

The Challenge of Classroom Leadership and Management Facing Newly Appointed Teachers

Ahmed Awad Amin Mahmoud Raba *

Curriculum and Instruction /TEFL Department, Faculty of Educational Sciences and Teacher Training,
An-Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine

*Corresponding author: Ahmedm@najah.edu

Abstract This study aims at exploring the problem of classroom management—as a facet of teacher leadership—facing newly appointed teachers in Palestine’s public schools. Its main purpose is to determine the relationship of attitudes and behaviors, as well as other study variables such as gender and academic qualification, to classroom management for newly appointed teachers. To achieve this, the researcher used a 14-item questionnaire distributed among a sample of 30 male and female teachers randomly selected from a cohort of 150 of newly appointed teachers in the West Bank governorate of Qabatia. The study was conducted during the first semester of the scholastic year 2014 – 2015. In collecting and analyzing the data necessary for the study, the researcher used different statistical procedures such as means, frequencies, and independent t-test. The findings indicate a low competency level of 53.7% in classroom management skills among newly appointed teachers. In the light of this finding, the study recommends the inclusion of class management theory and practice in the syllabus of the practicum courses for all courses in pre-service teacher education. Likewise, the study recommends that school principals, with support from district leadership, provide newly appointed teachers with structured, systematic induction and mentoring by experienced teachers who can model effective classroom leadership.

Keywords: *classroom leadership, newly appointed teachers, classroom management*

Cite This Article: Ahmed Awad Amin Mahmoud Raba, “The Challenge of Classroom Leadership and Management Facing Newly Appointed Teachers.” *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 4, no. 2A (2016): 25-29. doi: 10.12691/education-4-2A-4.

1. Introduction

Perhaps the single most important aspect of teacher leadership is how a teacher manages the classroom. A teacher cannot successfully teach his/her students if he/she is unable to manage the class appropriately, which is also a major concern of both principals and parents [1]. Repeatedly failing to exercise effective classroom management can cost teachers their jobs [2].

Classroom management is a subset of teacher leadership, where the latter refers to the capacity of a teacher to work collaboratively with school leadership and other teachers, as well as with parents, to support high quality learning for all students [3]. Classroom management on the other hand refers to methods that teachers use to keep students organized, focused, involved, and academically engaged during a class. When classroom management strategies are carried out appropriately, teachers can limit behaviors that might otherwise hinder learning for both individual and groups of students, while influencing positive behaviors and attitudes that enhance learning. Generally speaking, an effective teacher tends to display firm but flexible classroom management skills, while an inexperienced or less effective teacher may face a disorderly classroom where students are disengaged from the learning process.

There are many reasons why lack of discipline is symptomatic of failed classroom leadership. One reason is teaching style. If the teacher is apathetic or shows little interest in supporting students’ progress, students are likely to become bored, passive, or restless [4]. External factors can also be a problem. Poverty, violence, and other forms of human insecurity both in the home and in society more generally can severely influence a student’s receptivity to a teacher’s attempts to manage classroom learning and discipline. The paper by Bihan Qaimari in this special issue sheds light on the devastating impact that violent political conflict has had on teachers’ professional identity and attitudes in Palestine [5]. When external threats to human security put school children at risk, the teacher plays a leading role in caring for their welfare and, when necessary, in referring students to counselors or, in cases of suspected domestic violence, to report abuse to the proper authorities [6].

Classroom leadership must be a part of a teacher’s scope of work. It must be practiced daily and effectively—and monitored and supported by school leadership—so that quality teaching and learning remains the norm for everyone in the class. Practicing leadership through effective management skills will always be a challenge, however. Teachers in the 21st century have to keep up with local and global changes in technology, curriculum, pedagogy, assessment practices, and policies. Meeting these challenges means that teachers must make consistent

use of effective management strategies if they expect to make learning not only engaging for students but also appropriate to students' different interests and learning styles. In brief, classroom management is implicated in virtually all attitudes and behaviors that inform both the efficiency and efficacy of a teacher's toolkit.

Therefore, this study aimed at exploring the problem of classroom management facing newly appointed teachers in Palestine's public schools and to suggest avenues that teachers, as well as school and district leadership, might consider for helping newly appointed teachers develop their leadership and management skills and thus ensure that all students get the high quality learning they deserve.

