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Effectively Managing Classroom: A Case Study of Four Novice Elementary Teachers in Private Schools

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Abstract *This study explored the lived experiences of novice elementary school teachers with respect to classroom management. This study used a phenomenological case study research design. Four novice elementary school teachers struggling with classroom management were selected from private elementary schools in Lahore. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit the lived experiences of the participants. All interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for conducting a qualitative content analysis of the data. The analysis revealed that novice teachers faced various challenges in managing their class—and used multiple pedagogical techniques to handle day-to-day classroom issues. Usually, a new teacher is highly dependent on the support and help from the school management; irony, however, is that they seldom receive any. This study contributes to contextual knowledge related to the issues and needs of novice private elementary school teachers at the start of their careers.*

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Introduction

The most critical aspect of teaching is how effectively a teacher manages the classroom. A teacher cannot successfully teach their students if they cannot handle the class appropriately, which is also a significant concern for both; principals and parents. Repeatedly failing to exercise effective classroom management can cost teachers stress, depression, and even quitting their job.

Teachers are the most valuable source of education in a school. They are the ones who effectively proceed with the process of learning. But teachers need support to give quality education. Especially when they are new to the profession, experiencing a real classroom is altogether a different experience than studying it as a teachers' education program (Burns & Darling-Hammond, 2014). Almost all novice teachers experience problems in classroom management at the start of their careers (Klassen & Durksen, 2014).

A novice teacher is the one who is just beginning to work in an actual classroom, often having just done a teacher preparation program (Collins & O'Brien, 2011). Classroom management can be defined as skills required "in the organization and presentation of lessons in such a way that all pupils are actively engaged in learning" (Laslett & Smith, 2002, p. 2). Classroom management does not only help teacher manage students but provide favorable conditions to implement the planning (Lewis, 2008, p. 10). Properly managed classrooms reap the benefits of a community of well-bounded participants (Cummings, 2000).

Novice teachers face stress and frustration while managing the classroom. The researcher opines that the underlying reason for stress in many cases is the missing link between teacher education degree and actual classroom experience (Burkman, 2012; Husain, Gulzar, & Ageel, 2016; Raba & Mahmoud, 2016; Struyven &

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Vanthournout, 2014). Therefore, the teachers who have a teacher education degree or academic degree should be given the opportunity for continuous professional development because this helps classroom management (Kwaku, Mensah, & Jonathan, 2016).

Besides, novice teachers face a lot of problems in private schools due to inappropriate working conditions, high student strength, and issues regarding classroom management are immense, particularly the behavior issues in classes. The teacher has a high workload and less time to plan for classes. At the same time, there is no support system available, like team teaching or teacher consultants, which may help them in lesson planning and classroom management (Simon & Johnson, 2015). It is essential to improve the teaching experience of novice private school teachers in Pakistan to give a quality education (Ashley et al., 2014; Iqbal, 2012).

The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) provides the statistics that 40% of our private elementary teachers have teacher education degrees (Pakistan, 2015) as the researchers claimed that teacher education is crucial in producing pedagogically trained teachers (Pugatch, 2017). Teaching in twenty-first-century schools is difficult, so the teachers should be taught the twenty-first-century skills to manage their classes in a better way (Guerriero, 2017). It is crucial for private schools in Pakistan to only hire teachers with a professional degree in teacher's education program, as it provides an analogy of classroom processes, consequently improving the quality of education. Additionally, its high time to upgrade teachers' education curriculum and the courses taught to address better modern challenges (Farah, Fauzee, & Daud, 2016).

Literature Review

Effective classroom management is an art, and unfortunately, not many of them are skilled at it (Hong, 2010; Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, & Boshuizen, 2015). Only a managed classroom supports an organized and effective teaching-learning process. (Ur, 2006). Teachers' interpersonal rapport, flexibility, consistency, discipline, pedagogical content knowledge, and willingness to change make the very fabric of a managed classroom (Raba & Mahmoud, 2016). "Classroom *Management* refers to skill in the organization and presentation of lessons in such a way that all pupils are actively engaged in learning" (Laslett & Smith, 2002, p. 2). Four tenets of classroom management, as described by Lewis (2008), are:

1. An effective seating plan;
2. Quality relationship between teachers and students;
3. Pedagogical and Content knowledge informed by age appropriateness;
4. An ongoing and regular process of observation and documentation.

