

The Effect of EFL Teachers' Stress on their Classroom Management Practices: An Investigation of Male and Female Teachers

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship between perceived stress and behavior and instructional management in male and female foreign language teachers in cities of Mohr, Lamerd, Parsian and Asalouye. A total of 96 male (N = 58) and female (N = 38) university and high school teachers participated in the present study. All participants were randomly selected from different universities and high schools which were more accessible and accommodating for the purpose of study. Behavior and Instructional Management Scale (BIMS) developed by Wolfgang and Glikman (1986) was used to collect data about teachers' reported classroom management practices. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) was used for measuring the perception of stress. The reliability and validity of the questionnaires were found acceptable according to Cronbach's Alpha and factor analysis. Questionnaires were administered to the teachers via emails and in person. The results obtained from the Pearson correlation analyses revealed that there was not a significant relationship between perceived stress and behavior management in both male and female teachers, reflecting the fact that high stress was unlikely to affect behavior management in both genders. For instructional management, it is likely for both male and female teachers to

decrease their instructional management practices when their perceived stress is high. The implications of the findings are discussed.

Keywords: stress, behavior and classroom management, gender, Iranian teachers

Introduction

Classroom environment constitutes a complicated area where learners and teachers constantly engage in discussions, interactions, writing and even using body language such as gestures (Martin, 2002). Effective Classroom Management (CM) has all the earmarks of being a fundamental condition for setting up a viable teaching and learning environment (Emmer, Evertson & Worsham, 2000; Evertson, Emmer, Sanford & Clements, 1993).

The term classroom management has been argued to refer to the implementation of different techniques in order to achieve order (Emmer et al., 1994; Evertson et al., 1994). Classroom management alludes to the methods and strategies that teachers apply in their classrooms to attain order (Doyle, 1980). According to Shechtman and Leichtenritt (2004), learning and order are inter-related concepts since misbehavior (namely the prohibition of the teaching process, the rights of others to learn, and debilitating or aggressive behavior) and passive behavior (that is not paying sufficient attention to learning) hinder the learning process. Behavior should not be considered as a totally internal or external act; rather, it is quite obvious that it stems from the interface between individuals and their environment (Alexander, 2000), in the form of physiological, mental and social aspects (Evans et al., 1989). This combination of the elements has been extensively advocated by educational psychologists (Cochran-Smith, 2003) and is

evidently mirrored and advocated by the humanistic and learner-oriented approaches to teaching (Lambert & McCombs, 1998).

Classroom management is a critical issue for every teacher; experienced or beginner, male or female, old or young (Merç, 2004). As indicated by Luo, Bellows, and Grady (2000), for some teachers, controlling classroom situations can be challenging. Indeed, even instructors with 25 years of experience can in any case confront management issues (Kyriacou, 1991). This is even more remarkable in an EFL context, when the target language is being learned as a foreign language in the classroom context.

Stress as a prohibited factor is a critical issue in many professions especially those involved in social service, such as teaching (Roache, 2008). Stressful environments in the teaching process bring so many problems such as teacher burnout, depersonalization of students resulting in school-failure, and emotional exhaustion. “‘Emotional exhaustion’ refers to feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and entrapment, ‘depersonalization’ is considered as a physical exhaustion caused by lost energy, and ‘lack of personal accomplishment’, equals to reduced productivity, low morale, withdrawal, and an inability to cope, is now referred to as the development of negative attitudes to the work, people, and self” (Sadeghi & Khezrlou, 2016, pp.4-5) All types of stressors are considered as barriers or difficulties perceived by teachers that interfere with or hinder the instructional process carried out to achieve learning objectives and which would explain a high level of burnout (Achwarzer & Greenglass, 1999; Blasé, 1982). Stress among teachers can affect the quality of teaching in the class which, in turn, brings about some hardships in facilitating the process of learning and meeting the course objectives. Most educators would agree that the teacher's ‘personality’ or ‘mental health’ (and behavior) are

important in the classroom; some might consider these characteristics even more important than his knowledge of the subject matter and methods of teaching (Coates & Thoresen 1974).

