Comprehending Elementary School Teachers' Classroom Management Approaches

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Abstract
This study intends to determine elementary school teachers' degree of classroom control, which constitutes the consistency in their classroom management and discipline-related behaviour. The major research question was as follows: Is the control approach adopted by teachers related to certain variables (gender, age, subject area, experience)? The study design was based on descriptive and causal-comparative research methods. Research data were collected from 119 elementary school teachers. Results revealed that, in general, elementary school teachers adopted medium-level control. There was no statistically significant difference found between teachers' control approach and their age, gender, experience, marital status and subject area. If teachers are aware of the philosophy underlying their level of control and if they internalize it, their teaching behaviour is affected. Therefore, teachers can become informed and follow studies about their control approach.

Keywords*: classroom management, discipline models, elementary schools, degree of control

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Introduction

Parents whose children are about to start first grade usually embark on a quest for 'a good teacher' rather than 'a good school'. At this time, they question teachers' competencies in classroom management more than their other professional competencies. They encounter comments about a teacher, for example, 'S/he rewards as well as punishes', 'S/he does not compromise in discipline', 'S/he is like a friend to the kids', 'S/he has strong communication skills' and 'S/he is rules-oriented'. Parents strive to know the teacher based on similar comments, and parental sensitivity vis-à-vis the teacher's classroom management style and skills increases gradually. Then, they begin to confront the idea that 'very good teachers' can have wildly different classroom management styles.

The environment in which both teacher and students behaviours are displayed within an acceptable framework for effective learning is referred to as 'order'. Some teachers try to achieve success in the learning process by restricting students' behaviour within a limited framework, while others have a broad framework for promoting learning. The common goal of teachers with varying styles of classroom management, be it broad or restricted, is to promote all students to be task-oriented and ensure continuous improvement within this framework referred to as 'order'. Classroom management is the process by which the necessary order for effective learning and teaching is established, maintained and re-established when disrupted.

Students' level of freedom in the classroom (wide–restricted) and the teachers' degree of control (high–low) is a significant discussion topic in education. Some teachers grant wide freedom with a lower degree of control, whereas others impose significant restrictions on behaviour by adopting a high degree of control. The control levels of teachers range from 'low level' to 'high level'. Based on this difference, Glickman and Wolfgang (1980, p. 460) classified teachers' classroom management approaches as demonstrated in Figure 1.
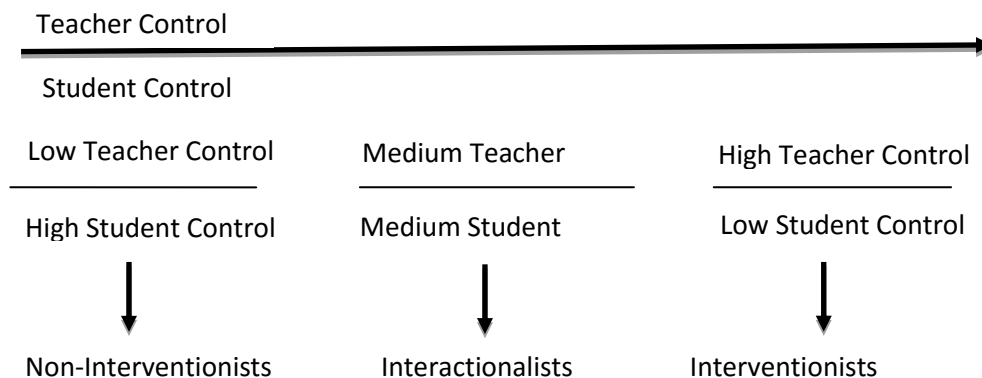

Fig. 1. Teacher-student control continuum. Source: Glickman and Tamashiro (1980)

Teachers' practices were geared towards establishing and maintaining order in the classroom, as well as its re-establishment when it is disrupted, which are shaped to a great degree by the philosophies of education they espouse. Each internally coherent cluster of practices is referred to as a disciplinary model or classroom management approach. The degree of control wielded by the teacher or the student over classroom mechanics is regarded as the most significant factor in model formation. Classroom management approaches are thus classified as (1) low teacher control approaches, (2) medium teacher control approaches and (3) high teacher control approaches.

