Research Article

Exploring UAE Primary School Teachers' Classroom Management Strategies in Dealing with Disruptive Students: A Case Study

Ayeda Abdulla Saeed Al Shebli
PhD, United Arab Emirates University, College of Education
Advisor: Dr. Mohamed Al Hosani
United Arab Emirates University, College of Education

ABSTRACT

The teachers are always keen to develop efficient classroom management strategies to deliver quality education but it's always difficult for them to manage the students having disruptive behavior. Therefore, this research explores UAE primary school teachers' classroom management strategies in dealing with disruptive students. The study has used a qualitative approach by conducting five individual interviews with teachers and doing ten classroom observations. Several classroom management strategies were identified. The results revealed that the classroom management strategies used by teachers in dealing with disruptive students are establishing classroom rules and routines with their students, praising students, using meaningful interactions, using direct strategies, and fostering positive teacher-student relationships. Some teachers prefer to avoid the use of punishment strategy while dealing with disruptive students. The findings of this research can help the researchers, teachers, and school leaders who are searching for solutions to manage disruptive students

Keywords: Disruptive Behavior, Classroom Management Strategies; Primary School, Educational Management, Student Behavior.

1. INTRODUCTION

The disruptive behaviors in classrooms are increasing rapidly (White, Algozzine, Audetre, Marr, & Ellis, 2001) and students who display such disruptive behaviors are known as "disruptors" because their behavior disrupts the classroom and lesson activities (Maddeh, Bennour, & Souissi, 2015). According to Sun and Shek's (2012), the common examples of disruptive behavior include, non-attentiveness/daydreaming/idleness, sleeping, getting out of one's seat, habitual failure to submit assignments, physical aggression, talking out of turn, verbal aggression, disrespecting teachers, copying homework, clowning, playing, tardiness, eating/drinking, and passive engagement in class. Moreover, they highlight that "talking out of turn" was the most common and the most disruptive behavior to teaching and learning. In addition, their research reported that "disrespecting teachers" was the most unacceptable problem behavior. Further, "…classrooms where disruptive behavior occurs frequently get less academic engaged time, and the students in disruptive classrooms stand in the low category in achievement tests" (Ghazi, Shahzada, Tariq, & Khan, 2013, p. 350).

The disruptive students inside the classroom have become an increasing concern for teachers and school management. Consequently, teachers are spending more time on discipline and classroom management, which can influence teaching and learning processes. The main issue here is that disruptive students retard the effectiveness of teaching and learning; this is considered a severe problem.

This case study aimed to explore UAE primary school teachers' classroom management strategies in dealing with disruptive students. It is valuable to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions of how to deal with disruptive students to improve educational outcomes.

The following main research question was used to support the collection of in-depth and meaningful data; it is followed by three sub-questions that facilitate understanding of the perceptions of the participants regarding strategies of dealing with disruptive students:

1. How do UAE primary school teachers deal with disruptive students?
   a. *What type of classroom management strategies do teachers use to manage their classes?*
   b. *What direct strategies do teachers use to control disruptive students?*
   c. *What are the views of teachers on managing classrooms with disruptive students?*
   d. *Theoretical Background*

This study focused on how primary school teachers deal with disruptive students; therefore, it is essential to highlight the classroom management strategies those teachers use to control disruptive students. This research is guided by two main concepts, one is disruptive behavior and the second is classroom management strategies. Ali and Gracey (2013) defined disruptive behavior based on the following three criteria: conduct that disturbs the usual learning and teaching processes, the repetition of such conduct, and conduct that aims to cause interruption. Minott (2015) defined disruptive behavior as "any behavior which presents a barrier to others' learning or inhibits the achievement of the teacher's purposes" (p. 64). On the other hand, Oliver, Wehby, and Daniel (2011), described classroom management strategies as a collection of non-instructional classroom procedures that teachers implement in classroom settings to avoid disruptive behavior during lessons.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers always encounter student behavior in their classrooms that hinders the smoothness and effectiveness of teaching and learning processes. The strategies used by teachers to manage those behaviors differ from teacher to teacher. The literature described below highlights some common classroom management strategies teachers use to deal with disruptive students.

