

Classroom Management Strategies: Do Teachers Violate Child Rights?

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Abstract

This paper investigates if teachers, as they apply different classroom management strategies, violate in any way possible, the rights of children in the classrooms. The study sample consisted of six teachers, selected from schools in Governorate of Muscat, Sultanate of Oman. Qualitative research method was used to conduct this research. Using interviews with research participants, needed information were collected. Results showed that bullying is a common behavioral problem in the classrooms; followed by talking with classmates during the class; coming to class late; use of a device and not paying attention. Based on the results of this paper, a number of recommendations were made.

Keywords: Classroom management, child rights, Oman

Introduction

Teachers strive to create a positive environment in their classrooms so that teaching and learning can take place effectively and efficiently. However, different forms of students' misbehaviors may arise and need to be dealt with. Therefore, one of the key components for successful teaching is the use of effective classroom management strategies. On the other hand, in their attempt to correct or prevent unwanted behavior, teachers must make sure that they observe child rights and not to commit any violations.

Howe and Covell (2005) found that classroom management and behavioural issues were the biggest stressors in teacher's lives. If a teacher cannot manage their class, their teaching instruction was challenged. As Carter and Osler (2000) noted, being a "soft" teacher, described as someone who is not too strict, is perceived by teachers as being weak; and being a "hard" teacher means more prestige and teachers feeling that they control the class. Promotion of children rights has become a key issue in schools. It is considered a duty of School administrators to create a safe school environment and ensure the rights of children are protected. However, research findings indicated that some teachers believe that empowering students will come at the cost of their power and authority. Therefore, they are unwilling to adopt pupil voice approaches in their classroom (Flutter, 2007). The use of such an authoritarian style of teacher-pupil relations in the classroom does not comply with the children's participation rights stated in the child rights convention.

Classroom Management Definitions

Evertson and Weinstein (2006: 4) identified two distinct purposes for classroom management: It seeks to establish and sustain an orderly environment so students can engage in meaningful academic learning, and it also aims to enhance student social and moral growth. They stated that "*The actions teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social-emotional learning ... It not only seeks to establish and sustain an orderly environment so students can engage in meaningful academic learning, it also aims to enhance students' social and moral growth*".

McDonald (2013: 20) states that “classroom management involves teacher actions and instructional techniques to create a learning environment that facilitates and supports active engagement in both academic and social and emotional learning”.

Henley (2010) identifies classroom management as the essential teaching skill, and sees that effective teachers minimise students’ misbehaviours to reduce interruptions and create learning environments that allow for students’ intellectual and emotional growth. Classroom management is about creating inviting and appealing environments for student learning. Strategies used to manage classes are tools that teachers can use to help create such an environment, ranging from activities to improve teacher–student relationships to rules to regulate student behavior (Korpershoek, Harms, de Boer, van Kuijk, & Doolaard, 2016).

Forms of misbehavior in the classroom

Teachers in all parts of the world struggle with classroom management, specifically in the areas of discipline and student behavior (Wubbels, 2011). Researchers came with sets of list of different types of misbehaviors in the classrooms. Observing a number of urban grade 5 classrooms in Malaysia, Abdul Majid et al (2014) found numerous patterns of disruptive behaviours among the pupils, namely: distracting their peers, not paying attention, coming late, and arguing in the classroom.

In their study to identify the most common, disruptive, and unacceptable student problem behaviors from teachers’ perspective Sun and Shek (2012) found that the most common and disruptive problem behavior was talking out of turn, followed by nonattentiveness, daydreaming, and idleness. The most unacceptable problem behavior was disrespecting teachers in terms of disobedience and rudeness, followed by talking out of turn and verbal aggression. Dalgıç & Bayhan (2014), concluded that task avoidance, constant talking with classmates, verbal hostility towards peers and teacher, indifference to study subject during classes, damaging school stuff, and coming late are the most frequent student misbehavior types reported by teachers.

Research findings showed that different forms of student’s misbehavior exists in all classrooms. Teachers need to spare no efforts to manage classroom problems and create positive learning environment. However, this might come at the cost of time allocating for teaching. Thus, effective classroom management strategies become a requirement for effective teaching and quality education.

Classroom Management Strategies

Teachers can prevent the disruptive behaviors by adopting different classroom management strategies. Urinboyev, Wickenberg, & Leo (2016) conducted intensive review of scholarly literature on children rights in classrooms and schools. They analysed forty-two peer reviewed journal articles published between 1990 and 2014. They found that there is dominance of an authoritarian style of teacher-pupil relations in the classroom. In such setting, teachers make decisions and control the class and students’ involvement or contribution is limited. Therefore, it is suggested that classroom management should be based on democratic principles where children’s participation is encouraged, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where children have opportunities to be involved in the processes pertaining to teaching and learning.

Findings of a research conducted in United Kingdom showed that, the use of “pupil voice strategies” help teachers better understand the processes of teaching and learning (Flutter, 2007). It is also found that pupils are asking for effective mechanisms for consultation and representation; and teachers who are more responsive to pupils needs and adopt more democratic style would encounter considerable support from their pupils (Osler, 2000).

Wachtel (1999) identified four approaches to responding to misbehaviour.