2. Statement of the Problem

Based on the researcher's long experience in Palestine's schools, colleges and universities, newly appointed teachers were observed exhibiting fear, nervousness and reluctance about the way they manage the class. For this reason, this study was conducted in an attempt to investigate the challenges to practices and attitudes facing newly appointed teachers in regards to classroom management.

2.1. Key Research Questions

This study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1) What problems do newly appointed teachers face in terms of practices and attitudes about classroom management?
- 2) Is there a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) in classroom management based on the gender of newly appointed teachers?
- 3) Is there a statistically significant difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) in classroom management based on the academic qualifications of newly appointed teachers?

2.2. Definition of Terms

Classroom management: Classroom management refers to methods and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, focused, involved, and academically engaged during a class. This includes maintaining order and motivation in the class while providing effective instruction, assessment, and feedback to support student learning.

Newly appointed Teacher: For the purpose of the study, a newly appointed teacher is a public school teacher with less than 5 years' experience. The study population is limited to newly appointed teachers of English in the West Bank governorate of Qabatia.

3. Literature Review

In the area of social relations, inter-personal rapport is of critical importance in leadership and management. In this respect, Cruz, et al. [7] show that the best possible teacher must be an effective communicator with students, parents and faculty. Evertson and Weinstein [8] point out that discipline is only one of the many components that figure into classroom management. Both the variety and

complexity of interpersonal relationships and personalities within the classroom, not to mention societal factors outside the classroom, can play a critical role. These authors also caution that classroom management is not simply a "bag of tricks" that is passed along from one teacher to another, or merely a matter of setting ground rules with rewards and penalties. On the contrary, it is a complex combination of practices and processes that require firmness, flexibility and adjustment.

For Sasson [9], flexibility is critical in managing classrooms. She reminds us that management problems are a fact of every new teacher's life, for whom the most important thing to remember is to avoid falling into a panic and then aggressively attempt to regain class control. Flexibility, then, means the willingness to reflect on one's practices and their impact on student's behavior, and to identify sources of problems instead of allowing stress to control one's decisions and actions. This attitude supports the leadership dimension of classroom management. In other words, rather than seeing management problems as a threat to a new teacher's control of the classroom, they should be seen as problems of practice that require reflection and a willingness to experiment with different strategies in order to find out what works best in a given classroom context.

Simply put, being a reflective practitioner is what sets experienced, professional educators apart from novice teachers who look for quick fixes without identifying causes and planning appropriate action [10]. At the same time, however, what is appropriate in one classroom context may be unsuitable in another, for even though two students may exhibit similar patterns of behavior, the reasons may differ, which again calls for classroom leadership that articulates a discipline approach that is clearly communicated, yet flexible when necessary [11].

Though effective classroom management requires a degree of flexibility, at the same time, however, teachers need to be consistent in their expectations and actions so that students understand that rules will be enforced. To do otherwise risks creating conditions for a dysfunctional classroom environment where students could become inattentive, unmotivated, disrespectful, or out of control [12] and [13]. To preempt such circumstances from happening, Harmer [14] recommends that inexperienced teachers eschew the naïve belief that discipline means reacting only when things get out of hand; instead, they need to establish and consistently apply a clearly articulated code of conduct that is mutually agreed on by both the teacher and students.

Are newly appointed teachers in Palestine being equipped by teacher education programs with the kinds of knowledge, dispositions, and skills that enable them to practice effective classroom management? As reported in this special issue by Bsharat and Rmahi [15], although student-teachers in their study expressed general satisfaction with the technical training they received in developing lesson plans and selecting appropriate instructional methods, they felt poorly prepared when it came to classroom management. These findings are consistent with those reported in an unpublished MA thesis by Darwish [16], whose study examined teacher preparation courses at universities in the Gaza Strip. The study found most courses tended to emphasize the teaching of theoretical information at the expense of

practical applications, as well as a corresponding lack of attention to helping student-teachers develop skills associated with pedagogical content knowledge and formative assessments of student learning, skills that are designed to keep students motivated and actively engaged in the learning process.

In sum, this review of the literature implies that pre-service teacher education programs in Palestine may not be equipping students sufficiently with the kinds of knowledge, dispositions, and skills that would otherwise improve their readiness to practice effective classroom management strategies as newly appointed teachers. Findings from the current study will now be presented in the following sections.

4. Methodology

This section lays out the methods and procedures used in carrying out the research. Specifically, it presents the research design, study population and sample, the instrument and its validity and reliability, data collection procedures, and statistical analysis.

