

COPING STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS OF STUDENTS THROUGH THE EYES OF EXPERIENCED ELEMENTARY TEACHERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Behavioral problems of students are now challenging issue for all ranked school teachers in the classroom worldwide. Nature of the behavioral problems of students varies country to country, culture to culture, gender to gender and even grade to grade level. This research study explores the coping strategies that experienced elementary teachers used to deal with behavioral problems of the students in the classrooms. Research study being qualitative in nature specifically conducted through transcendental phenomenological methodology. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews from purposefully selected 10 experienced elementary teachers within the one district of province Punjab Pakistan and analyzed using qualitative method. It was recommended based on the finding of the study that traditional and conventional coping strategies to deal behavioral problems of students would be substituted with preventive and supportive coping strategies as these are much desired and effective toward securing students' learning and teachers' instructional time in the classroom.

Keywords: Behavioral problems of students, coping strategies, experienced elementary teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Education is a dynamic process that wishes to develop all features of an individual's personality and brings necessary changes in the outlooks and behaviour of human beings to make them positive toward own self, society and the nation. The role of teacher in education system is of much importance and central. Classroom management strategies hold a dynamic position in all teaching learning processes. Behavioral problems of students are among the greatest challenges that are faced in schools today. Teachers use different strategies to manage classroom situations. When students are disruptive and off-task, they demand teacher's potential to keep them on task. Behavioral problems of students have become a devastating dilemma for teachers, administrators and parents. Increased academic stress with lots of exposure to electronic media has greater impact on students' mind at adolescent level resultantly causing behavioral problems. Mostly novice teachers consider it to be the most problematic aspect of a teacher's workday. To maintain discipline in classroom is considered the basic principle and it plays a very crucial role in learning process (Amogne, A. E. 2015).

Due to behavioral problems of students in classrooms most of the teachers' instruction time spent in handling the situation and teacher then left with less time to complete the lesson. The types of behavioral problems of the students vary across teachers, across the region, area, country and class level. Teachers used different strategies to overcome the students' behavioral problems during the classroom teaching. Teaching since last two decades has become more challenging profession all over the world. It also has caused to decline in teachers job satisfaction and increased stress on teachers. Dearth of classroom management has been identified as one of the top reason of teacher stress (Collie et al., 2012). Managing students' behaviour in the classroom has become a diverse challenge among public school teachers who are legally bound not to exercise authoritarian or punishment style to control the class for maintaining discipline.

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Therefore, this study aimed to explore the coping strategies experienced Elementary teachers used to deal with behavioral problems of students to make teaching learning effective.

Statement of the Problem

Classroom management involves too many aspects that a teacher have to observe to create a conducive environment for making teaching learning process smooth and affective in all respects. Unfortunately classroom now are full of students behavioral problems due to the various factors like exposure of students toward social media and information technology. Cultural, moral and social values are diminishing from the society. Specifically elementary classrooms where boys are at their adolescent level have been much victimizing in the near past. The issue voices internationally but it varies from country to country and culture to culture context. Teachers especially novice teachers are under great stress as most of the teachers instructional time went with solving the problematic issues of the students in the classroom. Policy documents and curriculum provide only theoretical knowledge at limited level that how to deal with students behavioral problems. There was a dire need to step forward in the issue by gaining in-depth understanding of the phenomena as commonly experienced by the Elementary teachers. So present study was conducted to explore the coping strategies that experienced Elementary teachers used to deal with behavioral problems of the students in the classroom.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

- i. Explore the coping strategies that experienced elementary teachers used to deal with behavioral problems of the students in the classrooms.

Research Questions

- i. How do experienced elementary teachers perceive about behavioral problems of students?
- ii. What are the coping strategies used by experienced elementary teachers to deal with behavioral problems of students?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Behavioral problem of the students is defined as any behavior that interrupts teaching and learning (Zakaria, et al., 2013). Behavioral problem is also referred to as Misbehavior, disruptive behavior, negative and challenging behavior. Misbehavior can be any action from students being off task to students becoming physically destructive (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014). According to Allday (2011), "Classroom management is one of the most important sets of skills a teacher can attain and is also one of the most difficult to master".

