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# Teacher perceptions of classroom management and problematic behaviors in primary schools

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to determine and evaluate the problematic behaviors teachers that work in primary schools encounter in classroom management, the reasons of these behaviors and the methods, activities they use to cope with these behaviors, and their ideas and thoughts regarding classroom management. The interview method which is one of the qualitative research methods has been used. Maximum variety exemplification, which is one of the purposeful exemplification methods, is employed in this paper. Eighteen teachers that work in different schools in central districts of Kayseri in the school years of 2006-2007 participated in the sample of this research. Research results show that teachers that work in primary schools are faced with various problematic behaviors of students in the process of learning-teaching activities. Among these behaviors are students' coming unprepared to the lessons and lack of attention to the lesson, and especially their speaking without permission, and being disrespectful to the teacher. To cope with these problems, teachers first employ nonverbal warnings (jests and mimics), then spoke with the student one by one, gave difficult homework, and employed reward-punishment system. Some of the teachers agreed that teacher's coming prepared to the lesson is the most important factor in facilitating classroom management.

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*Keywords:* Problematic behaviors; teacher perceptions; qualitative research.

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## 1. Introduction

Currently, one of the significant problems that teachers, school administrators and parents encounter is the increase in student behaviors that distort the learning atmosphere in schools. The general aim of education is to develop the desired qualities in students by means of education. In this process, in order to reach the aims, teachers are obliged to perform a number of duties such as making the students attend the lessons, arranging the classroom atmosphere, organizing activities in classroom, giving learning duties, and eliminating the factors that prevent learning. To perform these duties expertly and to arrange a high-quality learning atmosphere, the teachers are required to have classroom management abilities.

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In recent years, the enrichment of the stimuli in the learning-teaching atmosphere, and the transformation of the individuals' interests, needs and expectations in parallel with the changing social structure have resulted in the increase of the undesired behaviors of the students in schools. According to Woolfolk (1995), classroom management includes the methods that are employed in order to ensure a positive and effective learning atmosphere. One of the significant indicators of the success or failure of classroom management is the behaviors of the students in the classroom. If students behave in accordance with their expected roles in the classroom, then it means there is not any management problem in that class (Erden, 2008). Yet, if a teacher frequently encounters student behaviors that hinder the learning-teaching atmosphere and create an undesired atmosphere in the classroom, then it can be claimed that there is a significant problem in classroom management in that classroom.

Many teachers assume the increase of the undesired behaviors in the classroom as the most important danger that threatens education and learning. The problematic behaviors of the students not only have adverse effects on the learning process but also cause a significant waste of time. Meanwhile, the observed behaviors of students such as disobedience to the rules, playing truant, cheating in exams, joining in some illegal activities such as gangs, finally cause the learning life of the student to come to an end.

The problematic behaviors of the students diminish the teachers' professional satisfaction and their devotion to the school and their occupation. Moreover, the results of these circumstances are reflected to the students in a negative way. The vicious cycle between the teacher and the student reduces the success of teaching and causes the system to work inefficiently. The inefficient school systems bring up students who are deficient in cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects (Yiğit, 2006).

The purpose of this paper is to identify and evaluate teachers' ideas and thoughts regarding the problematic behaviors the teachers that work in primary schools encounter in classroom management, the reasons of these problematic behaviors, the methods and activities used in handling these behaviors, and classroom management.

In order to achieve the general purpose of this research, the following questions will be answered:

1. What are the problems encountered in classroom management?
2. What kind of activities and methods do you use to ensure an effective atmosphere and to facilitate classroom management?
3. What do you consider to be the reasons of the problematic behaviors in classrooms?
4. What should be the duty of the teacher to solve the problematic behaviors in the classroom?

## **2. Method**

In this paper, the interview method which is one of the qualitative research methods has been used. Qualitative research can be aptly defined as the research that makes it possible for the researcher to lead a qualitative process in discovering the circumstances and perceptions realistically and totally in their natural environments and which emphasizes meanings, experiences and definitions. Qualitative research enables the researcher to collect information qualitatively by means of observation, interview and document analysis (Coolican, 1992, Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). In this paper the data is collected via the semi-structured interview technique.

