

Varying reasons of young learners' problem behaviours according to novice ELT teachers

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Abstract

This research is conducted to examine novice ELT teachers' perspective on the possible motives behind young learners' problem behaviours in English classes. The gender of ELT teachers have been also considered in order to investigate whether there is a difference between the perception of male and female teachers on the leading causes of problem behaviours in classroom. The adapted version of the questionnaire developed by Miller, Ferguson & Byrne (2000) were conducted with 15 male and 15 female novice teachers in their first year in teaching profession. The result of the study indicated that both male and female novice teachers have similar ideas about the causes of misbehaviour except for one point: (1) teachers' rewards and punishments. Female teachers stated that teachers' rewards and punishment might be the main motive for problem behaviours whereas male teachers disregard this factor as a crucial cause of misbehaviour. As for the other three factors, all the teachers agreed that (2) "adult behaviour" and (3) "curriculum demands on children" might increase the frequency of misbehaviour among young learners in English classes. (4) "Personality of the learner", however, was found to be the most important reason behind problem behaviours. As the results revealed, most of the factors were explained similarly by both male and female teachers except for teachers' rewards and punishments, a finding which shows that gender has little (if any) effect on novice teachers' attribution for learner misbehaviour in EFL classes.

Keywords: Gender; novice teachers; problem behaviours; young learners.

1. Introduction

Classroom management is a vital component of education in terms of creating an environment in which instruction and learning take place effectively (Altinel, 2006). In the studies conducted by Harmer (1983) and Lewis (2000), the importance of classroom management was cited as the representative of the teachers' effectiveness. Moreover, Bru, Stephens & Torsheim (2002) found meaningful correlation between student achievement and effective classroom management. In this sense, teachers should be aware of students' misbehaviours and their underlying cause to behave in this way.

Misbehaviours are a major cause of classroom problems, which should be taken into consideration by the teachers. Since misbehaviour causes loss of attention, it can decrease learners' participation, comprehension and enthusiasm during the lessons. For this reason, teachers should understand the reasons behind the problem behaviour (Turanlı, 1999).

There has been a lot of research on student misbehaviour focusing on several dimensions. For instance, Houghton, Wheldall & Merrett (1988) investigated the problem behaviours which teachers find most troublesome; Greenlee & Ogletree (1993) studied teachers' attitudes toward student discipline problem and classroom management strategies; Gibbs & Gardiner (2008)

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focused on cross-phase and cross-cultural investigation of primary and secondary teachers' attributions for pupils' misbehaviour; and more recently, Ozben (2010) investigated teachers' strategies to cope with student misbehaviour. Sadık (2008) concluded in another study that teachers found the intervention strategies as preventive and repairing. Sadık (2008) also found that students regarded their teachers' behaviours as punishing, threatening and unfair. All these studies have indicated that student problem behaviours have negative effects on classroom management and teachers should understand the reasons behind the problem behaviours.

In EFL context, classroom management studies have included various issues such as the effect of implementing a specific ELT methodology (Carless, 2002), evaluation of ELT textbooks in terms of classroom management (Litz, 2005), EFL teachers' classroom management orientations (Rahimi and Asadollahia, 2012), and motivational strategies used by EFL teachers (Sugita and Takeuchi, 2014). Classroom management issues have been discussed mostly by focusing on the learners and the teachers in the centre; however, relatively few studies have handled the issue from the perspective of novice teachers, who usually tend to have classroom management problems stemming from learner misbehaviour. The scarcity of such studies suggested the need for this research in order to lead to further studies on similar issues. For this reason, this study aims to find out novice EFL teachers' perception and interpretation of student misbehaviour, their causes and intervention strategies to be suggested. Moreover, the effects of teachers' gender on their perception, attitudes and beliefs regarding misbehaviour are also investigated by focusing on specific factors.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

In total, 15 male and 15 female novice EFL teachers who are in their first year as an official teacher at 14 different primary state schools in a south-eastern city, Şanlıurfa, in Turkey were recruited. All of the participants had similar educational backgrounds, graduating from English Language Teaching or English Language and Literature Departments. None of the participants has an ongoing education in any MA programs. The student profile is similar in all schools since the participants are working in the same province of the city and the students have similar economic backgrounds.

2.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The study was carried out with 30 teachers who were asked to evaluate their 4th grade students according to problem behaviours that they encounter at their classes. Reasonable attempts were made to represent the young learners in the province by choosing similar state schools and novice teachers. The teachers were given a questionnaire developed by Miller et al. (2000). The pilot study of this questionnaire was conducted by Gibbs and Gardiner (2008), and the study revealed that the instrument might be utilized to gather data about teachers' perceptions.. The questionnaire was sent to the participants by e-mail and they were invited to contact with the researchers at any point that they could not understand. The data were analysed using SPSS 16. Since the numbers of male and female teachers were equal, the data obtained from these two groups were compared through independent sample t-test analysis. The findings were then explained according to factor analysis cited by Gibbs & Gardiner (2008) for a similar study comparing primary and secondary teachers' perceptions.