Parsonson (2012) conducted research that offered teachers a range of evidence-based interventions aimed at limiting disruptive behavior in their classrooms (antecedent strategies), as well as strategies that promote positive student behavior (contingency management). He claimed that strategies such as detention, removal from class, and office referrals are no longer effective. In addition, he claimed that teachers avoid using positive reinforcement because they believe that extrinsic rewards reduce students' intrinsic motivation to learn and behave well. Moreover, he argued that using antecedent strategies and contingency management can help in creating effective learning opportunities. His recommended interventions are pre-planned behavior management procedures, building positive relationships with students, and using positive reinforcement. Oliver et al. (2011) highlighted three types of interventions to avoid and deal with disruptive behavior. These interventions include universal interventions that suit all subjects, outside classroom interventions that involve social workers, and additional interventions such as parental involvement.

Beazidou, Botsoglou, and Andreou (2013) identified teachers' classroom management practices with disruptive students. They highlighted teachers' development of routines and reinforcing expectations in their classrooms. In addition, they assigned students tasks that they were responsible for and provided students who followed the rules with positive reinforcement and feedback. The results of their research revealed that improving positive classroom management practices and avoiding punishment would enhance positive behavior among students. Larenas (2011) conducted a qualitative study that identified helpful disciplinary strategies amongst a group of five teachers. The results indicated that some teachers who use the following strategies find them effective: raising one's tone of voice, calling students' parents, scolding students, and removing difficult students from the classroom. However, other teachers claimed that maintaining a positive attitude towards difficult students, requesting help from school social workers, holding conversations with the students, and making students reflect on their bad behavior facilitated the management of disruptive students.

Akın, Yıldırım, and Goodwin (2016) explored Turkish elementary teachers' classroom management practices in dealing with disruptive students. They conducted interviews to know the strategies used by teachers to deal with disruptive students. The findings of their study explained that teachers use different learning strategies like peer work and group work to develop a team spirit. Moreover, the teachers should

assign responsibilities to students to keep them on task all the time. Alike, Polirstok (2015) discussed some strategies for classroom management she thinks are easy to implement. She asserted that teacher fidelity and commitment to the behavioral expectations established for students is key to success in managing students' behavior inside the classroom. The classroom management strategies discussed in her paper are as follows: changing the teacher approval-to-disapproval ratio, selective ignoring, focusing on structure and routine, increasing the student locus of control, de-escalating student aggression and hostility, and limiting the use of punishment. She claimed that teaching and learning processes can occur smoothly through such strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study was conducted to explore UAE primary school teachers' classroom management strategies in dealing with disruptive students. Qualitative research is an approach that encompasses the discovery of several explanations for situations and phenomena (Creswell, 2012). This type of research can consist of single or multiple cases. The data collection tools used in this case study are in-depth interviews and observation. One important feature of the case study approach is that the case can be described within specific parameters (a certain time and place). To conduct a case study, the researcher should investigate and advocate cases that show different perspectives on the same problem or process (Creswell, 2012).

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were five teachers who work in a primary school. The school has been chosen randomly. The participants differed in terms of years of teaching, age, and grades taught. All of them experienced disruptive students in their classrooms. The participants were selected based on their time availability and willingness to participate in this study.

3.2. Instruments

Iacono, Brown, and Holtham (2009) explained about the case study that "the case study relies on multiple sources of evidence and multiple data collection techniques" (p. 41). This study used two main methods for data collection: observation and semi-structured interviews. The aim of using observation was to provide relevant data about the issue. "Observational data represent a firsthand picture of the events, is carried out in a natural field setting and enable the researcher to obtain contextual factors" (Zohrabi, 2013, p. 257). The purpose of using interviews was to gather teachers' views and perceptions on disruptive students and enrich our understanding of this issue; this was an appropriate method because "interviewing is expected to broaden the scope of understanding investigated phenomena, as it is a more naturalistic and less structured data collection tool" (Alshenqeeti, 2014, p. 40). The interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' strategies to deal with disruptive behavior. Following questions are used in the interviews:

- *What type of classroom room management strategies do you use to manage in your classes?*
- *What direct strategies do you use to control disruptive students?*

3.3. Data Collection

The five interviews were conducted in person. The English language was used to interview the English medium teachers and the Arabic language was used with local teachers. The researcher had to translate the Arabic interviews into English. All five interviews were recorded using an Apple iPhone 7 device. Each interview lasted approximately 35-50 minutes. The interviews took place teachers' meeting room. Overall, the researcher observed 10 classes; 45 minutes were spent in the classroom each day (five observations per week) over a two-week period. The observations took place in the classrooms. The observer focused on disruptive students and specifically on the teacher's verbal and nonverbal language, actions, and behaviors in response to disruptive students.

