Factors Influencing How Teachers Manage Their Classrooms

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Abstract

Teaching and learning a foreign language is a social process which requires the interaction of two important parts of the process, the teacher and the students, in a social environment. As this process takes place in a social context, it is inevitable to experience some problems while teaching the students having different needs, interests and levels. These problems may be caused by the students, teachers as well as the physical environment in which teaching and learning take place. It is clear that language teaching skill is not enough to handle these problems; teachers also need classroom management skills so that they are able to manage their classrooms. It is believed that successful classroom management is highly related to effective instruction. As classroom management is a general term that is affected by many factors, the effectiveness of classroom environment depends on how teachers cope with these factors and provide their students with a positive and friendly classroom atmosphere. It is clear that a detailed analysis of the factors that affect successful classroom management and adequate teacher training on how to cope with them will make unmanageable classrooms manageable which will immediately result in effective teaching and learning process. In this article, factors that influence successful classroom management will be analyzed and possible solutions to these problems will be presented.

Key Words: Classroom management, teacher training, effective instruction, physical environment.

Özet

Bir yabancı dilin öğretimi ve öğrenimi, sosyal bir ortam içerisinde sürecin önemli iki parçası olan öğretmen ve öğrenci arasındaki etkileşimi gerektiren sosyal bir süreçtir. Bu süreç sosyal bir bağlamda yer aldığı için, farklı ihtiyaç, ilgi ve seviyelere sahip öğrencinlerin öğretimi süresince bazı sorunların yaşanmaması imkansızdır. Bu

problemler öğrenci ve öğretmenden kaynaklanabildiği gibi öğretim ve öğrenimin geçtiği fiziksel ortamdan da kaynaklanablir. Bu problemlerle başedebilmek için dil öğretim becerisinin yeterli olmadığı açıktır; öğretmenler sınıflarını yönetebilmek için sınıf yönetimi becerilerine de ihtiyaç duyarlar. Başarılı sınıf yönetiminin etkili öğretim ile oldukça ilgili olduğuna inanılmaktadır. Sınıf yönetimi birçok faktörden etkilenen genel bir terim olduğu için, sınıf ortamının etkinliği öğretmenlerin bu problemlerle nasıl başettikleri ve öğrencilerine nasıl pozitif ve arkadaşça bir sınıf ortamı sağladıklarına bağlıdır. Başarılı sınıf yönetimini etkileyen faktörlerin detaylı bir analizi ve bu problemlerin çözümü üzerine yapılacak etkili bir öğretmen eğitiminin başedilemeyen sınıfları başedileben sınıflar haline getireceği ve bu durumun etkili öğretme ve öğrenme süreciyle sonuçlanacağı kesindir. Bu makalede, başarılı sınıf yönetimini etkileyen faktörler incelenecek ve bu problemler için olası çözümler sunulacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sınıf yönetimi, öğretmen-eğitimi, etkili eğitim, fiziksel çevre.

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom management has become an indispensable part of language teaching and learning process owing to the fact that it has a crucial effect on teachers, students and classroom procedures. It can be defined as a way of organizing the physical setting of the classroom, students, resources and the equipment so that effective and successful teaching and learning can take place. It is believed that successful classroom management is closely related to effective instruction. "Research findings converge on the conclusion that teachers who approach classroom management as a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments tend to be more successful than teachers who place more emphasis on their roles as authority figures and disciplinarians. (Brophy, 1988a, p.1). It means that the teacher must try to enhance students learning as well as maximize appropriate students behavior.

Classroom management is a broad term that is affected by many factors and it is these factors that make classrooms manageable or unmanageable. In this paper, these factors will be handled under three main categories as factors concerning students, factors concerning the school environment and factors concerning teachers. These three factors will be analyzed in details and solutions will be provided so as to deal with each situation.

2. FACTORS INFLUENCING HOW TEACHERS MANAGE THEIR CLASSROOMS

As it is stated before, classroom management is an important figure in teaching and learning environment that is influenced by many factors. In this paper, these factors will be dealt with under three categories as factors concerning the students, factors concerning the school environment and factors concerning teachers.

