

# Redefining Classroom Management in Hybrid Education Setting from the Perspectives of EFL and German Language Instructors

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to investigate the perceptions of English and German language instructors regarding the opportunities and challenges for classroom management created by the hybrid education setting. The participant group included 21 instructors (17 EFL and 4 German). Participating instructors were employed at the School of Foreign Languages, and they were actively teaching in the hybrid education model developed by the school. A convenient sampling strategy was adopted while determining the participants. The study adopted a qualitative research design, and the data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data was analyzed by following the content analysis procedures. The findings were presented through the emerging codes and themes. The results showed that the participating instructors faced varying challenges in terms of classroom management in the online classes. The study findings revealed a good deal of research evidence on the divergent training needs of instructors because the instructors found it hard to implement their traditional classroom management strategies in online classes. Planners and policymakers are provided insights for setting clear responsibilities and rules for learners during the online courses and providing in-service training opportunities for instructors as the new conditions call for innovative strategies to implement effective classroom management practices to contribute empirically, contextually, and policy.*

## INTRODUCTION

Part of a class's performance in hybrid education settings is determined by how productive and well-managed the learning environment is. However, because of the particular arrangement of a classroom setting, educators may confront obstacles specific to this context. To begin, the lack of physical connection in an online course may necessitate exploring various methods to keep students interested. Learners with short attention spans may feel bored, misbehave, or even disappear amid a class when learning in front of a computer. Furthermore, it is very unusual for students learning at home to be surrounded by distractions, ranging from family members conversing to smartphones ringing in the background. While these concerns might prevent teachers from successfully conducting their virtual sessions, they can overcome these obstacles if they are prepared and have the correct online classroom management tactics. This study aims to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes and perspectives about

classroom management in online learning environments. The participating instructors in this study are EFL and German instructors at a state university, teaching in the English and German preparatory programs. The school of foreign languages, which constitutes the setting, developed a hybrid system, and the instructors in the participating group have both face-to-face and online classes. In this regard, the participants are expected to have the chance to compare and contrast the two instruction types in terms of the opportunities and/or challenges the online education conditions to create for classroom management. The study adopted a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The participant group represents the whole EFL and German instructors' population at school.

Classrooms are learning environments where students and teachers collaborate to achieve educational objectives. In educational institutions, effective goal attainment process management is critical. As a result, classroom management and creating an effective learning environment is critical to educational achievement. ([Kavrayici, 2021](#)). Classrooms contain various activities and complexity, which present management issues. ([MacIntyre et al., 2020](#)). Part of a class's performance in hybrid education settings is determined by how productive and well-managed the learning environment is. However, because of the particular design of a virtual classroom, teachers may confront obstacles that are exclusive to this environment.

To begin with, the lack of physical connection in an online class may necessitate various methods to keep students motivated ([Hakim, 2020](#)). Students may have a short attention span while learning in front of a computer, causing them to become bored, misbehave, or even leave class. Furthermore, learners studying at home are frequently encircled by distractions, ranging from family members conversing to mobile phones ringing in the background. ([Gao & Zhang, 2020](#)). While these concerns and difficult online student types may prevent teachers from operating their virtual sessions successfully, they are not insurmountable if they are not prepared and have the appropriate online classroom management tools in place ([Fuentes et al., 2021](#)). At its most basic level, classroom management is an approach used by teachers to assist education and ensure that students learn most effectively in a calm classroom setting. Having a systematic process that establishes standards for student conduct in the classroom may aid in the most effective management of the classroom environment, ensuring that students are held accountable for their actions and behaviors. ([Dahmash, 2020](#)).

Classroom management refers to the proactive and reactive tactics used by instructors to assist and encourage academic and social/emotional development in the classroom ([Everston & Weinstein 2006, p. 4](#)). So, classroom management refers to the techniques teachers employ to create an environment that leads to student learning. Numerous studies have been published on the difficulties encountered by instructors while using online classrooms, such as motivating students to learn and dealing with misbehaviors, disrespectful interactions, and disruptive events. ([Baker, Gentry, & Larmer, 2016](#); [Chesley & Jordan, 2012](#); [Goodwin, 2012](#); [Greenberg, Putman, & Walsh, 2014](#)).

