Navigating the Complexities of EFL Classroom Management in the Iranian Context: Exploring Key Challenges, Effective Strategies, and Practical Recommendations for Novice Teachers

Hossein Rezaee
Farhangian *University, Arak, Iran*
hosseinrezaee8236@gmail.com
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Abstract

Effective classroom management is a fundamental component of successful language teaching and is closely associated with students' engagement, participation, and learning outcomes. However, maintaining a productive and supportive classroom environment can be particularly challenging for novice teachers who are still developing their pedagogical knowledge and practical teaching skills. In the Iranian EFL context, novice teachers may encounter a range of classroom management difficulties, including student talkativeness, disruptive behavior, peer harassment, lateness, lack of engagement, and defiance. Such challenges can reduce instructional time, increase teachers' stress and anxiety, and negatively affect their teaching efficacy and professional well-being. The present study explores the complexities of classroom management among novice Iranian EFL teachers, focusing on the major challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ to address problematic classroom behaviors, and the types of support they perceive as necessary for effective classroom management. Adopting a case-study design, the study was conducted in a middle school and a secondary school in Iran, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews with novice English language teachers. The findings revealed that novice teachers experienced multiple classroom management challenges, particularly student distractions, disruptive behaviors, low engagement, and difficulties in maintaining students' attention and participation. The teachers reported using a variety of management techniques, with some strategies proving more effective than others depending on the classroom context and students' needs. The findings further indicated that inadequate practical preparation during pre-service teacher education contributed to novice teachers' difficulties in managing classrooms effectively. The study therefore highlights the importance of integrating practical classroom management training into pre-service and in-service professional development programs. It concludes by offering practical recommendations for helping novice Iranian EFL teachers develop effective classroom management skills and create more supportive, orderly, and engaging learning environments.

Keywords: Classroom Management; Novice EFL Teachers; Iranian EFL Context; Student Misbehavior; Classroom Management Strategies;

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is a challenging skill for future teachers, for it is an essential component of the teaching practice (Hannah, 2013). Knowledge of the field or subject matter is not enough for teachers to achieve instructional goals (Marshall, 2016). Undeniably, organized, well-managed classrooms, free from struggles and chaos, offer better opportunities for learners to achieve great things (Adelman & Taylor, 2005). Indeed, effective classroom management is necessary for learners to be fully engaged in active learning, as it fosters fairness, kindness, respect, trust, and concentration (Linsin, 2011).

The aim of this study is to reveal the novice teachers4 concerns about classroom management. It targets the techniques and strategies that help neophyte and experienced teachers successfully implement management guidelines and rules in the classroom. Moreover, it aims to provide teachers with recommendations on how to respond appropriately to learners' misbehaviors. It sheds light on classroom management obstacles and the problems neophyte teachers face and offers strategies and solutions to help them overcome them.

Literature Review: Classroom Management

Tal (2010) defined classroom management as the teacher's ability to guide the class toward socioemotional satisfaction and learning. Classroom management integrates all the factors that create an organized, well-established learning environment. Certainly, the classroom environment should facilitate and enhance teaching rather than hamper it (Marsh, 2010). Moreover, classroom management refers to the tasks teachers undertake to create a respectful, caring, organized, and productive environment that supports and facilitates both academic and emotional learning. An environment that involves and fosters academic and social skills, such as empathy, communication, self-regulation, and anger management (James, C. et al., 2011). Classroom management is a broad term that refers to strategies intended to motivate learners and engage them in productive activities. These techniques should be applied in the classroom to eliminate and correct harmful, disruptive behaviors (Everston & Weinsten, 2006).

Further, classroom discipline and classroom management include both preventive and responsive actions taken by teachers to change and improve learners' behavior. Wong et al. (2012) viewed that classroom management is all about teachers' actions in the classroom to organize learners, time, equipment, emotions, and space so that effective learning takes place. Indeed, classroom management is a multifaceted practice that requires teachers to demonstrate competence, talent, skills, and intelligence. It is a challenging and ongoing practice that helps teachers manage learners' attitudes and behaviors effectively.

Additionally, management refers to the skills involved in organizing and presenting lessons to engage all students in learning. This involves teachers' ability to select and use appropriate teaching materials and organize the different elements and steps of the lesson. For Bellard (2005),

effective classroom management is based on a practical, feasible plan that involves appropriate strategies and effective methods.

