A Qualitative Study on Iranian EFL Teachers' Strategies of Classroom Management: Focusing on Cultural Strategies

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Abstract

The main aim of this qualitative study was to explore the strategies of classroom management for Iranian EFL teachers. To achieve this aim, 30 Iranian EFL teachers were selected through convenience sampling from some online groups of high school EFL teachers in WhatsApp or Telegram. Data collection was done via an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. According to the results, many strategies were identified which are presented in the paper. The most important ones include using knowledge received through academic education, using personal experiences, managing students' needs, giving and receiving feedback from the class, teaching based on professional ethics, and considering cultural issues. Moreover, the results indicated that EFL teachers are required to resort to cultural strategies to convert classroom management knowledge resources into practical activities. The findings have some implications for EFL teacher education researchers, policymakers, curriculum developers, and teachers. More importantly, this study can be used in teacher preparation programs to prepare teachers for classroom management in the future.

Keywords: Classroom Management; Classroom management Strategies; Cultural Strategies; Qualitative study; EFL Teachers;

1. Introduction

EFL classrooms, just as any other classroom, may require certain components that are important to make them helpful and intriguing for both educators and students (Bedir, 2022). These elements of course need to be

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envisaged in such a way that they would contribute to and/or enhance effective classroom management systems. Bedir (2022) notifies that classroom management is not limited to the teachers' actions in the classroom, but it encompasses various activities of the teacher and measures what the teacher takes to specify teaching objectives, find suitable materials, get prepared for the classroom, involve the learner in the teaching-learning process, and finally assessing learners' development in the educational context. In the same vein, Brown (2007) classifies classroom management components into the actual classroom environment, for example, the comfort, sight, and sound, the utilization of the whiteboard or blackboard in the class, and the equipment which are required in the classroom. Furthermore, he mentions those components that are identified with the instructor, for example, his/her tone, voice, and speaking ability as verbal elements and body language and gestures as non-verbal communication. Therefore, EFL instructors need to gain mastery over classroom management methods that will be useful for them to control the class and cause their pupils to appreciate it as opposed to despise it or think about it as a cumbersome task (Marashi & Assgar, 2019).

Considering the knowledge base of classroom management, Freeman and Johnson (2005) proposed a knowledge base that focuses on "the activity of teaching itself – who does it, where it is done, and how it is done" (p. 405). Accordingly, such a knowledge base is believed to comprise three interconnected domains representing the activity of teaching: the teacher-learner, the social context, and the pedagogical process. Lafayette (2003) introduces three major domains of knowledge in classroom management, namely language proficiency, civilization and culture, and language analysis (i.e., knowledge about the language). However, he does not seem to recognize the significance of pedagogical knowledge/skill and pedagogical content knowledge/skill. Day (2003), Roberts (2008), and Richards (2008) suggest more comprehensive knowledge categories to overcome the weakness of Lafayette's framework and highlight not only the role of the knowledge of psycholinguistics, linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, research methods, etc. but also pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of the context of teaching, i.e., the learners, school, community, staff and colleagues, and pedagogical reasoning and decision making skills including skills in inquiry in the classroom management.

In view of classroom management content knowledge, a question of concern is what exactly should prospective teachers learn, i.e., what makes up the knowledge base for language teacher classroom management.

Lafayette (2003) proposes the most important domains for EFL teachers' subject matter knowledge as language proficiency, civilization and culture, and language analysis. To him, language proficiency is a vital knowledge domain, while the important role of cultural awareness for both language learners and teachers is indubitable. Understanding the role of classroom management of EFL teachers is of prime significance in that it may affect the whole process of teaching. As Lightbown and Spada (2006) discuss, classroom management paves the ground for effective teaching and learning. Thus, doing such a study extends the scope of EFL teachers' classroom management literacy and makes it in line with teachers' knowledge of management strategies as well as cultural strategies. As far as the researchers know, in the Iranian context, no study has so far been conducted on this issue, so exploring Iranian EFL teachers' cultural strategies of classroom management can be helpful for both novice and experienced teachers. Regarding the main objective of the study, a research question has been formed to examine.

