



## CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AS ENVISIONED BY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS OF THE POST-INDEPENDENCE GEORGIAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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### **Abstract:**

In this study, experiences of elementary school teachers about classroom management and the meaning they ascribe to the concept of classroom management were examined through a phenomenological research study. The opinions of teachers working at the elementary school level were investigated through the dimensions of strengths and weaknesses of the teachers, problems encountered in classroom management, and the teachers' suggestions for how to become an ideal teacher. The sample of the study consisted of a total of 48 teachers who served in elementary schools in the cities of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi and Marneuli of Georgia in the 2018–2019 academic year. In the study, a semi-structured interview form consisting of 8 open-ended questions was used as a data collection instrument. The categories were created by the researchers comparing the statements of the participants by using the debriefing method. The results of the study were finalized after they were revised by the researchers and the participants working together. Various data were shared in the findings section indicating that the teachers had strong competence in ensuring a safe learning environment within a friendly environment with students; nevertheless, they experienced problems in terms of behavioral rules and communication. In the results section, it was discussed how the teachers' experiences in classroom management were related to the topics of social culture and friendly atmosphere.

**Keywords:** classroom management, problems encountered in classroom management, social culture

### **1. Introduction**

The value ascribed to education and educated teachers are very important in the future of a country. The more equipped the teachers who are the real architects of education are, the more qualified the students they educate become. However, there are obstacles

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to teachers' offering the ideal education, and if these obstacles cannot be overcome, it will be inevitable that there will be losses in the quality of education.

Students we are trying to educate have very different characteristics. Some are active, some are very quiet, some are asocial, some are extroverted, and some are prim, whereas some others have a completely rebellious characteristic and are impossible to force into a certain personality.

Because each student is also a child, he can also carry his life — how he lives at home or on the street — to school. All these problems are an obstacle to teachers when managing a classroom in the ideal sense. In the face of such problems and wrong student behaviors, it is necessary to teach and educate teachers on what kind of an attitude they should assume. The lack of knowledge of how to behave in such cases leads to the inability to offer proper education in the classroom.

In order to offer harmonious and quality education in the classroom, there is a need for equipped teachers to cope with students with very different personalities. Otherwise, complaints from students and their parents about classrooms where insufficient teachers give education will escalate, and as a result, not only the education will be hindered, but also the teachers will be affected psychologically. Therefore, it is very important that teachers be equipped personally. In other words, education to be offered to teachers before and after they officially begin teaching is very important. This is because teachers who are not equipped will either have to quit their profession early or exhibit behaviors that will cause a negative effect on students (Jones, 2006).

Some teachers think that they can motivate students with a very well-prepared course and ensure student engagement. However, teachers cannot achieve success in a classroom environment without trust, no matter how hard they struggle to use a creative, interesting, and innovative approach for a course (Teaching Tolerance, 2016). Effective classroom management is an important factor affecting student engagement and achievement.

Classroom management requires a systematic implementation of the elements involved in instructional design in general. Although a student-centered teaching is currently in effect today, teachers are one of the most important elements of education and are obliged to ensure the safety of the classroom environment and to guide students (Çubukçu & Girmen, 2008). In this context, it is the responsibility of the teacher to ensure classroom management. Therefore, it is important to study classroom management skills of teachers and investigate the underlying causes of their behavior.

The role of social culture and the environment where the person lives is at the top of the list of external variables affecting classroom management behaviors (Kıncal, 2006). Social culture is the collection of values that people living under the umbrella of a state or live in a society gain without even realizing it, based on their life experiences. An important consequence of social culture is the fact that it directs behaviors and thoughts of people. From worldview to art, and from our relationships with people to classroom management, it affects our entire life, how we see the life, and our behaviors. It is also important to question the sort of classroom management and the type of teacher that social cultural values bring about.