The study employed a cross-sectional design for an investigative survey based on a questionnaire. The population consisted of 150 male and female newly appointed English language teachers in the West Bank governorate of Qabatia, from whom a random sample of 30 teachers was selected (Table 1). The questionnaire was administered to the sample during the second semester of the 2014 – 2015 academic year.

Table 1. Distribution of sample based on the study's independent variables

Variable	Level	Frequency	Percentage %
Gender	Male	8	26.7
	Female	22	73.3
Academic qualifications	BA	13	43.3
	MA	17	56.7
	Total	30	100.0

After conducting an extensive literature review on teacher leadership and classroom management, particularly in the context of newly appointed teachers, a 14-item questionnaire was developed to measure views of teachers about their classroom management competencies and their views about the quality of their pre-service training and

the in-service support from their schools. The questionnaire, which used a 5-point Likert agreement scale, was reviewed by a group of experts in the field of TEFL and psychology, and their recommendations contributed to the validity of the survey items. After the survey was piloted, a test of scale reliability produced a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.97, indicating a high degree of internal consistency among the items.

The statistical software package SPSS was used to produce frequency distributions and measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) of the variables, while an independent samples t-test was used in determining the existence of statistically significant differences in the mean score of the dependent variable, classroom management, and the two independent variables of gender and academic qualification.

5. Results

The Results are presented in two parts. The first presents results of the descriptive analysis of the self-reported classroom management competencies of newly appointed teachers. The second part presents results of the statistical test to determine if there was a relationship between classroom management and the two independent variables of gender and academic qualification.

5.1. How do Newly Appointed Teachers Rate Their Competency in Classroom Management?

To answer this question, the mean, standard deviation, and percentages of each item were computed. Table 2 presents the findings. To simplify the analysis and interpretation, the mean score for each 5-point item was converted to a percentage. For example, the mean score for item number 1 in Table 2 is 3.07 which, when divided by 5, equals 0.614, or, 61.4%. Thus, the average for item number 1 as rated by the respondents as a group (not to be confused with the percentage of respondents) gave the item an agreement rating of 64.4%. To interpret the percentages, the researcher used the following three-tiered ranking of classroom management competency levels:

- 80 % or more = high degree of competency
- 70-79.9% = moderate degree of competency
- 60 - 69.9 % = low degree of competency

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for classroom management practices and attitudes

Number	Items	M	SD	Percent	Level
1	I use specific techniques to solve potential problems in the classroom management.	3.07	0.25	61.40	Low
2	I respond to inappropriate behaviors quickly and assertively.	3.07	0.24	61.40	Low
3	I use specific disciplinary strategies that instill a sense of personal discipline.	3.10	0.54	62.00	Low
4	I use disciplinary rules that are appropriate and suitable for managing my students.	3.13	0.41	62.60	Low
5	I change in my practices of classroom management to motivate students to learn.	3.13	0.36	62.60	Low
6	I use strategies that emphasize the students' concerns and wishes.	3.13	0.28	62.60	Low
7	In my classes, I have well-articulated rules for general classroom behavior.	3.27	0.35	65.40	Low
8	I use different disciplinary strategies that enhance the students' sense of acceptance.	3.33	0.36	66.60	Low
9	I use specific disciplinary strategies that reinforce appropriate behavior.	3.37	0.39	67.40	Low
10	I am engaged in the rules of the general classroom behavior.	3.63	0.61	72.60	Moderate
11	Most inexperienced teachers are prepared to use modern classroom management practices.	1.43	0.47	28.6	Very low
12	Theory about classroom leadership and management at the university and school is adequate.	1.43	0.88	28.6	Very low
13	The practicum course at the university provides enough material about classroom leadership and management.	1.37	0.65	27.4	Very low
14	Effective classroom management is the result cooperation and support from the school principal and experienced teachers.	1.13	0.47	22.6	Very low
15	Grand mean	2.685	0.35	53.7	Low

These results for items 1-10 indicate a low level of classroom management competency, 64.6% overall, among newly appointed teachers. The results for items 11-14, which measure pre-service preparation in methods of classroom management, was extremely low at 26.8% overall. Taken together, the respondents' level of competency in classroom management was 2.68, or 53.77%. This points to a serious problem of confidence among newly appointed teachers in their capacity to manage their classrooms effectively.

5.2. Is There a Statistically Significant Difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) in Classroom Management Based on the Gender of Newly Appointed Teachers?

