

Classroom management: Strategies and challenges of Iranian teachers

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the strategies and challenges faced by Iranian teachers in classroom management. The importance of this study lied in its potential contribution to effective approaches in classroom management, professional growth of teachers, and research knowledge. To serve that end, it utilized a qualitative research design, employing semi-structured interview and open-ended questionnaire to gather data from a sample of Iranian teachers. The findings revealed that Iranian teachers were required to use different strategies to put their knowledge resources and practices of classroom management into the real context of classroom with high effectiveness. The study also indicated several challenges faced by Iranian teachers, such as students' misbehavior, class communication, fulfillment of learner expectations, time management, care for and attention to learners, giving and receiving feedback, interactions with students' families, flexibility, accountability and commitment, lesson planning, group work planning, and professional ethics. It can be concluded that teachers' classroom management literacy is fed by different knowledge resources. Moreover, classroom management literacy is not formed overnight, but it is the product of various knowledge domains. More importantly, classroom management is not an easy task for Iranian teachers. These findings have significant implications for Iranian teachers, teacher educators and curriculum planners.

Keywords: Classroom Management, Classroom management Strategies, Classroom management Challenges

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1. Introduction

Classroom management has created a lot of concerns for the educational contexts and moreover, it is amongst the most frequent topics for the teacher. In fact, the role the teacher plays in the L2 classroom and the strategies he/she adopts to manage the classroom would definitely affect learners' L2 development and task achievement (Demirdag, 2015). Also, instructors' teaching effectiveness is assessed through their classroom management abilities and viably dealing with learners' misbehaviors in the classroom (Tartwijk & Hammerness, 2011). Successful teachers are expected to establish a thriving learning atmosphere and environment which is invigorating, empowering, and helpful for learners' language acquisition (Wehby & Lane, 2019).

In the broadest term, classroom management alludes to the full scope of teacher efforts to manage classroom activities and learning procedure of the learners, supervise learners' behaviors in the classroom, and lead them toward selecting and conducting appropriate social behaviors (Brorphy, 2006; Burden, 2020). Likewise, Chichermir and Obrazisove (2020) defined classroom management as “the actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to attainment of the goals of instruction” (p. 185). Hence, activities such as arranging the physical environment of classroom, establishing rules and procedures, maintaining attention to lessons and engagement in academic activities could be considered as significant classroom management tasks (Korpershoek & Kuijk, 2014). Thus, classroom management is broader than disciplining learners. This includes what instructors need to apply in order to improve the learners' participation in classroom discussions, collaboration in class activities, and establishment of a productive classroom (Cafferata & Gonzalez, 2013). According to Everstone and Weinstein (2006), classroom management encompasses any specific action the teacher takes in an attempt to encourage learners follow his/ her instructions and move toward both L2 development and social learning. Considering this definition, one might think that relying on instructional procedures is an indispensable notion in classroom management and an ideal status of management in which learners are self-organized is hard to achieve (Akbari & Yazdanmehr, 2015). Provided that Iranian teachers use such cues effectively; they can pave the way for their learners' success in well managed classroom context.

Fuller (2016) categorized teachers' classroom management practices into three domains: planning, implementing, and assessing. This categorization was rooted in strategies used before actual teaching (planning), during teaching (implementing), and after teaching (assessing). Other researchers have also addressed different phases and domains of classroom management (Asghari, Alemi, & Tajeddin, 2021; Moghadam & Mehrpour, 2017; Phillips, Kovanović, Mitchell, & Gašević, 2019; Phillips, Siebert-Evenstone, Kessler, Gasevic, & Shaffer, 2021) have addressed teachers' classroom management. However, a review of studies in the area of teacher classroom management highlights the need to learn more about this topic in Iran. The first step in this regard is to explore the Iranian teachers' strategies in classroom management. The second step is to explore the challenges Iranian teachers experience in classroom management. In order to meet the objectives, the following research questions have been raised:

1. What are Iranian teachers' strategies of classroom management?
2. What are the challenges Iranian teachers experience in classroom management in practice?

2. Review of the Related Literature

Ababneh (2012) studied the students' views concerning classroom management and the way the staff at Al-Balqa'a University managed classes. The findings revealed that active and effective classroom management could help the students improve their abilities in different aspects and make use of the class time more effectively. It was interesting that both genders had similar views in this respect. Moreover, evaluation of teachers' classroom management by the learners could have positive consequences in this respect and would help the teachers reconsider their methods of classroom management. Likewise, they mentioned that the atmosphere in which teachers paved the ground for the active involvement of the learner in the classroom activities could be conducive to better results in terms of learner cooperation and more organized behaviors.