Effective Classroom management is a challenging aspect of teaching. It is a process that involves various tasks performed by both teachers and learners (Delceva & Dizdarevik, 2014). Internationally, classroom management issues and student misbehavior are major concerns for teachers. In fact, learners in all countries display inappropriate behaviors that affect the teaching-learning climate (Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp, 2007). Many teachers report problems related to learners' disengagement and misbehavior, which cause stress and burnout (Center for Education Statistics and Evaluation, 2020). According to Stichter et al. (2009), teachers who do not use effective classroom management strategies experience ongoing verbal annoyance and disruptive student behavior. Modern classroom management models focus on creating a quiet learning environment free of inappropriate behavior and full of engaging activities (Sullivan et al., 2014).

Teachers have always expressed serious concerns about effectively managing learners' misbehavior, which is linked to a positive learning atmosphere (Shin & Koh, 2007). According to Baker (2005), many studies have shown that teachers who didn't receive training in classroom management leave the teaching profession. Ben (2006) viewed that effective classroom management practices are important for offering successful instruction. Certainly, a chaotic atmosphere negatively affects students' achievements. Research has recommended that teachers receive training to effectively implement classroom management strategies.

Research Problem and Research Questions

Teachers face many classrooms management challenges, including overcrowded classrooms, diverse levels, interests, wants, and attitudes. Therefore, creating a comfortable and inclusive learning atmosphere is a major challenge for neophyte teachers. Teachers frequently complain about the gap between their theoretical knowledge and its actual implementation in the classroom. Moreover, many teachers fail to respond effectively to minor and major disciplinary problems caused by their learners. Classroom management is crucial to creating a teaching environment that reduces disruptions and anxiety, increases instructional time, and encourages learners to engage in productive learning. Effective Classroom management is a challenging aspect of teaching. Many teachers report problems related to learners' disengagement and misbehavior, which cause stress and burnout. This paper addresses the following questions:

- *What are the classroom management challenges that novice teachers face?*
- *What are the most effective strategies that neophyte teachers should use to achieve successful classroom management?*
- *How should novice teachers react appropriately to disruptive behaviors?*

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

This research was conducted as a case study. It provides the researcher with evidence, information, and facts about the research topic. In this research, classroom interviews with

teachers were conducted. The results are analyzed statistically. Qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this research. Indeed, a mixed-methods approach enables the researcher to gather and analyze data.

Ethically, the researcher interviewed participants from one middle school and one secondary school. The interview was conducted at different times because they do not work at the same sites. This took the researcher one week. Teachers' answers made an original contribution to the research. In addition to answering the interview questions, the informants openly, frankly, and happily expressed their concerns and offered suggestions regarding classroom management issues.

2.1 Participants

Research participants are considered the most crucial element in any research work. In this research, we involved five novice English language teachers. Two from middle school and three from secondary school. There are three females and two males aged 25 to 28. They were selected randomly, but they are all novice teachers.

2.2 Data Collection Tools

The interview is a useful research tool for gathering information from participants. It provides indepth data about the research topic. According to Kumar (2010), interviewing is a method of collecting information from people. Moreover, the interview is an important data-gathering technique that involves verbal communication between the researcher and the informant. In this research, an interview was structured to elicit data from 5 novice English language teachers at middle and secondary schools in the province of Arak, Iran. The interview includes 10 questions.

3. RESULTS

Items 1 and 2: How old are you, and how long have you been teaching?

Table 1.

Teachers' Professional Experience.

	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Professional Experience	1 year	1 year	2 years	2 years	3 years

Age	25 years old	26 years old	27 years old	28 years old	28 year old

As mentioned in the table above, two teachers have 1 year of experience, two have 2 years, and 1 has 3 years. They are aged 25 to 28.

Item 3: Have you received any courses about classroom management techniques at your university? If yes, do you find them workable?

Table 2.

Teachers' classroom management pre-knowledge

Yes	2
No	3

The results revealed that 3 teachers had not received any lectures on classroom management strategies at university. Those who received lectures during their study period argued that some knowledge is highly valuable, as they used it in teaching situations, especially when dealing with problem behavior. One of the informants says she relies on her university lectures to manage group work tasks. Another participant said she built positive relationships with her learners while revising the psycho-pedagogical courses she had taken at university.

Item 4: What are the difficulties and the challenges that you face in managing your classroom?

Answering this question, the participants gave the following answers:

Teachers 1: "Dealing with students with different abilities, needs, interests, and preferences, dealing with struggles among learners, obstacles, and psychological barriers of foreign language learning, and overcrowded classrooms".

Teacher 2: "Dealing with misbehavior, failure to manage some intricate situations, making all learners participate in the classroom, lack of support from learners' parents and colleagues, and workload pressure".