The results of the independent samples t-test, as seen in Table 3, show that there is a statistically significant

difference in the variation of the means in the classroom management competencies based on gender among the newly appointed teachers in favor of females, which suggests that females are more competent than males in managing their classrooms.

5.3. Is There a Statistically Significant Difference ($\alpha = 0.05$) in Classroom Management Based on the Academic Qualifications of Newly Appointed Teachers?

The results of the independent samples t-test, as seen in Table 4, show that there was no significant difference in the variations of the means due to academic qualifications. In other words, the level of a teacher's academic qualification appears to have no relationship to his/her classroom management competencies.

Table 3. An independent-sample t-test

	gender	N	M	SD	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Total Score	male	8	2.54	.26904	-2.29	28	0.029
	female	22	2.83	.33297			

Table 4. An independent-sample t-test due to academic qualifications.

	qualifications	N	M	SD	T	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
Total Score	B.A	13	2.74	.22483	1.17	28	0.25
	M.A	17	2.61	.34641			

6. Discussion

The findings of this study strongly suggest that less experienced teachers of English in Palestine are facing a crisis in their capacity to practice effective classroom leadership and management. They appear to feel that both their pre-service training and their in-service support from school leadership and experienced teachers have done little to prepare or support them for managing a classroom effectively.

The views of newly appointed teachers about their pre-service training raises questions about the efficacy of the practicum component of their teacher training: How well is the practicum preparing future teachers with appropriate frameworks and strategies to handle discipline problems and enact context-appropriate decisions and actions [17]? Are both the principal and the cooperating teacher in a practicum school serving as good models of classroom leadership and providing effective supervision and feedback to help new teachers reflect on their classroom management practices [18]?

In the in-service context, the results point to serious implications for the professional growth and well-being of newly appointed teachers. For as the research literature shows, unless new teachers get the support they need early on, they are likely to suffer from low professional self-esteem, grow less reflective about their practices, become isolated from their peers, and feel less motivated as leaders in contributing to improving students' learning [19]. This point begs the question: Is the induction process for newly appointed teachers in Palestine's schools offering appropriate levels of technical and professional support, for example through coaching or mentoring, that

new teachers typically need? As Melvin argues [20] "mentoring programs can effectively assist new teachers to get acclimated into the educational environment, become familiar and competent with the curriculum and expectations of the school, master the state standards, and increase the overall competence of the teacher" (p. 10). In the same vein, Feiman-Nemser [21] makes the point that powerful induction programs do more than just provide emotional support; to the contrary, they treat the first several years of teaching as "a phase of learning to teach and surround new teachers with a professional culture that supports teacher learning" (p. 25).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study began with the common-sense assumption that one of the most important—if not most challenging— aspects of teacher leadership is how a teacher manages the classroom. No matter how strong a teacher's content knowledge may be, students are less likely to learn well if a teacher cannot successfully create and manage a positive, engaging and orderly classroom environment [22]. Our sample of newly appointed teachers of English gave themselves a low overall rating of 53.7% for competencies in classroom management. This raises a red flag. It points to the need for professional development that focuses on how to maintain an orderly classroom while also supporting the learning needs of all students, especially for those who are struggling or falling behind.

Sadly, evidence from international and cross-cultural research shows that recourse to corporal punishment can sometimes become the norm when teachers are unable to manage classroom discipline effectively [23]. While there is only anecdotal evidence that this is a problem in some

Palestinian classrooms, it is an issue to be taken seriously by both school and district leadership. A large body of research finds strong correlations between harsh forms of classroom management with increased bullying, acting out, and other forms of hostility by students [24], as well as contributing to low student achievement [25].

Results from this study, therefore, point to an urgent need in both pre-service and in-service contexts in Palestine to fill gaps in the knowledge, attitudes, and skills that new teachers have about classroom leadership in general and classroom management in particular. The study closes with the following five recommendations.

- 1) Faculties of education should embed theory and techniques for effective classroom management into the curricula of teacher education programs across all departments and specializations.
- 2) Faculties of education should make classroom leadership and strategies for effective classroom management, particularly in dealing with discipline issues, front and center in practicum courses.
- 3) Both faculties of education and the Ministry of Education should place a research focus on evaluating policies and practices linked to classroom leadership and management in the contexts of pre-service, induction, and in-service teacher education programs.
- 4) District-level directorates of education should build their capacity to collect data about and offer continuous professional development for principals and teachers on effective strategies for class management and discipline.
- 5) Ministry of Education policies should provide for both material and human resources to support district and school leadership to implement and sustain induction and mentoring programs for newly appointed teachers.

