Classroom Management in the Arab World

Yazid Isa Alshoraty
Ph.D., The Hashemite University, Jordan
E-mail: ysoraty@hotmail.com
Tel: 00962795046423

Abstract

The study aims at examining the present situation of classroom management in the Arab world. It starts with explaining and discussing the main principles of the proactive and reactive approaches to classroom management. Then it analyzes the proofs and evidences which show that the remedial punitive approach is prevailing in Arab education. Finally it suggests adopting the comprehensive approach which incorporates prevention into remedy in classroom management.

Keywords: Arab Education, Classroom Management, Arab World, Proactive and Reactive Management.

Introduction

Classroom management is based on gaining order and achieving learning. Effective learning depends on achieving order. So, classroom management is a real challenge to teachers, and the problems related to classroom management usually cause anxiety and stress to many teachers (Soraty, 2003).

Success in the educational process as a whole stems basically from success in classrooms, which can not be attained without successful classroom management that guarantees both order and learning (Jones & Jones, 1995). In other words, classroom management is the source of many educational defects and problems. Achieving order, which is a requirement for real learning, constitutes a source of tension to many teachers around the world. For example, the American teachers working in public schools considered discipline in classrooms as the second major problem, after drugs, they faced from 1986 to 1991. So, the findings of a study, conducted in 1987, revealed that 29% percent of American teachers expressed their desire to quit teaching as a result of student misbehavior. Also, the results of another study showed that 58% of a sample consisted of 3300 American teachers working in public schools considered misbehaving students as the first cause of stress related to teaching (Jones & Jones, 1995).

Classroom management can be defined as the procedures taken by teachers to enhance students’ interaction, participation, cooperation and involvement in classroom activities and provide a productive and effective learning environment (Sanford, Emmer & Clement, 1983). It is a process based on a number of activities through which teachers can secure the conditions that facilitate effective learning. Such a process consists of four stages:

A Specifying the ideal or desired classroom conditions
B Analyzing the real or existing classroom conditions
C Choosing and employing the appropriate managerial techniques that can bridge the gap between the existing and desired classroom conditions
D Evaluating classroom management efficiency and passing judgment about the degree of success of the management techniques employed (Cooper, 2003).
There are two main approaches to classroom management:

First, the proactive approach which stresses utilizing all possible techniques, methods, strategies, and procedures which lead to avoiding and preventing classroom problems through eliminating their causes, sources, and motives in order to promote learning.

Second, the remedial approach which focuses on finding solutions to classroom problems after they have occurred. It is a responsive approach that is based on the teachers’ reaction to their students’ classroom misbehavior. It neglects taking initiatives or preventive measures to stop classroom disorder before it escalates.

**Aim and Questions of the Study**

This study aims at analyzing the existing situation of classroom management in the Arab world through answering the following questions:

A. What are the main principles of the proactive approach to classroom management?
B. What are the main principles of the remedial approach to classroom management?
C. Which classroom management approach prevails in Arab education?
D. What is the most appropriate approach to classroom management in Arab education?

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in the following points:

A. Many Arab researchers concentrated on the problems of educational administration and school management, but gave little attention to classroom management.
B. The findings of this study may enable Arab education policy makers to adopt certain mechanisms and measures to develop classroom management in Arab schools.
C. The study may stimulate Arab education researchers to conduct research about the managerial problems in classrooms.

**Answering the Study Questions**

**Answering the First Question: What are the Main Principles of the Proactive Approach to Classroom Management?**

This approach lays emphasis on prevention more than remedy in classroom management. It is concerned with exerting every possible effort to have secure and safe classrooms that have no student behavioral problems. It seeks uprooting misbehavior and misconduct in classrooms. Its essence is to get rid of all factors that contribute to creating problems in classroom.

Successful teachers in classroom management, according to this approach, are those who do their best in order not to have any problems in classrooms, not those who passively wait until problems take place, and then they embark on looking for solutions. (Jones & Jones, 1995). The research conducted by Kounin proved that the most important feature of effective classroom management is not having the ability to solve classroom problems, but achieving excellence in succeeding to win the cooperation and involvement of learners and create an effective learning environment which will lead to the disappearance of problems in classrooms (Good & Brophy, 1987).

