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Elite Schools Principals' Concerns and Beliefs Regarding Beginning Teachers' Classroom Management Skills: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the concerns and beliefs of the elite school principals regarding novice teachers' classroom management skills. This qualitative research used hermeneutic phenomenology as its research design, and ten principals of the elite schools of Lahore were participants of the study selected through criterion purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions of principals regarding novice teachers' classroom management skills. The analysis revealed that regardless of the theoretical knowledge, novice teachers need practical training, and only time, experience, and hard work can further hone their management skills. The crux of the matter is to incorporate professional development courses dealing with classroom management skills as mandatory for all novice teachers to create an organizational culture that supports novice teachers to become effective classroom organizers. The findings of the study will be helpful for teachers, principals, and school management.

Keywords: Novice Teachers, Principals, Classroom Management, Qualitative Research

Introduction

Beginning teachers often face obstacles regarding classroom management and discipline issues (Martin & Baldwin, 1996; Saleem, Muhammad, & Siddiqui, 2021). Classroom management includes managing a conducive environment for successful teaching-learning, for instance, organizing a physical environment, setting rules and procedures, and sustaining students' behavior (Jones, 2013). Usually, beginning teachers are unable to handle unpredictable student behaviors and classroom management problems; thus, effective management skills are essential to facilitate the teaching-learning process (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020b). Classroom management skills are important as it directly affects the quality of teaching; hence polishing classroom management strategies are crucial (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003; Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2021).

Many researchers believe using classroom management strategies is quite a challenging task (Naveed, Muhammad, & Siddiqui, 2022; Zaka & Muhammad, 2021). The basic objective of classroom management skills is to develop social attitudes and behavior while also increasing the academic progress of students (Simonsen, Myers, & DeLuca, 2010; Tahira, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020). The efficiency of teachers and students increases with the use of active learning techniques such as hands-on activities and collaborative projects in a well-managed classroom (Evertson, 2007; Hani, Muhammad, & Mahmood, 2022; Pirzada, Muhammad, & Zaka, 2021), which maximizes students' learning and progress (Allen & Blackston, 2003; Saleem, Muhammad, & Qureshi, 2021).

With "classroom management," the first thing that comes to mind is discipline. Although classroom management is a vital process, it cannot be restricted to discipline only (Duck, 2007; Siddiqui, Arif, & Muhammad, 2020). Well-managed classrooms reduce the misbehavior of students and maximize their progress and involvement. Many researchers suggest that teachers' competency in handling classrooms has a direct correlation to learners' progress (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2019). Hence beginning teachers need to be skilled and competent classroom managers (Diana, Muhammad, & Iftikhar, 2021; Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020a). A principal, being an instructional leader, plays a key role in classroom management practices of teachers as the vision of the school is reflected in classrooms (Siddiqui, Muhammad, & Naseer, 2021; Yasmin, Muhammad, & Siddiqui, 2021)

The purpose of this study is to explore the elite school principals' concerns and beliefs regarding beginning teachers' classroom management skills. Classroom management is a critical skill for beginning teachers to maximize the growth and learning of students. There is little research on the principal's belief regarding the classroom management skills of a novice teacher. The current study will explore this phenomenon and fill the gap in research. The purpose of this study is to explore the beliefs of elite school principals regarding beginning teacher classroom management and providing emotional and instructional support to students. The research questions for this study are:

- What are the beliefs of elite school principals regarding beginning teachers' classroom management techniques?
- What are the beliefs of elite school principals regarding the emotional and instructional support provided to students by beginning teachers?

Review of Literature

A study by Blase and Kirby (2008) revealed teachers' belief that principals are the support system of the school. The principal maintains the discipline of the school and gives confidence, security, and control to teachers. According to principals, one major concern while hiring new staff in the school is effective classroom management strategies and skills (Ralph, Kesten, Lang, & Smith, 1998). Ralph et al. surveyed 95 Canadian principals to find out their concern area, and it revealed that 83% of the principals believe that classroom management strategies are crucial.

Marzano et al. (2003) stated that in the classroom teacher plays the role of classroom manager. It's the teacher's responsibility to tackle the non-serious behavior of students with efficient management skills. Bagley developed the first documented research on classroom management in 1907 by evaluating management techniques. He identified effective teachers through textbooks, his personal experiences, and observation. Bagley's book "Classroom management: Its Principles and Techniques" focuses on behavior management.