Low Teacher Control Approaches

This is also referred to as the Non-Interventionist approach; the low teacher control approach upholds the idea that students possess intrinsic potential: They can make the right decisions in many matters relevant to them because of their inherent skills and features, without needing adults. Every

decision they make, right or wrong, serves their development. Therefore, instead of making decisions on students' behalf, teachers should create environments where students can decide for themselves, and teachers should consider their preferences and feelings in all processes. Since students possess intrinsic potential and the power to decide, they can control their behaviour. The teacher's duty is not to control the students' behaviour and impose rules but to create an environment where students can control their behaviour and impose their own rules. Burden (2006) indicated that in this philosophical approach, the teacher has a low level of control, whereas the students enjoy a high level of autonomy; however, this approach does not lead to confusion in the classroom. Ultimately, students determine behavioural standards, and the teacher is primarily responsible for implementing these standards so as to allow students to learn in an orderly environment.

Thomas Harris's (1969) Transactional Analysis Model, Jacob Kounin's (1970) Ripple Effect and Group Management Model, Haim Ginott's (1972) Discipline Through Congruent Communication Model and Thomas Gordon's (2003) Teacher Effectiveness Training Model are the leading non-interventionist disciplinary models.

Medium Teacher Control Approaches

Also referred to as the Interactivist approach, the medium teacher control approach bears traces of both the non-interventionist and the interventionist approach. The idea that internal and external factors matter in student development underlies this approach. The student's intrinsic potential is acknowledged, yet students' behavioural control becomes the joint responsibility of the teacher and the student, due to the effect of external factors on students' development. The teacher's primary focus is on group behaviour and meeting the group's academic needs. This approach holds that rules and functioning need to be jointly developed by the teacher and students. Once rules have been established, the teacher should be responsible for ensuring that students abide by the rules and that they face rational consequences in the case of failure to do so. Cooperative discipline and democratic practices within the classroom bear importance in this approach.

Rudolph Dreikurs's (1972) Social Discipline Model, William Glasser's (1969) Reality Therapy Model and Linda Albert's (2003) Cooperative Discipline Model strongly reflect features of the interactivist approach.

High Teacher Control Approaches

Also referred to as the Interventionist approach, the high teacher control approach defends the view that external factors are significant in students' growth and development and that external factors mould and shape students. In contrast to the low teacher control approach, this approach emphasises students' lack of intrinsic potential. The teachers determine right and wrong behaviour. Parallel to behaviourist theories, this approach advocates reinforcement of appropriate student behaviour and teacher intervention in the event of inappropriate behaviour. Teachers may resort to reward and punishment in necessary circumstances. According to this approach, teachers aim to channel students towards appropriate behaviour through the high level of control they maintain.

Lee Canter and Marlene Canter's (1976) Assertive Discipline Model and Frederic Jones' (1987) Positive Discipline Model are prominent examples of interventionist discipline.

Wolfgang and Glickman (1986) have summarized beliefs of three schools of thought regarding classroom management and discipline and showed it in a chart (see Table1).

Table 1
Classroom Management Approaches

Interventionist (High Teacher Control)	Interactionalist (Medium Teacher Control)	Non-interventionist (Low Teacher Control)
Teacher has primary responsibility for control	Student and teacher share responsibility for control	Students have primary responsibility for control
Teacher develops the rules	Teacher develops the rules with some student input	Students develop the rules with teacher guidance
Primary focus in on behaviour	Initial focus in on behaviour, followed by thoughts and feelings	Primary focus is on thoughts and feelings
Minor emphasis on individual differences in students	Moderate emphasis on individual differences in students	Major emphasis on individual differences in students
Teacher moves quickly to control behaviour	Teacher allows some time for students to control behaviour, but teacher protects right of the group	Teacher allows time for students to control behaviour
Types of interventions are rewars, punishments, token economy	Types of interventions are consequences and class meetings	Types of interventions are non-verbal cues and individual conferences

Source: Wolfgang and Glickman (1986)

Nevertheless, a teacher's classroom management style should not be expected to align completely with one of the three approaches explained above. The teacher might engage in practices characteristic of any approach during a classroom management period. However, the teacher's classroom management style will be perceived to have a dominant approach. Teachers should demonstrate coherence between the disciplinary approach they primarily believe in and the disciplinary approach they predominantly project in the classroom. This study aims to determine the disciplinary approaches held by primary school teachers and to compare these approaches to demographic variables such as gender, age, subject matter and school type.

