

Managing Elementary Classrooms: Experiences of Novice Public-Schools Teachers regarding Behavioral Challenges of Students

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Abstract

Novice teachers are those who have teacher education, but they are new in the teaching profession. This study aimed to develop an understanding of the experiences of novice public-school teachers regarding student's behavioral challenges in classroom management. Moreover, this study explored the variety of inappropriate behaviors that students exhibit in classrooms. In addition, challenges teachers experienced in managing these behaviors of students and the associated teachers' problems. A qualitative semi-structured interview research design was used in this study, and a purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. The data were collected from 20 novice elementary public-school teachers in Lahore who had less than three years of experience. The results of this study highlighted the inappropriate behaviors of students such as talking, telling lies, using foul language, making noise, bullying, doing naughty activities, showing aggression, stealing, and physically fighting with other students. The teachers used a variety of techniques to manage these behaviors, such as giving moral lessons, separating the naughty child, and shuffling the seating arrangement of students to keep them involved in lessons. The problems caused by these behaviors while managing class were wastage of time, other students got disturbed, and the attention of the teacher was diverted.

Key Words: *Novice Teachers, Classroom Management, Behavioral Challenges, Public-Elementary Schools, Semi-Structured-Interviews.*

Introduction

Novice teachers are new in schools, and they are at a stage where they learn classroom management in actual classrooms (Burns & Darling-Hammond, 2014). In so doing, they experience many challenges in the management of class (Ahmad et al., 2012) since they are new to the classroom setting and they experience the swim-and-swing time in their early days (Awan, 2015). They consider they are given

difficult classes, low achieving classes, and classes that have students with more behavioral challenges (Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). They have a perception that high-achieving classes are given to experienced teachers, and those teachers experience fewer challenges in classroom management (Akdağ & Haser, 2016).

Classroom management is an essential skill in teaching (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020a, 2020b). Through this skill, teachers can create an environment of learning in the class (Hue & Li, 2008). Classroom management is usually dependent upon all the activities that a teacher carries out in class to engage students and to promote the learning of students (Cangelosi, 2013). Classroom management is depended upon the skill of teachers that how they organize learning, plan and present a lesson and how they include all students and engage them in the process of learning (Laslett & Smith, 2002). Thus, classroom management is establishing an environment of learning in which a teacher has the techniques to successfully manage behavioral and other challenges that occur during the process of learning (Collins & O'Brien, 2011).

Novice teachers experience many challenges in classroom management in their early days. Especially, these challenges are regarding physical facilities in the school, administration-related support, students' behavioral challenges, and teachers' self-created challenges in the classroom (Husain, Gulzar, & Aqeel, 2016; Raba, 2016; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Teachers in Pakistan also experience the same challenges (Ayub, Hussain, & Ghulamullah, 2018; Iqbal, 2012). Generally, those challenges are related to physical facilities in schools (Ahmad et al., 2012), lack of administration support by the principal and other non-teaching staff (Alwi, Rauf, & Haider, 2015), students behavioral challenges (Batool, Ali, & Mehmood, 2017; Butt & Khalid, 2015) and teachers' self-created challenges which they create through their own behaviors (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2019).

Twenty-first-century teachers are experiencing huge challenges in the behavioral management of students. Managing the classroom while handling a variety of behaviors of students is nearly impossible for novice teachers (Grant, 2017). A study done in Pakistan found at least 35% of students of each class have behavioral problems and both teachers and parents are afraid of these increasing numbers of behavioral challenges (Maitla, Joiya, Yasin, Naveed, & Waqas, 2018). Teachers' most of the time in class is spent in managing the difficult behaviors of students (Al-Zu'bi, 2013). Generally, these behaviors of students are categorized as attention-seeking, power-seeking, revenge-seeking, and behaviors of inadequacy to learn and perform (Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 2013). These are disruptive behaviors that make classroom management difficult (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014).

This study is conducted to explore the classroom management-related challenges novice teachers experience in their initial days regarding managing the behaviors of students. It is essential to explore which challenges of student behaviors they have mostly experienced, how they have managed those behaviors, and what are challenges they experienced in classroom management because of these behavioral challenges. This study is guided by the following research objectives:

- (1) To identify students' behavioral challenges experienced by novice teachers during classroom management;
- (2) To explore how novice teachers handle students' behavioral challenges during classroom management;

Literature Review

Teaching in the twenty-first century is more difficult than before because now the teachers have to manage the classroom with more variety of behaviors of students (Guerriero, 2017). The studies established that there are more behavioral challenges of students during classroom management to manage than before (Sullivan et al., 2014; Wolff, Jarodzka, den Bogert, & Boshuizen, 2016). The global statistics show that in America, 37-39% of students have behavioral challenges (Jaffee, Harrington, Cohen, & Moffitt, 2005). In Pakistan, teachers and parents reported 35% of students have behavioral challenges (Syed, 2009). In America, 35% of novice teachers left the job because of the behavioral challenges of students (Ferguson, Frost, & Hall, 2012).