2.1. FACTORS CONCERNING STUDENTS

2.1.1. STUDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS

It is important to take students' needs and characteristics into account while designing the language programs, classroom activities and materials so that effective and successful instruction can take place. As classroom management is closely related to effective instruction, students' needs and characteristics are also essential in managing classrooms. Jones and Jones (2001:29) state that high expectations, active engagement of students, cooperative learning and the incorporation of various aspects of students' cultures are important figures in effective teaching. It is believed that incorporating one of these methods that are designed in line with students' personal, developmental and cultural needs into instruction will help teachers to reduce classroom management problems.

It is also necessary to learn child's family and cultural setting so that the teacher can pay attention to students' cultural values and family background as well as incorporate them into teaching and learning situation. It is teacher's responsibility to design teaching and learning process according to the factors that are present in the classroom, school and community.

The summary of different learner needs and characteristics are given in the following list. Learners may have differences in their characteristics such as:

- Age
- Personality
- Attitude
- Aptitude
- Motivation
- Learning styles and strategies

- Multiple intelligences

Learners may also have differences in their needs such as:
- Personal needs
- Developmental needs
- Cultural needs

2.2. FACTORS CONCERNING SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

It is not possible to keep classroom management away from school variables such as school climate, structure, decision making and the type of professional support provided in the building. Classroom management, effective instruction and enhanced student behavior, is highly affected by these variables. It is asserted that students show more positive behaviors in schools where they feel the sense of belonging and support. Moreover, they are more successful when they are engaged in instructional activities designed in tandem with their own lives and cultures. (Jones and Jones, 2001:31).

2.2.1. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE CLASSROOM

Some people may think that physical setting of the classroom is not very important in managing classrooms until they experience any environmental problems that change the atmosphere of the classroom and prevent them form teaching effectively. However, it is essential to recognize that the physical environment can influence the way teachers and students feel, think and behave. (Weinstein, 1996:27). As a result, it is really necessary for teachers to establish a classroom environment that is nonthreatening, friendly, motivating, positive and really conducive to effective learning and enhanced student behavior.

2.2.1.1. SIGHTS, SOUNDS AND FEELINGS

Your environment is all that surrounds you at the moment, sights: the things you see, sounds: the things you hear, smells: the things you smell, feelings: the things you feel. As a teacher, it is important to provide students with appropriate sights, sounds and feelings in order to prevent classroom management problems and enhance desired student behavior.

It is important to create a visual environment that:

- **Is Attractive:** The materials prepared should be neat, colorful and appealing to the eye of the students.
- **Is Functional:** It is important that the materials should teach and reinforce what is aimed to teach, and they should have a social and communicative value.
- **Is Stimulating:** The materials being used should provoke critical thinking and be questioning in nature.
- **Is Motivational:** It is essential that the materials should raise students' awareness and encourage them to learn.
- **Creates pride and fosters self-esteem:** The materials should help students feel self-confident and proud of them by praising their accomplishments and strengths so that students are able to persist in their studies.

It is important to create an audio environment that will enable students to feel relaxed during the classroom procedures. It is suggested that music should be employed while attendance is being taken, during an introductory activity, or during class work times so as to motivate students and set a friendly and nonthreating atmosphere. However, there may be some students, who are disturbed by the music, so it is the teacher's duty to assess the learners' characteristics and design classroom procedures accordingly.

Besides creating an effective visual and audio environment, it is also important to create an environment that is contributory to concentration, study and learning. This means an effective classroom environment in which students feel relaxed, comfortable, and at ease.

2.2.1.2. SEATING ARRANGEMENT

Seating arrangement is an important physical factor that affects teacher- student, student-teacher and student-student interaction in classroom procedures. If our aim is communication and interaction in the target language, it is important to design the seating system in such a way that students are able to communicate with each other. Semi- circles or U-shapes are really desirable as they allow students to face each other; as a result, they feel socially secure.

In addition to social security, it is also important to increase psychological security of the students. It is important to arrange the classroom space so that students

are free from being disturbed. Allowing students to select their own seats is another way to increase psychological security. (Weinstein, 1996: 29).

