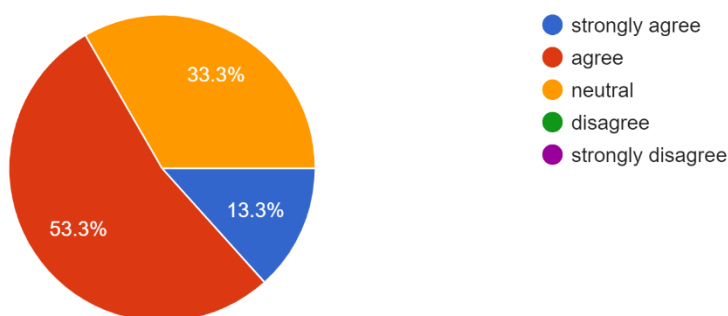


Figure 7 Punishment of misbehavior

Reward and punishment are the two sides of the same coin. When a student gets a reward for doing class activities and having good manners. The opposite is applicable too. He/she gets a punishment for bad manners and not abiding by the rules and class etiquette. However, compared to the reward, fewer respondents believe in the effectiveness of punishment. Interestingly, a third of the respondents (33.3%) were not sure of the effectiveness of the use of punishment as a technique to manage classes better.

The teachers need to give different in-class activities to accommodate for students' different learning styles.

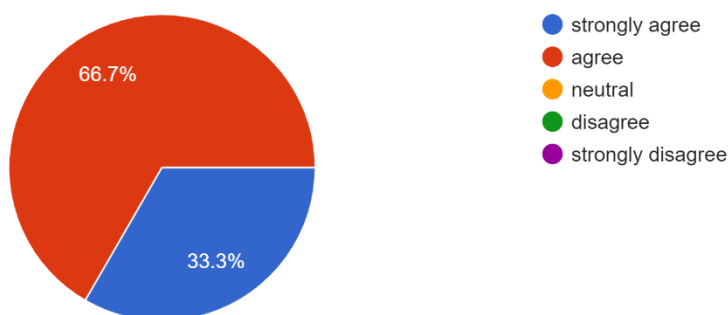


Figure 8 various in-class activities

Sometimes the class is difficult to manage because the students have different levels and different learning styles. It is always a good idea to have a variety of activities in class to keep all or almost all the students engaged in class. It is a lot of hard work for the teacher as it requires a lot of effort and time. However, the result is worth it. The class would be more engaging and the students would be more motivated.

4. Discussions:

Based on the findings of the study, creating and maintaining a good relationship with students can be a good facilitator for classroom management. Like parenting, teachers need to discipline students sometimes, especially when they are not behaving or performing as is expected. Encouragement is another key factor for effective management of a class. It can be verbal compliments, giving candy, giving extra marks, or any other way that motivates the students to do better. Another way to manage the class better is by having group work activities that require all the students to participate. However, group work requires careful planning, execution, and monitoring from the teacher.

5. Conclusions

Throughout this study, the following conclusions have been drawn:

1. Classroom management is an important component of teaching and learning. If the classroom is managed successfully, the teaching and learning process goes productively and successfully.
2. Some strategies can help teachers control and manage their classes better. One strategy is planning, which means the teacher prepares activities for the whole class period. Another strategy is building a professional rapport with the students, but the teacher needs to draw the line of the boundary and respect it. The third strategy is different in class activities.
3. Many challenges can be found that adhere to classroom management. The challenges are: large classes, having not enough time, or poor seating. Groupwork helps teachers to manage their classes, though, the fixed seats can be one of the challenges of groupwork.
4. Talking with the students and giving them rewards and punishments are always good gestures toward building a healthy rapport between the students and the teachers.
5. Classroom management is a skill that can be acquired and nurtured through observation and reading constantly about best practices to manage classes effectively.

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