3.4. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed into a Word document. Analyzing qualitative data is challenging because it requires the use of text instead of numbers, the focus is on the intended meaning of the language (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). The researcher first created a file that included the transcribed and observed data to analyze the data. Second, a codebook was created for the codes derived from data in the file. A codebook can be defined as a set of codes and definitions used to direct and aid the analysis of qualitative data (Bernard &

Ryan, 2010). Third, manual coding of each response was conducted to identify words, phrases, themes, and subthemes that match the aim of this analysis. A code is a qualitative inquiry representing a word or phrase indicating an essential meaning for the study (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). Fourth, after the codes were generated, they were compared to be classified into meaningful units then into themes and subthemes. To ensure the validly and reliability of the codes and themes, another researcher reviewed the transcribed data with the codebook and found no issues in the coding of data.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes the responses of the five teachers to the interview questions regarding how they deal with disruptive students; it also summarizes the observations collected from the 10 classes. The responses were classified into seven themes, and those themes were divided into subthemes. As shown in Table 1, the classroom management strategies reported by teachers included the following: rules, routines, praise, direct strategies, meaningful instruction, teacher-student relationships, and punishment.

Themes	Subthemes	Number of responses based on the interviews (5 total interviewees)	Number of relevant responses on the observations (10 total observations)
Rules	• School rules • Classroom rules • Teachers' expectations • Clear direction • Changing seating	1 5 5 3 3	0 7 8 5 2
Routines	• Positive classroom environment • Parental involvement • Assigning tasks and responsibilities for each student • Involving students in groups	3 2 4 4	8 0 6 8
Praise	• Using reward system • Encouraging positive behavior • Giving extra points	4 5 3	3 6 8
Direct strategies	• Verbal warnings • Verbal praise • Raising voice tone • Acting as a role model • Politely confronting disruptive students • Monitoring students	5 5 3 2 1 3	8 6 9 4 7 7

Meaningful instruction	• Planning ahead • Using relevant materials • Using different activities • Considering students' interests and learning styles	3 2 4 5	6 7 5 3
Teacher-student relationship	• Establishing positive relationship with students • Face-to-face discussions	5 2	7 3
Punishment	• Removing students from the classroom • Deducting points • Sending student to social worker • Calling parents • Yelling at the student • Detention • Not including student in school parties and trips • Negatively confronting disruptive students	2 4 4 3 2 1 2 0	4 4 6 4 8 2 0 6

Table 1: A summary of teachers' perceptions and observations regarding the strategies they use with disruptive students

Teachers reported that rules are very important to establishing effective lessons. They claimed that students should be reminded over and over about the classroom rules, especially at the beginning of the class. Also, teachers' expectations lead and guide students throughout their lessons. Rules assured that students know what they have to accomplish during every lesson so they can meet the expectations of their teacher. One teacher explained the importance of rules as follows:

> *With clear directions and rules, my students take my lesson seriously. When establishing each lesson and talking about the instructions and objectives of the lesson, they pay attention and try to follow my instructions to accomplish the objective. If my planning does not go well with the class time, I will definitely suffer with disruptive students since they will have finished their task; therefore, I always prepare extra activities such as puzzles to avoid their negative behavior.*

Another teacher illustrated that rules are required to manage disruptive students. She noted the following:

> *Our students are very smart; they test you from day one. If you are standing in the classroom without expectations or an agenda, you will find yourself in a middle of chaos where not one of them recognizes you standing in front of your class.*

Another strategy reported by the teachers is the importance of establishing routines in the classroom. This helps students know what their role is inside the classroom. One teacher reported the following:

> *"Routines take time to establish, but when they are established, they will save you time later. Familiarizing students with their roles, responsibilities, tasks, and groups will help you manage their behavior."*