2.2.1.3. CHALK BOARD USE

As Brown (2001) states that "White board is one of our greatest allies." (also cited in Sarıçoban:2005). It is clear that the things you are teaching are only visible through the use of whiteboard. It is the place where student's attention can be directed; as a result, the teacher should be careful in using the board clearly and effectively.

2.2.1.4. EQUIPMENT

Instructional equipment is a necessary part of teaching and learning process, but there are certain things that teachers should bear in mind while they are employing them. It is advisable to consider that:

- Students are provided with outlets in a classroom,
- The classroom is big enough for the equipment to fit comfortably,
- The visual and auditory stimuli are within easy reach of every student,
- Enough time before and after the class is allotted for the students to get and return the equipment,
- The teachers are equipped with necessary information on how to operate the machinery,
- Extras, extra light bulb or battery, are provided in case of emergency. (Sarıçoban, 2005: 5).

2.2.2. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE CLASSRROM

As well as the physical factors affecting the classroom environment, social factors are also important in classroom management owing to fact that classroom is a community in which teachers and students interact socially. The size of the classroom-large or small, the number of students or classrooms consisting of mixed-ability students all has certain effects on structured interaction between teachers and students, effective teaching and successful management of the problems that can be experienced in any classroom. In this part, problems in overcrowded and mixed-ability classes will be presented.

2.2.2.1. TEACHING IN OVERCROWDED CLASSROOMS

In order for foreign language teaching to be successful, it is important to limit the number of students to at least 15 or 16. However, it is not possible to have classrooms that have this ideal number in Turkey because of the fact that there are too many students and the physical conditions most of the schools have are not appropriate enough to manage these students. As a result, most of the students have to be taught in overcrowded classrooms which pose a great difficulty for the teacher in terms of teaching as well as managing classroom procedures. Some of the most common problems of overcrowded classrooms and possible solutions are summarized as the following: (Sarıçoban, 2001: 3-6) (also cited in Sarıçoban, 2005:9-10).

a. **Discomfort:**

This may pose the following problems:

- it may not be possible for some students to move easily and join in some of the activities,
- the voice of the teacher must be loud and attractive enough so that even the students sitting at the back can hear him/her,
- some of the activities cannot be conducted owing to the lack of room,
- the teachers who have to teach large classes may feel frustrated and tired,
- the students have the tendency not to attend the classes.

Possible solutions:

- It is important for the teachers to choose the seating arrangement that will enable students to see the board clearly, interact with each other effectively and move around the classroom easily.
- Pair or group work activities are essential to make the most of class time.
- It is advisable to have semi-circle sitting arrangements in small classes so that the teacher can have the control of the students.

b. **Control:**

It is difficult to control classes:

- when there are too many students,
- when students make noise while they are doing the activities,
- when uninterested students try to disturb the other students,

● when teachers fall short behind the curriculum.

Possible Solutions:

● Conducting pair or group work activities as well as assigning roles to the students are vital in controlling the large classes.
● Never act like a king.

c. Individual Attention:

It is not possible for the teachers to give individual attention to the students because:

● they don't have enough time to deal with each student,
● students having some psychological barriers such as being shy or introvert may not be given the necessary help.

Possible Solutions:

● the teacher should call students by their names so that they can show that they consider them individuals.
● They should try to reduce the anxiety of the students.
● They should ask students' opinions.

d. Evaluation:

Evaluation may be ineffective:

● time and opportunities for teachers to listen to their students are very limited,
● it takes a long time to check student- generated work,
● it may not be possible to complete the syllabus,
● right evaluation in grading may not be made,
● it may not be possible to have objective quizzes or exams as students may have the tendency to cheat.

Possible Solutions:

● It is important for the teachers to encourage their students so that they can share the responsibility of teaching and learning process. Some techniques such as peer check and teacher's reflection as well as self-reflection of students on their progress may also help teachers to cope with problems posed by evaluation.

e. **Learning Effectiveness:**

Effective learning may be a problem in large classes because:

● the teachers cannot be sure that their students get everything they teach,

● they cannot learn about the weaknesses and strengths of their students easily through quizzes or other measurements.