1. What are the Iranian EFL teachers' strategies for classroom management?

2. Literature Review

Yüksel and Halıcı (2010) investigated the impact of classroom management techniques on motivating young EFL learners. Finding the best way to catch the attention of young EFL learners through effective classroom management by means of games, realia, role-playing, and, drama is of great significance due to the fact that the world of young learners consists of visual images, pictures, and games, so they are under the bombardment of all these. Depending upon this, it has been also mentioned how the ELF teachers will catch the attention of the young EFL learners, which is one of the problematic areas. Normally thinking, learners are not roped into the class. However, in order to learn regularly and peacefully, the students must feel relaxed, they should be at peace, it should not be a kind of torture, and the teacher should vary the activities in the class so as to escape from the monotonous atmosphere. All of these things leave an impact on the students' psychology and their motivational level either positively or negatively. Therefore, the study depicts how to motivate young EFL learners through effective classroom management by means of games, realia, role-playing, drama, and the body language of the teacher. The study has also shown the sustainable development in foreign language teaching and learning fundamentally for young EFL learners.

Akbari and Yazdanmehr (2015) investigated how expert EFL teachers could manage their class and keep its discipline. To this aim, 20 teachers were selected through purposive snowball and convenience sampling methods. Since they were directly dealing with teachers as trainers, supervisors, and mentors, they were considered qualified informants. Some themes were extracted from the content analysis of the interviews, including expert teachers' identification power, use of external control, use of preventive management strategies, monitoring student behavior, clarification of expectations, use of body language, and establishing rules and routines. Next year, the study by Pas et al. (2016) used observational information from 1262 classrooms in 52 high schools to inspect instructor classroom management techniques and evaluations of learners' consistency, engagement, and social disturbance. Latent profile analysis (LPA) was administered to scrutinize particular examples of broad students' behavior in connection to teachers' utilization of classroom management tactics and classroom arrangement. Examinations showed a practical relationship between forms of participants' behavior and instructors' classroom management. In classes where language learners regularly met anticipations, teachers offered more chances to reply and less objection and reactive behavioral management. Classrooms with resistant learners had instructors who utilized the most objection and reactive behavior management. These discoveries underline the connection between learners' styles of behavior and teacher classroom management and have suggestions for screening and professional progress.

Wolff et al., (2017) investigated how educators' cognition and conceptualizations vary among experts and novice teachers in order to improve novice instructors' skill expansion. A coding plan was employed utilizing grounded theory to examine expert and novice instructors' verbalizations portraying classroom occasions and their significance for classroom management. Four classes of codes including perceptions/interpretations, topical concentration, temporality, and cognitive processing appeared. Mixed-method investigation of instructors' verbalizations generated several significant impacts associated with instructors' level of expertise. Particularly, educators' cognitive processing differed significantly in view of mastery level. Differences in concentration included subjects such as pupil learning, learner discipline, and instructor communication and impact. Expert instructors concentrated on learning in the classroom and the educator's capability to impact learning, while novice teachers paid more attention to discipline maintenance and behavioral standards.

Chichermir et al. (2020) investigated classroom management in EFL classes and sought the perception of EFL students in China and Russia. The results revealed that generally, the perception of classroom management between Chinese and Russian respondents had more similarities than distinctions. Chichermir et al. (2020) proposed that understanding differences in the perception of Chinese and Russian respondents at universities are helpful for teaching staff and students to understand each other's expectation, as well as stimulating new or modified strategies of classroom management. In a more recent study, Kalantarypour and Modirkhamene (2021) tried to identify the classroom management practices and coping styles of Iranian EFL instructors and the causal relationship between the EFL learners' ultimate achievement. Findings revealed that teachers reported the use of positive strategies of involvement and recognition, and social problem-solving and relaxation compared to the rather negative categories of classroom management and coping styles. Moreover, the results indicated a positive effect on the learners' language achievement of classroom management and coping styles. However, coping styles did not mediate the relationship between teachers' classroom management and the learners' ultimate achievement. In the same year, Shakerkhoshroudi, Beh-Afarin, and Nikoopour (2021) investigated the strategies employed by EFL teachers to avoid classroom management constraints. To this end, some teachers in a language learning institute in Tehran were interviewed, and the main coping strategies used by the teachers were extracted through qualitative analysis of the interviews. Then, the extracted strategies were worded into items and the questionnaire on EFL teachers' coping strategies was validated. The results indicated that the participants used 23 coping strategies under two sub-constructs: problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. The results also showed that highly expert teachers used the extracted coping strategies more frequently. Moreover, the researcher confirmed that teachers need in-service training courses on coping strategies to manage their classes efficiently.

