



Examining Pedagogical Challenges: Novice Teachers' Classroom Management Experiences in Urban Public Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the classroom management challenges novice teachers experience in their first year of teaching. In addition, novice teachers experience challenges because of the differences they face in the theory they have studied and the actual class situation that they have to manage. For this purpose, a basic qualitative research design was employed, and in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with novice elementary-secondary school teachers using purposive sampling. The novice teachers who attained a degree in teacher education did their first job in public elementary schools in Lahore and had less than two years of experience, which was the sample of this study. It was found that the majority of the teachers opted for this profession by choice and were satisfied with their job. It was found that they have learned classroom management in teacher education programs, such as developing lesson plans, managing class routines and class rules, monitoring students' work, and involving students through class participation and activities. The novice teachers developed class rules, prepared in class with content preparation and planned activities, established rapport with students, and roamed around students to monitor their learning. However, novice teachers faced challenges related to students' behaviors because of high-class strength, unwillingness to learn, disruptive students, and frequent absenteeism from class. Novice teachers could be facilitated by providing support to address these challenges.

Introduction

Classroom management is the collection of classroom activities that maximizes learning opportunities and a conducive environment and reduces the chances of distractive activities during teaching and learning (Burden, 2020). The management of students' behaviors, time, space, and teaching learning activities (Byrne, 2017). Classroom management provides more opportunities for students to learn and perform. The ability to manage students' behaviors and actions and keep students involved in studies is effective classroom management (Aus, Jögi, Poom-Valickis, Eisenschmidt, & Kikas, 2017). Classroom management is a collection of planned activities, and the teacher executes those activities while engaging the students and managing their behaviors to achieve learning goals (Wolff, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2021).

Novice teachers are those who have just entered the teaching profession and are learning to teach (Collins & O'Brien, 2011). They are the ones who have generally studied teaching and learning in teacher education programs and are trying to implement those skills in students (Tarosa, 2020; Voss, Wagner, Klusmann, Trautwein, & Kunter, 2017). In this journey of teaching in an actual classroom, they need support from the school principal and senior teachers who can help them in planning, learning, and executing the lesson successfully in the classroom while managing the everyday challenges of students and infrastructure that they might have to face (Adamu, Okereke, & Hamidu, 2022; Babadjanova, 2020).

Classroom management is the most effective skill in teaching and learning, but it has been observed that novice teachers experience more challenges in managing their classes because of more impulsive behaviors that they demonstrate in classes to control the disruptive behaviors of students and to teach students more effectively (Cakmak, Gunduz, & Emstad, 2019; Hannan, Russell, Takahashi, & Park, 2015). This pressure of proving themselves as more strict and effective teachers increases their challenges in teaching in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Novice teachers understand the real class teaching experiences by getting assistance from the principal and senior teachers (Tahir, Ahmed, & Qadeer, 2020). Practically planning the class teaching, keeping in view the general disruptions of behaviors of students and natural incidents, and managing them with wisdom rather than aggressive behaviors (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2019; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Many classroom-management-related challenges that novice and experienced teachers experience during teaching, such as lack of administrative support from their school administration, especially the principal, and nonteaching staff, make teaching difficult for them (Saleem, Qureshi & Zia, 2021; Stephanie, Too, & Kipng'etich, 2017). Physical facilities in classrooms, like comfortable furniture, spacious classrooms, audio/video aids, and utilities like electricity, water, and sanitation, are the basic facilities that facilitate the process of teaching and learning in school. Teachers experience physical facilities-related challenges in many schools, particularly in developing countries (Arshad, Qamar, & Gulzar, 2018; Jahan, 2017; Saleem, Muhammad, & Qureshi, 2023; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Novice teachers experience challenges in managing the behaviors of students because the disruptive behaviors of students make classroom management difficult for them (Mahvar, Farahani, & Aryankhesal, 2018), especially when students show aggressive, bullying, complaining, arguing, stealing, and joking behaviors which are very difficult to manage (Maitla, Joiya, Yasin, Naveed, & Waqas, 2018; Nash, Schlösser, & Scarr, 2016; Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2021).

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges novice public school teachers face in teaching secondary public schools in Lahore. Moreover, it explores how they managed those challenges.

Objectives of the study

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. To explore the challenges of novice public secondary school teachers, experience in classroom management
2. To explore the strategies novice public secondary school teachers use while managing their classes.