LeFebvre and Allen (2014) analyzed teachers' immediacy in lecture/laboratory setting and independent classrooms. Two hundred fifty-six learners answered to instruments evaluating instructors' immediacy behavior recurrence, impressions of

teaching quality, and cognitive learning. No significant difference was observed between lecture/laboratory setting and independent instructing immediacy practices. However, all learners who perceived recurrent immediate behaviors showed greater levels of cognitive and affective learning. Higher levels of faculty-learner communication were reported in self-contained classrooms while lecture/laboratory settings were significantly superior with regard to learner endeavor and participation.

Akbari and Yazdanmehr (2015) studied the expert teacher class management. The research sought to investigate how expert teachers could manage their class and keep its discipline. 20 specialists including teacher educators, university professors of applied linguistics, mentor teachers and language institute supervisors were selected through purposive snowball and convenience sampling methods, and were interviewed. Four themes and three sub-themes were extracted from the qualitative content analysis of the interviews. The themes included: expert teachers' identification power, use of external control, use of preventive management strategies and monitoring student behavior. The three sub-themes of the second theme were: clarification of expectations, use of body language and establishing rules and routines. The researchers concluded that knowledge of these themes and sub-themes could shed light on a key behavioral aspect of expert English language teachers in class. These strategies, if followed properly, could set good examples for novice teachers and those who have problem managing their classes.

Kuusinen (2016) conducted a meta-analytic review of the relationship between teacher self-efficacy, structured classroom management, supportive classroom climate, and cognitive activation. As the participants of the study, 39 teachers attended the study. As shown by correlation tests, although a significant relationship was found between teacher self-efficacy, structured classroom management, supportive classroom climate, and cognitive activation, the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and cognitive activation was stronger. Macías (2018) also investigated the classroom management challenges, the approaches to confronting them, and the alternatives for improving pre-service teachers' classroom management skills. The finding of the study demonstrated that classroom management was a surmountable hurdle and the challenges ranged from inadequate classroom conditions to explicit acts of misbehavior. Besides, it was

discovered that the main approaches to classroom management could be establishing rules and reinforcing consequences for misbehavior.

To Sum up, the above studies focused on the classroom management from different angles. The present study considered the EFL teachers classroom management to explore the strategies and challenges that Iranian teachers experienced in classroom management. To the researchers' best of knowledge no study has so far been conducted on this issue, at least in the Iranian context. Therefore, the absence of research in this area highlighted the need to conduct the current study to tackle the missed issues to add to the richness of research on EFL context.

3. Methodology

The study population included the Iranian teachers teaching English at different private institutes and universities in Iran. From this population, 30 Iranian teachers (11 males and 19 females) were selected to participate in the study through convenience sampling from different virtual groups in WhatsApp or Telegram. They were PhD holders in TEFL and had more than 15 years of teaching experience. Ethical issues were observed by obtaining consent from the participants to participate in the study. Moreover, they were informed of the study's objectives and were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their personal information.

Two instruments were used for data collection in the present study. A semi-structured interview with five open-ended questions was used to gather the data. Interviews were conducted in a one-to-one format in English. The interview questions were developed based on a literature review. The researcher carried out the interviews herself through WhatsApp and Telegram, and each interview lasted around 35 to 45 minutes. The researcher audio-recorded the interviews for further in-depth analysis. The dependability and credibility of the interview data were checked through member checks and low inference descriptors. Using low-inference descriptors means quoting from the interviewees. Member checking involves checking interpretations with the interviewees to see whether their sayings have been correctly interpreted. The researcher developed an open-ended questionnaire with eight questions based on a thorough literature review and the results of the interviews to triangulate the collected data. The questions were

scrutinized by 10 teachers to ensure their relevance and accuracy. The Google Form containing the questionnaire was sent to the respondents via WhatsApp and Telegram.

For conducting the present research, first the instruments were developed and validated by the researcher. Then, 10 teachers were randomly selected for a preliminary interview to pilot the interview guide. After that, the researcher interviewed 30 teachers through WhatsApp and Telegram to elicit their knowledge resources and perceptions of classroom management. Then, the open-ended questionnaire was administered to the participants. The participants received the Google Form containing the questionnaire through WhatsApp and Telegram. Next, the collected data were analyzed through thematic analysis using MAXQDA.