Frequent difficult behaviors of students are generally attention-seeking attitudes. It is found that noise and constant talking are experienced by novice teachers, and they consider almost 30% of students of each class create noise (Maitla et al., 2018), and they consider noise as the biggest classroom management challenge (Koptelov, Manninger, Sullivan, & Williams, 2015). Peer victimization is common in elementary classes (Leadbeater & Hoglund, 2009).

The teachers have to spend a lot of their time stopping students from victimizing any week student (Hoglund, Hosan, & Leadbeater, 2012). Students seek sympathy in class, and convincing those students to study is very difficult as they exaggerate trivial matters and do not want to study (Beaty-O'Ferrall, Green, & Hanna, 2010). Naughty students distract the attention of both teacher and students from learning to fun making and making those students learn seriously is very difficult (Merç & Subaşı, 2015)

Students have power-seeking behaviors, and they want to show others that they are powerful in so many ways. Arguing, challenging, and disobeying students are increasing in classrooms (Gilliam, 2005). Those students argue and challenge the teacher (Johns, Crowley, & Guetzloe, 2005), and managing their behaviors timely and indulging them in a leading role is necessary (Johns et al., 2005). The lack of attention from the family might have made them behave oddly and show their power to the teacher (Akin, Yildirim, & Goodwin, 2016).

Students also show revenge-seeking behaviors in class. They are blunt/harsh, insult other students, involve in the destruction of property, and bully other students (Akin et al., 2016). The students did not know the consequences of their revenge-seeking behaviors. Managing them in class while teaching is challenging, and telling that these behaviors will isolate them in social circles need an extra bit of effort of the teacher (Barkauskaitė & Meškauskienė, 2017).

Twenty percent of students in each class show feelings of inadequacy in the classroom (Merç & Subaşı, 2015). They are uninterested in learning, unwilling to participate, refuse to do new things, have low confidence, and want to be left alone in class (Merç & Subaşı, 2015). Involving those students in the process of learning is very difficult since they do not have the urge to learn, and they are stubborn in their beliefs (Mbuva, 2017; Perrachione, Rosser, & Petersen, 2008).

Searches for studies related to teachers' management of behavioral challenges of students conducted in the Pakistani context yielded very few studies.



Table 1 summarizes the findings of the studies in the Pakistani context

Authors	Aim	Research design	Research methods	Setting	Major findings
Ayub et al. (2018)	This study aimed to explore reasons for work stress among primary school teachers.	Mixed methods research	The data were randomly collected from 200 primary school teachers. Qualitative data was collected from focused group discussions.	20 Schools in Quetta	Most of the teachers experienced stress because of the behavioral management of students and high paper workload. They found it difficult to manage their classes because of students' disciplinary problems.
Batool et al. (2017)	This study aimed to explore the effect of corporal punishments on students and the reason for using corporal punishments in classrooms.	Mixed methods research	The data was collected from 68 teachers through the non-probability sample.	5 Schools from Rawalpindi	It was found that the teachers still used corporal punishments to discipline students. The teachers reported that due to the high workload and overcrowded classes, they used corporal punishments.
Butt and Khalid (2015)	This study aimed to review the studies conducted upon behavioral challenges of students from 1970 to 2014. This study reviewed the challenges of students below 18 years.	Meta-analysis	Forty-five research papers were included in this study. All the research papers were published in Pakistani research journals, and all the studies were conducted on Pakistani students.	Pakistan	The research trends showed that the students had increasing aggressive behaviors, especially ADHD behaviors were on the rise.
Dayan, Perveen, and Khan (2018)	This study aimed to explore the challenges that novice teachers experience during the transition period from the teacher education program to actual classroom teaching.	Qualitative case study	Sixteen participants participated in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used. 8 participants from each private and public schools.	Peshawar	Teachers from both public and private schools reported challenges in the behavioral management of students. They reported the challenges had increased in classroom management because of the inability to manage the discipline in class.
Ghazi, Shahzada, Tariq, and Khan (2013)	The purpose of this study was to explore the disruptive behaviors of secondary school teachers which the teachers experience during classroom management.	Quantitative descriptive study	Multi-stage sampling was used. Data were collected from 500 teachers.	The study conducted in KPK, and the data was collected from 8 districts and 213 secondary schools of KPK.	The results of the study demonstrated that the disruptive behaviors of students are increasing in secondary schools. The teachers consider classroom management difficult because of these behaviors.