### *2.1. Participants*

Maximum variety exemplification, which is one of the purposeful exemplification methods, is employed in this paper. The aim of the maximum variety exemplification is to reflect the variety of the participants that can be partial to the problem through forming a relatively small sample (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2000). In this paper, it is asserted that the gender of the teachers, their seniority, experiences, different branches and finally the different locations and levels of the schools that they work in have sufficient power to grant this variety.

Eighteen teachers that work in different schools in central districts of Kayseri in the school years of 2006-2007 participated in the sample of this research. Nine female and nine male teachers participated in this research. Five of the teachers had 1-5 years of experience, five of them had 6-10 years of experience, six of them had 11-15 years of experience, and two of them were experienced for 16 years and more. Branches of three of these teachers were Science Education; two of them were Social Sciences teachers; three of them were Religious Culture and Moral Education teachers; five of them were form masters; two of them were Mathematics teachers and three of them Turkish teachers.

## 2.2. *Data accumulation means and process*

The form is edited by two experts so as to ascertain the internal validity of the semi-structured interview form, after considering whether it encompasses the particular subject matter, whether it is sufficient in providing the required data, and finally whether the questions evoke each other. The questions are checked in order to determine their intelligibility and explicitness after a trial interview with a teacher. As a result of this, the validity of the questions is ensured. In qualitative researches, internal validity pertains to whether the researcher can actually measure the required data by the instrument or method s/he uses (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005). Moreover, to guarantee internal validity, it is significant to quote the participants, and thereby to explain the results of the interview form (Wolcott, 1990). Now it is time to accumulate data, as it is ascertained that the interview questions provide the desired data.

An explanation, which would give details about the purpose of the research and how the form will be filled, has been prepared for the interviews. Interviews could last for between 35 and 45 minutes. The data acquired from the interviews have been recorded by means of note taking method. The interviews are given to the students of Religious Culture and Moral Education department as a research project of the Classroom Management course. Hence, they have been instructed on how to use the semi-structured interview technique before they performed the interviews. They have been also reminded not to disclose the identity of the participants.

After the implementation of the interviews, the researcher and an expert study and revise the interview forms one by one, and discuss the topics that are *agreed* and *disagreed*. To ensure reliability of the research, Miles and Huberman's the reliability formula (1994) is employed, and the reliability of this research is calculated as 92%. For a questionnaire to be reliable, the minimum rate is 70% (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

## 2.3. *The data analysis and evaluation*

Descriptive analysis technique is used in the process of analyzing the data. The aim of this technique is to transform the unprocessed data into an understandable and usable form for the reader. The data obtained from the descriptive analysis are summed up and evaluated in accordance with the themes specified earlier. In this analysis, direct quotations are frequently given in order to reflect, to the highest possible degree, the ideas of the participants (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2000).

## 2.4. *The analysis of the data is actualized as follows*

For each of the participants, a different code is used. After numbering the records of each interview from 1 to 18 and encoding them as T1, T2 ... T18, each answer is identified by the code number of the particular teacher. The encoded data is cut and placed in different files that have the same codes. Then, the data in these files are once more analyzed and encoded, enabling the researchers to formulate themes. Later on, the question "How often do these themes take place in each interview?" is attempted to find out. Since some of the interviews included more than one theme, these particular interviews are placed in more than one theme.

