

A Qualitative Study on Classroom Management and Classroom Discipline Problems, Reasons, and Solutions: A Case of Information Technologies Class

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate classroom management and discipline problems that Information Technology teachers have faced, and to reveal underlying reasons and possible solutions of these problems by considering the views of parents, teachers, and administrator. This study was designed as qualitative study. Subjects of this study consisted of 14 school administrators, 14 teachers, and 17 parents. Three different, but parallel, semi-structured interview schedules were used for data collection. Data were analyzed through the use of content analysis method. As a result of this analysis, the problems associated with classroom management were grouped under following themes; lack of motivation, breaking the rules and routines, lack of infrastructure, insufficient time management, ineffective classroom environment, and lack of interaction in classrooms. On the other side, participants related these problems with following reasons; place and structure of the course in the curriculum, classroom environment, classroom size and lack of hardware, lack of rules, home environment and parents attitudes, lack of teachers' management skills and students attitudes. Finally, following solutions were suggested to overcome disciplines and classroom management problems; improvement in teachers' qualification, regulation at place and structure of the course in the curriculum, organizing motivational activities, using software which controls computers usage in classroom/lab, reorganizing classroom/lab sitting plan, giving punishment, ignoring misbehavior, understanding reasons behind problems, meeting with parents and providing coordination among different subject communities (Zümre) in schools.

Key Words

Information Technology Course, Classroom Management, Discipline Problems.

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Advance in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have been influencing almost all parts of our lives. Without doubt, it has become necessary to prepare new generation to be equipped with these ICT skills (Dursun & Çuhadar, 2009). In fact, Information Technology teachers, so called computer teachers, working at primary and secondary schools have pivotal roles to fulfill this mission (Kabakçı & Odabaşı, 2007). However, this is not an easy task; especially the prevalence of new technologies in schools has resulted in new classroom management and discipline problems. Students' wrong usage and damage of technological tools in classrooms (Irving, 2003), ineffective time management while using technology, using cell phone in classrooms, video and sound records which might influence the private life are some of the examples emerging as a result of the entrance of new technologies into the schools. In this sense, a successful classroom management and organization is fundamental for designing an effective teaching and learning environment and for preventing discipline problems and misbehaviors (Brophy, 1983; Emmer, Evertson, & Worsham, 2000; Evertson, Emmer, Sanford, & Clements, 1983). Also, communicating with parents is essential for eliminating these problems (Yıldırım & Dönmez, 2008).

The existing literature revealed frequent misbehaviors observed in Turkish classrooms. For example, Atıcı and Merry (2001) reported that Turkish students demonstrated misbehaviors such as talking out of turn, wandering aimlessly, irritating pupils, and misusing materials. Similarly, Türnüklü and Galton (2001) mentioned about Turkish students' frequent misbehaviors as illicit talking, inappropriate movement and interrupting another pupil.

According to study conducted with twenty primary school teachers from Turkey and England by Türnüklü and Galton (2001), it was found that most of the classroom management problems in both countries were similar. Their study indicated that the most prevalent disruptive behavior in both Turkey and England (51.4% and 49.5% respectively) was "noisy or illicit talking." Then, "in appropriate movement" was another most frequently misbehavior observed in selected Turkish (27.1%) and the UK schools (27%). "Disturbing friends" was third most frequent misbehavior in selected schools (9.3% for Turkish classes and 7.9% for UK classes). The same study also examined the reasons behind these misbehaviors. It was found that the frequency of misbehaviors depended on different factors "such as the student's age, gender, the time

of day, different part of the lesson, the seating arrangement in the classroom, the type of learning activity and the subject matter” (Türnüku & Galton, 2001, p.296). On the other side, while financial problems of parents could be main reason of these misbehaviors in Turkey, divorce was likely to be main cause of these inappropriate behaviors in England (Türknüklü & Galton, 2001).

Atıcı (2007) attributed the reasons of misbehaviors to family related issues and student related issues. Among these, family related reasons have been observed to be one of the most prevalent reasons of inappropriate behaviors (Atıcı, 2007; Weisshew & Peng, 1993). On the other side, Çağlar (2008) divides the factors related to misbehaviors into two different, but related categories; internal and external factors. He further explains that although teachers could have direct influence on internal factors (student, teacher, environment), they do not have direct impact on external factors. He divides external factors into two groups, one is related to students’ close environment (family, school and friends) and the other one is related to remote environment (educational management, country governance and development in the World) (Çağlar, 2008).