Conceptual framework

Novice teachers are new in the field of teaching, so they face a lot of challenges in managing the classroom (Ahmed, Faizi, & Akbar, 2020; Lang, 2013). The theory of challenge and support promotes that when individuals experience challenges, they need support (Sanford, 2017). In this study, the challenges novice teachers experienced and how they cope with those challenges with the help of support from administration and support staff are investigated to see how novice teachers managed the classroom management-related challenges.

Literature Review

Classroom management is the most essential skill of a novice teacher (Senom, Zakaria, & Ahmad Shah, 2013). No teacher can survive without the skill of classroom management since they have to teach in real classrooms and have to manage the everyday challenges happening in those classrooms (Zhong & Craig, 2020). In a study conducted in Pakistan, it was reported that novice teachers considered themselves struggling because of the immense pressure of managing their classes effectively and proving themselves to be well-equipped with the skills of classroom management (Awan, 2015). It is experienced that novice teachers try to practice the skills of ideal teachers in their classes to establish themselves at a very early stage of their career (Babadjanova, 2020), but they experience more challenges in doing so because of the idealist strategies they want to implement in their classes and show rigidity in applying those strategies (Ayub, Hussain, & Ghulamullah, 2018; Barkauskaitė & Meškauskienė, 2017).

According to Lang (2013), classroom management is divided into three different action plans: people management, instructional management, and behavior management. The way teachers communicate and interact with their students makes them follow their people management. The way a teacher proceeds with the process of teaching and learning is instructional management, which means managing the curriculum and activities to teach it more effectively. How do teachers manage the disruptive behaviors of their students, which behaviors do they deliberately avoid responding to, and when do they give some response related to behavior management (Babadjanova, 2020; Lang, 2013). In a study, novice teachers report that classroom management is not only managing the learning of students of the students, but also classroom management managing the class atmosphere and modifying the behaviors of the students (Pas, Cash, O'Brennan, Debnam, & Bradshaw, 2015).

Novice teachers who move from learning to teaching in the classroom are mostly unprepared for the real-time challenges they have to experience in the actual classroom (Miles & Knipe, 2018). This might be because teacher education programs do not link the theory to actual classroom

situations (Zhong & Craig, 2020). This gap in theory and practice increases the level of stress in novice teachers, and they experience more challenges in teaching (Husain, Gulzar, & Aqeel, 2016; Kozikoğlu, 2018). Novice teachers are trying to attain success in classroom management, and they are under pressure to survive in the workplace (Cakmak et al., 2019; Jahan, 2017). At this stage, they need the support and mentoring of experienced teachers to help them survive in the actual classroom successfully (Azhar & Kayani, 2017; Eggleston, 2018).

Novice teachers mostly face these challenges in classroom management, which are related to administrative support from the school principal and administrative staff (Raba, 2016; Ayesha Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020). Secondly, there is a lack of physical facilities in classrooms like furniture/spacious classrooms and water/sanitation (Baafi, 2020; Ramli, Zain, Campus, Chepa, & Bharu, 2018; A Saleem et al., 2023). Managing the behaviors of the students, such as talking, making noise, doing naughty activities, showing aggressive behaviors, and being unwilling to learn (Batool, Ali, & Mehmood, 2017; Thomas, 2016). Teachers manage their self-created challenges, which they create because of their behaviors like anger, frustration, and coming unprepared in the classroom (Bielićki, 2014; Saleem et al., 2019).

Methodology

The basic qualitative research design was employed to explore the challenges of novice secondary school teachers' experiences in the implementation of the strategies of classroom management learned in teacher education programs. Qualitative research provides a chance to look deep into the experiences of individuals regarding a particular situation they have been experiencing throughout their journey. Inquiring about the challenges and experiences through interviews is the way to look deeply into the conditions they were undergoing and the meanings they gave to those experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In basic qualitative research, general challenges that human beings experience are elaborated on the basis of the responses of the participants, how they take those experiences, and how those experiences affect their thoughts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The population of this study was all the novice secondary school teachers of Lahore. Twenty participants from 6 public secondary schools participated in this study; in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 novice teachers. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants who were experiencing that phenomenon (Patton, 2015). Novice teachers with less than 2 years of experience doing their first job and who were experiencing challenges regarding classroom management were selected as participants in the study.