Possible Solutions:

● It is important for teachers to work collaboratively with the school organization and design goals that are attainable by the students at the end of the term. They should design their activities in such a way that students can get the most of them.

2.2.2.2. TEACHING IN MIXED- ABILITY CLASSES

Many classrooms include students having different needs, interests, and abilities and at different cognitive, affective and emotional levels. These classes are called 'mixed-ability' classes and they pose a great difficulty for the teachers who have to teach them. When the activities or materials are not in line with their needs and interests, the students become restless and they start to disturb the other students. As a result, it is really difficult for the teacher to keep the class together as with these different-ability students positive class atmosphere changes into a chaos which results in waste of valuable class hour.

It is assumed that there are different ways of dealing with mixed-ability students. As Prodromou (1992:6) states that it is possible to appeal to the needs and interests of the students with a variety of activities such games, jokes, puzzles, stories, project work, and the use of simplified readers. It is, of course, teachers' duty to decide on the activities and materials to be used with these students as the activities and materials should be designed in line with the levels, needs, interests and learning styles.

2.2.3. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF THE CLASSROOM

As Bull and Solity (1996: 18) state that the type of the educational tasks, its relevance to the topic being taught, its difficulty level and length are really important factors that affect classroom management. Moreover, teacher's presentation of a

particular topic, the examples given and his/her instructions for a particular activity have a great influence on effective classroom management.

2.3. FACTORS CONCERNING TEACHERS

In classroom management, some problems may be caused by factors concerning teachers. The basics of effective teaching that includes lesson design, student motivation: teacher variables, teacher's roles and styles, and teacher's voice and body language as well as the importance of teacher training in classroom management will be presented in this part.

2.3.1.THE BASICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHING

2.3.1.1. LESSON DESIGN

As it is mentioned before, effective student learning is closely related to the successful classroom management. It is believed that there are certain components that are most effective in helping students to learn new material. (summarized from Levin and Nolan, 2000, 99-100).

- **Lesson introduction:** It enables students to be aware of the classroom procedures, activates their prior knowledge, and attracts their attention and motivates them to learn.

- **Clarity:** It is important for the teachers to explain the new material clearly with the help of meaningful, concrete and to the point examples.

- **Coached practice:** An effective lesson should include guided practice either orally or written, so that the students use the skill or knowledge they have learned newly and they receive feedback and correction from the teacher.

- **Closure:** It is necessary to finish the lesson by making students summarize the main parts of the lesson.

- **Solitary practice:** Independent practice either in the form of seatwork or homework, is also important for the students to practice the skill or knowledge on their own.

- **Review:** Previously learned skills and knowledge should be reviewed on a weekly or monthly basis so that students can reflect on their learning and provide additional reinforcement.

2.3.1.2. STUDENT MOTIVATION: TEACHER VARIABLES

Enhancing motivation in students is one of the most effective tools that the teachers can employ in preventing classroom management problems. When students are eager to learn, they become actively engaged in learning and they pay attention to the task they are dealing with. However, when their attention is not directed at the lesson, they lose control easily and they end up disturbing the teachers and the other students. Some of the variables that a professional teacher can use so as to increase the student motivation are as follows: (summarized from Levin and Nolan, 2000: 1000-101).

- **Student interest:** Student motivation can be increased by relating subject content to the real lives of the students. Allowing students to plan or select the activities can also foster motivation.
- **Student needs:** If students believe that learning activities enable them to meet some of their basic needs, they are more motivated to learn.
- **Novelty and variety:** Learning activities that include new events, situations and materials as well as variety are more likely to motivate students.
- **Success:** When students are successful at somehow challenging tasks, their motivation is enhanced. As a result, it is important for teachers to provide their students with tasks that are slightly above their current level.
- **Tension:** A certain amount of anxiety is necessary to increase learning. When there is no anxiety, the students may feel too relaxed and no learning occurs.
- **Feeling tone:** It refers to the emotional atmosphere or climate in the classroom. The classroom atmosphere should be positive, friendly and nonthreatening so that effective learning can take place.
- **Feedback:** Feedback also fosters motivation because it gives valuable information to the students on their progress. It also provides teachers with the areas that need revising and improvement.
- **Encouragement:** It focuses on positive behavior, recognizes real effort, and shows the students that the teacher respects and believes in them.