3. Findings

In order to find out the difference between male and female teachers' perception of misbehaviour, the questionnaire results were analysed using independent sample t-test. The questionnaire was subcategorized into four parts in accordance with the study conducted by Gibbs & Gardiner (2008). This was done to find out which factor is seen as the most effective reason of problem behaviours by male and female teachers. The questionnaire was a Likert-type: 4 for *very important*, 3 for *important*, 2 for *not very important*, and 1 for *not important at all*.

Table 1. Items of the Misbehaviour Questionnaire

Main Reasons of Misbehaviour according to Gibbs & Gardiner (2008)	Item No in Questionnaire
1. Teachers' Rewards and Punishments	2, 6, 8, 13, 17, 24, 25, 27, 28
2. Adult Behaviour	3, 5, 7, 11, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23
3. Curriculum Demands on Children	1, 4, 9, 10, 12, 14, 26
4. Child's Personality	15, 20, 22

As seen in Table 1, there were nine items regarding the teachers' behaviour as the main cause of problem behaviour in classroom; nine items regarding adult behaviours as the main reason; seven items regarding curriculum demands on children; and three items regarding child's personality as the leading cause of problem behaviours.

Table 2. Factor 1 (Teacher Rewards and Punishments as the Main Cause of Misbehaviour)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Teacher rewards and Equal punishments	variances assumed	4,000	,116	-8,030	28	,002
	Equal variances not assumed			-8,030	24,725	,006

An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the perception of "*teacher rewards and punishments as the main cause of misbehaviour*" between male and female novice EFL teachers. There was a significant difference in the scores for male ($M= 1,73$, $SD= 0,23$) and female novice teachers ($M= 2,9$, $SD= 0,1$), [$t(4) = -8,03$, $p = 0,002$]. These results, given in Table 2, clearly indicated that female teachers associated *teacher rewards and punishments* with problem behaviours more than male teachers did. That is, novice male teachers assumed that teachers' behaviours did not have much effect on children's misbehaviour in classroom context.

Table 3. Factor 2 (Adult Behaviour as the Main Cause of Misbehaviour)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		Sig. (2-tailed)
		F	Sig.	t	df	
Adult Behaviour	Equal variances assumed	,500	,519	2,012	28	,114
	Equal variances not assumed			2,012	26,670	,121

It can be seen in Table 3 that there was not a significant difference between the perception of male ($M= 3,47$, $SD= 0,21$) and female ($M= 3,15$, $SD= 0,15$) teachers regarding “*adult behaviour as the main cause of misbehaviour*”, [$t(4)= 2,01$, $p = 0,114$]. These results suggested that both male and female novice EFL teachers assumed adult behaviours as a leading cause of problem behaviours.

Table 4. Factor 3 (Curriculum Demands on Children as the Main Cause of Misbehaviour)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		Sig. (2-tailed)
		F	Sig.	t	df	
Curriculum demands on children	Equal variances assumed	,000	1,000	-,849	28	,444
	Equal variances not assumed			-,849	26,969	,444

The results in Table 4 demonstrated that there was not a statistically meaningful difference between the perception of male ($M= 2,63$, $SD= 0,32$) and female ($M= 2,87$, $SD= 0,35$) novice EFL teachers in terms of “*curriculum demands on children as the main reason of misbehaviour*”, [$t(4)= -0,85$, $p = 0,44$]. The findings revealed that male and female novice EFL teachers assumed curricular issues as the main cause of misbehaviour at the same rate. Indeed, it can be concluded that the effect of curricular demands on children's problem behaviour is at the same level for all teachers.

Table 5. Factor 4 (Child Personality as the Main Cause of Misbehaviour)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Child personality	Equal variances assumed	1,565	,279	-,243	28	,820
	Equal variances not assumed			-,243	26,124	,823

As indicated in Table 5, the t-test results showed that there was not a significant difference between the assumption of male ($M= 3,23$, $SD= 0,21$) and female ($M= 3,27$, $SD= 0,12$) novice EFL teachers, [$t(4)= -0,24$, $p = 0,82$]. This finding suggested that both male and female EFL novice teachers have similar ideas about child personality as the most important aspect of problem behaviours. In fact, it can be concluded that teachers accept child personality as the most important reason behind child's misbehaviour.