Methods

Participants

The participants in this study were 119 elementary school teachers, of whom 78 (65.5%) were male and 41 (34.5%) were female. A large majority (%84) of participants work in private schools. Their average occupational experience is 12.5 years (SD = 11.9), and their teaching careers vary between 1 and 43 years.

Data Collection Tool and Procedures

The 'Beliefs on Discipline Inventory (BDI)' developed by Tamashiro and Glickman (1980) was used to determine classroom management approaches adopted by participants. BDI is structured in such a way as to determine levels of control exhibited by teachers in a classroom setting as falling into either of the three different levels of 'low control', 'medium control' and 'high control'. BDI

includes 12 items, each with two choices of the 'forced choice' type, and the participants were required to mark the choice with which they agreed more. The examples of statements included in the inventory were presented below:

(1)
A. Generally, I assign students to specific areas or seats in the classroom (High Teacher Control).
B. Generally, my seating (or work area) assignments are open to negotiation (Medium Teacher Control).

(2)
If a student interrupts my lesson by talking to a neighbour, I will most likely:
A. Move the children away from other students and continue the lesson; class time should not be wasted on account of one student (High Teacher Control).
B. Tell students about my annoyance and conduct a discussion with students about how they feel when being interrupted (Low Teacher Control).

BDI includes three subscales representing the low, medium and high control levels. Of 24 choices drafted for the 12 items, each group of eight constitutes one subscale for the low control level, the medium control level and the high control level. Therefore, the lowest possible score for a subscale is zero and the highest possible score is eight. The subscale with the highest number of points represents the dominant control level.

The choices (A or B) that form the subscales were separately evaluated to determine the degree of selectiveness of items composing the data collection tool. A choice was scored with 1 point if marked and with 0 if unmarked. Scored items were thus added to obtain total scores for each control level. The correlation between item scores and total scores was calculated with biserial correlation to reveal item discrimination values. When a discrimination value of 0.20 is set as the benchmark, the items have discrimination values ranging from 0.22 to 0.56.

Administrations of the BDI were conducted in three separate sessions, each lasting approximately three hours. Researchers underscored that teachers do not react in the same manner to similar classroom situations and that some teachers have a wider frame of acceptance in relation to student behaviour, whereas others are more inclined to restrict student behaviour to a narrow framework; this difference in discipline approaches is normal, and it stems from different philosophical approaches adopted by different teachers.

Participants answered the inventory simultaneously during sessions and scored it according to the provided instructions. Teachers who scored highest in each subscale were asked to describe 'what kind of a teacher they were' without providing names for subscales, and the participants were asked to name each subscale (academic, analogous or spiritual), under which they described themselves, by considering features expressed by these teachers. Participants named each group in the following manner by considering descriptions. Table 2 demonstrates that the scale in which these appellations and analogies are used possesses the power to classify teachers according to their classroom management approaches.

In the next step, researchers indicated that the subscales were generally referred to as (1) low teacher control approaches, (2) medium teacher control approaches and (3) high teacher control approaches; the philosophical and conceptual foundations underlying these approaches were also shared. Participants were then asked to rank these approaches according to their proximity with their beliefs and to indicate to what extent they use these approaches in their classroom. A significant relationship (r = 0.522, p<.0001) was revealed between the participants' control levels measured via the inventory and their self-declared control levels indicated by reflecting on their existing practices. This finding indicates the scale's power to measure the intended feature

Table 2
Participants' Self-Descriptions Regarding Control Approaches

Low Teacher Control Approaches	Medium Teacher Control Approaches	High Teacher Control Approaches
Tolerant	Equitable	Normative
Sweet	Collaborationist	Hard
Loving	Democrat	I Know
Concerted	Find a Compromise	Authoritative
Emancipatory	Accommodationist	Clear
Balance	Sharer	Interventionist
Mild-Mannered	Effective	Classic
Ease	Love	Disciplinarian
Student Centered	Medium	Teacher Centered
Entertaining	Me and My Students	Systematic
Extra Large?	Let's Deal First	Layout
Humanist	Modern	Sensible
Together	İnteractionist	Small
As You Say	Happy Together	Mother Hen
Creative	Ideal, Altogether	Let's Establish Rules
Baklava	Rock Candy	Traditionalist
Constitutional Monarchy	White Chocolate	I Got the Power
Milk Chocolate	Ocean	Perfectionist
Rain	Liquid	Semolina Helva
Plasm	Controlling Liberty	Absolute Monarchy
Low Control	Innovator	Bitter Chocolate
Unshelled Hazelnut	Medium Control	Cloud
	Pine Nut	Solid
		Mahmut Hoca
		High Control
		Walnut

Findings

The evaluation based on subscales determined that a large majority of participants (72.3%) use the medium control approach. This approach is followed by teachers with the high level control approach (21%) and teachers with the low control approach (6.7%). Distribution of participants' control levels according to gender is presented in Table 3.