4. Results

Concerning the first research question “*What are Iranian teachers’ knowledge resources of classroom management?*”, the following strategies were identified for Iranian teachers’ classroom management (Table 1):

Table 1. Iranian teachers’ classroom management strategies

Resources/Practices	Strategies
Academic knowledge	Using knowledge received through academic education
	Using knowledge received through reading papers
	Using knowledge received through reading books
	Using knowledge received through reading theses
Personal opinions	Using personal beliefs
	Using personal ideologies
	Using personal opinions
Past experiences	Using teaching experience
	Learning from university professors’ classroom management
	Learning from colleagues’ classroom management
Professional events	Participating in in-service training courses
	Participating in professional group meetings
	Participating in workshops
Contextual interpretations	Interpreting class situations
	Taking environmental factors into account
Feedback	Using feedback received from supervisors
	Using feedback received from students, and colleagues
Response to students’ misbehavior	Managing naughty students
	Managing students with misbehavior
	Managing students’ aggression
	Managing students’ inattention to assignments
Class communication	Managing teacher-students interaction
	Managing student-student interaction
Fulfillment of learner expectations	Managing learners’ expectations
	Managing students’ desires
	Managing students’ needs

	Managing students' priorities
Time management	Managing time of classroom
Showing care & attention to learners	Showing support to students Showing empathy to students Showing sympathy to students Showing care to students Showing attention to students
Giving & receiving feedback	Giving conducive feedback on students' learning Giving feedback on students' behavior and performance Receiving feedback from students on teaching methods Receiving feedback from students on class behaviors
Interaction with students' family	Being in regular contact with students' family Being informed of students' family background
Showing flexibility	Being flexible in teaching Being flexible in evaluation Being flexible in class interaction
Showing accountability & commitment	Being accountable and committed to students Being accountable and committed to students' families Being accountable and committed to authorities
Planning lessons	Preparing lesson plans before coming to the class
Planning group works	Taking advantage of group activities in the class Taking advantage of group tasks in the class
Following professional ethics	Teaching based on professional ethics Behaving based on professional ethics

Regarding the second research question “*What are the challenges Iranian teachers experience in classroom management in practice?*” as the result of the grounded-theory based thematic analysis of the qualitative data, seven challenges were experienced by the Iranian teachers in classroom management in practice which are shown in Table 2 along with their descriptions.

Table 2. Challenges Iranian teachers experience in classroom management

Challenge	Description
Shortage of time	Short time of classes which are crowded and too difficult to be managed
Shortage of facility	Constraints in the facility of high schools, lack of new technology devices
Low motivation of students	Students whose motivation level to learn English is low
Students' behaviors	Students' impoliteness, naughtiness, and misbehavior in the classroom
Personal concern	Personal life problems and challenges
Demanding textbooks	Textbooks with lots of materials that should be covered in a short time period
Supervisors' misbehavior	Misbehavior of supervisors who regularly observe high school teachers' classes

As shown in the Table 2, seven challenges were identified for the Iranian teachers in classroom management. One of these challenges was shortage of time. By this, the participants meant that the time of classes was short. The following excerpts show this.

Mohammadi: *Time of classes is so limited that you cannot cover the planned works and activities. I myself can just cover half of the works in my mind.*

Yavari: *The challenge of time constraint is problematic for me. Practically, 20 minutes of the time of class is wasted. Just 70 minutes remain which is too short to permit you to do whatever you have decided to do before coming to the class.*

As the second challenge shown in Table 2, shortage of facility was identified. This refers to physical facilities which must be available in the classroom or high school to make English teaching more effective. The following excerpts illustrate this:

Rezaei: *We have a big problem in classroom management and that is shortage of physical facility. For instance, there is no language lab in our schools. This is a basic need for English teachers.*

Taheri: *A main challenge of classroom management is lack of facility. Teachers cannot even show a video to the students in the classroom. Most of the classes have no computer. These make classroom management a challenging task for teachers.*

As the third challenge, low motivation of students was shown in the Table 2. This refers to students' low motivation or lack of motivation to learn English language. This is confirmed by the following excerpts:

Naderi: *Students don't show any motivation to learn English. They think that learning English is useless and time consuming. I think that my students are not motivated to learn English.*

Jaberi: *Lack of motivation in English learning is the main challenge of classroom management. Students don't have interest to learn English. Students' motivation is constantly reducing in these years.*

The fourth challenge illustrated in Table 2 was students' behaviors which referred to students' impoliteness, naughtiness, and misbehavior in the classroom. This point is clear in the following excerpts:

Pakdaman: *A challenge which affects classroom management is that students behave impolitely. Students' impoliteness is reflected in all aspects of their behavior. This makes me exhausted in managing the classroom.*

Zahedi: *Impoliteness of students is a preventive factor in classroom management. They do not behave with their teacher politely. Politeness is really observed in few students.*

Personal concern was the fifth challenge identified in the data. This is referred to the

teachers' personal life problems and challenges. The following excerpts describe this issue:

Zarei: *I am not satisfied with my life. My mind is always occupied with so many matters from financial problems to family issues. This puts no energy for managing the classroom.*

Amiri: *My personal life is a block in classroom management. Sometimes I am physically in the class but my mind is miles away. Thus, I am not well prepared to manage my class.*

The sixth challenge indicated in the Table 4.4 was heavy textbooks. By this, textbooks with high number of materials that should be covered in a short time period are meant. See the reflection of this challenge in the following excerpts:

Mansouri: *The volume of materials of the textbooks is very high. A teacher finds it too hard to cover this number of materials. Because teachers are always busy with finishing the textbooks, they ignore other aspects of classroom management.*

Safari: *Practically, the proportion of textbook materials to the time of each class session is not reasonable. In each session, we should teach about 10 pages of the book. This is a hard task for teachers. This challenge is inevitably effective on classroom management.*

The last challenge indicated in the Table 4.4 was supervisors' misbehavior. By this, the misbehavior of supervisors who regularly observe high school teachers' classes was meant. See the representation of this challenge in the following excerpts:

Ghaderi: *In education ministry, a well-known procedure is that some supervisors observe the classes. Unfortunately, the behavior of them is very negative, instead of being negative. This reverse effect demotivates me in managing the classroom.*

Ebrahimi: *Supervisors' comments in their regular visits from my class have a bad influence on my energy on classroom management. They think that they are the bosses of teachers. This approach towards teachers prevents them from taking appropriate measures to manage the classes.*

5. Discussion

In discussing findings related to the first research question, it can be argued that Iranian teachers are required to use different strategies to put their knowledge resources and practices of classroom management into the real context of classroom with high effectiveness. According to Čiuladienė and Račelytė (2016), classroom management

needs plans or strategies to be efficient in real teaching contexts. By the strategies which are related to and congruent with knowledge resources and practices of classroom management, classroom management is operationalized through being converted from a theoretical construct into a practical construct. To this end, as put by Jasso et al. (2016), teachers are needed to resort to various strategies in sequential or simultaneous form in a way that classrooms can be appropriately managed.

Considering the second research question, the following challenges were extracted for the Iranian teachers' classroom management: Shortage of time, shortage of facility, low motivation of students, students' behaviors, personal disturbance, heavy textbooks, and supervisors' misbehavior. In the same line with the present study, in the studies by Chory et al. (2017) and Derakhshan et al. (2020), shortage of time, behavior of students, and personal problems were found as the main challenges experienced by teachers when managing the classroom. Students' low motivation, shortage of facility and large curricula, were consistent with the results of Kazemi and Tornbolm (2008), Rasooli et al. (2019) and Taha (2022). However, supervisors' misbehavior was unique to the present study.

The Iranian teachers apparently experience challenges of classroom management due to factors which are individual, system-based, and social. Personal disturbance is obviously an individual factor. This causes classroom management malfunction/dysfunction at the individual level by occupying teachers' mind and disturbing their concentration. Shortage of time, shortage of facility and heavy textbooks are challenges which are rooted in the educational system. These are limitations which are out of the personal hands and removing which requires taking appropriate measures by top-level authorities. Low motivation of students, students' behaviors and supervisors' misbehavior are social factors which are related to inter-personal relationships of teachers with others. These act at the social level by distorting teachers' interactions and communications.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the present study led to some conclusions on Iranian teachers' classroom management. Teachers' classroom management literacy is fed by different knowledge resources. Proof for this deduction can be found in the types of knowledge resources

extracted from the data through thematic analysis. Moreover, classroom management literacy is not formed overnight but it is the product of various knowledge domains. More importantly, it can be concluded that classroom management is not an easy task for Iranian teachers. Evidence to this deduction is the mentioned challenges by the participants of the present study. They perceived classroom management as a challenging construct wherein several factors including shortage of time, shortage of facility, low motivation of students, students' behaviors, personal disturbance, heavy textbooks, and supervisors' misbehavior prevent them from managing classrooms. These challenges pave the way for the sixth conclusion: teachers are required to resort to different types of strategies to convert classroom management knowledge resources and practices into practical activities namely classroom management, in real situations. Coping with the challenges of classroom management requires using different strategies.

Findings of this research have useful insights to those involved in teaching on how to manage their classroom. The results of this study also sensitize the stakeholders to the importance of exploring classroom management among teachers, as a relatively under-probed research area. Further, the present study developed a model which can be used for guiding the pre-service and in-service teachers in classroom management. Additionally, the developed model in this study can be used as an evaluative instrument by supervisors in evaluating classroom management performance of teachers.

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