Whatever the stress sources are, teachers' management of their classroom in such circumstances is of utmost importance. This study is an attempt to explore the role of stress in teachers' management.

Importance and necessity of research

The term, classroom management, seems synonymous with teaching. Accordingly, classroom management is of primary importance for both novice and experienced teachers. Administrators in the educational sector stress the importance of classroom management. This emphasis on classroom management might be because classroom management continues to be essential in establishing a positive learning environment that can foster academic achievement (Rosas & West, 2009), thus implying a model for the direct path between management and achievement. This path between management and learners' achievement, however, is prone to the influence of a number of variables such as the degree of stress experienced by teachers.

Understating the effect of teaching stress on teachers' classroom management styles which are assumed to be affecting learners' academic success would possibly contribute to better understating of classroom contexts. When fewer problems occur in a classroom, teachers and students are able to teach and learn from each other more successfully. When this occurs, schools retain teachers and create higher levels of student engagement and academic success (Brophy, 2010). The information gained from this study would add to the current knowledge as well as

assist in developing management practices used by both low-stressed and high-stressed teachers in their classrooms.

The significance of this study is two-fold. In the first place, although there has been considerable focus on the topic of classroom management and processes in teaching, there have been relatively very rare attempts to examine how teachers' internal factors such as stress influence their classroom management practice. Second, in cities of Mohr, Lamerd, Parsian and Asalouye there has been no study on this topic. The current study is an attempt to examine how teachers' levels of stress mediate their effectiveness in their management of their classrooms.

Definition of Key Terms

Classroom Management

The term classroom management has been described in different ways by several researchers throughout the history. Generally, classroom management alludes to the activities and strategies that teachers employ to sustain order (Doyle, 1980). Martin, Yin and Baldwin (1998) view classroom management in more general and comprehensive ways by explaining it as all teacher attempts to supervise a massive number of activities in the classroom including learning, social interaction and students' behaviors. Brophy (2010) regards classroom management as "a process of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments" (p. 41).

In this study, teachers' management practices were tapped into through a Likert-scale questionnaire adopted from Martin and Sass (2010). This questionnaire includes two parts of 'instructional management' and 'behavior management'. The former deals with the teachers' use

of strategies to cope with instructional and pedagogical challenges faced by the learners; whereas the latter is concerned with the teachers' behavior and responses towards the issues arising in the classroom context.

Stress

Stress has been defined in various manners over the past 65 years by researchers, psychologists, writers and health professionals. The current wealth of definitions and lack of consensus appears to be propelled by the fact that individuals may react differently to the same event. What may serve as a source of motivation for one individual could in fact overwhelm a different individual and, therein, lies part of the problem. Seyle (1976), a pioneer in the field of stress research who coined the term 'stressor', was among the first to differentiate between 'good stress', which he called 'eustress' and 'bad stress' which he referred to as 'distress' (Seaward, 1997).

In the present study, teachers' level of perceived stress was evaluated through a Likert-scale questionnaire by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein, (1983). Scores above the obtained mean are indicative of high stress and those below it represent low stress.

Research questions

This study attempted to investigate this issue by addressing the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between teachers' stress (that is anxious and less anxious teachers) and classroom management practices?
2. Is there any significant difference between male and female teachers with regard to their classroom management practices?

Society and statistical sample

A total of 96 male (N = 58) and female (N = 38) university and high school teachers participated in the present study. All participants were randomly selected from different universities and high schools which were more accessible and accommodating for the purpose of study. Participants were therefore from a large number of universities and schools including both state and private ones. The participants were selected on a voluntary basis and were guaranteed anonymity by withholding their real names from all parts of this study. In addition, the age of the participants was between 20 and 51 years. The majority of teachers were new to the profession (N = 53) who had less than 9 years of teaching experience and the rest of the participants (N = 43) were considered as experienced teachers who had more than 9 years of teaching experience. Twenty-six of the participants were single while 70 were married. The questionnaires of teaching stress and classroom management were filled out and sent back by means of both emails and hard-copy administration for the concern of practicality.