2.3.1.3. TEACHER'S ROLES AND STYLES

If the roles and styles of the teachers are not set properly; they may be potential factors that cause classroom management problems. In line with the approaches and

methods being employed, the teachers play certain roles such as conductor, provider, facilitator, director, initiator, and etc…. It is important for the teachers to be aware of their roles and to be consistent in conducting them. As for the teaching styles, every teacher has his/her own preferences in teaching. It is desirable to have different styles as long as the teachers have behaviors and attitudes accordingly. (Sarıçoban, 2005:5).

2.3.1.4. TEACHER'S VOICE AND BODY LANGAUGE

As Sarıçoban (2005:6) states that both verbal and non-verbal behaviors are important factors that mostly affect teachers in classroom management. It is important that teachers should speak loud enough to be heard by all of the students in class and clear enough to be understood clearly. It is important that teachers use their gestures and mimics effectively, they have frequent eye contact with the students, they are not fixed in one place in a classroom, and they pay attention to the way they get dressed.

2.3.2. TEACHER TRAINING IN CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

As having successful classroom management skills are thought to be necessary in fostering effective student learning, providing teachers who lack some classroom management skills with necessary theoretical approaches to classroom discipline and useful tips on implementation has gained great importance recently. However, the researches on many of the models in which teachers are expected to be trained are very limited. Emmer and Aussiker (1987) stated that "It is concluded that training in one or more of the models of classroom management should be viewed as supplemental to a more comprehensive approach to discipline and management." It is claimed that the most effective method of responding to disruptive student behavior involve a combination of preventive classroom management and instructional approaches with corrective methods. (Jones and Jones, 2001:36).

In order to prove the effectiveness of teacher training programs, a specific study was conducted at Başkent University so as to find out whether pre-service teacher training program the teachers attend at the beginning of their employment enable teachers to become effective in classroom management skills. In order to observe the classroom management skills and applications of the teachers, a questionnaire covering the subject areas that were taught during the training program as well as teachers' own experiences was prepared and implemented on 30 randomly chosen teachers. The results of the research indicate that most of the teachers are aware of the skills taught during

teacher training program and they usually have good management skills. Most of the teachers believe that prevention of the behavior more important than maintaining classroom discipline. They mostly get prepared for their lessons and they have contingency plans in case of emergency. Finally, most of the teachers think that pre-service teacher training program is quite effective. (Sarıçoban and Barışkan, 2005).

It is important that teachers should receive support in classroom management skills. This may include the observation of other teachers, providing teachers with ideas for helping students, designing conflict resolution conferences between the student and the teacher or meeting with an administrator to find solutions for the problems (Jones and Jones, 2001: 37).

3. CONCLUSION

As teaching and learning is a social process that takes place in a social environment, it is quite normal to experience problems while teaching students. Owing to this fact, classroom management which means the prevention of disruptive behaviors form occurring and maintaining a positive classroom atmosphere has become an important part of teaching and learning process. It is also important that effective teaching is highly related to successful classroom management skills.

It is indicated that there are many factors that affect successful classroom management. These factors are categorized under three headings as factors concerning students, factors concerning school environment and factors concerning teachers. Factors concerning students relate to the needs and characteristics of the students as methods that are to be incorporated into management skills should be in line with the personal, developmental and cultural backgrounds of the students. The school environment includes physical factors such as sights, sounds and feelings, seating arrangement, chalkboard use and equipment; social factors such as large classes sans mixed-ability classes and educational factors such as presentation of subject matter and delivery of instructions. As for the last factor, factors concerning teachers, it is important that effective lesson design, teacher variables motivating students, teacher's roles and styles as well as their voice and body language play a great role in classroom management. Moreover, it is put forward that teachers who lack certain management skills can be trained through certain programs and it is also proven that it is really effective and useful to provide teachers with teacher training programs for classroom management skills.

In conclusion, classroom management is a broad area that is highly affected by many factors. Careful analysis and understanding of these factors and their effects on student learning and motivation will enable teachers to be able to prevent disruptive behaviors or cope with them when they occur.

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