Studies on Information Technology Teachers

The review of the literature indicated that studies addressing to the department of Computer Education and Instructional Technology (CEIT) are scarce because it is a newly established department. Existing studies on this area mainly covered the following subjects; professional requirement of Information Technology Teachers, their status and work conditions (Kıyıcı & Kabakçı, 2006), perceptions about the department of CEIT (Durdu & Yıldırım, 2005), and their problems and difficulties they encountered in their professional life (Dursun & Çuhadar, 2009). Results of these studies indicated that problems that IT teachers have faced can be categorized under four themes; namely “problems related with school administrators”, “problems related with teaching”, “technical and infrastructure problems” and “personal problems” (Deryakulu, 2005; Kabakçı, Akbulut & Özoğul, 2009; Kıyıcı & Kabakçı, 2006). Particularly, it is important to highlight that the study conducted by Kıyıcı and Kabakçı (2006) to investigate IT teachers’ problems in their first year teaching profession revealed that the problems associated with classroom management was appeared the most highest degree under the teaching related problems.

A study conducted by Dursun and Çuhadar (2009) investigating the pre-service computer teachers' views on the teaching profession indicated that the main reason of classroom management problem was that the efforts of students in IT classes were not graded and students did not obtain any grade from IT courses at the end of the semester. Another study which was conducted with 70 IT teachers showed that 43 % of the problems were mainly due to student-related issues and crowded classroom (Deryakulu, 2005). Still another cause of the problem asserted by Çağiltay, Çakıroğlu, Çağiltay, and Çakıroğlu (2001) is the limited number of available technological tools in classroom and computer labs.

Current Status of Information Technology Course in Turkey

According to 2378 numbered issue and Ministry of National Education guide dated with 15 March 1993, it was stated that “teachers who will teach computer [Information Technology] course will be selected from candidates who hold major or minor in Computer Education field”, if needed number does not meet, IT teachers will be selected from “teachers who are already working in the Ministry of National Education with a higher education diploma.” Initial Computer Education and Instructional Technology department was founded in Middle East Technical University in 1993 (Durdu & Yıldırım, 2005). Up to this date, infrastructures necessary for computer education and training for computer teachers were established, and those trained by Ministry of National Education were selected from various fields to become computer teachers. One of these trainings was realized in 1985 for 225 teachers. They were taken to training about computer literacy and BASIC programming language (Akkoyunlu & İmer, 1998). On the other side, it was 1998 when computer lesson were firstly included into national curriculum as a 1 or 2 hours per week for 4th to 8th graders. Later, the nature of the course was changed and it was set as an elective course for the elementary schools (1st to 8th grades) (Deryakulu & Olkun, 2006).

The Purpose of the Study

This study aims to reveal misbehaviors, classroom management and discipline problems that Information Technology Teachers encountered, as well as underlying reasons and possible solutions of these problems

by considering the views of parents, school administrators and teachers. In scope of this general aim, following specific research questions were addressed;

1. What are the classroom management problems that Information Technology Teachers faced?
2. What are the discipline problems that Information Technology Teachers faced?
3. What are the underlying reasons of these classroom management and discipline problems?
4. What are the possible solutions suggested by teachers, administrators and parents for these classroom management and discipline problems?

Method

The design of the study was made use of qualitative research method. This method provides the researchers to work small groups, but thus to gain in-depth information, understanding and wider insight on the selected subjects (Patton, 1990; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008).

Subjects

Subject of this qualitative study consisted of 17 family members (13 Mothers, 3 Fathers, and 1 Elder Brother) whose children or sibling took an Information Technology course, 14 Information Technology Teachers (6 Females, 8 Males) and 14 school principals and vice principals (6 Females, 8 Males). While selecting the sample, convenience sampling method was used. This sampling method help the researchers access the subjects easily and facilitates the research process (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Characteristics of the subjects (particularly, administrators and teachers) are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.*Demographic information of administrators and teachers*

Administrator (n=14)		Teacher (n=14)	
Demographic Information	f	Demographic Information	f
<i>Gender</i>		<i>Gender</i>	
Female	6	Female	6
Male	8	Male	8
<i>Experience in the profession</i>		<i>Experience in the profession</i>	
First year	-	First year	2
1-5	9	1-5	8
6-10	5	6-10	4
<i>Graduation (department)</i>		<i>Graduation (department)</i>	
Computer Education Teacher	2	Computer Teacher	7
Technology and Design Teacher	1	Computer System Teachers	2
Applied Science (Science Ed...etc)	3	Technology and Design Teacher	1
Social Studies (History, Literature...etc)	3	Computer Tech. & Programming Teacher	1
Class Teacher	2	Vocational Schools	1
Math Teachers	2	Others	2
Others	1		
<i>Type of administrator</i>		<i>Work Load in a week</i>	
Principal	5	1-10 hours	4
Assistant Principal	3	11-20 hours	4
Not indicated	6	21-30 hours	6