In the presentation of the research data, the researchers make use of the codes that were given to the teachers. Besides, the evaluations are supported by taking direct quotations from the interviews. In the direct quotations from the ideas of the teachers, first the code of the teacher is given, and then comes the idea in italic form with the line numbers in parenthesis.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. *Teacher's Ideas Concerning the Problems Encountered in Classroom Management*

The first question directed to teachers is what their ideas are concerning the problems encountered in classroom management. According to the results acquired from the data, half of the interviewed teachers emphasized students' coming to class unprepared as one of the problems encountered in classroom management. Other teachers also stressed lack of motivation and hyperactivity in students, along with students' indifference to the lessons and having

negative ideas about lessons. *According to T3, the most frequent problem encountered in the classroom is the students' indifference to the lesson; and while he is lecturing the students give attention to other things (ln. 52-55). As for T18, one of the important problems she encounters in the classroom is the students' chatting among themselves, their giving and taking tools such as pencils, rulers and books, and their walking among the desks with some kind of excuse (ln. 618-621).* Other things teachers notify as problematic behaviors in classroom management are impoliteness to the teacher, replying his/her questions in an impolite manner, and coming late to the lesson.

### *3.2. Teachers' ideas relating to the activities and methods used in facilitating classroom management and forming an effective atmosphere*

Nine of the teachers interviewed have informed that they used nonverbal communication in order to facilitate classroom management; while seven of them have notified that they spoke with their students one by one, and used question-answer method in the classroom. Two teachers have stated that they used reward-punishment system, while the teacher who is encoded as T10 have informed us that *when one of his/her sixth grade students did not made his/her homework, he/she ordered him/her to write this faulty behaviour for fifty times and have it signed by his/her family. I usually use this method (ln. 294-296).*

While five of the teachers asserted that they gave practice homework to the students to facilitate the classroom management and form an effective classroom atmosphere, one of the teachers who considered giving difficult homework to the students as a highly effective way even gave advice to the interviewer. The idea of this teacher is as follows: *I give difficult homework to the student who has problematic behaviors in the classroom. By this means, management is facilitated. I recommend young teachers to employ the same method (T11, 348-350). I give research homework, and I lecture by means of the question-answer method. I do not use any methods other than the usual, traditional ones. (T7, ln. 186-187)*

The teacher encoded as T18 answered this question by explaining the fact that *I give punishments the students would like (ln. 631); for instance, I warn the student with problematic behaviors with verbal or nonverbal warnings. If he/she persists in doing the same behavior, then I would buy candies to all students. This would in a way prevent such behaviors to occur (ln. 631-634).* When the interviewer asks him/her if there is any activity he uses in the classroom, the teacher says *no, because classroom management is impeded by some of the activities. That is, usually, the activities used in facilitating classroom management actually impede classroom management (ln. 635-637).*

T14 actually has a significant point. *I think if I come prepared to the lesson, then it would be easy for me to form classroom management. Thus, I come prepared to the lesson. Besides, interacting with the students is also effective. The way I talk to them, my tone, eye contact, etc. are reflected to classroom management. To be effective in these means to be effective in classroom management... (ln. 56-60).* T14 is one of the two teachers who think that coming prepared to the lesson facilitates classroom management. Moreover, teachers try to be effective in classroom management by using or not using various methods and by trying to know the family, giving examples from daily life, threatening with points, and by explaining classroom rules and making them to adopt these rules.

By the answers taken from these teachers, it has been found out that teachers actually do not use some methods they can use to facilitate classroom management. This condition, without doubt, has reasons of its own. Yet, one of the apparent reasons why teachers do not use these methods is either they do not know these methods or they could not succeeded in practice.

### *3.3. Teacher's ideas concerning the reasons of the problematic behaviors in the classroom.*

Twelve of the teachers who participated in the interview assume that the reasons of the problematic behaviors are domestic and related to the upbringing style. It is possible to support these results with Sari's research results about primary schools that have high and low school life quality (2007); because, in this research, some of the teachers have stated that family has an important place in teacher-student interactions. Family has a significant and effective place in the life of the student. The first step for children to acquire social norms and values is the family (Celep, 2004). The way the families socialize their children can effect classroom management. It is observed that the students who are not supervised by their families show more problematic behaviors in the classroom (Gottfredson,