The third theme was praising students. Most of the teachers reported that praising helps them mange disruptive students' behavior. Students are encouraged to behave appropriately through a reward system inside the classroom. A teacher claimed:

> *Whenever I start talking about rewards, students pay attention to me—especially disruptive students—asking me what I am going to give them and when. I always tend to reward them with something they really like or want. Once, I told my students that by the end of the trimester we will have pizza party. Students looked at me and asked if they would have to pay for the pizza. I told them "Of course not. This party will be a reward for you if you behave well during this trimester and no one gets a red point". A red point means a warning.*

The fourth theme was direct strategies. Teachers mentioned four strategies that they use directly with disruptive students; verbal warnings, verbal praise when appropriate, raising their tone of voice, and polite confrontation. Some teachers mentioned that direct strategies did not always work with difficult disruptive students. In such cases, they use punishment strategies, such as removing students from the classroom, deducting points, sending students to social workers, calling parents, yelling at the students, detention, not including students in school parties and trips, and negatively confronting disruptive students. Despite these punishment strategies, some students still continue their disruptive behavior. Teachers reported that they prefer to praise those students rather than punishment. One teacher reported the following:

> I was very tired of sending students to social workers. Nothing had changed with those students; they seemed not to care about anything. I have started playing a game with my students called "soft ball." This game includes a lot of rules. Of course, disruptive students refused to play it at the beginning, but when they saw how much their classmates enjoyed playing this game, they raised their hands and asked if they could join them. I told them they could under one condition—they have to follow the rules. If not, they cannot join us. Since that day, those students have been winning the game and always ask me to play it.

Meaningful instruction is another theme derived from the participants' responses. Teachers reported that instruction is very important; when students see that the teacher is well prepared for the lesson, she attracts their attention directly, and students know that they will learn something during the lesson. One important aspect that the teachers reported is students' different interests and learning styles. When students feel that lesson activities are not relevant to their interests or learning styles they start acting inappropriately. Students need activities that grab their attention and use their senses. The teachers claimed that disruptive students do not see any point in doing something they do not like, so they start disturbing the lesson to avoid activities or tasks.

Finally, the importance of positive teacher-student relationships was one area that all teachers agreed on. Having a good relationship with students will help avoid disruptive behavior inside the classroom. One teacher reported, "I like to see all students on my side; therefore, I involve them in a lot of discussions. I always try to listen to them to know what they really want and the how they like to be treated." Another teacher reported:

> I have a good relationship with my students; I did not build this relationship in one day. I worked very hard to reach this goal. Teachers need to trust their students and give them the opportunity to talk and express their feelings. The teacher's role is to listen to them. Students like to be heard by others; if we suppress their voices, they will act inappropriately.

Despite the reports of the interviewed teachers, the researcher observed that direct strategies, such as verbal warnings, verbal praise, raising one's tone of voice tone, and monitoring students, are used a lot inside the classroom. The praising strategy of giving extra points was also used a lot. Most of the teachers started their lessons by introducing the outcomes and the objectives that should be achieved by the end of the lesson. A lot of teachers then used group work in the activities. Groups were formulated based on student behavior, not level. Teachers tended to separate disruptive students and assign them to different groups. Each student played their own role in the groups. The monitoring of disruptive students was obvious; teachers tended to stand closer to those students, ask them questions to check their understanding, and check their work. Also, teachers used behavior sheets to monitor positive and negative behavior. Regarding punishment, some teachers removed students from the class; others sent them to social workers. However, some teachers ignored disruptive students' behavior and pretended that they were not present in the class; unfortunately, the rest of the students still paid attention to them. The researcher witnessed several negative confrontations between teachers and students. These confrontations took long periods of time and were never resolved. In one situation, a teacher left the classroom and went directly to the administration to complain about the student.

5. DISCUSSION

Based on the participating teachers' perceptions and classroom observations, this study attempted to explore the classroom management strategies used to deal with disruptive students in a primary school in the UAE.