The Pandemic process is still transforming education and training procedures throughout the world. This change is based on significant new information and technology, and the transformation process is fast. ([Kooli, 2021](#)). Indeed, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many nations have adapted to new conditions in several sectors, including education. ([Octaberlina & Muslim, 2020](#)). Governments have transitioned from face-to-face classroom settings to virtual classrooms ([Arabacı & Polat, 2013](#)). Real classroom settings, which were accepted as the prevailing learning environment before the pandemic period, gave their place to online classroom environments after the Pandemic. Throughout this process, it is vital to investigate the success of online learning management environments in terms of classroom management methods. Given the nature of online classes, it is difficult to assert that all characteristics of excellent classroom management can be found in online classrooms. Indeed, both learners and instructors face various challenges while engaging in online learning.

In the related literature, there are studies investigating the efficiency of online classes in general; however, the number of studies particularly investigating the issue in terms of classroom management is far from sufficient. With this in mind, this qualitative study primarily aims to explore the perceptions of English and German language instructors regarding the opportunities and challenges created for classroom management. Therefore, the current study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceived effects of online teaching on the classroom management practices of EFL and German instructors?
2. How do the instructors evaluate and compare face-to-face and online classes in terms of classroom management?
3. What are the opportunities and challenges perceived by the instructors in terms of classroom management in online education?
4. What are the needs of instructors in terms of classroom management in online education settings?

## **METHODS**

A qualitative research design was adopted for the current study to explore the perception of foreign language instructors about classroom management practices in online classes. In order to obtain detailed information about the central phenomenon, a qualitative approach was thought to be beneficial as it would be more complicated than conventional research methods ([Strauss & Corbin, 1998](#)). To obtain the qualitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants. The accuracy and credibility of these findings were validated through semi-structured interviews.

The study participants were 21 instructors (17 English and 4 German instructors) working at a school of foreign languages at a state university. They were all actively teaching at the school of foreign languages, and they had both face-to-face and online classes. The study used a purposeful sampling strategy to select participants and research venues, deemed the most appropriate way to select exploitable persons and sites ([Cresswell, 2012](#)). Therefore, only those teachers at this school who teach both online and face-to-face programs were permitted to participate in the present study. All participants actively taught foreign languages in a hybrid teaching setting for at least two years.

The necessary permissions are obtained to access the participants and research settings. All of the teachers volunteered to take part in the present study. Before administering the semi-structured interviews, all participants provided verbal informed permission and were told about the study's main objective.

The qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 participating instructors using an online meeting platform. These semi-structured interviews were conducted in Turkish, and interview data were recorded using procedures. To improve the reliability and validity of data collection, two study researchers independently reviewed the transcriptions. Finally, all the information was gathered during the second semester of the 2021/2022 school year. The researchers created the interview items after a thorough examination of the relevant literature. The first drafts were given to 7 EFL and 2 German lecturers for assessment. The final versions of the interview items were then decided through changes based on their feedback and views. Thus, expert opinion was used to determine the face and content validity of the instruments.

The semi-structured interview mainly included five open-ended central questions. First, they investigated (a) their evaluations of classroom management in online classes, (b) the impact of online classes on their understanding of classroom management, (c) their comparison of face-to-face and online classes in terms of classroom management, (d) opportunities and/or challenges created by the online education environment regarding classroom management, (e) their needs.

The content analysis approach was used to analyze the qualitative data. Thematic approaches were mostly employed in data analysis. First, the information was organized. Following a thorough evaluation of the qualitative data, the overall sense of data was investigated. The codes were then created using in vivo and descriptive coding approaches ([Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014](#)). Finally, themes were discovered by describing and interpreting these codes. To establish inter-rater reliability, all steps of data analysis were carried out separately by two researchers. The outcomes of each step were compared at the conclusion, and an agreement was reached on the contentious issues.

## **RESULTS**

### ***Perceptions Regarding Classroom Management in Online Classes***

Semi-structured interviews were performed with the participating instructors to answer the research questions. The study's qualitative findings showed a total of codes about evaluations of the instructors. The codes were divided into four major themes. The opportunities, challenges, suggestions,

and needs were determined as the central themes. The distribution of the main themes and codes is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Themes and codes about teachers' perceptions of classroom management in online classes.**

Themes	Codes
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Flexibility,</li><li>✓ Ability to reach a large number of learners,</li><li>✓ Ability to change the materials easily</li><li>✓ Accessibility</li><li>✓ Personalization</li><li>✓ Being able to record the sessions for various purposes</li></ul>
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Isolation of learners</li><li>✓ Too much reliance on self-discipline</li><li>✓ Distractors</li><li>✓ Silent and/or invisible learners</li><li>✓ Being unable to monitor all the learners in group activities</li><li>✓ Leaving the class without permission</li><li>✓ Technical issues</li><li>✓ Limited peer collaboration</li><li>✓ Lack of motivation</li><li>✓ Limited in-person interaction</li><li>✓ Cheating during online assessments</li></ul>
Suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Setting strict rules for learners</li><li>✓ Arranging smaller groups</li></ul>
Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ In-service training</li><li>✓ Peer-observation</li><li>✓ Technologically competent group members/leaders</li></ul>