Measurement tool

Behavior and Instructional Management Scale (BIMS) developed by Wolfgang and Glikman (1986) was used to collect data about teachers' reported classroom management practices. Based on real classroom practices, this questionnaire measures two aspects of classroom management: instructional management (12 items), and behavior management (12 items). Instructional management items measure how seatwork is monitored, how everyday activities are organized, and how materials are devoted to the class time. Behavior management items centralize on pre-planned strategies that block certain behaviors rather than the ways teachers deal with the behaviors. BIMS is a six-point Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 for 'strongly agree' to 6 for

'strongly disagree'. The questionnaire is scored by means of adding up the scores for each subscale; in other words, the data is obtained by averaging responses across all items. Scoring for items 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18, and 24 was reversed. In the present study, the former method of scoring was applied in order to gain a total score for the construct of classroom management.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) was used for measuring the perception of stress (see Appendix B). It is a measure of the degree to which contexts impose stress on individuals. Items are developed to capture how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded individuals consider their experiences. The questionnaire also comprises a number of direct questions about the current levels of experienced stress. The PSS was developed for use in community experiments with a minimum of a junior high school education. The items can be easily comprehended by the respondents and the response alternatives are simple to understand. In addition, the nature of the questions is general and therefore they are not biased in terms of content and are applicable to any subpopulation group. The queries in the PSS look for information about feelings and thoughts within the last month, and in each case, respondents are requested to provide data about how often they had the feeling in a particular way. The PSS scale consists of 10 Likert-scale type items with the answers ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). For items 4, 5, 7, and 8, PSS scores are achieved by means of reversing scores (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) and then they are added up across all items. For other items, scores are summed with higher scores showing higher levels of perceived stress. The final score shows the persons' perceived level of stress.

The reliability of both questionnaires, too, was estimated through the Cronbach's alpha with 15 teachers in the pilot study. The reliability and validity of the questionnaires were found acceptable according to Cronbach's Alpha and factor analysis.

Procedure

Data were collected from 96 English as a Foreign Language university and school teachers from cities of Mohr, Lamerd, Parsian and Asalouye. Both the hard and soft copies of the questionnaires were administered to the teachers via emails and in person because data would be gathered from many respondents within a short period of time. Completion of the questionnaires took no more than 30 minutes and the questionnaires were requested to be sent back within a week. Teachers at the selected universities and schools were sent an email asking them to forward a request to their fellows to participate in the study. A follow up reminder was emailed approximately one week later to each respondent in order to precipitate the response time. After the collection of the returned and complete questionnaires, the scores will be calculated and entered into the SPSS software for the quantitative data analysis. For both analysis, a significance level of .05 will be set.

Investigating Research Questions

1. Correlation between Stress & Behaviour Management (Male vs. Female teachers)

The results of Pearson correlation for the effect of perceived stress on behavior management in Table 1 clearly show that there is an insignificant relationship between teachers' behavior management practices and their perceived stress for both male teachers ($r = .16$, $p = .21$) and female teachers ($r = .09$, $p = .59$). This means that when teachers' perceived stress is high, it is unlikely to affect their behavior management.

Table 1: Correlations between Perceived Stress and BM

Gender			Behaviour Management
MALES	Perceived Stress	Pearson Correlation	.168
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.212
		N	57
FEMALES	Perceived Stress	Pearson Correlation	.090
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.596
		N	37

2. Correlation between Stress & Instructional Management (Male vs. Female teachers)

The results in Table 2 clearly show that there is a significant negative relationship between male teachers' instructional management practices and their perceived stress ($r = -.37$, $p = .004$) and a marginally significant correlation for female teachers ($r = -.28$, $p = .08$). The r values for both genders almost show a moderate effect. This means that more stress is likely to lead to less control in both genders' instructional management.