Research conducted by many researchers elaborates that students' ill behavior causes multiple problems for teachers, and it results in anxiety issues among teachers (Aman, Muhammad, & Batool, 2021; Saleem et al., 2019). Many researchers have suggested that it is crucial to integrate classroom management skills and strategies in teacher education. The principal needs to hire those teachers who can manage a class efficiently. The teacher, being a manager of the class, is completely responsible for the academics and behavior of students (Evertson, 2007).

The framework selected for this research explores the three domains of classroom management: emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). By following this framework, the teaching-learning process will lead to the efficacy and professional development of students. For effective classroom management, these three domains are important. Using this framework increases classroom interaction by integrating three domains in the classroom. These three domains have further dimensions; for instance, emotional support is divided into further three dimensions, positive and negative classroom climate, regard for student's perspective, and teacher sensitivity. Classroom organization is divided into productivity, behavior management, and instructional learning formats. And the last domain of instructional support includes concept development, language modeling, and quality of feedback.

Methods

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews to collect data. The major reason for using semi-structured interviews in qualitative research is to take detailed thoughts of the respondents

Table 1: Demographic information of the participants

School	Names	Public/ Private	Test-based employment	Demo based employment
School 1	Beacon House School	Private	Test-based (BELT to be given, and 80% score is required)	The demo is taken for the required level to be taught
School 2	Lahore Grammar School	Private	No test required	The demo is taken for the required level to be taught

Criterion sampling was used to select the participants of the study as it proved useful in previous studies (Khalid, Muhammad, & Siddiqui, 2022; Khawaja, Muhammad, & Siddiqui, 2022). The following criteria were used to decide the inclusion of participants in this study:

- 1) Participants must be the principal of an elite school in Lahore. Elite schools are those that have restrictive criteria for employment.
- 2) Participants had at least five years of experience in the field.

Table 2: Demographic information of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Academic Qualification	Experience
Participant 1	Female	42	Master's in English	10 years
Participant 2	Female	52	MPhil English	9 years
Participant 3	Female	54	Master's in Linguistics	12 years
Participant 4	Female	49	Master's in Physics	13 years
Participant 5	Female	46	Ph.D. in Mathematics	15 years
Participant 6	Female	54	Master's in Computer Sciences	10 years
Participant 7	Female	58	Master's in English	16 years
Participant 8	Female	52	Master's in Economics	13 years
Participant 9	Female	49	MBA	13 years
Participant 10	Female	48	Master's in economics	16 years

The researcher contacted the participants by WhatsApp to discuss the next steps in the research process. After that, the interviews were conducted via Zoom according to the ease of the participants and the Covid situation. Zoom's built-in recording function was used to record the interviews. The whole data was transferred and saved in a computer to analyze the data. All interview recordings were transcribed and translated into English. The analysis of data proceeded using cross-case analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2020).

Findings

Theme one: Emotional Support

Participants were asked the question, being a principal, do you think novice teachers have any knowledge regarding classroom management strategies? A wide variety of the participants responded that novice teachers are unaware of classroom management strategies. They believed that training and workshops were required to learn new strategies and to make the classroom organized and productive. For example, one participant said:

The teachers who are very new to the system don't know how to deal with the students in the classroom; they don't know how to make plans and how to implement them how to conduct the lesson. We need to train them from scratch, and everything we need to explain to them, and then they get to know, but there are few teachers who are vigilant enough to learn things from the environment. (Participant 7)

Teachers, however, agreed that based on their educational degree courses, they have some prior understanding of classroom management. Nevertheless, in-house training arranged by the school management goes a long way and is equally beneficial for the teachers and the school management.

Emotional support from the school management is always proportional to the overall performance of the staff. When enquired if novice teachers need emotional support, almost all the participants agreed that emotional support provides confidence to experiment in the class and apply classroom management strategies creatively without being threatened.