The first researcher conducted interviews with novice teachers in order to explore the challenges they were experiencing related to classroom management in public secondary schools in Lahore. The interview had questions related to general challenges they were experiencing, the difference in theory and practice in the classroom, and how the experience of novice teachers could be improved with the help of support from principal and senior teachers. Qualitative data analysis with NVivo 14 was used to analyze the interview data.

Results

Professional Motivation and Career Choice in Teaching

The majority of the participants expressed that they considered teaching to be the most effective profession and that this profession provided them with a chance to improve the lives of others.

They considered that teaching provided them with a chance to involve themselves in lifelong learning. The respect attached to teaching made this tough profession a prestigious one. The learning of the students introduced them to the feeling of satisfaction. As one of the participants described, *“Because I enjoy teaching, my knowledge will continue to grow, and I will be a lifelong learner, and I am also inspired by my teachers, who are amazing people”* (Teacher 17).

Some of the participants elaborated that for females, the ideal job is teaching. In this job, they not only had a chance to contribute to society, but this was a half-day job. Maintaining work/personal life balance was quite easy for a woman. As one of the participants stated, *“As a woman, I enjoy teaching because it is a simple and acceptable profession. The school timing is less than other jobs, which are very difficult for women to do with their personal life”* (Teacher 3).

Theoretical Knowledge Acquisition: Classroom Management Strategies from Teacher Education

Most participants explained they have learned to keep eye contact with students. Setting the class routine and setting targets for days and weeks was a successful strategy. Involving students in class through different activities and using audio-video aids increases the chance of better learning outcomes. Class participation through activities and question answers kept students more attentive. Praising students on their performance and positive reinforcement, such as clapping, announcing their name, writing their name on the board, declaring student of the day, and giving gifts in class, was very effective. As one of the participants reported,

Teachers should have daily or weekly plans and targets that they can discuss with students and work together. The students do their best in class and obey the teacher’s instructions. The teacher should show his appreciation by writing his name on the whiteboard and giving him presents such as books and clapping. (Teacher 6)

Some participants expressed that every class has some shy and slow learning students and involving them in learning is one of the toughest tasks. However, when teachers know the strategies to keep all students involved in learning, like group activities, motivating dull students, appreciating students, roaming around students, and providing assistance, these are some of the essential strategies teachers should use. The teachers who could make accommodation according to the abilities of students could handle their classes the best way. As one of the participants stated,

Some students are shy and unwilling to learn, and some are slow learners and do not come forward to participate. We must bring them on stage because they do not come forward on their own. They are especially problematic for the class, and we must come up with a strategy for them. As teachers, we need to use polite language so that they can freely share their ideas. Encourage them to participate in activities and try to appreciate them. When teachers communicate with students in a friendly manner. (Teacher 13)

Implementation of Classroom Management: From Theory to Practice

Most participants described that the classroom management strategies they use for their class were setting the class routine and developing some class rules for the students to follow. They develop a positive class environment through their conduct and friendly relationships with students. They creatively manage their class by introducing class activities and keeping students involved in doing something during the class. They address the disruptive behaviors of students by making eye

contact, making non-verbal jokes, and politely modifying their behaviors. As one of the participants narrated, “*To manage my class, I use different teaching methods, avoid punishing the class, providing different activities during free time, Address quickly bad behavior of students*” (Teacher 16).

Some participants described that they are using classroom management strategies they have learned in their teacher education degree. They Plan their lesson planning they have already planned their lesson according to students’ needs and requirements. The novice teachers expressed that everyone was allowed to ask any question related to the topic. They have provided a friendly learning atmosphere for their students. When any student experiences any challenge related to discipline or learning, they ask students to freely discuss it with them. Novice teachers also use different teaching methods in their classroom, such as lectures, discussion, and questioning, and try to involve their students. They also used group study techniques in which students learned to accept and respect the views and opinions of others. Students also develop the habit of sharing knowledge and things. As one of the participants narrated:

In the classroom, I mostly use a group study technique that helps in class management. My pupils are divided into groups based on their ability and achievement levels. A group must have a minimum of six students: two low, two medium, and two high achievers. The student who performs best in the weekly exam becomes the group leader for the next week. The group study technique has greatly helped me in managing my class. Students help one another by sharing notes. As a teacher, I believe that communication plays an important role in group study because students learn to understand and respect each other’s ideas and opinions. In group study, students also learn to accept and respect the views and opinions of others. (Teacher 7)