In this case, teachers become class leaders who contribute to class progress, provide students with security, help students to learn, and enable them to achieve their goals (Darch & Kameenui, 2004).

The essential principles of the proactive approach to classroom management are:
Providing Effective Instruction
According to the Instructional Classroom Management Approach, many classroom problems stem from poor teaching. So, successful instruction leads to effective classroom management, and successful instruction requires using certain teaching strategies such as providing exciting and diversified teaching methods, providing students with proper and interesting content, and boosting student motivation for learning.

Effective Instruction, which contributes to preventing classroom problems, should focus on drawing students’ attention. So, Good & Brophy (1987) point out that one of the characteristics of proactive classroom management is resolving incidents of minor inattention before they developed into major disruptions through using techniques such as:

A **With-it -ness**: Effective teachers should monitor and scan their classrooms regularly through positioning themselves so they can see all of the students to keep track of what is going on, detect inappropriate behavior early and accurately, and nip problems in the bud before they escalate into serious disruptions.

B **Overlapping**: Good teachers have the ability to do more than one thing at a time when necessary. They can handle routine classroom tasks and meet individual needs without disrupting the ongoing activities of the class as a whole.

C **Continuity and Momentum**: Successful teachers should move through their lessons at a brisk pace without interruption of the flow.

D **Variety and Challenge of Seatwork**
In order to keep their students continuously involved, good teachers should give them interesting, challenging and diversified seatwork tasks.

In conclusion, effective teaching is the essence of proactive classroom management, because, as the findings of a study showed, 90% of behavior problems are attributed to poor teaching (Downing, 2005).

Providing a Suitable Physical and Psychological Learning Environment
The success of learning depends on the quality of the environment in which it takes place. The physical dimension of the learning environment, which covers the classroom and its seats, light, color, air conditioning, capacity, etc. highly affects learning. Similarly, the psychological aspect of the learning environment, which includes the students’ comfort, feelings, emotions and attitudes towards their teachers and the subjects they teach, has great impact on learning. In order to avoid classroom problems, the proactive approach to classroom management encourages securing a healthy environment that boosts students’ motivation for learning. Such an environment, as Darch & Kameenui (2004) indicate, makes students comfortable and involved. Comfort and involvement reduce misbehavior in classrooms,

Specifying Clear Behavior Rules and Laws
The source of many classroom behavioral problems is lack of students’ knowledge of behavior laws. So, specifying such laws clearly and encouraging students to abide by them contribute to avoiding many classroom misbehavior practices. Teachers should explain to their students how to behave well and show them the consequences of good and bad behavior (Downing, 2005).

Taking Prior Measures and Decisions Before Starting Teaching
One of the characteristics of proactive classroom management is taking decisions and measures in advance. Before teachers see their students, they should have a prior idea about them through examining their records and files which provide information about the talented students, the misbehaving students and the students with special needs. Also, teachers should bear in mind in advance the activities, routines, classroom environment, instruction, and relation with students they will provide (Digiulio, 2000). This will make teaching more effective and, as a result, classroom problems will be significantly reduced.
Establishing Positive Relations in Classrooms

Positive relations in classroom help to enhance learning, provide a sound learning environment and minimize behavioral problems. So, teachers who are convinced of the proactive approach to classroom management are usually eager to achieve a three-way interaction in their profession:

Interaction with Students

Good relations among teachers and students prepare students for learning and make them develop positive attitude towards teachers that promote their self-discipline, voluntary commitment and attention to lessons (Downing, 2005). According to the Socio-Emotional Climate Classroom Management Approach, the positive relation among teachers and students usually results in successful instruction and effective classroom management. So, to guarantee such a good relation, teachers are encouraged to adopt strategies such as communicating realness, acceptance, and empathic understanding, utilizing effective communication, and developing a democratic classroom (Cooper, 2003). The findings of a study showed that the teachers who established good relations with their students had 31% less classroom discipline problems than those whose relations with students were negative (Marzano & Marzano, 2003).

Interactions Among Students

Good relations among students help establish a cooperative unified and strong learning group. According to the Socio-Psychological Classroom Management Approach, since schooling takes place within a group context—the classroom, the central task of the teacher is to establish and maintain an effective and productive classroom group. To attain such a task, teachers are encouraged to apply certain strategies such as clarifying expectations, sharing leadership, fostering productive group norms, encouraging open communication, promoting cohesiveness, using group problem solving discussions, handling conflict, and utilizing group-focus behaviors (Cooper, 2003).