For instance, one participant said:

When the teacher enters the school, and it's not an easy job to do, they may get upset about the things, how to cater to their students, how to deal with them, and how to conduct the lesson, sometimes they do get upset. So, for that, we need to sympathize with them. And we need to give them emotional support. (Participant 1)

Another participant said that to accommodate diversity, novice teachers need emotional support. She said:

Yes, teaching is an emotionally draining career. And it's not just about the teacher's performance; it's also about how pupils act and learn. As a result, to regulate behaviors and accommodate diversity, teachers require emotional support. (Participant 7)

Another participant emphasized the emotional bond between teachers and students:

It works a lot. If you want to teach a child in a proper way, you need to develop a kind of contact, or you need to mingle yourself with them; you must come to their level first, and then you will be able to teach them. And if a child is not feeling comfortable in the class, the

child won't be able to learn anything. So, quality learning for quality teaching is necessary. (Participant 1)

Talking about the importance of a positive climate in the classroom, some participants mentioned that it depends on the personality of the teacher; if the teacher has a positive personality, she will try to inculcate positivity in the classroom. One teacher said:

I think it depends on the personality of a person; if a teacher has a positive personality, the teacher will try to develop that kind of atmosphere in the classroom as well. But a teacher must know that a positive environment is the most important for the learning for quality learning. (Participant 9)

Some participants don't believe that novice teachers have any idea of positivity in the classroom. They are unknown to the behavioral and management issues which are happening in the classrooms. As one participant said:

I don't think so. They really don't know what a healthy and learning atmosphere is where learning is happening. Because if there are behavioral and management issues, the learning won't be taking place. I have seen the teachers that are teaching their content. They come, and they just deliver what they are saying, and they ignore the things happening around them in the class. They are not aware of it most of the time. (Participant 2)

All the participants said that novice teachers should be encouraged to build a positive climate in the classrooms by giving them training and workshops, interacting with experienced teachers, also, by observing their peers. The attitude of the school head towards things and towards teachers needs to be optimistic, and the second thing they highlighted is the element of trust. For example, one participant quoted:

First, I believe that I myself should have a positive vibe towards the teachers and the students. So, I think my behavior would encourage the rest of the teachers, especially the new ones, especially the teachers who had just joined, so I should set goals that should be positive towards them. So, I believe that it starts with trust. So, if I trust the teacher, staff, and students so a positive climate atmosphere will be created. (Participant 7)

Most of the participants said novice teachers don't use strategies to avoid a negative climate in the school. They do learn it with the passage of time by seeking guidance from the workshops and co-teachers. They have no idea of eliminating the negative climate from the classroom. It's the schools' responsibility to give them training.

Research participants were asked the question of whether they believe that novice teachers are well known for the importance of sensitivity and students' comfort level for managing effective classrooms. And almost all participants shared that novice teachers are not aware of the sensitivity and comfort level of students. Novice teachers are not familiar with the concept of sensitivity and student comfort level and cannot cater to the individual needs of students. Training is very important for them to get into these matters. One participant quoted:

Yes, teachers should be aware, but I doubt that new teachers are aware of the sensitivity and comfort level of students to manage an effective classroom. So, no, not at all. However, they recognize that if pupils are not comfortable with the teacher or the classroom environment, learning will not take place. So, not at first, but over time, the teacher will realize and learn. (Participant 7)

Theme two: Classroom organization

Participants were asked if they were familiar with classroom organization. In the responses, most of the participants shared that new teachers are unknown to classroom organization. It needs to be taught. For example, the participant quoted:

Well, maybe they are familiar with classroom organization without knowing that it is classroom organization. But not too technical, because a novice teacher that I would hire, I would not expect them to know all this. I would know that they must learn all this. (Participant 4)

Some of the participants said novice teachers learn the organization of the classroom by spending time in their respective classrooms and by seeking help from co-experienced teachers. All participants said that training is the most important step in novice teachers' professional careers. It increases the productivity of novice teachers, and improves the teachers' perceptions as they start reflecting on their own practice. One of the participants quoted:

Yes. Without that, they won't be able to do that, because I think basic knowledge of what to do and what not to do should be with them, rest is on their practice, because major, you know, theory and practice, carries equal marks. So, a theory should be there; it should be taught through workshops, classroom management, and teaching strategies. So, all these things should be taught to them, and the rest they can practice in their own classrooms when they put to practice. (Participant 2)

Another participant shared:

Without a doubt. After training, novice instructors implement new strategies in the classroom; teachers learn how to apply effective strategies, group activities, and questioning techniques, among other things. As a result, it will undoubtedly boost productivity. (Participant 8)

Research participants were asked how they could bring change to instructional learning formats of novice teachers. Almost all participants gave the same response that novice teachers can bring a change by getting trained in instructional learning formats in which different strategies are demonstrated. They all strongly believed in training sessions, formal and informal training, walkthrough, and observations. Collectively these all things bring a change. Quoting one of the participants:

Informal and formal observation, walkthrough, and discussions will bring change and productivity as we know that everything can be taught by training and workshops. If the novice teacher is a very good learner and he or she is very much into the teaching, then they will learn it quickly and will also apply it in the classrooms. (Participant 2)

Research participants were asked about ways to empower novice teachers to be effective classroom managers. Participants felt that trusting them by giving them confidence and authority in their own work is the key. One of the participants said:

The criticism is when they feel that something some expectation is not real; whatever we are telling them is not a real thing. And it is when you say something that has zero links with a reality check. So, the best thing is to perform it in front of them and show them that this is how it has been done. And the Head should have built the trust level and given them authority to do their work on their own. It will give them confidence and a sense of responsibility. When all these things are being done, then there is no point in criticism. (Participant 2)

Few of the participants believed that there should be constructive criticism. Novice teachers cannot be perfect overnight. It takes time and a lot of struggle. For example, she quoted:

Okay, so first, being novice teachers, we need to understand that the teacher won't get perfect overnight. She is going to get perfect step by step, and you cannot expect a novice teacher to do everything together. Like there are certain areas in which a novice teacher needs improvement, we must go one step at a time. First, we must pick up one crucial point; we must train the teacher accordingly. And then, we must follow up on whether that thing is implemented in the classroom as well and then move on to the next. So, let's say that if I have observed a novice teacher, and I am going to give her feedback, first, to motivate her further, I am going to encourage her, and I am going to appreciate her for the good things that she did in the classroom. And then, I am going to ask her to reflect on her own lesson. Like how she perceived that okay, what could be done better, because, you know, for a novice teacher, reflection is the most important thing. Because once they reflect, they know, they realize something that they've done wrong, then they can make it better. (Participant 4)

All participants agreed that they could be empowered by giving them opportunities by motivating them to achieve the level of effective classroom managers. And by having clear expectations of what the organization is demanding. Also, novice teachers can be empowered by letting them reflect on their work that what they have done, and what are their weak areas. One of the participants supported this and said:

We can empower them by creating opportunities or creating opportunities with clear expectations by showing trust towards them and by sharing classroom management strategies with them. So, this is how we can empower them, or we can give them opportunities, so they can prove themselves. (Participant 10)

Theme three: Instructional support

Participants were asked questions about their role as a principal, such as what is their perspective regarding instructional support. Do novice teachers need more support? Is there any role of instructional support for novice teachers in building effective classroom management? What strategies do they prefer for novice teachers to provide instructional support to students? Almost all participants agreed that new teachers need support in every aspect because they are new in the organization. They need special attention and support. All participants believed that instructional support has a deep impact, so everything should be clear to teachers so they perform their duties in a proper way. All participants believed that every student's need is important. Child-related workshops are very important for teachers to attend so that they can cater to the students. While discussing the perspective of instructional support, one of the participants mentioned:

Yes, they need instructional support equally as they need training, and instructional support, as I mentioned before, could be in the form of peer observation, co-teaching, or it can be in the form of a coordination meeting in which the teacher is trained to give instructions in a better way. So instructional support is needed until the teacher is independent to do it. (Participant 8)

Students should be empowered and need to develop leadership qualities. As one of the participants quoted:

Okay, well, again, empowering the students, making them leaders of their own key learning, and providing them the same support that was provided to the teacher by her peers. So, one important aspect of children's instructional support could also be peer learning. They need to have reflection, peer learning, and independent learning in their classroom. (Participant 4)

Research participants were asked how they manage the quality of feedback to novice teachers in their school. The Head of the school should appreciate the teachers for their efforts, as it gives them the confidence to work harder. And after that, more strategies should be taught to help the teachers to cover their weak areas. One of the participants shared:

So, first, I always begin with the good points. Yes, every individual has very good positive abilities and qualities. So, I always mention those whenever a new teacher is coming and doing something great; I always praise that teacher a lot for doing that job so, if you want a person to do his or her role in the best way because everybody needs precision. And yeah, it may happen that the teacher has not done something good, but first, we need to tell them what they have done well. Then I always come to the next point that whatever she has not done in a better way, and I give suggestions. (Participant 1)

One of the participants said the quality of feedback starts with positive comments, and then it focuses on the area where more work is needed. She quoted:

So again, quality of feedback would be by focusing on the points that need to be reflected on, it would involve the teachers' reflection, and it would involve the positives that the teacher has done, the good points along with the points of reflection, and then the area which she would want to pick up to improve in her next lesson. (Participant 4)

Research participants were asked what methods they implement to help novice teachers to improve their instructional methods. All the participants agreed that conversation is vital to developing relationships between students and teachers. A friendly relationship between them increases the achievements and learning pace of the learners. One of the participants mentioned:

So, in my opinion, one of the best ways for improvement is to engage novice teachers in development programs. It is the greatest way to enhance teaching and learning through the workshop. Involving them in different courses and hands-on activities is the best way forward. So, this is the best method to involve them. (Participant 8)

While discussing the importance of conversation, all participants agreed on the same concept. One of the participants quoted:

Yes, it is because students will learn more when you're friendly rather than when you are arrogant or you are very straightforward and bossy. If the teacher wants to achieve the objective of learning, she should develop a relationship of friendship. Students feel more comfortable sharing their learning and their issue with a friend rather than with a bossy and strict teacher. So friendly relations with students always benefit teachers and students as well. (Participant 2)

Discussion

Most findings of the current study support the earlier research. Wolff, van den Bogert, Jarodzka, and Boshuizen (2015) found that, in terms of conceptualization and cognitive processing, there is a huge difference between novice and experienced teachers. They also concluded that experienced teachers provide aid to novice ones; they guide them on how to create a bridge between effective management and effective learning. The present study also supported that experienced teachers guide new teachers. They organize one-to-one meetings with novice teachers to eliminate the obstacles they are facing in the workplace. Experienced teachers provide emotional and instructional support to beginner teachers.

An in-depth study by Clark (2012) on novice teachers revealed that novice teachers face many challenges, and they need support to sustain them in the organization. Our current research also concluded that novice teachers need every kind of support from their surroundings; mainly, they need emotional, professional, and instructional support.

In the current study, the researcher found that the veteran teachers help the novice teacher in every aspect; experienced teachers try their level best to make them feel at home, they provide assistance in lesson planning, how to conduct the lesson, and what strategies would help them the most. Kayalar (2016) also conducted a similar study, and their findings support the current study. They have concluded that experienced teachers use tactics to make their classrooms more manageable, and they also teach those strategies to novice ones. They have mentioned strategies, for instance, the use of soft voice in the classroom and introducing the topic when the class is silent so that they can grasp it. Novice ones are advised to use nonverbal communication as a strategy and to identify the behavior issues quickly and smartly. They should remain optimistic, organized, and flexible also, and jot down everything they have learned.

As Hattie (2012) explains, "Learning is not always pleasurable and easy; it requires over learning at certain points, spiraling up and down the knowledge continuum, building a working relationship with others in challenging grappling tasks" (p.20). The findings of the present study also revealed that novice teachers would get the theoretical knowledge from training sessions, workshops, co-experienced teachers, and administration, but to be effective teachers, they have to practice that learning in their respective classrooms. Wolff, Jarodzka, and Boshuizen (2021) also concluded the same findings that for deep insight, novice teachers must learn how to analyze the event going on in the classroom, and this can only be learned by doing practice.

Saleem et al. (2021) did a study on novice teachers, and the results are contradictory to the present study. They concluded that novice teachers go through aggression, physical fights, and bullying of students. Novice teachers create these challenges. However, in the current study, none of the participants pointed out these issues.

This study also found that novice teachers face many ups and downs at the start of their career; help is required from the school administration, and sometimes they provide help, but most of the time, they do not provide any assistance (Saleem, Muhammad, & Masood, 2020c). However, in the present research, most of the participants agreed that novice teachers are being helped by co-experienced teachers, and school administration is also available to provide help. Even though principals are positive about the comfort level of novice teachers, they believe that novice teachers can do productive tasks when their needs are fully fulfilled.

Conclusion

This qualitative study provides an insight into the beliefs and concerns of the principals regarding classroom management of novice teachers. Interestingly, analysis of the study revealed that all the participants of the study believed that, generally, novice teachers lack practical knowledge of classroom management. Some of them who have an academic background in Education might have good theoretical knowledge, but they still need continuous training and workshops. However, becoming an effective and successful classroom manager requires concentrated efforts both by the management and the teacher herself and is a gradual, time taking process. All the participants strongly believed that emotional support from the management is one of the important motivational factors which encourages teachers to grow professionally and provides them support to look up to when needed.

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