Establishing Classroom Authority: Development and Implementation of Class Rules

Most participants reported that classroom management rules were very important for the smooth conduct of learning in the limited time. Novice teachers explained that they have made class rules for their classes in order to teach effectively. They explained punctuality, cleanliness, and discipline were the most significant rules in their classes. They have mentioned to their students that they should be on time and that their dress, hands, and other parts of their body should be clean. In discipline, they have mentioned to their students that they were not allowed to speak while the teacher was teaching, whispering, doing naughty activities, and asking for books, copies, and other materials, which were totally restricted by the teachers. They were of the view that when students constantly asked for learning material, they disturbed the discipline in the class. Most importantly, bad language and physical torture like hitting, punching, or pricking in class were strictly prohibited in the class. As one of the participants stated,

First rule. Be punctual. Second rule. Students are mentally and physically prepared for classroom learning and activity. Third rule. The students’ nails and uniforms must be cleaned regularly. Fourth rule. Stay within their boundaries, avoiding using bad language or injuring others. Fifth rule. Be courteous to one another and have the patience to listen to the viewpoints of others. (Teacher 1)

A few participants expressed that they had not developed strict class rules for their class. They were of the view that in the classroom, many new situations arise every day, and in sports, teachers have to take some actions. Generally, when students come late or show some misconduct, the

teacher asks all the students in class what the punishment should be for the particular student, and the students suggest punishment for the student. As one of the participants stated,

Rules are made according to the situation, and I am trying to establish my classroom management rules with the help of students by asking questions; for example, if any student arrives late, then I ask my entire class what his punishment will be. (Teacher 7)

Key Challenges in Novice Teachers' Classroom Management Experience

Most participants described the common classroom management-related challenges that they experience every day: students unwilling to learn, uninterested in learning, disruptive behaviors that create disturbances in class, and the frequent absenteeism of students from class. They expressed that the majority of the students were either unwilling to learn or uninterested in learning. This might be because they did not feel the need to learn or develop an interest in learning, and in some cases, their families did not show interest in academic life. Moreover, classes having more than forty students exhibit a variety of behaviors that are very difficult for a teacher to manage. Some students were aggressive, naughty, talking, and involved in bullying or other distracting activities. Most of the students were absent from school, and their families did not cooperate with the teacher in this regard. This was observed when the teacher assigned homework or there was an announcement that tomorrow would be class, and more than half of the class was absent from school. As one of the participants reported,

Student attendance at 100% represents a crucial matter. Student absences interrupt teachers from completing educational activities within their scheduled time period. Students who do not cooperate with teachers represent a major problem alongside this issue. Through both actions and nonparticipation, students show unwillingness to learn while avoiding engaging with teaching feedback and becoming absent from examinations. Teachers face all their classroom-based difficulties because of management issues. (Teacher 2)

A participant reported that students and parents were only concerned with the marks and grades but did not show interest in improving the behaviors and skills of the students. The students were unwilling to learn, but they still wanted to get good marks. The students did not exhibit good behavior in class. Rather, they only talked about marks. They did not take an interest in learning. Rather, they wanted their result to be excellent. As one of the participants described,

Most of the time, parents and students only concentrate on marks and grades. Students do not exhibit good behavior. Rather, in class, they talk mostly about their grades and marks. Learning is not propriety for them. Parents are not willing to listen to students' problems. Rather, they only talk about the grades of their children. (Teacher 13)

Response Strategies to Classroom Management Challenges

Most participants explained that they manage classroom management-related challenges by using facial gestures, scolding, and appreciating the students when required. Novice teachers were of the view that when they observed anything disturbing or distracting, they showed angry gestures and even verbally asked students to focus on their studies. They roam around the room to keep all the students active, and they frequently ask questions to keep students on their toes. When students respond or perform well, they appreciate it; in a similar way, when any student misbehaves, the

teacher scolds them or keeps them busy so that they cannot disturb them. As one of the participants narrated, *“Teachers are not allowed to punish students. I deal with discipline issues by ignoring them and relying on nonverbal communication, gestures, and other techniques”* (Teacher 2).

Some participants explained that they manage their classroom management discipline challenges through positive and friendly relationship development with the students. They were of the view that when the classroom was well-organized, activities to keep students involved in studies were already planned, the teacher had developed a positive rapport with the students, and there were rarely challenges in classroom management. Moreover, politely telling students the disadvantages of misbehavior could contribute to their conduct. As one of the participants described, *“I tried to be friendly and positive with my students. Listen to them if they are having problems and try to solve their issues.”* (Teacher 14).