In the last part of the questionnaire, the teachers were asked to state if they think there are other major causes of misbehaviour they encounter. Most of the teachers did not reply this question. Only two female teachers mentioned the children might be hyperactive and unmanageable, but these problems are already included under the "child behaviour" item.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The questionnaire used in this study consists of four factors (each defining the most important reason of classroom misbehaviour), which can be listed as below:

- Teacher rewards and punishment
- Adult Behaviour
- Curriculum demands on children
- Child personality

Actually, this study cannot be claimed to reflect teachers' own explanations for the causes of misbehaviour. However, teachers' perception regarding the potential reasons of misbehaviour showed variance in this study; that is, the factors, even if they were not created by the teachers themselves, were also liable in teachers' perspective. Out of four factors, teachers showed statistical difference only in one factor, which was "*teacher rewards and punishment as the main cause of misbehaviour*". Statistically, male novice teachers did not tend to blame teachers for problem behaviour in classroom when compared to female novice teachers. Female teachers appeared to recognize that their own behaviour was a major influence on children's behaviours. Although the mean score was not as high as that of female teachers, male teachers also seemed to accept their own behaviours might trigger misbehaviour. This finding is in accordance with Miller (1995), and Gibbs & Gardiner (2008). This difference between male and female teachers' perception might also stem from their understanding of classroom management and misbehaviour. It is a well-known fact that perception of misbehaviour is also changeable from one teacher to another one according to their perception of order and classroom management strategies.

The results showed that teachers, regardless of their gender, assumed that the most important reasons of problem behaviour in classroom were “adult behaviours”, “child’s personality”, and “curriculum demands on children” respectively from top to bottom. On account of this fact, these novice EFL teachers assumed that adults have the most profound influence on children’s behaviour. Nevertheless, it can be said that children’s personality might also play a crucial role in determining their behaviour. Also, as cited in Sadık (2008), children might interpret teachers’ strategies and parental approaches as punishing, threatening and unfair, which should be taken into consideration as adult behaviour rather than children’s personality.

To sum up, in this study, male and female novice EFL teachers were found to have different perceptions regarding misbehaviour only in one factor i.e. teachers’ behaviour. Actually, novice teachers thought children’s personality, adults’ behaviour and curriculum demands all might lead to problem behaviours in classroom. All these findings based on teachers’ perception might give the impression that novice EFL teachers encounter similar classroom management problems in their first year regardless of their gender.

Limitations

This study included data only from novice teachers, but the students were not asked about their ideas. However, comparing both teachers’ and students’ perspectives might lead to more tangible results which might represent the population more specifically. Moreover, conducting the same research in a different context and comparing the findings might unveil some interesting results.

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APPENDIX 1

Teachers' Perception of Misbehaviour

We are interested in finding out what teachers think might cause children to misbehave in class. Over the page is a list of things which some people say cause misbehaviour in classrooms. Please rate each item and specify (by putting a \surd in the appropriate box) whether you see them as very important, quite important, not very important, or not important at all. Please complete the following questions before turning over. All the information you give will be anonymous and confidential.

What stage of education are you involved in?

Primary :

Secondary :

Are you

Male :

Female :

How important do you think each of these might be in causing misbehaviour in class? Rate each one according to how important you view it by putting a \surd in the appropriate box.

Very important = 4

Quite important = 3

Not very important = 2

Not important at all = 1

Causes		Grades			
1	Too much class work is given	4	3	2	1
2	Child is bored	4	3	2	1
3	Parents bully their children	4	3	2	1
4	Teachers are too strict	4	3	2	1
5	Parents' behaviour sets a bad example	4	3	2	1
6	Teachers not seeming to punish bad behaviour	4	3	2	1
7	Child needs more help in class	4	3	2	1
8	Teachers seeming to have unfair punishment systems	4	3	2	1
9	Too much homework is given	4	3	2	1
10	Other children wanting to copy work	4	3	2	1
11	Parents are uncaring	4	3	2	1

12	Curriculum is too rigid	4	3	2	1
13	Teachers not rewarding good work	4	3	2	1
14	Children are under too much pressure to achieve curriculum targets	4	3	2	1
15	Other children encourage it	4	3	2	1
16	Alcohol/drug abuse by a family member	4	3	2	1
17	Teachers are too soft	4	3	2	1
18	Child is picked on or tormented by other children	4	3	2	1
19	Teachers shout all the time	4	3	2	1
20	Pupil wants attention	4	3	2	1
21	Teachers have racist attitudes	4	3	2	1
22	Child's personality	4	3	2	1
23	Child is worried about other things	4	3	2	1
24	Teachers seeming to have unfair system of rewards	4	3	2	1
25	Good work isn't noticed	4	3	2	1
26	Teachers under pressure to meet curriculum targets	4	3	2	1
27	Teachers don't listen to children	4	3	2	1
28	Pupil is being bullied	4	3	2	1

If you feel there are other major causes of misbehaviour, please add them here with possible reasons:

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Thank you for your contribution.