Table 3
Distribution of Participants' Control Levels According to Gender

| Control Level | Gender | | | | | |
| | Female | | Male | | Total | |
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Low Level Control	4	5.1	4	9.8	8	6.7
Medium Level Control	56	71.8	30	73.1	86	72.3
High Level Control	18	23.1	7	17.1	25	21.0
Total	78	100	41	100	119	100

As indicated in Table 4, when the mean and standard deviations of scores obtained from each subscale are considered, the medium level has the highest average, whereas the low and high level averages are quite close to each other.

Table 4
Mean and Standard Deviations of Subscale Scores

| Subscales | Female | | | Male | | | Total | | |
	N	X	SD	N	X	SD	N	X	SD
Low Control	78	3.47	1.48	41	3.22	1.67	119	3.39	1.54
Medium Control	78	5.63	1.26	41	5.22	1.19	119	5.49	1.25
High Control	78	2.90	1.25	41	3.56	1.29	119	3.13	1.30

A dependent t-test was used to analyse whether there was a significant difference between the subscale scores: the difference between scores for High Control and Low Control was not statistically significant. The score from the Medium Control Subscale was significantly higher than the High and Low Control. These findings indicate that participants markedly adopt the medium teacher control approach.

Comparisons using teachers' subscale scores revealed a statistically significant difference based on gender in the Low Control Subscale scores. This difference can be interpreted to mean that female teachers tend to have greater classroom control. Female teachers seem to restrict students' freedoms more than male teachers, for instance, in the case of participating in decisions and having preferences. However, scores obtained from subscales do not display any statistically significant differences based on school type, participants' marital status, their ages, occupational seniority and subject matter.

A significant relationship was observed between participants' control levels measured via the inventory and their self-declared control levels indicated by considering their existing practices. This finding can be interpreted to imply that participants are coherent in displaying their measured control levels in their actual practices.

Discussion

This study aimed to compare disciplinary approaches of primary school teachers according to demographic variables such as gender, age, subject matter and school type. To a large extent, the majority of study participants adopted the Medium Teacher Control Approach. The average value (5.49) obtained in relation to this approach is close to average values (5.00) obtained in Bailey and Johnson's (1999) study and Onwuegbuzie's (2000) study (5.05). Notably, the average score of 3.39 obtained in the present study for the high teacher control approach is far below the average from these

two previous studies (4.82 and 4.73), and the average of 3.13 for the low teacher control approach is above their average values (2.18 and 2.23). According to these results, although the teacher-participants adopted the teacher controlled classroom approach, they also value students' classroom preferences, ensure their participation in decisions and grant them freedoms to express their feelings and opinions.

Compared to female teachers, male teachers come relatively closer to the low teacher control approach is an important finding. In Onwuegbuzie (2000) and Martin and Ying's (1999) studies, the average scores for the low level subscale do not contain any significant gender-related differences.

Another important finding is the relationship between teachers' approaches as measured via the inventory and their actual classroom management approaches. This suggests that teachers are coherent in their classroom management approaches and that they use the classroom management approach in which they believe, in their actual practice.

Teachers had the opportunity to assess themselves on the basis of their classroom management approaches during the in-service training organized by Cito Turkey. They could effectively compare their actual classroom management practices with the conceptual foundations of these approaches and assess their levels of coherence. The high degree of interest and curiosity observed amongst teachers during the BDI administration clearly demonstrated the need for self-awareness with respect to classroom management approaches. Therefore, the fact that teachers faced themselves was considered beneficial. It was ensured that none of the discussed classroom management approaches was highlighted as superior or inferior. Instead, a general consensus was achieved to the effect that different approaches bring strength to a school as long as they possess conceptual foundations and are coherently implemented.

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