3. Methodology
3.1. Study Design
Since the main objective of the present study is to explore the EFL teachers' views towards the cultural strategies of classroom management, the qualitative research method was used as a design of this research to answer the research question. It should be noted that the present research was designed to assess the Iranian EFL teachers' views through a semi-structured interview with five open-ended questions.

3.2. Participants and Sample

The target statistical population of the study included all Iranian EFL teachers teaching English at different high schools in Iran. From the population, 30 Iranian EFL teachers (11 males and 19 females) participated in the present qualitative study via convenience sampling method from different virtual groups of EFL teachers in WhatsApp or Telegram. Convenience sampling (also called availability sampling, accidental sampling, or non-random convenience sampling) is a method of non-probability sampling method where researchers will choose their sample based solely on convenience. In fact, it is a non-probability sampling where data is collected from an easily accessible and available group of people. The individuals in the sample are selected not because they are most representative of the entire population, but because they are most easily accessible to the researcher (Simkus, 2023). The participants were B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. holders in TEFL. They had more than 15 years of teaching experience. They were in the age range of 40 to 63. This group participated in the semi-structured interview and filled out an open-ended questionnaire so that a model of classroom management literacy for Iranian EFL teachers could be developed.

3.3. Instruments

A semi-structured interview with five open-ended questions was used to uncover the Iranian EFL teachers' knowledge resources and cultural strategies in classroom management. It was conducted in one-to-one format in English. The interview questions were developed based on the literature review. The researcher carried out the interviews herself, which lasted around 35 to 45 minutes and audio recorded them for further in-depth analysis. It was conducted on WhatsApp and Telegram. To block the occurrence of any bias in the interviews, they were implemented using Strauss and Corbin's (1998) approach by moving from general questions to more specific questions.

3.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

To do the present work, first, 30 Iranian EFL teachers of both genders were selected by the researchers via convenience sampling method from different virtual groups. Second, some interviews were implemented in a one-to-one format, audio-recorded, and transcribed by the researcher in WhatsApp and Telegram as explained above. Third, the transcribed interviews and the participant's responses to the questions were read precisely and repeatedly by the researchers and exposed to coding stages

using a constant comparative method of analysis. In fact, the researchers recorded the interviews for further in-depth analysis. Moreover, the dependability and credibility of the interview data were checked. Then, the researchers developed an open-ended questionnaire based on a thorough literature review and the results of the interviews to triangulate the collected data. Finally, the participants received the Google Form containing the questionnaire through WhatsApp and Telegram. The construct validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through SEM and the reliability was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha. Next, the collected data were analyzed and coded line by line using version 10 of the qualitative data analysis software of MAXQDA. It is the most user-friendly choice for qualitative data analysis and it is designed to work with a wide range of data types, including text, audio, and video, and offers a variety of powerful tools for qualitative data analysis. In the current research, the qualitative thematic analysis was done in the fourth step. First, the researchers got familiar with the data and reviewed the collected data. Second, data coding was done. Third the extracted codes were meticulously reviewed to extract the recurrent patterns in them and extract the recurrent themes through merging the relevant and similar codes and removing the non-relevant codes. Fourth, the extracted themes were reviewed by the researchers to ensure their accuracy and usefulness. To do this, the researchers returned to the data to compare the themes against them.