Generally, novice teachers mirror the management styles of their mentors and teachers. (Rideout & Windle, 2017). However, dealing with the organizational pressures to follow the deadlines while managing the mood swings of their students makes it stressful so much so that teachers quit the profession. (Buchanan et al., 2013; Struyven & Vanthournout, 2014). Novice teachers do not have the expertise that helps predict the class's situation to manage the problems that provoke students to disrupt the academic activity (Wolff, Jarodzka, den Bogert, & Boshuizen, 2016). Classroom management is challenging not for novice teachers but experienced ones as well (Al-Zu'bi, 2013). On the contrary, it was found that more experienced teachers are less likely to experience stress and burnout owing to classroom management (Fisher, 2011). Additionally, school management, through training, can maintain the retention and satisfaction rate of the teachers. (Fisher, 2011).

Novice teachers pointed out that they have the most significant issue in dealing with emotionally disturbed pupils. Emotionally disturbed pupils can be defined as "aggressive students who sometimes are involved in bullying." Aggressive students engage in activities like calling names, dragging, and hitting. Such behaviors are destructive for classroom management and often threaten the well-being of other students and their families but their selves (Espelage et al., 2013). Disruptive students are generally supported by their class fellows, driven by ulterior motives, and usually are difficult to handle (Garandeau, Lee, & Salmivalli, 2014). A study found that teachers feel challenged while working with psychologically disturbed, hyperactive pupils leading to

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difficulty in dealing with the strenuous task of classroom management (DeAngelis, Wall, & Che, 2013). Such students usually hinder teacher-learning processes by initiating activities that are captivating and can hold students' attention. Such students, if countered inaptly, can become violent. Teachers, therefore, should be appropriately trained to handle such issues. (Burkman, 2012).

Though teachers are usually trained, they need assistance and guidance from their seniors and school management to face ground realities independently. Introducing professional learning communities or collaborative learning circles can benefit such teachers to a great extent. Teachers who are members of such support and learning groups are usually more confident, feel more efficacious in their classrooms, and don't feel withdrawn (Feiman-Nemser, 2012). Additionally, novice teachers find the support from mentor teachers and their positive feedback valuable for improving their classroom management. Also, such teachers have comparatively high motivational levels and ultimately manage their classrooms effectively (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010). Similarly, another study revealed that novice teachers' relationships with the school environment and colleagues support them adjusting to the workplace (Johnson et al., 2014).

Methods and Materials

To explore the lived experiences of four private elementary school novice teacher's case study methodology was employed with phenomenology as a theoretical framework. It allowed the researcher to investigate the problem, collect the data in the actual setting, remain sensitive to the people and problem, and reach themes from respondents' voices through the inductive method (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Moreover, a case study deals with a case or an individual. Let them explain their perspective on the problem, its context, and their unique experiences (Creswell, 2008, p. 73). The use of phenomenology as a theoretical framework allowed to explore a rich, detailed, first-person account of participants' experiences through interviews (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

The purposive sampling using criterion sampling technique was used to study novice teachers' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). The study ensured that all four participants had a professional teaching degree, were employed in either elite or low-cost private elementary schools. Essentially, all the participants were not having a total teaching experience of more than three months and were doing their first job.

In-depth interviews were used to collect the data. Interviews were conducted at the scheduled time and date as decided by the mutual understanding of participants and the researcher at the place of their convenience. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and were analyzed after transcription using profiling.

Findings

Participant 1

The participant was a Master's in education and taught at a local school in Lahore for three months. She was teaching arts and paintings to classes 1st to 3rd, joined the profession out of her own choice, and was not bothered by the profession's modest salary. She felt proud of her choice and contented about the massive respect and appreciation she got from her students and their families. She declared teaching as an exceptionally safe profession for females.

She first learned about classroom management and its important role, various issues, challenges, and techniques to manage classrooms. She opined that effective teaching could never take place unless the classroom is not properly managed. The teaching-learning process requires teachers to be pro at classroom management skills. She believed that classroom management varies from one class to another and requires a teacher to effectively address the individualistic classroom needs, desires, and mental ability. Despite an ideal classroom size, i.e., 15 students per teacher, teachers usually manage 25 to 30 students per teacher, making it arduous for a teacher to partake individual attention. Additionally, non-teaching activities ranging from all the paperwork involved, writing planners, and decorating classes make it rather an arduous activity on the whole. Students usually engage in disturbing activities when left unattended.