Various research studies found that experienced and trained teachers are better than novice and untrained teachers regarding classroom management strategies. This is because teachers who have more teaching experience and training be proved to better manage their classrooms (Entwistle & Ramsden, 2015).

Many researchers have identified various strategies to deal behavioral problems of students in the classroom. The most common include positive, rather than punitive, praise and conversation with students (Kulinna, 2008; RCF Sun, 2015).

Zakaria, et al. (2013) suggested use of warnings as coping strategy to deal with the behavioral problems of students in the classroom. A combination of punishment and rewards is alternative type of strategy used to deal behavioral problems of students (Langa, 2014). Punitive discipline management strategies are generally ineffective because these promote negative learning environment (Adelman & Taylor, 2015). The best coping strategy used to cope while dealing minor misbehavior begun with a nonverbal intervention (Garrett, 2014). Generally students act inappropriately to get attention of others (Halimah, S., Fitriana, R., & Ariyanti, A. 2019).

Teachers behaviour in the classroom as how they employ the situation, develop the students behaviour (Browne, 2013). Ghazi, et al. (2013) reported that since the prohibition of corporal punishment through bill by National Assembly of Pakistan students' behavioral problems has been escalated intensively and occur more repeatedly in classrooms. Teachers now are bound to use alternative coping strategy to overcome the behavioral problem of the students during the classroom teaching. It drags out the practicing of teachers' authoritarian style of controlling the students in the classroom.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was guided by the constructivist paradigm. The experiences of elementary teachers to cope with the behavioral problems of the students in the classrooms were implicit to be co-constructed which can differ significantly. Hence experienced Elementary teachers lived experiences regarding the classroom management particularly in use of coping strategies to deal with behavioral problems of the students were presumed to create meaningful and new knowledge. For this study qualitative method and explicitly transcendent phenomenology by Moustakas, (1994) were used to be best suited for obtaining meaningful knowledge.

The sampling process for the study was criterion purposive.

There were 10 experienced elementary teachers selected as study participants on criteria based both from govt. and private sector education system from within the one district of province Punjab Pakistan. Participants were given identification as ExpET.

Data Collection Methods

Keeping in view the study objective and research questions semi-structured interview data collection tool was used. All participant experienced elementary teachers were interviewed by the researcher face to face for data collection purpose.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this transcended phenomenological research study was to explore the coping strategies used by experienced elementary teachers to deal with behavioral problems of the students in the classroom.

All data collected through semi-structured interviews was analyzed in following steps.

- Horizontalisation
- Reduction and Elimination of data
- Clustering into themes
- Textural and structural description
- Synthesis
- Composite descriptive meaning
- Lastly making the essence (Moustaka ,1994)

Elementary Teachers Interviews

Elementary teachers' semi structured interviews were recorded and organized in accordance the following plan and data was stored and transcribed in the identification manner.

Table- 1: for Interview Schedule Experienced Elementary Teachers

Interview No.	Time Duration	Field Note ID
1	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 1.1
2	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 2.1
3	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 2.2
4	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 2.3
5	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 3.1
6	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 4.1
7	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 4.2
8	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 4.3
9	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 4.4
10	15 to 20 Minutes	ExpET 5.1

Table-1 showed the interview schedule of ten experienced elementary teachers.

Elementary teachers' perceptions about the term behavioral problems of the students

Participant experienced Elementary teachers were asked what they perceive about behavioral problems of the students. They viewed the phenomena as described here;

- “Any physical or vocal action of the student which interrupt the lesson in the class”. (ExpET 2.2)
- “Students unexpected actions which seek other students and teachers attention in the classroom”. (ExpET 3.1)
- “In my point of view behaviour of the students that are not liked by others which also fixed the delivery of lesson”. (ExpET 4.4)

- “It includes all type of behaviors that impede the instructional process in the classroom”. (ExpET 5.1)

Elementary teachers’ perceptions about coping strategies they used to deal with behavioral problems of students in the classrooms