Interaction with Parents and Colleagues

Teachers’ cooperation with students’ parents strengthens students’ academic levels and overcomes many of their problems. Positive relations among teachers and their colleagues upgrade the exchange of ideas and experiences and improve teachers’ instructional and administrative abilities (Downing, 2005).

Developing Students’ Internal Discipline

Proactive classroom management favors self-discipline which is based on internal motivation because it improves learning, reduces behavioral problems and makes classroom safer and more secure, and because trying to achieve discipline through force has been proven to be wrong (Good & Brophy, 1987).

Answering the Second Question: What are the Main Principles of the Remedial Approach to Classroom Management?

This approach highly concentrates on classroom control and considers it as an end. It supports enforcing discipline even by force. The most important concern of the teachers who follow this approach is order not learning. Teachers are trained to deal with classroom problems when they happen. They do not give much attention to taking preventive measures to avoid classroom misbehavior. They sometimes use punishment to reach discipline.

The nature of this approach is responsive because it stresses the reaction of teachers to students’ disruptive behaviors instead of providing the proper situations, conditions and circumstances that do not allow classroom problems to occur. The teachers’ violent reaction to students’ problems sometimes complicates the problems, creates a hostile attitude towards teachers, learning and school systems and weakens students’ achievement (Cooper, 2003). In addition, this approach is characterized by
passivity, for teachers do not anticipate problems and take initiative to abort them. In stead, they passively await problems and then they start handling them.

**Answering the Third Question: What is the Prevailing Classroom Management Approach in Arab Education?**

Examining classroom management practices in the Arab world reveals that the principles of proactive management are almost absent and the principles of remedial management are commonly applied. This can be explained as follows:

**The Weak Presence of Proactive Classroom Management**

In the Arab world, the weak presence of proactive classroom management principles is manifested in the following aspects:

**Failure in Providing Effective Teaching**

The most commonly employed teaching method in Arab schools and even universities is lecturing which causes boredom that is considered, as the findings of a study done by Buck (1992) showed, the first source of students’ disruptive behavior. For example, teaching in Egypt depends on memorization, repetition, reward and punishment, and teachers resort to control and domination (Sakran, 2001). Also, teacher education institutions heavily use lecturing as a major teaching method. For instance, teacher education colleges in Saudi Arabia and Egypt do not use except lecturing, as 86.25% of a sample of a study pointed out (Awad, 1995).

**Lack of Positive Relations Among Teachers and Students**

According to El-Sheikh (1999), the relation among teachers and students in Jordan, for instance, is uncomfortable for both parties. Students feel that their freedom in classroom is restricted, and believe that their teachers do not understand their feelings and expectations, nor do they treat them well. On the other hand, teachers think that the behaviors of their students are unacceptable, and need to be changed, otherwise order will disappear.

Also, the findings of a study conducted by Watfa & Al-Shurei (2000) revealed that the relation among faculty members and students at a number of Arab universities is characterized by lack of both interaction and passion, in addition to the existence of a gap.

The findings of a study conducted at the United Arab Emirates University proved such a negative relation among faculty members and students by revealing that the students complained about their professors' lack of interaction with them, little contribution to solving their problems, discontent with their questions, and avoidance to have dialogue with them (Al-Amiri, 2003).

Weak relations among teachers and students complicate classroom discipline problems.

**Lack of Appropriate Curricula**

Interesting, modern and relevant curricula contribute to avoiding many classroom problems and help students to involve themselves in learning. Curricula in the Arab world have many disadvantages that create some discipline problems. For example, among the problems found in the Egyptian curricula were: Focusing on theory more than practice, depending on memorization and redundancy, rigidity and ignoring the learners’ needs, interests and problems (Haji, 1994).