She is a typical novice teacher who used corporal punishments to control them upon getting offended by quarrelsome students. She, however, showed her antipathy for hitting students or using abusive language for the students. She didn't know any way to organize

her classrooms and had not been provided with training from the school management.

She agreed that training in a particular school context is crucial in classroom management besides having a professional teaching degree. Having a supporting coordinator and cooperative senior staff in the school helped her understand her students. Also, her principal's feedback on her activities helped her reflect on her work; consequently, she improved her classroom management craft. She opined that teacher retention rates could be sustained if they are supported in classroom management in their early days.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is Masters in Education and is teaching Urdu and Islamiyat to classes 1-3 and is working for two and a half months. Having belonged to a financially humble background and determined to pursue her MPhil education, she needed a stable source of income. So she opted for teaching as her profession.

Participant 2 is another typical novice teacher who feels difficulty while managing time effectively. Though she has been a student of education, she never studied it as a subject but the chapter. She found classroom management utterly difficult as she declares herself not a proficient multi-tasker. She found it strenuous to teach, deal with the students, and respond to official messages simultaneously in just 40 minutes.

Given the students are not adequately engaged in the lessons being taught in the classroom, she thought they were bound to be involved in activities such as hitting, snatching, pricking pencils, and raising arguments in classes. On the other hand, teachers had no authority in their classes due to the no-corporal punishment law. She told refraining students from enjoying their break and games periods, inducing written punishments rather than physical and punitive punishments are effective alternates to corporal punishments. She also found non-verbal cues as a very effective means of managing the classrooms. Her students responded to her cold stare more than to her shouts. She commented that inducing punishments are sometimes necessary as it keeps things on track. She commented that ill-mannered students, overtime, impractical deadlines for paperwork trigger stress and frustration.

She thinks that teaching requires an enormous amount of continuous effort. It is an ongoing improvement process and needs teachers to be guided and mentored by senior teachers and school administration. She also thought that novice teachers would most likely experience mismanaged classrooms if not guided about the school processes. She declared mentorship as extremely helpful in this regard. Additionally, feedback from her principal also helped her in improving her management techniques. Sharing her problems with seniors had helped her a lot in learning new techniques and handling her students. She recommended that team teaching should be encouraged in all schools.

Participant 3

Participant three has been a teacher in an Elite school for 3.5 months. Teaching Urdu to 6 to 9 classes bears a master's degree in education. She joined school teaching to gain experience as she aspires to become a lecturer after securing her M.Phil in education. She is so far enjoying her experience.

She is a novice teacher and had never studied classroom management as a subject. She is a great advocate of active learning and could easily keep her students busy in the learning process. She declared herself a self-taught classroom manager and critically evaluated her performance by saying 'zero to hero.' She said she felt devasted owing to not having a managed classroom. Neither her school administration nor her seniors helped her in learning the techniques. Had it not been for her teaching friends outside the school, she would have quit the profession. She regarded her teaching circle for introducing her to the concept of active learning, which kept the students busy to the extent that most of her issues regarding the discipline were solved on their own.

She termed hitting, punching, calling names, using abusive language, vandalism, and unwillingness to study as disruptive behaviors. She regarded boys as more disrupting than girls. Aggressive students, she told, operate on a different tangent. They had been the mastermind of disturbance. They bully their fellows, make mischief, yell not just on their class fellows but sometimes at the teacher, and are the self-

declared victim in every reported act. She said that she had to shout to control them. Yet, she rejected the probability of using degrading or abusive remarks against students no matter how seriously they misbehaved.

She regarded stress as the by-product of teaching, which can not be avoided. She commented that stress is embedded in mismanaged classrooms. She commented that it took her a while to realize that she won't manage anything unless she goes prepared in the classroom. She said her unprepared lessons were the root cause of stress for her. Though all the facts had always been on her fingertips, teaching goes beyond remembering facts; it requires a teacher to be prompt and prepared for unexpected questions. She commented that managed classrooms leave a profound impact on students and their families and on management.