Table 2: Correlations between Perceived Stress and IM

Gender			Instructional Management
MALES	Perceived Stress	Pearson Correlation	-.375**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004
		N	57
FEMALES	Perceived Stress	Pearson Correlation	-.282
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.087
		N	38

Discussion

The findings obtained from the present research point to the fact that teachers' perceived levels of stress may be correlated with their classroom management practices specifically instructional management. This finding supports the results of past studies (Friedman, & Farber, 1992; Jerusalem, & Mittag, 1995) showing that teachers who considered themselves to be less capable of adequately managing their classrooms indicated higher levels of stress when compared to the colleagues who possessed more confidence in their capabilities in this regard. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Brissie (1987) found that teachers who had a positive inclination towards their abilities and skills suffered to a lower degree from stress than their counterparts who rated their capabilities to be lower. In another study, Chwalisz, Altmaier, & Russell (1992) wanted teachers to rate their own abilities in reacting to the stressful situations that they experienced in the past few years. The results revealed that the high-scoring teachers applied more useful strategies and as a result they appeared to have lower levels of stress than low-scoring teachers. In a similar way, Brouwers and Tomic (1999) in a cross-sectional study found that teachers' beliefs about their appropriate classroom management practices were significantly related to their perceived stress levels.

The analysis of the items in the behavior management questionnaire leads us to estimate that one likely explanation for the effect of stress on IM but not on BM can stem from the learner-centered nature and humanistic nature of IM items. For instance, while the teacher exerts their power upon learners by 'strongly limiting student chatter', 'insist that students in the classroom follow the rules at all times' as reflected in BM items, they attempt to have a learner-friendly environment in IM practices. Particularly, they are inclined towards 'using collaborative learning', 'using active discussion', 'group work', 'adjusting instruction in response to individual

student needs’, and ‘using interaction’, all of which are intended to help learners flourish rather than dominate them. Therefore, stress could affect teachers’ humanistic attempts in negative ways but did not relate to their BM as strict rules.

Although females should have been interviewed to determine their lower level of stress compared to males, it is predicted that their support from their husbands and their personality as educators of their own children might have lowered their level of stress.

In general, then, it may be concluded that in line with the previous studies, the results of this study also exhibit a medium relationship between teachers’ instructional management practices and their experienced stress. More specifically, teachers’ management in terms of the instructional aspect is likely to be influenced moderately by their stress while their behavior management is not. It can be inferred from this finding that although teachers can find ways of coping with behavior problems rising in the classroom even if they are under stress, they may not handle the whole teaching process which is a more complicated process requiring more concentration and motivation on the part of teachers.

Another possible explanation for this result is that when teachers experience stress, they may fail to be confident about their instructional practices. Consequently, they would end up being anxious and emotionally depleted and therefore form a cynical instructional behavior towards their occupation and the learning process (Jerusalem, & Mittag, 1995). It needs to be noted that the prosperity of teachers in bringing about enhanced learning among their students is likely related to applying the managerial classroom skills of planning, arranging, directing, evaluating, instructing and managing the time. And if the teacher fails to employ these processes fruitfully, then the risks of exposure to stress and attrition is likely to increase.

The second main finding of the present study was the role that gender played in teachers' perceived stress. Although both male and female teachers suffered from adequate instructional management practices when experienced stress, their behavior management was not affected by stress. As a matter of fact, the level of stress and the type of stressors can differ from one gender to the other. There are a number of previous studies (e.g., Beilock, Gunderson, Ramirez, & Levine, 2009; Dang & Gupta, 1994; Klassen & Ming, 2010; Kumar & Deo, 2011; Veronica, 2011) that investigated a relationship between teacher stress and gender. The joint feature of these studies is that they all did not come up with a meaningful difference between opposite genders in perceiving occupational stress. Putter (2003), other than proposing teaching as a stressful employment, ensured that there is no important contrast in the degree of stress with respect to gender, age and teaching background. There are on the other hand a few other studies (such as Antoniou et al., 2006; Greenglass & Burke, 2003; Mishra, 1996) that showed higher levels of stress for female teachers, attributing this to gender contrasts in nonworking contexts, with higher workload and higher role contrasts between work and family. These controversial findings, therefore, may imply that this trait of teaching profession seems to be a context specific one and differs from one setting to the other.