Practical Interventions: Methods for Managing Classroom Difficulties

The majority of the participants describe that they use different techniques to handle classroom management-related challenges, such as roaming around the students to keep them on their toes and frequently asking questions related to what was taught to them. They use facial expressions such as staring and looking with anger to alert the students regarding their misconduct. They use verbal warnings to improve their behavior and, in some instances, by changing the seats of the students in order to stop them from participating in disciplinary activities. They give reminders to students regarding class rules, which they have developed with students in order to manage their class smoothly. When the teachers observed that students' attention was distracted, they involved them in some other activity, such as writing, guessing through placards, or asking them to write on board what they have learned. As one of the participants narrated,

I develop eye contact with students to keep them alert. I assign some work to the students and give them time to complete their tasks. I tried to stay calm and give the students a chance to correct their behavior; otherwise, I changed their seats.
(Teacher 14)

Some participants expressed that maintaining a positive relationship with their students is one of the significant skills of a novice teacher. They maintained positive and friendly relationships with their students. They involve students in learning, and when a student is experiencing challenges, they try to listen to the students' problems and try to solve them. An ideal class environment can only be achieved if we try to provide confidence and trust to students based on all the efforts teachers put into their learning and the improvement of their lives. As one of the participants reported,

My positive attitude has been really beneficial to me. I force them to recognize their limitations. I used good language, stayed calm, and dealt with them in a peaceful way. The teacher must use positive behavior in the classroom. (Teacher 13)

Discussion

The findings of the study highlighted that novice teachers experience behavior-related challenges because of high-class strength. Having more than 30 students made it difficult for them to teach. In India, classes have more than 50-60 students, and almost 10-15 minutes are spent taking attendance and disciplining the students before teaching (Jahan, 2017). In another study conducted in Uganda and Malawi, the classes had more than 80 students, and teachers almost found it impossible to teach because of a lot of disturbance created by students (Milner IV, Cunningham,

Delale-O'Connor, & Kestenberg, 2018). In studies conducted in Pakistan, novice teachers reported that they had more than 50 students, and the students had a lot of behavioral challenges, and teachers found it very difficult to teach and manage the discipline in the classroom (Saleem et al., 2021; A Saleem et al., 2023). Similarly, in KPK, the teachers reported that class strength has been an issue for novice and experienced teachers, yet novice teachers experience more challenges because of high student strength and inability to manage students (Suleman, Aslam, Ali, Hussain, & Ambreen, 2013).

Students show behavioral challenges, especially when talking, disturbing students, and being unwilling to learn. The majority of students in India disturb the atmosphere of the class, particularly by talking and bullying other students (Jahan, 2017). In developing countries, student behavior management is a huge challenge (Luschei & Chudgar, 2017). In a study conducted in KPK Pakistan, students distract other students and do not let them learn (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014). However, novice teachers in developed countries experience behavior-related challenges of students in their classroom, and they find it difficult to manage those behaviors because they are new and afraid of the fact that students have more behavioral variation and complications (Voss et al., 2017).

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the majority of novice teachers considered teaching a prestigious profession. Novice teachers have learned many classroom management techniques in teacher education programs, such as maintaining eye contact to keep students focused, setting class routines, teaching through activities, and class appreciation to keep students motivated. It was found that novice teachers developed class rules to keep students on track, like punctuality, cleanliness, and discipline rules as basic rules, whereas few teachers had developed hard rules since they were of the view that they experienced new situations and had to react according to the situation. The common classroom management-related challenges novice teachers experience were related to the behaviors of the students, specifically students unwilling to learn, uninterested in learning, descriptive behaviors, and absenteeism from the school, and only one teacher reported that both parents and students were only interested in marks not in the improvement of students behaviors.

Novice teachers' professional identity development evolves through interactions with structural limitations in their workplace. Large class sizes combined with inadequate preparation, school culture, and student demographics merge as influences defining novice teachers' professional experiences. Through their responses that combine applied knowledge with invented tactics, novice teachers demonstrate their evolving professional selves. Teacher identity formation proceeds in tension between theoretical teaching concepts and practical classroom management experiences. Teaching practices keep developing alongside changes in how teachers perceive their professional abilities. Support for novice teachers should effectively manage both structural challenges and early career teaching's complex psychological stresses. Subsequent research can examine the application of this theory in different educational settings while developing precise support measures for novice teachers.

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