1. The permissive approach characterised by low control and high support, with very little limit setting or boundaries and an abundance of nurturing.
2. The authoritarian approach, characterized by high control and low support, uses rewards and punishments.
3. The neglectful approach, characterized by an absence of both limit setting and nurturing.
4. The restorative or authoritative approach, which employs both high control and high support, confronts and disapproves of wrongdoing while supporting the intrinsic worth of the wrongdoer.

According to Harcourt and Mazzoni (2012), there is a need to consider children’s notions of social justice and their standpoints if we are to obtain the correct definition of what the ideal classroom looks like: respectful relationships between the teachers and children, teachers being kind and not shouting at the children, and a just and fair approach by different teachers when responding to the inappropriate behaviours of individual children.

Kwok (2019) proposed three strategies for classroom management. First, managing student behavior where *preventive strategies* are used to prevent any form of potential misbehavior, or *reactive strategies* are used to stop misbehavior momentarily.

Second, managing through academic content which means engaging students in academics will limit opportunities for misbehavior. Third, managing through student relations which means building positive interactions within the classroom. Another strategy is caring for students, which is defined by Nie and Lau (2009) as teachers showing warmth, concern, and acceptance of students.

In their analysis of classroom management techniques and strategies used to cope with the students' disruptive behaviors, Mahyar and Aryankhesal (2018) found that strategies teachers used in dealing with students' misbehaviors were classified into three categories: cooperative and problem solving strategies, avoidance strategies and punishment strategies. Teachers training on dealing with the students' disruptive behaviors and using various methods of teaching based on the classroom situation was emphasized. They concluded that using different classroom management strategies; developing teaching knowledge and skills; and making effective communication in the class can be helpful in developing effective classroom management skills.

Methodology

Qualitative research method was used to conduct this research. Using semi-structured interviews with six teachers from schools in the Governorate of Muscat, Oman, needed data were collected. The interviewees were randomly selected from different grade, specifically: grades: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. Interviewed teachers were asked to describe types of misbehaviors they encounter in their classrooms, and to explain the classroom strategies they follow in dealing with such misbehaviors. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed. It is important to mention that these interviews were very useful instrument for collecting in-depth information. However, due to the small sample size, results may not be generalizable to wide population.

Findings and discussion

Although the selected study sample represented different grades, yet types of misbehavior were quite similar. This means that classroom misbehaviors are common regardless of students' grade. The interviews with teachers revealed that the followings are the most common forms of students' misbehaviors in the classrooms:

1. Bullying (Verbal, Physical).
2. Talking with classmates during the class.
3. Coming to class late.
4. Use of a device.
5. Not paying attention.

The findings of this research showed that bullying is a common behavior problem in the classrooms; followed by talking with classmates during the class; coming to class late; use of a device and not paying attention. These are serious problems that will hinder the work of teachers and will negatively impact on the teaching and learning processes.

In their attempt to manage their classes, prevent misbehaving from occurring and create a positive learning environment, teachers stated that the most common classroom management strategies they use are:

1. Formulate classroom rules and regulations.
2. Verbal warnings.
3. Seating arrangements.
4. Letters to parents.
5. Deduction of marks.

Making a list of classroom rules and regulations at the beginning of the semester, explaining and discussing these rules with students is found to be very effective as misbehavior prevention strategy. In addition, the participants agreed that they mostly employed verbal strategies such as verbal warnings. They use verbal censure like please stop talking, be quiet and please pay attention to your work. One participant pointed out that if a student is trying to challenge teacher authority, then the best strategy to use is to "talk privately (in the office) with that student and explain to him that is not acceptable behavior".

Changing students' places when they talk with each other is considered an effective strategy as well. As participants confirmed that "when two students talk in the middle of the class, then the most effective way to stop this misbehavior is to separate them by changing their seats". Communicating with parents regarding their kids' behavior is perceived to be helpful in handling classroom problems.

As a teacher participant says "parents want to know about how their kids behave in school". Teachers who consider parents as their partners can get a lot of parental support which helps in preventing students' misbehaviors in classrooms.

Finally, deduct marks from student's grade when they misbehave is seen as an alternative to other behavioral management strategies in the class. Interviewed teachers said that they do not like to resort to this option, however, they do apply it sometimes.

Findings drawn from this research showed that teachers face the challenge of different types of student's misbehaviors in the classrooms. And to deal with misbehaving students, teachers use different classroom management strategies. The used strategies are by no means considered violations of child rights in Oman. Teachers find that their approach and strategies for dealing with misbehaviors are acceptable, effective and don't violate the rights of children.

Recommendations:

Based on the results of this paper, the following recommendations were made:

- There is a need to change school culture and build child-friendly classes where children feel safe and secure and enjoy their rights. In this regard, educating both teachers and students about human rights should be a priority in preventing child rights violations.
- Provide teacher training programs on best classroom management strategies and practices. Teachers need to understand that they can't use any strategy which might result in violating child rights in schools.
- Teachers should establish classroom rules and explain them to students in the first class meeting. These rules should be developed in accordance with existing child rights and school policy.
- Successful classroom management requires collaboration between all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents and school administration).

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