1986). The perspective of the families about school has for sure an impact on the student's attitudes to the school (Soleman, 1966, Simpson, ctd. in Celep, 2004). T17, who is one of the teachers that thinks the impact of the family and upbringing style are important factors observed the following: *the family is the important factor certainly. As the attitudes of the parents of this generation to their children is trying to give them what they did not have in the past—such as trying to have their children go to school s they could not go in the past; trying to make it possible for their children travel as they could not in the past—the child tends to oppose the authority. The parent authority on the children is really weak, and the parents are not balanced in reward and punishment. For instance, the student can have a cell phone worth 1,000 YTL. At the same time, internet, TV and friends can also affect the child's behaviors. All these circumstances are reflected in the classroom as problematic behaviors (ln. 586-593). T6 says that the most important reason is the difference in the family lives. Socioeconomic differences, different environments, family oppression, problematic families as a result of wrong marriages... all these make up the basis of the problems the students bring to the classroom (161-164).*

One of the eight teachers who relate the problematic behaviors in the classroom to impact of the friends stated that *it is acting with other friends, which causes these problematic behaviors. Even the quiet students present problematic behaviors with other friends (T5, ln. 130-131).* Some of the teachers have stressed that the problematic behaviors are caused because the students come unprepared to the lesson. They also observed that the student's desire to attract attention, his/her having a defect, lack of attention, the student's coming unprepared to the lesson, the effects of the development period on the student, and the student's belief that he/she will pass his/her class even though he/she is not successful.

### 3.4. Teachers' ideas concerning the duties of the teacher to solve the problematic behaviors

Twelve of the eighteen teachers interviewed stated that the teacher's coming prepared to the classroom is an important factor in preventing problematic behaviors in the classroom. Knowing the students well is another factor that is effective in lessening the problems. Being a good guide, model and friend, activating the student, attempting to find the source of the problems, regulating the distance with the students, and being patient are the duties of the teachers.

It is possible to come across other researches that support these ideas in the concerned literature. The quality of the teacher-student interactions affects academic success and student behaviors. Students prefer agreeable, friendly, tolerant and patient teachers, who do not discriminate among students, participating in his/her activities, attracting attention before starting the lessons, making the students willing to listen to the lessons, and who lecture using different methods (Başaran, 1994; Celep, 2008; Şişman, 2000). Teachers' agreeable attitudes are definitely important for the students to have more positive ideas about the school and teachers.

## 4. Result and Discussion

The result of the research shows that teachers in the primary schools are faced with various problematic behaviors of the students in the process of learning-teaching activities. Among these behaviors are the students' coming unprepared to the classroom, their lack of attention, and especially their speaking without permission, and being disrespectful to the teacher. To cope with these problems, teachers have asserted that they first employ nonverbal warnings (jests and mimics), then spoke with the student one by one, gave difficult homework, and employed reward-punishment system. Some of the teachers agreed that teacher's coming prepared to the lesson is the most important factor in facilitating classroom management.

In accordance with the results of the research, teachers do not make the required adaptations to facilitate the classroom management and form an effective classroom atmosphere; they could not attract students' attentions and could not motivate the students. Meanwhile, it is understood that the students are not informed about the learning activities before the lessons. Teachers' richness of method knowledge and their expertise in practice these methods make the teacher leader in the class. Yet, according to the results, teachers particularly abstain from using different methods as they think these make classroom management harder. Certainly limited lesson hours can be regarded as one of the reasons that restrict the teachers from using different methods. However, it is assumed that good planning does away with the negative effects of the restrictions.

According to the teachers, the most important reason of the problematic behaviors encountered in the classroom is family. Rapid population movement in the society, population growth which is not parallel to the economic development and problems like migration, formation of ghettos and cultural disintegration influence the way the families bring up their children, domestic violence and conflicts. This circumstance can also be the reason why the students sometimes behave in undesired ways in the classroom.

Teachers can communicate with parents bearing in mind the possibility that the reasons of problematic behaviours can be outside the classroom. They can also inform the parents about students' adaptation, development problems and their interests, needs and abilities. Besides, teachers can more effectively use various methods to prevent problematic behaviors even before they occur in the classroom. As teacher's being an expert in his/her subject area is a factor that can prevent potential problems, teachers must always come prepared to the class, be informed about active learning methods and have the ability to use them.

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