Hussein and Vostanis (2013)	The purpose of this study was to explore the effect and the importance of behavior management training to teachers teaching in the schools of Pakistan.	Mixed methods research design pre- and post-test	Thirty primary teachers participated in the study. Random sampling was used.	Five schools from Karachi, Pakistan.	The result of the study showed that the teachers considered the behavioral management of students very important. They emphasized that training should be given to teachers to help their ability to manage the behaviors of students.
Khan (2014)	The purpose of this study was to explore the relevance of parents' mental health with their children.	Quantitative study	Random sampling was employed. 80 parents and 80 children aging 12-16 participated in the study.	This study was conducted in Lahore.	The findings of the study reveal that the children of parents who have some mental health problems suffer from mental health, and this not only disturbed their education rather they have social adjustment problems in life.
Maitla et al. (2018)	The purpose of this study to investigate behavioral prevalence in elementary students.	Quantitative study	A convenient sampling technique was employed. Data were collected from 550 students. All the participants were male, and age was 14-15.	The study was conducted in two schools in Khanpur, KPK.	The "survey reports a high prevalence of behavioral disorders among school-going children in Khanpur, Pakistan" (p. 62).
Saleem et al. (2019)	The purpose of this study was to explore the self-created challenges in classroom management.	Basic qualitative research design	A purposive sampling technique was used, and 20 participants participated in this study.	Elementary schools of Lahore	The results of the study highlighted that teachers had a problem in the behavioral management of students, and they could not control their anger and created challenges of classroom management for themselves.
Shamamatus-Sabah, Gilani, Kamal, and Batool (2012)	The purpose of this study was to explore the effect of chaos in-home on the behaviors of students.	Quantitative research design	The data were collected from 150 primary school children and their mothers. A random sampling technique was used.	101 participants were from Rawalpindi and 49 from Lahore	The result of the study indicated that the children who had chaos in their homes had more aggressive and harsher behaviors, and those students suffered emotionally, socially, and academically. The gender of the child did not contribute in this context.
Suleman, Aslam, Ali, Hussain, and Ambreen (2013)	The purpose of this study was to explore the techniques secondary school teachers used to manage disruptive behaviors of students.	Quantitative research design	One hundred forty-five secondary school teachers and 920 secondary school students participated in the study. A random sampling technique was used.	The data were collected from all the secondary schools of Karak.	The findings of the study showed that teachers tried to use various strategies to manage disruptive behaviors of students. However, they faced behavioral challenges more because they did not develop class roles at the start of class, and teachers did not inform parents about disruptive behaviors of their children.

It is evident from the literature cited and displayed above that the empirical studies in the Pakistani context have not addressed the experiences of novice public-school teachers regarding students' challenges in managing behavioral issues in elementary classrooms in Lahore.

Novice teachers need to understand that the traditional strategies of classroom management cannot be used for managing the behaviors of students (Bluestein, 2014). As the teachers used to deal with students harshly, yelling at them and hitting them to manage their disruptive behaviors (Bluestein, 2014). Now, the teacher has to develop a positive learning environment in the class, and they need to motivate students to learn (Byrne, 2017). The teachers need to adopt various strategies to keep the students engaged towards learning and to handle their behaviors in such a way that other students do not get disturbed by them (Flower, McKenna, & Haring, 2017).

The novice teachers need to teach the classroom management strategies which help them in the behavioral management of students. Generally, novice teachers need to have an understanding of the chronological development of children, the changing needs, and the requirements of children by their age (Epstein & Willhite, 2017) as teachers spend most of their time managing the behaviors of students in classrooms (Al-Zu'bi, 2013; Shamama-tus-Sabah et al., 2012).

Methods

A qualitative semi-structured interview research design was used. Qualitative studies are an attempt to understand the meanings individuals give to their experiences (Creswell, 2007). The semi-structured interview research design was employed to explore the behavioral challenges of students which novice elementary public-school teachers in Lahore faced during classroom management and how they gave meaning to their experiences which they had while managing the difficult behaviors of students, how they had managed those behaviors of students in the class. The constructivist approach helped the researcher to explore the diverse meaning-making of the participants (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2019). The interaction between reality and experience made each participant gave meaning to their own experiences, which they had while managing the challenging behaviors during classroom management (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the individual who had experienced a particular phenomenon and had direct experience (Patton, 2015). Twenty novice teachers who had less than three years of teaching experience in public elementary schools in Lahore participated in the study.