### **Opportunities**

In the light of the qualitative data, the first emerging central theme was the opportunities perceived by the instructors. Many instructors credited the online classes because using online platforms provided flexibility in their classes. According to some participants, the flexibility in the online classes enabled them to manage their lessons more easily. Furthermore, the instructors seemed to exhibit positive attitudes towards online classes regarding this flexibility. For example, P2 from the ELT group stated in her interview that:

*Teaching is not limited to online or face-to-face classes in the hybrid model. Learners can determine and allocate time for their studies. This control enables individuals to plan their education around their responsibilities and ensures that they use the materials at hand at the most appropriate moment. This adaptability provides a pleasant learning atmosphere for them, and it has a favorable impact on my classroom management-* P2 from the ELT group.

Another opportunity stated by the participating instructors was the ability to reach a large number of students in the online sessions. Some instructors perceived this ability as an opportunity created by the hybrid teaching model. For instance, P4 from the German instructors' group mentioned in his responses:

*In this model, we can combine classes when necessary and reach a larger number of students. Although it creates some problems in terms of classroom management, I perceive this ability as a positive aspect-* P4 from the German group.

A group of participants emphasized that online classes create opportunities for taking personalized precautions for classroom management. Furthermore, these participants added that they could attain additional tasks or exercises for the students who lose concentration in the classes. For instance, P7 from the ELT group expressed her perceptions with the following statement:

*In the online classes, some students often lose their motivation, and thanks to the digital tools and materials at hand, I can give additional tasks, or sometimes I share some links and exercises with the students who lost their concentration. It makes me able to keep the learners on track-P7 from the ELT group.*

Another aspect of the online classes that the instructors perceived as an opportunity was the ability to record sessions for various purposes. Some participants credited the online classes in that they can record and watch the recordings later for professional development and reviewing the teaching strategies and classroom management practices. One of those participants was P9 from the German instructor P9 expressed his perceptions in the following words:

*In face-to-face classes, I do not have opportunities for monitoring my teaching and classroom management, or I have minimal chances like peer observation. However, I can easily record my online classes, and I review have the chance to review the classes to improve my teaching and classroom management- P9 from the German instructors' group.*

### **Challenges**

In the qualitative data collected from the instructors, various challenges were reported. However, the challenges were mainly related to the learners' behaviors and technical issues. As for the student-related problems, many instructors mentioned the isolation of learners from the real classroom setting and their peers. According to these instructors, although they try to do their best to create a collaborative learning environment, most of the time in the online classes, the learners stay isolated, and the instructors feel ineffective in reaching the students. Regarding this issue, for example, P10 from the ELT group stated that:

*Although I try to create a collaborative and communicative classroom atmosphere in the online classes, I increase the teacher talking time as many learners stay in isolation and keep away from communication unless I ask them the questions directly. Therefore, I can conclude that online classes depend too much on the students' self-discipline. Being unable to reach all the students makes me unable to manage my class effectively- P10 from the ELT department.*

On the other hand, there was also a consensus among the participants regarding the deteriorating effects of distractors in online classes. Many participants emphasized this issue as one of the unique challenges of online courses. As stated by many participants, the students are online during the classes, and their instructors do not have the chance to monitor their actual participation in the lessons. Even in lessons, many students are dealing with something else, and they sometimes hesitate to give reactions when they are directed questions. Another distracting factor was stated as the surrounding conditions of the students like others in the same room or some ether outsider factors. For example, P17 from the ELT group expressed her perceptions with the following statements in her interview:

*I cannot monitor the students actually; sometimes, I notice that the students are dealing with something else like playing games or watching something else. Sometimes, I hear the voices of some other people around the students. When I notice that they are distracted by any factor, I feel unable to manage my class effectively. - P17 from the ELT department.*

Another issue highlighted by almost all of the participants was the silent and/or invisible students. The instructors perceived this as having a negative influence on their classroom management practices. According to many participants, being unable to see most of the students during their classes cause them

to lose control of classroom management. As an example of this perception, P13 from the German group stated in his interview that:

*Most students prefer to keep their cameras and microphones off during online classes. In some cases, I accept this situation; however, it is frustrating for me when it turns into a classroom routine. When I cannot see the students, I feel like I am talking to a black screen without any participants. Furthermore, it makes me lose control over classroom management. - P13 from the German instructors' group.*

In addition, most of the participants attributed their loss of classroom management to technical problems faced by the students and themselves. According to these participants, students often have technical issues like the inability to connect properly, having broken or inappropriate cameras and microphones, and more. As stated by many participants, some students have a poor connection or lose their connection in the middle of the class, and they miss some important parts of the lesson or instructions. When they are unable to understand the instructions clearly, they cannot perform the tasks as demanded, which negatively affects the classroom management of the instructors. As an example of this perception, P20 from the ELT department expressed her opinions in the interview with the following statement:

*Giving clear instructions is critical in online classes, particularly before the smaller group activities. I model the task, but some students cannot get the instructions properly, which negatively affects their performance and my perceived classroom management.- P20 from the ELT department.*

Another challenge perceived by the instructors was cheating during the online assessments. Many participants mentioned cheating as a challenge for classroom management in online classes. As addressed by many participants, the school and individual instructors try to take some necessary precautions to prevent cheating in online assessments. According to some participants, having class control during the assessments is an essential aspect of classroom management; however, particularly for online assessments, they do not consider their practices as effective as in the face-to-face classroom settings. For instance, P16 from the ELT group expressed her perceptions regarding this aspect in the following words:

*Although the school and I set specific rules for the online assessments, I think that we do not have actual control over the students' misbehavior. For example, some students lose connection during the assessments, and they re-connect to the session, but I do not know what they were doing during that time. In addition, I know that there are some online tools that the students use, like screen translation applications or sharing their screens with a more knowledgeable other. Therefore, I can take all these factors into account that I lose control and classroom management during online assessments. -P16 from the ELT department.*

### **Suggestions**

In addition to the opportunities and challenges for classroom management, the qualitative data analysis revealed valuable suggestions offered by the participating instructors. As the participants were actively teaching in face-to-face and online classes simultaneously, they had the opportunity to compare both practices and offer some suggestions. The first outstanding suggestion was related to the rules set for the students in the online classes. Some participants emphasized that when the students are set free for the basics of online classes like using cameras and microphones, they prefer to keep silent and invisible, which affects their classroom management negatively. For instance, P11 from the German instructors' group expressed her suggestions with the following statement:

*At the beginning of the term, most of the students kept their cameras and microphones on during the online classes; however, when they noticed that the instructors tolerated it, they preferred being invisible and silent. At this point, I suggest setting certain rules for the students so that we can*

*monitor them during the online lessons and can manage the class properly.*-P11 from the German instructors' group.

As for the suggestions offered by the participants, another issue was related to the number of students in each group. Many participants believed that if fewer learners were in their online classes, it would be easier to control the class and maintain sound classroom management. As an example of this suggestion, for instance, P1 from the ELT group suggested that:

*When fewer students are in the online lessons, I can easily manage the class. However, especially at the beginning of the terms or just before the exams, there are more students in online classes, and at those times, I lose control of the class more quickly.*-P1 from the ELT department.

### **Needs**

The last central theme detected in the qualitative data was related to the needs of the participating instructors regarding the classroom management issues in the online classes. The participants mainly mentioned in-service training and peer observation for exchanging good practices and being assisted by a more technologically competent peer. As for the in-service training need, some participants stated that the concept of classroom management and their perceived classroom management differs to an important degree in online teaching settings. Many participants agreed that having in-service training developed for classroom management in online classes would benefit them. For example, P14 from the ELT department expressed his needs with the following statement:

*I am an experienced instructor, and I feel competent in classroom management in a real classroom setting; however, online classes have very different dynamics, and my traditional classroom management strategies do not work in online classes. Therefore, in-service training and modeling would be beneficial for me to equip me with appropriate strategies for classroom management in online classes.*-P14 from the ELT department.

Another aspect of needs articulated by the participating instructors was peer observation to exchange good practices and be paired with a technologically more competent peer. Some participants stated that their level of technological competence creates some obstacles for them for sound classroom management. As an example of this perception, P19 from the ELT group said in his answers to the interview questions that:

*I believe that many colleagues face various challenges in classroom management in online classes, but I also believe that we can learn from each other. Therefore, observing other instructors might make valuable contributions. What is more, when I have problems regarding technical issues, I contact the teachers in the same circle, so grouping the instructors depending on their level of technological competence would benefit the ones who need assistance in the process.*- P19 from the ELT group.