References

- [1] Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (1993). Toward a knowledge base for school learning. *Review of Educational Research*, 63(3), 249-294.
- [2] Melvin, L. (2012). *How to keep good teachers and principals: Practical solutions to today's classroom problems*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- [3] Pounder, J. S. (2006). Transformational Classroom Leadership The Fourth Wave of Teacher Leadership? *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 34(4), 533-545.
- [4] Lindhard, N., & Dlamini, N. (1990). *Lifeskills in the Classroom*. Maskew Miller Longman.
- [5] Qaimari, B. (2016). Exploring Teachers' Professional Identity in the context of war zone: A case study from Palestine. *American Journal of Educational Research* (Special Issue).
- [6] Scanlan, M., & López, F. (2012). Vamos! How school leaders promote equity and excellence for bilingual students. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 583-625.
- [7] Cruz, B. C., Ellerbrock, C. R., Vásquez, A., & Howes, E. V. (Eds.). (2014). *Talking Diversity with Teachers and Teacher Educators: Exercises and Critical Conversations Across the Curriculum*. Teachers College Press.
- [8] Evertson, C. M., & Weinstein, C. S. (2013). *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues*: Routledge.
- [9] Sasson, D. (2008). *New Teacher Tips on Dealing with Discipline Problems*. Retrieved January 19, 2015, from <http://ezinearticles.com/?New-Teacher-Tips-on-Dealing-With-Discipline-Problems&id=1385410>.
- [10] Scanlan, M., & López, F. (2012). Vamos! How school leaders promote equity and excellence for bilingual students. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 583-625.
- [11] Charles, C.M., (1989). *Building Classroom Discipline: From Models to Practice*. Longman Inc., New York.
- [12] Barbetta, P. M., Norona, K. L., & Bicard, D. F. (2005). Classroom behavior management: A dozen common mistakes and what to do instead. *Preventing School Failure. Alternative Education for Children and Youth*, 49(3), 11-19.
- [13] Ostrosky, M. M., Jung, E. Y., Hemmeter, M. L., & Thomas, D. (2008). Helping children understand routines and classroom schedules (What Works Brief Series, No. 3). Retrieved on dated May 12, 2012 from <http://www.adprima.com/managing.htm>.
- [14] Harmer, J. (1991). *The practice of English language teaching*. Longman Handbooks for Language Teachers. London/New York.
- [15] Bsharat, A., & Rmahi, R. (2016). Quality Assurance in Palestine's Teacher Education Programs: Lessons for Faculty and Program Leadership. *American Journal of Educational Research* (Special Issue).
- [16] Darwish, A. (2009). *Assessment of teacher preparation programs for Arabic, English, science and mathematics at Gaza Universities*. Unpublished MA thesis.
- [17] Smith, K., & Lev-Ari, L. (2005). The place of the practicum in pre-service teacher education: The voice of the students. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(3), 289-302.
- [18] Stoughton, E. H. (2007). "How will I get them to behave?": Pre service teachers reflect on classroom management. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(7), 1024-1037.
- [19] Hansen-Thomas, H., Dunlap, K., Casey, P. J., & Starrett, T. (2014). Teacher development: De facto teacher leaders for English language learners. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 5(1), 35-47.
- [20] Melvin, L. (2011). *How to keep good teachers and principals: practical solutions to today's classroom problems*. R&L Education.
- [21] Feiman-Nemser, S. (2003). What new teachers need to learn. *Educational Leadership*, 60(8), 25-29.
- [22] Ripoll-Núñez, K. J., & Rohner, R. P. (2006). Corporal punishment in cross-cultural perspective: Directions for a research agenda. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 40(3), 220-249.
- [23] Paolucci, E. O., & Violato, C. (2004). A meta-analysis of the published research on the affective, cognitive, and behavioral effects of corporal punishment. *The Journal of Psychology*, 138(3), 197-222.
- [24] Allen, K. P. (2010). Classroom Management, Bullying, and Teacher Practices. *Professional Educator*, 34(1), n1.
- [25] Emmer, E. T., & Stough, L. M. (2001). Classroom management: A critical part of educational psychology, with implications for teacher education. *Educational Psychologist*, 36(2), 103-112.