Data Collection Instruments

Three different, but parallel, semi-structured interview schedules; for family members, teachers and administrator, were developed for the study based on the informal interviews with two faculty staffs teaching classroom management course in the department of CEIT and also based on the analysis of the theoretical and empirical literature on classroom management. During the individual interviews, the participants were asked to indicate the discipline problems (i.e. misbehaviors) in the IT classes, the possible reasons of and solutions to these problems.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained from the subjects in the spring semester of 2008/2009 academic year. Qualitative data analysis process was organized in five steps which were parallel to the method proposed by Schloss and Smith (1999) and updated by Erdoğan and Ok (2007). These steps were called as (1) transcription, (2) reliability analysis, (3) coding, (4) establishing themes and categories and (5) writing up and interpreting the results. Collected data were firstly transformed into written format and then subjected to content analysis for examining the common codes and thus categories. Later, three randomly selected transcripts were coded independently by three coders in order to examine the consistency among the codes emerged and to find inter-rater reliability. Then, all transcripts were other three researchers and then these emerged codes were controlled by another researcher. Categories and themes were later established based on the codes and their similar characteristics. Finally, the emerged codes and established categories and themes were interpreted along with the quotation taken from the transcripts.

Findings

In light of the data obtained from the participants, the possible problems of IT teachers associated with classroom management were (1) lack of motivation, (2) rule and routines breaking, (3) lack of infrastructure, (4) ineffective time management, (5) classroom environment, and (6) lack of classroom interaction. The discipline problems and misbehaviors that teachers encountered in IT classes were mainly related to off-task behavior, (i.e. listening music, using MSN), noisy talking, walking aimlessly, and inappropriate use of classroom materials. The possible reasons behind classroom management problems and students' discipline problems were (1) the nature and status of the course in the curriculum, (2) classroom environment, (3) crowded classrooms and lack of software, (4) lack of rules, (5) home environment and parents' attitudes, (6) teachers' inefficiency in classroom management and (7) students' attitudes. The possible solutions to these problems proposed by the participants were (1) increasing teachers' pedagogical and subject area knowledge, (2) re-framing the nature of IT course in the curriculum, (3) using activities that facilitate motivation, (4) using software programs that help control the wrong computer usage, (5) effective managing the IT class-

es, (6) giving punishment, (7) ignoring, (8) investigating the reasons of the problem, (9) establishing rules, (10) contacting with parent and (11) cooperating with other groups of teachers in the school.

Results

As indicated by the teachers, students' lack of motivation, and breaking rules and routines can be mainly due to the nature of the course (i.e. one class hour in a week) in the curriculum. This is almost consistent with the previous findings (Altun & Ateş, 2008; Deryakulu & Olkun, 2006; Seferoğlu, 2007). Students' motivation can be increased through the use of various instructional methods and techniques (i.e. project based learning design, Özdener & Özçoban, 2004) High number of the students in classroom and relatively low number of the technological equipments also created problems in terms of effective management and effective usage of the materials (Altun, 2007; Çağiltay et al., 2001). The teachers indicated that since classrooms were too big, students' disruptive talking and wandering within the classroom could not be easily controlled. However, Ersoy (2005) believed that spaces should be available between the computers in order to control the students. Thus, the classes should be large enough for recruiting the available materials and should be equipped with the technological tools (i.e. computer) by considering the number of the students taking a course in that class.

Lack of available software programs which control students' usage of internet and the programs in the computer emerged as another reason to students' out-of task behavior. Purchasing and using software program in the computer labs can be a solution to eliminate this problem.

Lack of rules which organizes the daily activities and class routines, and breaking the established rules were observed to be the reason of the emergence of the classroom management and discipline problems. Rule establishment process in which both teachers and students are actively involved should be one of the solutions to these problems.

Teachers', principals' and family members' views were not totally in line with one another. Some of the parents and principals believed in teachers' insufficiency with regard to classroom management. On the other hand, teachers believed that some of the students' discipline problems were due to parental attitudes toward the course and the technology. As a curial actor in the effective classroom management (Savran &

Çakıroğlu, 2004), teachers should be taken to in-service training in terms of classroom management, conflict resolution and stress management. Furthermore, teachers should be equipped with self-organization and time-management skills (Bingimlas, 2009).

In short, research on classroom management in the available literature revealed similar results. Discipline problems and possible reasons were indicated in many of the studies. However, solutions to these emerged problems were not frequently spelled out. This research study, in this sense, served beneficial solutions to deal with the classroom management and discipline problems of IC teachers in specific and other teachers teaching various topics in general. This study is very significant since it provides different viewpoints in the context of problem-reason-solution associated with classroom management.

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