As shown in Table 1, strategies used include establishing classroom rules and routines, praising students, direct strategies, meaningful instruction, fostering teacher-student relationships, and punishment. The study's findings indicate that individual teachers use several strategies to deal with disruptive students; these strategies are important for the smooth delivery of their lessons without any disturbances. Some important strategies emerged in the findings of this study. First, establishing clear classroom rules and expectations would decrease disruptive behaviors during the academic year. Second, establishing routines within the classroom helps teachers maintain smooth teaching delivery and control the class as students know what they have to do. Acting randomly in the classroom/ unplanned lesson may cause distractions for the student, leading to his/her lack of attention and unwillingness to learn. This leads to undesirable behavior within the classroom. Studies conducted by Polirstok (2015) and Beazidou et al. (2013) similarly asserted the importance of establishing routines in the classroom to ensure consistency and let students know the goals they are expected to reach. Third, many teachers prefer praise to encourage positive behavior instead of using punishment strategies. Beazidou et al. (2013) and Parsonson (2012) found that praise and positive reinforcement, for both effort and results, play a role in controlling disruptive students, as this increases their confidence and their own expectations regarding their learning. Fourth, Akın et al. (2016) indicated in their findings that well-planned teaching supported teachers in addressing disruptive behavior. Some of the interviewees in this study indicated that teaching techniques play an important role; particularly when the materials are relevant to students and match their learning styles, disruptive students become more encouraged to participate in the class. Regarding punishment, Polirstok (2015) and Beazidou et al. (2013) indicated that punishment is not effective when dealing with disruptive behavior. Some interviewees also asserted this point, suggesting that punishment enhances disruptive behavior as students deliberately harass teachers who get angry quickly. On the other hand, some interviewees believe that punishment could work, especially if the student is scared that his/her parent might find about the disruptive behavior. Some students are also afraid of marks being deducted or the prospect of detention. Based on the researcher's observations, many teachers tended to punish students by removing them from the classroom, calling their parents, deducting marks, and yelling at them. Finally, some direct strategies used by teachers, especially as observed by the researcher, worked very well with disruptive students; these included verbal warnings, verbal praise, raising the tone of voice, politely confronting disruptive students, and monitoring students.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study revealed some classroom management strategies that teachers use to deal with disruptive students. The findings show that teachers should consider establishing classroom rules and routines with their students to minimize the ambiguity of tasks and subjects. Also, praise is important because it allows teachers to encourage students to work hard and grab students' attention with particular tasks. In addition, meaningful instruction and providing students with a positive learning environment can meet students' needs and interests. Furthermore, direct strategies such as verbal warnings and verbal praise are very useful and can minimize the time wasted when dealing with certain students. Moreover, teachers should have a good relationship with their students that is built on trust, respect, and honesty; whenever students have a good relationship with their teachers, they act properly in their classes. Finally, many teachers do not recommend punishment strategies to be used in the classroom. These strategies could negatively reflect the teacher and the rest of the students.

7. IMPLICATIONS

This case-based qualitative research has emphasized the broad area of classroom management and particularly the strategies developed by teachers to manage the disruptive behavior of students. Besides conducting the interviews and observations, this study has analyzed the literature review to highlight the implications. In terms of theoretical implications, this study has explained the different approaches to manage the disruptive behavior of students. Moreover, it has expanded the literature on classroom management, strategies developed by teachers, and disruptive behavior of students. Every teacher is concerned with disruptive behavior in the classroom. Therefore, this study has shifted the attention towards

different strategies that a school teacher can develop to avoid disruption. In comparison to previous studies, this research is different as its main focus was on classroom management during the disruption of students. The researchers focusing on disruptive behaviors can use the results of this study as a guideline. Besides highlighting significant theoretical implications, this study has provided many practical implications. It has directed the attention of school leaders, principals, owners, and particularly the teachers to emphasize on developing strategies to avoid disruption in class. The school teachers can focus on the results of this research to manage the disruption in their class.

8. LIMITATION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The current study offers several classroom management strategies for teachers in dealing with disruptive students, but still it has many limitations. These limitations can be considered by future studies emphasizing the disruptive behavior of students in class. First, the study is limited to a single primary school and it would be beneficial if the future studies can include other primary schools that might experience different types of disruptive students and behavior. Secondly, this research is based on interviews and observation, in the future, the studies can gather the data by using questionnaire and empirically examining the responses.

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