She believed that school staff, experienced teachers, and the school administration had their roles in adjusting a novice teacher. Providing her with a manageable workload during her early days, issuing humanly achievable deadlines, facilitating her with the resources, and providing her emotional support could help improve the school situation.

Participant 4

The participant is teaching class II as a home-teacher. She scored her M.A in Education from a local university in Lahore and bore three months of teaching experience at an elite school.

Becoming a doctor was her childhood dream. Nonetheless, her unstable financial situation didn't let her pursue her dream. Regardless of scoring good marks, she opted for studying education. Having respect for teachers grounded in her family norms, she decided to pursue teaching after completing her education. Though she is still struggling to make both ends meet, yet she enjoys teaching. She regarded a satisfied student as the greatest of all achievements. She is grateful to families for acknowledging her efforts.

She is well acquainted with the concept of classroom management as she had studied it during her leadership course. She defined classroom management as managing classroom and teaching-learning processes with such efficiency that all students feel important and satisfied. Analyzing students' attitudes, understanding their behaviors, developing an understanding of their motivations make the very fabric of a satisfied classroom.

Though she was familiar with classroom management, practically managing a classroom was a nerve tautening task when she first started teaching. She said that she had 25 students in her class. They all belonged to different backgrounds and bore different personalities. Teaching books had never been a challenge for her but manners. Some of her students in her class were verbally abusive to others, thus creating a disturbance. She said that students are usually disturbed when they feel emotionally disconnected from their teacher or are not properly involved in the teaching-learning process. She opined that in either case, students might indulge in misleading activities such as complaining, whispering, wrecking school property, and finger-pointing others, ultimately leading to a noisy classroom which she regarded as the genesis of a mismanaged classroom. Explaining her management with disruptive students, she said that since students are different, they can not be formula-treated. Some can be caressed, whereas others might be needing a rather strict treatment. She claimed that it took her less than a month to train her students to be gentle with others. Since then, they have been very cooperative and understanding not just to each other but even to the pressures of their teacher. She had never received any offending comments during her newly-started career. She was in awe of her students while explaining that once she felt irritated and left her class. Though her students were just the second graders, she severely dreaded her resentment and never created trouble afterwards.

She commented that the teacher should be vocal and expressive with her students. Having on-point body language helped her a lot in classroom management. She expressed her anger through her facial gestures, which the students well understood. She, however, had taken some serious actions against rebellious students.

She commented that administrations and experienced teachers are remarkably important for training novice teachers. However, neither of them was encouraging and supportive. Based on their seniority, teachers always keep a distance from their juniors; subsequently, an unwelcome environment is promoted. However, she appreciated her coordinator for breaking the stereotype and working in collaboration with the

newly hired. She believed in the show and tell and had been taking teachers to her lectures. She stressed that principals should be more vocal and honest while providing their feedback.

Conclusions

It is pretty apparent that novice teachers have to deal with a lot of pressure during their early days. The majority of the cases belonged to financially humbled backgrounds and have joined teaching for sustainable survival. It is, however, evident that all of them see teaching as their permanent profession and have a burning desire to excel at it. None of them had a nuanced understanding of classroom management and mixed it with discipline management.

As the cases show, most teachers think that mentorship is beneficial in training teachers for classroom management alongside their professional training and can be an area of future research. It is also worth noting that the most confident of all the teachers discussed getting help from teaching circles other than her colleagues, which speculates the importance of professional learning communities and their far-reaching benefits in teaching. After scrutinizing teacher-induction courses, it may be possible to amend:

1. Teaching curricula to bring teaching at par to 21st-century skills;
2. Effective training plans dealing with real-class-scenario under the guidance of trained teacher-instructor/mentor;
3. To develop a cognition that teachers, parents, and administration are equally responsible for the smooth teaching-learning process.

Undoubtedly, teaching is a noble profession; however, a cognition to address the ever-changing dynamics should be developed. Our teaching curriculum should not be taught as the mere requirement of the degree but rather address problems faced in a real classroom by posing solutions using the latest developments in education (Davis, 2017; Farrell, 2009, 2012). Most teacher preparation programs only cover basic classroom management concepts and skills such as developing rules and routines, praising students, and communicating with parents of students (Flower, McKenna, & Haring, 2017; Guerriero, 2014). Therefore, a more diverse perspective is needed to be brought into the teacher preparation programs.

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