Coping strategies used by the Participants experienced Elementary teachers to deal with behavioral problems of students based on their classroom practices and experiences has been summarized here as;

Table-2 Elementary teachers coping strategies to deal with behavioral problems of the students in the classrooms

Themes	Sub Themes
Preventative Strategies	Lesson Planning Appropriate Seating Identification and Meeting Students needs
Punitive Strategies	Punishment Repeat Homework
Corrective Strategies	Negative remarks Tactical ignoring Calling by Name Staring Eye Contact Taking Round
Distractive Strategies	Changing Seating/position Sending out of class
Supportive Strategies	Extending Relationships Indulge in activities
Reinforcement	Clapping Praise words

Table-2 showed the detail of six major themes and relevant 17 sub themes emerged through the perceptions of the participant’s experienced elementary teachers regarding the coping strategies they used to deal with behavioral problems of the students in the classroom.

Preventative Strategies

Preventative strategies referred to the strategies that teachers arranged or planned in advance before the occurrence of the undesirable behaviour in the classroom to probable prevent its happening. Teachers took various steps in setting classroom environment in advance to lessen the likelihoods of students’ behavioral problems. These types of measures may involve making shuffled seating arrangement attractive lesson plan or any other activities that could lead to serve the purpose. The attributes from the responses of experienced Elementary teachers during the interviews are cited here.

➤ **Lesson Planning**

Experienced Elementary teachers who used this type of coping strategy their responses are cited here.

- “I planned lessons so that all students could actively participate during the lesson. Thus it minimizes the likelihoods of occurrence of behavioral problems of students through the delivery of lessons in the classroom”. (ExpET 2.3)
- “Mostly I involved the students in my lessons using different tactics; consequently it made the students attentive and serious toward the learning”. (ExpET 3.1)

➤ **Appropriate Seating**

Seating arrangement in the classroom helps at both end, toward teacher to class management and for the students to comfort seating. Experienced Elementary teacher who experienced this aspect of coping strategies their responses are cited as.

- “Before that I started my teaching in the class room I have been ensured such type of students seating that each student remain in my eye contact. It assists me to control the student’s behavioral problems”. (ExpET 4.2)

➤ **Identification and Meeting Students needs**

Behavioral problems of the students carry to many reasons behind. If teacher is so proactive and conscious he identified the students need and tried to fulfill it at his end to comfort the student. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced such coping strategies they responded as.

- “I extend my relations close to the students to know their needs then I helped them to fulfill at their level, students felt more comfort in my classes and remain cooperative in learning”.(ExpET 2.2)
- “During the class round when I noticed the student in difficulty or stuck at solving the test or need some relevant writing materiel and looking around. I used to help him at my end so that he may go forward with the solution”. (ExpET3.1)

Punitive Strategies

Punitive strategies referred to the techniques a teacher used to curb the undesirable behaviour of students implying force factors. Responses of the experienced elementary teachers related to this main theme are cited here.

➤ **Punishment**

Punishment is controversial aversive problematic behavior coping strategy. It was a common and most frequent coping strategy remained in practice since past decades by school teachers in Pakistan. Minor nature of punishments in different forms is still in practice by the school teachers to deal the students with behavioral problems in the class rooms. Few of the participant Experienced Elementary teachers cited on the subject as:

- “Truly speaking rarely I got emotional enough to use punishment as a last resort to control the students’ problematic behavior in the classroom. I remain calm and use positive punitive strategies to overcome the situation and it always resulted in taking less time of the class to reach the solution”. (ExpET 4.1)
- “Students disrespectful behaviour toward teacher during the class put the teacher in a trial. All strategies some time fails to bring the dialogue to normal ending. In such situations some time I have to use light physical punishment but it happened quite rare”. (ExpET 5.1)
- **Repeat Homework**

Homework assignments are the part and parcel of each subject teaching at school level. Teachers used to assignee the completion of written home work to students in each subject on daily bases. The dose of home work also matter for students. Mostly students showed reluctance in doing the written home work even for a single time. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy their response are cited here.