The best way to grasp what we understand from the concept of classroom management and how we experience this concept is to take advantage of proven experiences and of experiences of senior teachers. In this study, it was investigated what problems were encountered in classroom management, how teachers understood these problems, and how they found solutions to such problems. And, findings were presented to support teachers to cope with the problems they would experience in classroom management. In this context, answers to the following research questions were sought:

- 1) What are the strengths and weaknesses of teachers in classroom management?
- 2) What are the problems faced by teachers in classroom management?
- 3) What kind of solutions do elementary school teachers offer in order to manage a classroom in an ideal way against problems arising from student behavior?

## **2. Literature Review**

Many studies have been conducted to measure classroom management skills of teachers. Classroom management has many components such as parents, teachers, school administration, social environment, ministry of education and students. In classroom management, it is of importance to pay attention to factors such as the fact that students have different personalities, each student has different needs, schools are in various social environments, and teachers have varying leadership approaches (Örücü, 2012).

Wang, Haertel, and Walberg (1993) have stated that if there is weakness in a classroom and a disorder in the classroom environment, then the education students receive gets poorer and proper learning cannot be achieved (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). There are also meta-analysis studies on this subject. Classroom management has been found to be implemented in the best possible way in classrooms where disciplinary rules are observed and students and teachers have a good relationship (Marzano, R. J., & Marzano, J. S., 2003).

How teachers master classroom management is very important in terms of accomplishing classroom management in practice. Researchers have demonstrated that teachers who take any course in classroom management exhibit more positive behaviors than teachers who do not take any course in classroom management (Borg & Ascione, 1982).

Research has shown that there is no significant difference in classroom management skills of teachers in terms of age and seniority. However, it has been found that female teachers have better classroom management skills than male teachers (Özgan, Yiğit, Aydın, & Küllük, 2011). It has been reported in a number of studies that there are significant differences between classroom management skills of teachers based on years of experience (Korkut & Babaoğlu, 2010).

It is necessary to investigate relations between students and teachers in terms of classroom management. If the nature of such relationships is positive, better classroom management is ensured. However, the extent of the relationship between teachers and

students depends on mutual interaction and spending time together for a long time. In this case, some teachers are more fortunate than others. Particularly the fact that secondary school teachers only teach branch courses causes them to spend less time with students. Elementary school teachers, on the other hand, spend more time with students, and according to a study, this enables them to develop better relationships (Riley, 2009). Teachers, compared to one another, also have disadvantages and advantages in conflict management. Some studies have shown that elementary school teachers feel safer in conflict management than secondary school teachers (Riley, 2009). The characteristic structures of students are not the same. Some of them are extremely naughty while some are very well-behaved. Having such students can create conflicts between them in the classroom, where positive classroom management becomes harder. Therefore, it is important to examine the ways in which teachers handle conflict management when studying classroom management. This is because classroom management styles of teachers show similarity to their conflict management styles (Morris-Rothschild & Brassard, 2006).

One of the issues that prevent teachers from implementing classroom management in an ideal sense is that they are not able to cope with classroom stress, and they need support in this manner. Research has shown that because of this problem, approximately 3 percent of teachers quit teaching in the first years of their profession (Partin, 2009). It is important to determine the measures to be taken to reduce teachers' levels of burnout.

In Georgia, many innovations have been made in the field of education after the independence, but they are not yet sufficient. Georgia has gained independence after many years of being under Soviet rule, and after that, it has been necessary to make improvements in many areas in a short period of time. These may be the reasons for the insufficiency. Particularly the research on classroom management skills of elementary school teachers and the effect of social culture and various external factors on classroom management are insufficient.

### **3. Materials and Methods**

This study was a phenomenological research study, a type of qualitative research study. In the context of the society where the teachers lived, the meanings they ascribed to the concept of classroom management and their experiences were questioned. This method was preferred because it was aimed to reveal an in-depth understanding of the meaning and nature of daily experiences about classroom management (Patton, 1990). In this study, the concept of classroom management was questioned under the headings of *"strengths and weaknesses of the teachers"*, *"problems they encountered in classroom management"* and *"their opinions on the ideal classroom management."* The phenomenon at the focal point of the study was the opinions of the elementary school teachers about classroom management. In the results part, T22, T44, etc. expressions are used while teachers' quotations are expressed.