Teacher 3: "Failure to include the whole class in active learning, problems arising from students' misbehavior, students' boredom, and overcrowded classrooms".

Teacher 4: "Time management, problems of making and weak learners understand the lectures, dealing with disruptive learners, students refusing orders, and failure to build good relationships with learners".

Teacher 5: "Problems related to phones, this makes learners distracted, learners' misbehavior and boredom, little learner-teacher interaction, and the lack of motivation".

Item 5. What classroom management techniques do you follow?

Teachers 1: "From the beginning, I try to give some rules and instructions, I tolerate mistakes and urge my learners to participate, I keep my learners engaged in learning, and I always vary my teaching techniques".

Teacher 2: "I give guidelines, I try to give positive expectations, I always make my learners engaged in tasks so that they do not find time for making trouble, and I include technology in my lectures to avoid learners' boredom".

Teacher 3: "I use soft and respectful language with learners, I motivate my learners, I praise good answers, I appreciate efforts, and I motivate my learners through giving them gifts".

Teacher 4: "I always give constructive feedback; I try to make my presence felt in the classroom. And I penalize misbehavior and praise good behavior."

Teacher 5: "I always ask my learners to raise their hands before speaking instead of shouting, and I set special routines for tasks such as group work and presenting the project so that learners follow the rules automatically without any disruption".

Item 6. What strategies do you use to deal with learners' misbehavior?

Teachers 1: "Although students' misbehavior causes stress and anxiety, I always try to keep calm, dealing immediately with minor problems so that they do not turn into major problems. When I deal with major problems, I sometimes shout and end up asking the disruptive learner to leave the classroom.

Teacher 2: "I always give reminders about the rules and norms of conduct and the consequences of violating these e rules. Sometimes, I raise my voice unconsciously, which makes me exhausted. Sometimes, I ask the disruptive learner to sit alone, giving him/her extra homework".

Teacher 3: "I always deal fairly with all students; sometimes I fail to prevent escalating situations arising from disruptive behaviors. Sometimes, I ask the learner to bring his parents."

Teacher 4: "Avoiding putting severe punishments, I always keep calm. Before intervening verbally, I try to use cues and stares to stop the misbehavior. Sometimes, I send the troublemaking student to the administration for further measures".

Teacher 5: "I reprimand the misbehavior and never use inconvenient words that might hurt the learner, I address the students' misbehavior calmly but firmly, I reprimand in private, sometimes, I address students' parents".

Item 7. Do you find these strategies effective?

Table3.

The effectiveness of the strategies used by teachers.

Yes	3
No	2
Sometimes	1

As mentioned in the tables, the 3 respondents find the classroom management strategies they use effective. Two of them do not find any positive results from their classroom management skills; only one interviewee says that his strategies are sometimes useful. These results show that what works with one teacher does not work automatically with others. Item 8. Do you seek help from your colleagues? Why?

Table 4.

Colleagues' help to novice teachers.

Yes	5
No	0

All teachers say that they ask their colleagues about useful classroom management strategies. One of the informants said he never hesitated to ask experienced teachers because they always provided him with the help, he needed to solve intricate situations. Another said that, thanks to his colleague, he could solve his time-management problem. Two teachers said that sometimes colleagues' advice does not work well, but they are always useful to some extent. A female teacher said she always had problems with learners' misbehavior and did not know how to deal with it appropriately; therefore, she decided to attend colleagues' classes to see how they manage it. She learned a lot from them and successfully dealt with some disruptive situations.

Item 9. What kind of help do they provide you with?

Teachers' answers are listed as follows:

Teacher 1: "They give us the opportunity to attend their classes, they accept us to attend and observe our classes, and give us their valuable remarks".

Teacher 2: "They give constructive feedback; they give us the effective norms and rules of conduct and explain to us how to implement them successfully".

Teacher 3: "They share their teaching experiences, they recommend useful teaching materials, and they recommend teaching resources".

Teacher 4: "They give us some useful techniques to deal with disruptive behavior."

Teacher 5: “They give us their lesson plans; they give techniques of conducting group work, and they act as facilitators, guides, and support”.

Item 10. Do you conduct research on classroom management skills?

Table 5.

Teachers' research on classroom management.