- “I some time used to penalize the problem creator student for doing the homework in twice as a punishing tool”. (ExpET4.3)
- **Negative remarks**

Sometime behavioral problems of the students forced the teacher to regret the student’s undesired behaviour by passing negative remarks about the student’s personality. So that he may feel ashamed on his doing. One of the Experienced Elementary teachers practiced this type of coping strategy.

“Some time I felt guilty on reflection for using such negative remarks toward the students during the class but what to do they compel to do so”. (ExpET 4.3)

Corrective Strategies

Such types of strategies are used in a way so that minimum disturbance could hurdle the smooth functioning of teachers teaching in the classroom. Experienced Elementary teachers’ responses in this respect are cited here.

➤ **Tactical ignoring**

Sometime teacher decide to consciously ignore the certain behavioral problem of the student and keep focus on the lesson flow. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy their responses are cited here.

- “Ignoring the problematic behavior of student, save time to indulge in futile dialogue. I have been doing this”. (ExpET 2.3)
- “I pretend as not to notice the student’s mischiefs much time during the classroom teaching. It keeps me to continue nonstop delivery of lesson”. (ExpET 4.3)

➤ **Calling by Name**

Teacher vigilance in the class values, sometime on noticing the behavioral problem of the student teacher just call the student by his name or spoke some other words to refrain the student from not doing the problem. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategies their responses are cited here.

- “On noticing the problematic behavior I call upon the student by name and warn, this also makes alerts to other students in the classroom”. (ExpET 4.3)
- “Sometime calling by name like Akbar put attention on your book you will answer my next question, make alert all the students in the classroom”. (ExpET 4.4)

➤ **Staring**

Students some time show undesirable behaviour just by avoiding teacher’s attention. Teachers single look toward such students refrain them from showing such behaviour. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy their responses are cited here.

- “Often my daring look at the problematic students in the classroom refrain the student from exhibiting the problem behavior, it saved me to engage in big issue during the delivery of lecture”. (ExpET 2.3)
- “During the instruction in the classroom I frequently glare on the smart students to keep them under eye otherwise they would have found opportunity to behave differently as these are there to tease the fellow students or disturb the class”. (ExpET 4.1)

➤ **Eye Contact**

Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy their responses are cited here.

- “ I always keep an eye on all students to ensure them that no one is ignorant of me”.(ExpET 2.1)
- “I remain in eye contact with all the class while delivering lecture so that they may know that I am watching their actions”. (ExpET 4.3)

➤ **Taking Round**

Teachers used to take round of the class during the lesson to check if all students are engaged in learning activities. This type of teacher’s action creates alertness in the students. Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy their responses are cited here.

- “Often whenever I physically move toward that corner of class where I suspect students may initiate the problematic behaviour it prevailed pin silence there”. (ExpET 3.1)

Distractive Strategies

Distractive strategies involve the strategies applied by the teachers to divert the problematic behaviour of the students to other responsible and acceptable behaviour. These types of strategies often require rigor experience and understanding of the situation as the decision taken under these tactics some time lead to big hindrance in the delivery of class lessons. Experienced Elementary teachers’ responses regarding such strategies are cited here.

➤ **Changing Seating/position**

Students mostly exhibit behavioral problem with the support of neighboring peers in the classroom. Experienced Elementary teachers who used this type of coping strategy his response is cited here.

- “It’s my experience that students show unwanted behavior willfully by the support of other fellow students , so whenever I confront such situation I at once shifted the students seating from one to other corner to break the friends circle”. (ExpET 4.3)

➤ **Sending out of class**

Sending the problematic student out of the classroom is just like to shift the behavioral problems of the students to the other place. Elementary teacher who experienced this type of coping strategy his response is cited here.

- “Through sending the trouble creator student out of the class I have been saved lot of my class instruction time”. (ExpET 2.2)

Supportive Strategies

Supportive strategies refer to the positive actions taken by the teachers to extend complete intimacy for understanding and solving the problems of the student that may otherwise cause toward students behavioral problems. Experienced Elementary teachers responses in this regards are cited here.