The first researcher (AS) developed a semi-structured interview guide in collaboration with the other two authors. The research sought consent from the principal of the school and the novice teacher to conduct their interviews to explore the behavioral challenges they have experienced during classroom management. The interviews were detailed and in-depth (Mills & Gay, 2016). The interviews aimed to explore the behavioral challenges novice teachers experienced, how they manage those behaviors of students, what problems were caused because of those behaviors of students.

Inductive content analysis was used to analyze the interview data (Kyngäs, 2020). The first researcher conducted the interviews, then transcribed those interviews. The first researcher read each interview and open coded all the relevant data (Creswell, 2014). Similar codes were grouped in one place. This grouping of data was meant "to reduce the number of categories by collapsing those that are similar or dissimilar into broader higher order categories" (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008, p. 111). At the final stage, various themes extracted from a cluster were described with actual responses as evidence (Mills & Gay, 2016).

Findings

The inappropriate behaviors of students

The majority of participants expressed that they had experienced these behaviors: Talking, telling lies, using foul language, making noise, bullying, doing naughty activities, and showing aggression, stealing, and physically fighting with other students. They witnessed these kinds of students in each class, and managing these behaviors of students was most difficult for them. As one of the participants reported,

A teacher faces behavioral problems when he/she aims to complete his topic, but the students do not allow him to do it. Some students prick pencils at each other. Some stand in their seats. Some students use foul language. Some are very aggressive; they overreact. Some students bully each other. The naughty students make fun. (Teacher 8)

Another participant stated,

Yes, we have all sorts of students: Students who prick pencils to others, students who make noise, students who are loud and so on. We have aggressive students and naughty students.... Sometimes, one student does a funny thing; the other students follow that activity. (Teacher 17)

Few participants elaborated that early childhood students wept, made noise, and complained about each other. They claimed that small children did not have major disruptive behaviors, nor were they found to be more aggressive; rather, they wept on trivial matters and now and then complained about each other. As one participant described,

These children are very small, and they generally do not show very disturbing behaviors. They generally make a lot of noise in the class. Yes, I have students who steal. Many of them snatch things from each other and weep on petty matters. I have a child who weeps a lot. (Teacher 1)

A participant reported that her school was in a vicinity where both Muslim and Christian students studied together. She expressed that students fought with each other on religion. The Christian students emphasized that they did not want to study Islamiat. She emphasized managing religious fighting had been very difficult for her. As the participant narrated,

Our school is in a vicinity where both Christian and Muslim students come to study. The students fight about their religion a lot. When a Muslim child says anything to a Christian child, he complains that he is saying about my religion. Secondly, Christian students do not want to study Islamiat. The students create problems on this matter. (Teacher 16)

Management of inappropriate behaviors

Most participants managed the inappropriate behaviors of students by giving them moral lessons in class, giving them attention, and making those students participate actively in the learning activities. Although they faced difficulty in managing inappropriate behaviors, they tried their level best to engage the students in learning. They separated the naughty pupil and made him/her sit in the first row, and kept them involved. As one participant elaborated,

First of all, I give a moral lecture to students and tell them that if they misbehave, then nobody else will suffer. They themselves will suffer. I deal with the behaviors with patience and with love. When the teacher behaves harshly, the students become stubborn. (Teacher 6)

Another participant described,

I think the best way to control all these minds is to keep them involved in studies. I try to keep them busy. I give tasks to naughty students or make groups of students so that they work with each other in groups. I made a naughty pupil sit in the first row so that I give them more attention. (Teacher 17)

Very few of the participants dealt with students by showing cold behavior. They described that there is no need that each teacher would manage the classroom by exhibiting anger. However, the display of cold behavior or staring has been more successful in their case. As one participant described,

It is very difficult to manage all these behaviors. You have to exhibit cold behavior in class, so the students do not gather the courage to misbehave. Cold behavior means talking to the point, not allowing students to get free with you or ask personal questions. At the start, I used to get free with students, and I realized I was not able to manage the class. The students used to be out of control. I have experienced a lot of issues. The strict teachers were managing their classes better than I. (Teacher 4)

A participant expressed that he used to manage the behavior of students in class by shuffling them at the start of class. He emphasized that by utilizing the first five minutes of class in arranging the students and by not allowing friends to sit with each other, they could not disturb the discipline in class. As one participant believed,