Yes	3
No	0
Sometimes	2

The table shows that all novice teachers conduct research to identify the most useful classroom management techniques. Indeed, numerous studies, articles, and research dissertations offer a range of skills and strategies for addressing classroom management issues. Certainly, research is the key to offering safe, enjoyable, and interesting instruction. Many studies offer recommendations for classroom management, such as building positive relationships with learners, setting rules, and minimizing disruptive behavior.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research revealed that classroom management poses great challenges to novice teachers. Indeed, problems such as overcrowded classes and student misbehavior require knowledge and experience to be addressed appropriately. As the evidence shows that not all teachers receive appropriate instruction during their university studies, it is essential to include lectures for future teachers so they can apply this knowledge in their professional careers. Moreover, it is also necessary to set pre-service training during their last year of studies. Those who received such instruction and training graduated from the higher teacher-training schools.

Among the problems mentioned by the participants that make classroom management a difficult task for teachers, we can cite: students' misbehavior, lack of students' motivation, workload pressure, lack of support, overcrowded classrooms, failure to build positive relationships with learners, time management, the use of mobiles in the classroom, and dealing with learners with different abilities. These problems stem from teachers' lack of experience, students' age, the lack of clear rules to regulate and deter disruptive learners, the negligence of the school administration, and careless parents. These problems need to be appropriately addressed.

Moreover, the findings showed that the teachers use various techniques to overcome classroom management challenges. Some of them set rules and guidelines at the beginning; others say they always keep their learners engaged, so there is no time for trouble. Another teacher integrates technology to make his lessons more engaging and to communicate positive expectations to learners. In addition, novice teachers involved in this research used adequate language, motivated and praised learners, gave positive and constructive feedback, and rewarded diligent learners.

Obviously, the results indicate that these novice teachers use multiple strategies that can be truly effective in addressing the intricate situations in the classroom. About teachers' reaction to learners' misbehavior, the participants cite some strategies such as asking the disruptive learner to sit alone, giving homework and extra tasks to be fulfilled at home, asking the learner to leave the classroom, sending him/ her to the school administrators, calling parents, and reprimanding them in private. Indeed, all the techniques used by the informants are recommended by studies in this field. However, the actual implementation of these techniques requires a positive attitude towards learners and a strong personality. Indeed, teachers need experience and techniques to make these strategies functional. Theoretically, these techniques sound good and useful, but in practice, many teachers fail to implement them effectively. Many EFL teachers complain about the futility of the classroom management strategies recommended by scholars and researchers. In fact, what works with one teacher may fail with another teacher. This is due to the teachers' dissimilar characters. Therefore, we can say that the usefulness or uselessness of any technique depends heavily on the teacher's character, seriousness, attitudes, aptitudes, relationships with learners, and flexibility.

Additionally, the research explored the kind of help that neophyte teachers may receive from their experienced colleagues. All the participants say they seek advice and help from their colleagues in school. They reveal that their colleagues' help is very important, as it can solve many problems and overcome complex situations. The investigated novice teachers acknowledged this help. Indeed, their colleagues offered them support by inviting them to attend their classes, accepting invitations to assess their teaching performance, giving recommendations, and sharing experiences. Still, they hand them their lesson plans and teaching materials and recommend resources. Obviously, novice teachers should never hesitate or feel ashamed to ask their colleagues for support, orientation, and assistance, which are of great importance. Novice teachers should value and consider their colleagues' suggestions and remarks.

The novice teachers involved in this study say they conduct research to find suitable solutions to their classroom problems. Indeed, numerous studies have addressed classroom management issues. Certainly, research is a vital tool that could equip novice teachers with the most useful techniques for better classroom management.

Obviously, effective classroom management involves both preventive and responsive strategies. The preventive strategies aim to increase instructional time and reduce time spent responding to inappropriate behaviors. According to Woolfolk Hoy & Weinstein (2006), preventive techniques involve teachers changing and shaping their own behaviors (physical,

emotional, and instructional), which, in turn, can affect learners' classroom behaviors. Responsive classroom management strategies address learners' behaviors that may influence their own and peers' learning. They are used to effectively address inappropriate behaviors, minimize distractions, and maintain a positive, calm classroom atmosphere.

Indeed, classroom management involves multiple skills that teachers should acquire. Research on classroom management must consider the complex nature of teaching. In fact, researchers should address the psychological, emotional, scientific, ethical, and social areas that could affect both teachers' and learners' attitudes and performance. Essentially, teacher education curricula should not only provide novice teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills but also engage them in real classroom practice so they can bridge theory and practice. This would help them connect with experienced teachers, improve their classroom management skills, and participate in professional development. Research should target these issues and examine the reasons behind classroom management failures among neophyte teachers.