Implications for classroom management practices

Preparing a language course involves creating a foundation based upon the course objectives. The intensity of the preparation and planning phase is determined by the course; the needs of the students; the level of knowledge of the instructor; the teaching methodologies used, and his or her individual philosophy of teaching and learning (McGaghie, 2006). However, preparing such a course takes a great deal of time, attention, energy and also money. This is especially true when the course being taught for the first time. In addition, usually managements working in the non-

governmental section have a budget problem for such turnover. Accordingly, there is no preparation course in its real sense for the teachers to give them the awareness about the stressors and coping strategies. The implication here for the managements of language learning contexts is that preparation courses can give the teachers necessary awareness about the problematic sources of stress which helps them to handle the situation easily. Moreover, teacher can reach a high level of confidence which can guarantee meeting course objective much easier. Pasek (2006) comparing two groups of teachers found that preparation courses are really helpful in controlling stress and manifesting helpful coping strategies.

Student teachers experience stress when what they face in the classrooms does not correspond to what they have learnt in their training course. Consequently, it is vital for policy makers and teacher training course providers to make a connection between theoretical frameworks and methodological issues. That is during the methodological courses teachers should be introduced to some practical measures. In addition, since every classroom is a unique place of its own and can provoke stress in a different manner, teachers can be given opportunities to share their reflections and exchange their personal experiences in teaching practicum.

Of equal importance is the idea that the management ability of pre-service teachers can be increased using appropriate materials. Many novice teachers may not feel confident in the classroom as a result of their preparation from coursework. Teachers need to be provided with appropriate textbooks in their training and education so that they can deal with the wide range of instructional needs in their prospective classrooms.

There is also the aspect of syllabus implementation with regard to the stress of employing a new curriculum. The study by McCormick, Ayres, and Beechey (2006) was conducted to investigate

the relationships among teachers' occupational stress, stress coping, and relevant teachers' perceptions of curriculum changes in a major educational reform.

Suggestions for further Research

The focus of the present study was to investigate the presence of teaching stress in teaching practicum and its relationship with behavior and instructional management practices of teachers in Iranian context (from cities of Mehr, Lamerd, Parsian and Asalouye) which can give an idea for further studies in the field. As research on stress and classroom management is in its infancy and needs more attention, similar research can be done in other parts of the country since the anticipation of the study was that every context is unique and has its own demands.

This study was devoted only to discover the role of teacher stress in behavior and instructional management. Further attempts can be done to find possible factors giving rise to stress among language teachers in different regions.

More importantly, any problematic issue needs remedial, further studies can be devoted to coping strategies and finding some solutions in controlling the problem of stress.

One of the most important points to be considered in the teachers' classroom management is that the individual differences play an important role in the practice of teaching and learning. Teachers' individual differences include teaching styles, strategies, age, gender, cultural background, background knowledge, and the affective domain (i.e., motivation, stress, tolerance of ambiguity, burnout and so forth). Due to some restrictions, these individual-difference variables have not been taken into account in the present study. Further studies are suggested to

investigate these different variables. As a result, individual differences and their possible effects on the management styles of teachers can be better understood.

The present study was conducted with teachers in the in-service period; however, other studies can be carried out to examine the classroom management abilities of teachers in pre-service period. This is an important line of research since the management skills of teachers are likely to be shaped and developed during their training. Thus, research can be conducted in this area to signify the weaknesses and the strengths of training programs from the perspective of management development and the language learning of the learners as its offshoot.

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