Similarly, the curricula in Saudi Arabia have the problem of repetition which wastes effort and time, increases student boredom and paves the way for more classroom discipline problems (Khalifa, 2004), for ineffective curricula do not draw students’ attention, nor do they enhance their desires for learning.
Failing to Provide a Proper Learning Physical Environment
The physical environment for learning in many Arab schools is inappropriate and unacceptable. For instance, the results of a study done by Haji (1994) about the buildings of elementary schools in Egypt showed: 18% were not originally built as schools, 10% were irrelevant as schools or even as buildings, 29% needed rebuilding, one third of them had no electricity, 90% had no libraries, 14% had no yards, 8% did not have drinking water, 44% had problems with bathrooms. Such totally miserable physical conditions hinder learning and encourage pupils to misbehave.

Lack of a Scientific, Modern and Suitable Educational Evaluation System
Evaluation in many Arab educational institutions focuses on measuring only low levels of cognitive abilities and neglects affective and psycho-motor domains. For example, the findings of a study done by Al-Abdullah & Oneiza (1994) showed that 77.7% of the questions included in some textbooks in Jordan measure remembering only.

Paying Little Attention to Activities
Exciting activities in many Arab schools are given little importance. They are marginal in everyday schedules. Even scientific activities and experiments do not depend on students, personal and direct involvement. For instance, the findings of the study conducted by Baara & Qarara (1998) revealed that 52.4% of scientific activities in 7th grade Chemistry curricula in Jordan are performed by teachers alone.

The Prevalence of Remedial Classroom Management Principles
The principles of the reactive, remedial and responsive approach to classroom management are grass-rooted in contemporary Arab education. The main concern for many teachers is enforcing order through all means including force and punishment. The top priority is given to dealing with discipline problems and student misbehavior.

Remedy is more important than prevention, as far as classroom disruption is concerned. The findings of a number of studies indicated that discipline is mainly sought through punishment; for instance, in Jordan, the principals of secondary schools use punishment first to solve problems, (Al-Rasheed , 1988) the secondary schools, teachers prefer the oppressive way in classroom discipline, (Badrakhan, 2004) and 97.7% of students in Amman Area indicated that their teachers discriminate against, beat, threaten and disrespect them (Darwaza, et al., 2003)

The application of the principles of the traditional responsive approach to classroom management in many Arab schools had some negative consequences such as:
1) Lack of students’ respect to their teachers, that sometimes led to not only refusing their instructions, but also physically attacking some of them (Darwaza , et al. ,2003)
2) Students’ challenge of and violation to order and discipline (Sulaiman, 1982).
3) Students’ lack of interest in learning, absence, violence, smoking and carelessness (Oweidat, 1999)
4) Cheating and paying no attention to lessons (Al-Qadi, 1999)
5) Rebellion against school authority (Massad, et al. , 1999)

In conclusion, not only did the remedial approach to classroom management in the Arab world negatively affect order, but it also weakened learning

Answering the Fourth Question : What is the Most Appropriate Approach to Classroom Management in Arab Education?

The most effective solution for classroom management problems in the Arab world is the adoption of the Comprehensive Approach to Classroom Management which incorporates remedy into prevention, on condition that remedy should not mean force, punishment, aggression, oppression, repression,
severity or compulsion, but it means depending on sound, objective, effective and scientific methods for behavior modification. In other words, the Comprehensive Approach employs proactive mechanisms and techniques as well as successful and safe remedial measures to guarantee a productive learning environment. For example, the findings of a study indicated that training teachers who teach low-achieving students with behavioral problems in accordance with the Comprehensive Approach principles led to improving the students’ behavior, raising their academic level, enhancing their positive attitude towards their study and schools, reducing classroom problems and increasing the level of their success expectations. (Jones & Jones, 1995). The Comprehensive Approach changes remedy from passive responses to problems into active processes which help students assess their misbehavior and modify it through correct problem-solving means.

Conclusions
Classroom management in the Arab world passes through a critical stage and faces a real crisis. Its essence is enforcing discipline in classrooms through any means. Using punishment is permissible as long as it contributes to achieving discipline, which is considered as an end. The main concern of most teachers is solving problems instead of preventing them. This remedial and responsive approach to classroom managers is an obstacle to achieving both discipline and learning. Classroom management in the Arab world are encouraged to adopt the Comprehensive Approach to classroom management which requires employing proactive measures as well as remedial problem solving and behavior modification strategies, methods and techniques to reach discipline and enhance learning. Arab teachers should become classroom leaders who provide students with enthusiasm for self-discipline and fruitful learning.

References