4. Results

With regard to the research question, the following strategies were identified for Iranian EFL teachers' classroom management (Table 1):

Table 1. *Iranian EFL Teachers' Classroom Management Strategies*

Resources/Practices	Strategies
Academic knowledge	Using knowledge received through academic education, Using knowledge received through reading papers, Using knowledge received through reading books, Using knowledge received through reading theses
Personal cultural perceptions	Using personal beliefs, Using personal ideologies, Using personal opinions
Past experiences	Using teaching experience, Learning from university professors' classroom management Learning from colleagues' classroom management

Resources/Practices	Strategies
Professional events	Participating in in-service training courses, Participating in professional group meetings, Participating in workshops
Contextual interpretations	Interpreting class situations, Taking environmental factors into account
Feedback	Using feedback received from supervisors, Using feedback received from students, and colleagues
Response to students' misbehavior	Managing naughty students, Managing students with misbehavior, Managing students' aggression Managing students' inattention to assignments
Class cultural communication	Managing teacher-students interaction Managing student-student interaction
Fulfillment of learner expectations	Managing learners' expectations, Managing students' wants, Managing students' needs, Managing students' priorities
Time management	Managing time in classroom
Showing care & attention to learners	Showing support to students Showing empathy to students Showing sympathy to students Showing care to students Showing attention to students
Giving & receiving feedback	Giving conducive feedback on students' learning, Giving feedback on students' behavior and performance; Receiving feedback from students on teaching methods Receiving feedback from students on class behaviors
Cultural Interaction	Being in regular contact with students' family Being informed of students' family background
Showing flexibility	Being flexible in teaching, Being flexible in evaluation, Being flexible in class interaction
Showing commitment	Being accountable and committed to students Being accountable and committed to students' families, Being accountable and committed to authorities
Planning lessons	Preparing lesson plans before coming to the class
Planning group works	Taking advantage of group activities in the class Taking advantage of group tasks in the class
Following professional ethics	Teaching based on professional ethics Behaving based on professional ethics

Quotations confirming these strategies were provided briefly in the sections on the results of the research question.

Karimi: *I chose my plan of classroom management based on guidelines given in the resources that were taught in educational courses.*

Rezaei: *I personally analyze the cultural issues and decide what to do in the class. Personal thinking helps me in managing classroom affairs.*

Yavari: *I take into account my established cultural ideologies in selecting the procedure of classroom management.*

Karami: *I follow what experience has shown me to be practical and right in class. Experience is a good teacher for teaching at least for me.*

Naderi: *Participation in in-service training courses gives me new hints for managing the classroom. Materials provided in TTC programs are up-to-date and very useful.*

Ghaderi: *Analysis and synthesis of each class situation led me well in managing the classes. Each class has its own situation and needs particular managerial strategies.*

Amiri: *The classroom environment imposes certain constraints on classroom management. The conditions of each class determine what you should do to manage the class.*

Zarei: *Feedback I take from supervisors who regularly visit my classes acts as a good reference for me in classroom management. They point out delicate things that can be helpful in classroom management.*

Safari: *Peers' and colleagues' comments have always helped me in classroom management. They see things from an external eye view. This gives me guidance for the management of the classroom.*

Ebrahimi: *Some students are aggressive. Some others do not do class assignments. Classroom management involves managing these students in appropriate ways.*

Tavakoli: *Teachers should know how to manage the classroom relations. It is a really embarrassing task for teachers.*

Mohebbi: *Students learn more effectively in a setting where communication is good. Balance is very significant in class interaction.*

Hemmati: *Classroom management cannot be separated from the fulfillment of students' needs. Students have a variety of needs in English learning, which should be met by education.*

Rahimi: *Management of time is of importance in classroom management. If we learn to manage time, we have put aside a big block in the path of classroom management.*

Nasiri: *To manage a classroom, teachers should like all students. They should care for them, and show empathy towards them. teachers should see students as their friends.*

Karimi: *Classroom management involves giving feedback to students regarding their learning and behaviors. Teachers should receive feedback from students on their teaching performance.*

Rahimi: *Teachers should be in contact with the families of students. The background of students must be known to teachers. Otherwise, classroom management may not be done successfully.*

Taban: *Classroom management has an affinity with flexibility. We should be flexible in all dimensions of the class including teaching and evaluation methods.*

Zahedi: *Classroom management requires accountability to stakeholders including students and their families. Students should feel that their teachers are accountable.*