➤ **Extending Relationships**

Teachers extend acquaintance with the students to develop confidence and trust in them. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy their responses are cited here.

- “I took ownership of my class and develop close relationship with students to know and solve their problems at their level so they took more interest in the classroom learning and avoid misbehaving”. (ExpET 4.4)
- “I have been known by the names of most students of my class and develop intimacy so they refrain from behaving unwontedly in the classroom”. (ExpET 5.1)

➤ **Indulge in activities**

Activity based learning develop more interest of the learners resultantly minimize the behavioral problems of students. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy their responses are cited here.

- “Students often show less interest in the subject that they consider difficult for them, I engage them by assigning little projects in groups, group competition quizzes etc. and help them where they need”. (ExpET 1.1)

“I took help from students to solve the problems on board with fellow support, it develop confidence in them and make attentive toward true learning”. (ExpET 3.1)

Reinforcement

Most of the participant’s elementary teachers told that whenever they encounter with behavioral problems of the students in the classroom they took positive actions like smart words, medal, care, attention for good behaviors.

➤ **Clapping**

To clap for appraising the student’s response is very common and traditional activity remain in practice by the all level teachers. Experienced Elementary teachers who used this type of coping strategy in the classroom their responses are cited here.

- “Appreciations even of little nature just clapping for the students in my classroom often prove to be more affective on showing responsible behavior, well in time completion of home assignments, ensuring attendance and correct feedback”.(ExpET 3.1)
- “I used clapping for specific students for their positive feedback toward class activities made the students more attentive and careful in responses” (ExpET 4.2)

➤ **Praise words**

Words play a motivational role if these are spoken by the teacher toward students. Teachers used different praising words to keep the students motivated toward the desirable responses in the classroom. Experienced Elementary teachers who experienced this type of coping strategy in the classroom their responses are cited here.

- “Shabbash, well done, good Mr.. You have done excellent your work spokes, has been in my practice to keep the students motivated for attentive classroom learning”.(ExpET 2.2)
- “You really deserve it, keep it up, wow, excellent performance my words in the classroom inclined he students for smooth learning in the classroom”. (ExpET 4.4)

FINDINGS

It was found through the analysis that Experienced Elementary teachers rarely used to punish the students, if otherwise it was unavoidable to use then it was of little nature. Negative remarks to condemn the problematic behavioral of students was also used as coping strategy to maintain the class discipline.

Corrective strategies were found to be mostly used by experienced elementary teachers to deal with behavioral problems of students that resulting little interruption toward the delivery of lectures. These included tactical ignoring, calling the problematic student by name, staring, eye contact and taking round of the classroom to alert the back benchers. Distractive strategies like changing seat or position, and sending out of class were found to be used to handle the problem creator students. Supportive strategies that include extending relationships, indulge in activities were found to develop ownership and positive response among students in the classroom. Likewise it was

found that elementary teachers used different reinforcement's tool like clapping use of praise words to keep students motivated for showing responsive and disciplined behavior in the classroom.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings of this research study were in line with the theoretical and empirical literature that has been presented in Literature review. Behavioral problems of students in the classroom are becoming more challenging issue for the school teachers in general specifically elementary teachers in the schools are under great stress due to this phenomenon. As students at this developmental stage are curious and exposed to adolescence and social knowledge rather less serious in academics due to not being a board exam classes. Students now are more exposed to the social media internet cable and human rights. Most of these factors have distracted the students' attention from serious learning and academic activities. Most of the teachers' instructional activities and time just wasted each day during the subject teaching in the classroom while dealing with the so called behavioral problems of students. Behavioral problems of students not only disturb the other class students learning but also cause to defame and disrespect for both school and teachers in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND TRAINING

Pre service and continuous professional developments trainings would be conducted engaging expert and experienced teachers in the field focusing better class management particularly covering relevant aspects for dealing with behavioral problems of the students at elementary level. It is recommended that education administrations should plan and devise such programs, conferences and seminars that could provide opportunity to local community, parents and teachers for participation in discussions to seek the solutions for behavioral problems of the students in coordination with each other.

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