### **DISCUSSION**

This research, which aims to reveal the perceptions of foreign language instructors regarding the opportunities and challenges created by online teaching settings, actually brings up an issue that has been relatively neglected in the related literature. There are hardly any direct studies examining this aspect from an insider viewpoint. This study summarised the instructors' perceptions about the opportunities and challenges they encountered in online lessons. It was found that English and German language instructors stated some opportunities like flexibility and personalization. On the other hand, some issues were reported by the participating instructors as adverse effects of online teaching on their classroom management. The findings have also revealed that the problems faced by the instructors in online classes affected their classroom management. In other words, instructors' classroom management effectiveness decreases due to the varying conditions and issues in online courses, which may cause the instructors' motivation to decrease.

As it can be inferred from the viewpoints of the participating instructors, the new conditions force the instructors to pursue their classes online despite all the practical and technical challenges ([Hodges et al., 2020](#)). The unique challenge for university instructors is the lack of knowledge of the appropriate strategies required for classroom management in online education settings ([Ching, Hsu, and Baldwin, 2018](#)). Because of the online aspect of school and university classes during the last year, instructors have made several recommendations to manage online classrooms ([Bates, 2020](#)). Most of these online classroom management solutions are concerned with teaching tools, and materials teachers might employ in their online classes. Teachers' performance is critical in online learning since students' learning depends on classroom activities and is assessed using criteria independent of the teacher's grades ([Daher and Shahbari, 2020](#)). To cope successfully with the workload, management of an online educational setting also includes planning, self-monitoring, and time management abilities.

Managing online classrooms entails mostly communication with students and lecturers. Online communication needs more content, presentation, and time preparation than face-to-face communication. These online communication strategies directly impact a student's success or failure ([Northcote, Gosselin, Kilgour, Reynaud, & McLoughlin, 2019](#)).

In the related literature, some studies highlight the contributions of providing in-service training opportunities for teachers to improve classroom management practices of teachers and instructors. In addition, some other studies emphasize that providing professional development in classroom management determines how well participants can use the skills taught ([Saleem et al., 2016](#); [Milliken, 2019](#)). However, conducting a good classroom management process in online teaching entails complex processes and procedures requiring additional training for instructors. Getting specific training on this issue can enable instructors to select among the best and most appropriate strategies for student education in online classes ([Milliken, 2019](#)). The results revealed that instructors tend to improve their effectiveness in online classroom management; they utilize ways to better present content and solve online teaching problems. These findings of the present study are consistent with the results of several previous studies ([Herbert et al., 2016](#); [G Padaguri & Akram Pasha, 2021](#); [Milliken, 2019](#); [Franklin and Harrington, 2019](#); [Harrison, 2021](#)). Participants in this study showed similar tendencies to the participants in the [Milliken \(2019\)](#) study regarding the use strategies they use and face challenges in online classroom management. Similarly, the participating instructors in the current study offered suggestions regarding developing in-service training courses and workshops to impart online classroom management approaches and procedures to improve their understanding of effective classroom management practices.

## **CONCLUSION**

As it tries to explore the phenomenon of classroom management from the perspectives of actual practitioners and puts forward suggestions for planners and policymakers, the findings of this study can assist teachers in managing online classrooms more effectively, improve learning opportunities for all students, reduce disruptive behavior in the classroom, and provide ideas for improved online teaching. Enriching the classroom management repertoire of the instructors via effective classroom management training is a critical step toward better online education results for all students ([Oliver, 2007](#)). Flexibility, understanding, inventiveness, and patience are required to ensure a great academic experience for both instructors and students. Increasing student-teacher participation in the online learning environment is critical to educational achievement. Given the possible limitations, it can be advised that this study be explored from the standpoint of students' perspectives and challenges in studying online classes in future studies. In addition, classroom observations would also yield a more detailed understanding of the classroom management issue in online teaching environments. Furthermore, greater study on teachers' knowledge and abilities in successful classroom management in other disciplines and at other levels is needed. Collecting quantitative data from larger groups and utilizing statistical methods can help examine the relationship and correlation between variables and other potential effective factors.

## **Implications**

The current study offers various implications and recommendations for policymakers and course designers. For example, while planning hybrid programs, instructors' perceptions and needs regarding

online courses should be taken into account, and in-service training courses should be designed beyond basic technical online teaching strategies; instructors should be specifically trained on how to adapt their classroom management strategies into online teaching environments, and finally, instructors should be provided with constant support.

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The authors declare no funding and conflicts of interest for this research.

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