I do the shuffling of student's seats at the start of class. Spending these five minutes shuffling and separating friends from each other help me in classroom management. Sometimes when I enter the class, a student informs me that this child has done this with me outside the class. Then I try to make the student understand that this is not right. (Teacher 15)

Problems in managing inappropriate behaviors

Most participants expressed that because of inappropriate behaviors of students, the time of class was wasted in disciplining those students, and both students and the teacher could not concentrate upon teaching and learning. Even the students who wanted to study could not study because the tempo of the class was usually disturbed by some misbehaving, naughty, and irritating students. Both students and the teacher were irritated by this exhibition of behavioral disturbance by any student. As one participant stated, "You cannot deliver your lesson properly. Other students are irritated by that child. The attention of both students and teacher is diverted away from learning. The discipline of the class is ruined" (Teacher 3). Another participant described,

While managing these students, the time of the teacher is wasted, he cannot give attention to the rest of the class, and the target topic of the teacher is not completed during that time. The more you have such students, the more you have challenges in your class. (Teacher 10)

A participant believed that inappropriate behaviors of students did not disturb the discipline in class, and he dealt with disturbing students successfully, and the other students in class concentrate upon studies. He did not allow any student to disturb the whole class. As one participant reported, "I don't think that there is any problem in this. When I make a child understand what wrong he has done, the rest of class keeps on working" (Teacher 14).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicated that all the novice teachers had experienced challenges related to students' behavior in classroom management as studies suggested that most of the time of novice teachers was spent in behavioral management in class (Al-Zu'bi, 2013). The reason for experiencing more behavioral challenges was they lacked knowledge and skills of disciplining the classroom (Wolff et al., 2016; Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2015). A study done in Australia pointed out that novice teachers considered behavioral management as the most difficult task in classroom management (Egeberg, McConney, & Price, 2016). In this regard, Pakistani teachers' challenges worsened because they did not have the support of psychologists in schools (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016).

The findings of the study highlighted these behavioral challenges experienced by novice teachers: talking, telling lies, using foul language, making noise, bullying, doing naughty activities, and showing aggression, stealing, and physically fighting with other students. Talking and making noise have been found the most common behavior of students. 30% of the challenges are related to talking and making noise (Merç & Subaşı, 2015). Teacher's time is spent in creating silence in class (Cangelosi, 2013). Naughty students have been found to be involved in some activity to distract the attention of other students in the class (Beaty-O'Ferrall et al., 2010). A study done in Pakistan indicated that students involved in physical fights or destruction of property were taking revenge from others (Batoool et al., 2017). In addition, bullying was common in the classroom where the bullies were enjoying the suffering of other pupils in class (Merç & Subaşı, 2015), which disturbed the discipline in class (Maitla et al., 2018). The habit of telling lies, complaining, and aggression made classroom management difficult for the teacher (Muhammad & Iqbal, 2015).

Thus, it is essential to educate novice teachers about the behavioral management of students in the classroom (Zuckerman, 2007). The knowledge and skill of behavioral management help the teacher in managing the classroom effectively (Wolff et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Thus, this could be concluded that all novice teachers have faced behavioral challenges during classroom management. These were the common challenges they experienced: excessive talking, telling lies, using foul language, making noise, bullying, doing naughty activities, showing aggression, stealing, and physically fighting with other students. The majority of teachers managed these behaviors of students by giving moral lessons, giving extra attention to those students, and keeping them involved in their studies. In addition, strategies such as showing cold behaviors to students and shuffling students before the start of the class were successful strategies in managing behavior challenges of students.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

This study has several strengths, including an in-depth exploration of the experiences of novice public-school teachers regarding challenges in managing behavioral issues in elementary classrooms in Lahore.

This study employed semi-structured interviews with 20 novice teachers that allowed not only the identification of students' behavioral challenges experienced by novice teachers during classroom management but also an exploration of how novice teachers handle students' behavioral challenges while managing classrooms.

However, the results of this qualitative interview study should be interpreted with caution because the sample is small, and it would not be appropriate to assume that similar results would come from all novice public-school teachers in a similar situation. The findings of this study cannot be generalized to all novice public-school teachers in schools in Lahore since the data were collected from the purposefully selected elementary public schools in Lahore. Therefore, it is suggested that this study can be extended by conducting a survey study with novice teachers of primary schools, colleges, and universities in order to explore the challenges novice teachers experience in their initial days. In addition, this study could be conducted on novice teachers working in private schools in different regions of Pakistan in order to explore the level of challenges related to students' behavioral challenges and challenges teachers were experiencing during classroom management.

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