Classroom Management Recommendations for Novice Teachers

Oliver & Reschly (2007) stated that effective classroom management requires teachers to adopt a comprehensive approach that involves setting and implementing specific rules, reinforcing students' engagement, encouraging appropriate behavior, using strategies to reduce misbehavior, and modifying classroom management strategies as needed. The following classroom management techniques could be very helpful for novice teachers:

A/Setting Rules and Norms of Conduct: Establishing rules and norms of conduct is paramount to effective classroom management. They give learners, from the beginning, general guidelines on how to behave and carry out tasks in the classroom in a systematic and organized way (Garrett, 2014). For example, the teacher from the very beginning can give instructions such as: "Always be respectful", "When I start explaining the lesson, you must listen carefully" ...Etc. These rules and guidelines should be explicitly stated to learners.

B/ Building Positive Relationships with Learners: Effective classroom management requires teachers to develop caring, supportive relationships with their learners. This strong relationship fosters a respectful climate and enables academic success for both teachers and learners. Horne and Brown (2017) stressed the establishment and management of positive relationships with learners and colleagues to afford a decent and respectful work environment. In fact, learners feel free, overcome their psychological obstacles, and are willing to work with their teacher and peers. Building positive relationships with learners would help novice teachers create a productive, enjoyable, and caring learning atmosphere. This would help avoid classroom struggles and conflicts (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

C/ Displaying Instructional Professionalism: The energy and excitement for classroom activities are necessary for both teachers and learners, as the absence of these vital elements can lead to distraction and loss of interest, and ultimately to discipline problems. Well-structured

instruction should involve teachers providing learners with opportunities to think and respond verbally during the lecture (Cooper & Scott, 2017). Research has revealed that learners spend more time behaving appropriately (i.e., engaged in lessons) with teachers who use high levels of interactional practices. Moreover, there are times when teachers need to teach less and allow more practice, discussion, games, and even some humor, because too much of the same thing can be tedious and boring.

D/ Identifying Reasons for Misbehavior: Teachers should understand why students are disengaged from learning or are being troublesome, so they can provide appropriate corrective actions. Learners may display the same disruptive behaviors for different reasons. For example, a student starts talking with his/her friend during an activity or while the teacher is explaining the lesson because of several reasons: the teacher didn't ask them to work quietly, or the task is too difficult or too easy, the task instructions are not clear, or the rules of conduct are forgotten and not implemented regularly and fairly. Further, there could be other reasons for students' misbehavior. For example, family problems and a difficult home situation could negatively affect students' attitudes. Some learners suffer from family abuse or severe poverty, which is the reason that makes them behave in disruptive ways. Further, other factors may contribute to misbehavior, such as the weather (too hot or too cold), students' tiredness, timing, or noise from outside the classroom. All these factors affect learners' concentration and create a sort of discomfort.

E/ Reacting to Learners' Misbehaviors: The classroom is the context in which the teaching-learning discourse occurs, and when students interact with their teacher, some struggles can arise (Basit et al., 2010). It is recommended to use the most unremarkable techniques, such as non-verbal cues, such as stares, eye contact, hand signals, using gestures, or getting closer to the learner to make our physical presence felt without saying anything. These techniques would avoid creating distractions and problems that could be more severe than the misbehavior itself.

If disruptive behavior continues and the nonverbal strategy is ineffective, a brief, positive verbal statement should be given. It should be specific to the behavior and as disruptive as possible to the lesson. For example, if a learner is off-task or is not participating in a group, he/she can be asked to work independently (Epstein et al., 2008). Besides, positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior is essential. It includes the use of praise and rewards to acknowledge learning efforts and good behaviors (Moore et al., 2019).

5. CONCLUSION

Classroom management is a common understanding between learners and teachers. It is an agreed-upon framework that everyone should be committed to. Effective classroom management is fundamental for creating and maintaining an atmosphere that facilitates learning. Both preventative and responsive strategies should be used by teachers to push learners to behave appropriately.

In sum, effective classroom management depends on teachers and learners working together as partners. Teachers should find a middle ground between peremptory instruction and

submissive obedience. Still, classroom management skills should be accorded great importance during pre-service and in-service teachers' training. This research tried to shed light on this issue because it is the key to successful and effective teaching.

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Appendix

Teachers' Interview

Question 1. How old are you?

Question 2. How long have you been teaching?

Question 3. Have you received any courses on classroom management techniques at your university?

If yes, do you find them workable?

Question 4. What are the difficulties and the challenges that you face in managing your classroom?

Question 5. What classroom management techniques do you follow?

Question 6. What strategies do you use to deal with learners' misbehavior?

Question 7. Do you find these strategies effective?

Question 8. Do you seek help from your colleagues? Why?

Question 9. What kind of help do they provide you with?

Question 10. Do you conduct research on classroom management skills?