Jaberi: *Responsibility and commitment to students, authorities, and even families are important in classroom management.*

Rezaei: *Planning lessons is the most inevitable dimension of classroom management. I prepare lesson plans before the class. It helps me understand learning activities exactly.*

Kaveh: *In the management of the classroom, taking measures to incorporate group work has a specific place. Teachers need to use group tasks for the benefit of all the students.*

Mansouri: *Professional ethics play a main role in managing the classes. To comply with this, I regulate my behavior with students according to the ethics of teaching.*

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In analyzing the research question "What are Iranian EFL teachers' strategies of classroom management? fifty strategies were identified which are presented in Table 1. These strategies were related to Academic knowledge, personal cultural perceptions, experiences, professional events, contextual interpretations, class cultural communication, fulfillment of learner expectations, time management, attention to learners, giving & receiving feedback, cultural interaction, showing flexibility and commitment, planning lessons as well as group works, and following professional ethics. In discussing these findings, EFL teachers are required to use different strategies to put their knowledge resources and practices of classroom management into the real context of the classroom with high effectiveness (Tierney, 2016).

The results of the present study contribute to the growing body of research investigating the factors or resources that feed classroom management. In fact, understanding the role of classroom management of EFL teachers is of prime significance in that it may affect the whole process of teaching. As Lightbown and Spada (2006) discuss, classroom management is highly significant for the language teacher as it paves the ground for effective teaching and learning processes. It should be stated that the above-mentioned strategies were identified and used by Iranian EFL teachers to manage the classrooms effectively. Thus, given the potential importance of classroom management, it may be necessary that EFL teachers become aware of the effective usage of classroom management cues and strategies in the classroom which play critical roles in managing the class and helping the students. Considering the results, it can be said that classroom management literacy is the output of merging strategies and knowledge resources. This collection makes a whole called classroom management literacy through a set of relations and interrelations that are there among them.

According to Čiuladienė and Račelytė (2016), classroom management needs plans or strategies to be efficient in real teaching contexts. By the strategies that are related to and congruent with knowledge resources and practices of classroom management, classroom management is operationalized by being converted from a theoretical construct into a practical construct. To this end, as put by Jasso, Törnblom, and Sabbagh (2016), EFL teachers are needed to resort to various strategies in sequential or simultaneous form in a way that classrooms can be appropriately managed. The results were also supported the Kalantarypour and Modirkhamene's (2021) study which tried to identify classroom management practices and strategies. Their results reported the use of positive strategies of involvement and recognition; and social problem solving and relaxation which had a positive effect on the learners' language achievement of classroom management. Moreover, the findings of this work are partially in line with Shakerkhoshroudi et al. (2021) who investigated the strategies employed by EFL teachers to avoid classroom management constraints through qualitative analysis. The results showed that the teachers used many coping strategies under two sub-constructs problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. More importantly, highly expert teachers used the extracted coping strategies more frequently.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that classroom management is multidimensional and simultaneous and that EFL teachers are involved in the constant process. The variety of knowledge resources and practices

identified for teachers' classroom management are proof of this deduction. Moreover, classroom management literacy is the output of merging knowledge resources and practices of classroom management, each branched into a set of strategies. This collection makes a whole called classroom management strategies through a set of cultural relations and interrelations that are there among them. The important aspect of this study lies in its theoretical contribution to foreign language research and the pedagogical implications for foreign language teaching and learning. Given the potential importance of classroom management, it may be necessary that EFL teachers become aware of the effective usage of classroom management cues and strategies in the classroom which play critical roles in managing the class and helping the students (Marashi & Ahmadi, 2017). Additionally, the present study contributes to the growing body of research investigating the factors or resources that feed classroom management. With a view to the research paucity in the domain of classroom management research, the findings of the present study have useful insights for those involved in EFL teaching on how to manage their classroom. Moreover, TEFL policymakers and top authorities can use the findings of the present study to complete the theoretical bases of teacher education in the realm of classroom management and take appropriate measures to incorporate these changes in the teacher education system of Iran. Given that the EFL teacher education system of Iran is relatively static, this can revise its nature and transform its agendas.

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