### 3.1 Participants

During the data collection, teachers who had had direct experience in classroom management and had been serving for at least 8 years were identified as the research population. Since it was intended to have teachers fully reflect their experiences about classroom management and to eliminate a biased perspective during the sample selection, the maximum variation sampling method, one of the purposive sampling methods, was used. The sample of the study consisted of 48 elementary school teachers randomly selected from among the teachers who served in 5 private and 3 state elementary schools in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi, and Marneuli in Georgia. Of the teachers, 32 were working at private schools and 16 were in public schools. Table 1 shows various characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1: Data on participants**

	Total	Gender		School Type		Experience			
		F	M	Private	Public	1-5	6-10	11-15	>15
<b>Tbilisi</b>	18	17	1	12	6	3	6	5	4
<b>Batumi</b>	6	4	2	5	1	1	2	2	1
<b>Rustavi</b>	8	7	1	6	2		3	1	4
<b>Kutaisi</b>	11	11	0	6	5	2	3	2	4
<b>Marneuli</b>	5	4	1	3	2		2	3	

### 3.2 Data Collection Instrument

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used as a data collection instrument in the study. In this form, a total of 8 open-ended questions were asked to the teachers. When the questions were prepared, the general problems encountered in classroom management were considered by reviewing the literature. In order to ensure the validity of the questions, opinions of two lecturers in the field of classroom management were taken. After that, the necessary corrections were made, and the form was finalized.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

In this study, in which the phenomenological research method was used, data were analyzed using content analysis. The peer debriefing method was used when performing the content analysis. The data were analyzed together with two experts who had conducted research in the field of classroom management, and categories were created on different days. By analyzing the conversations, and gathering all data in one table, themes and sub-themes were created separately for each participant and data type. Two experts were consulted to determine the validity of the themes that were created and to make inferences from these codes.

An attempt was made to improve the validity of the study through member checking. The findings were reviewed with 3 participating teachers and an expert, and the accuracy of the themes was investigated. The analysis was finalized after corrections. Participants contribute to qualitative studies in terms of reliability by participating in both research data and results (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

## 4. Results

At the end of the analyses, based on research questions, the findings on the elementary school teachers' classroom management behaviors were gathered under the headings of *the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers, the problems encountered in classroom management, and their opinions on the ideal class management.*

### 4.1 The strengths and weaknesses of teachers in classroom management

In this section, findings on the first research question — “What are the strengths and weaknesses of teachers in classroom management?” — are given. The strengths and weaknesses of the teachers were categorized into the headings of friendly approach and effective teaching.

**Table 2:** The strengths and weaknesses of the teachers

Categories	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Friendly Approach</b>	Looking at events in a positive way	Sentimental approach to personal problems of students
	Evaluation of students without prejudice	Compassion in punishment
	Forgetting the old problems easily	Being very softhearted
	Creating a friendly atmosphere	Too much sincerity
	Gaining student trust easily	
	Dealing with each student individually	
	Participation in extracurricular activities	
<b>Effective Teaching</b>	Good use of body language	Unnecessarily excessive use of body language
	Ability to use technological materials frequently	Inability to cope with different personality types
	Following current educational approaches	Getting tired at the last lessons of the day
	Coming to class prepared	Failure to have students participate in the class
	Drawing attention to the lesson	

The categories and the most frequently repeated codes that emerged during the analysis of data on strengths and weaknesses of the teachers are shown in Table 2. The answers that were mentioned with the “friendly approach” theme were the most noteworthy answers in this category. In this regard, T44 said “to address students according to their age; to correct their misdemeanor, not by treating them harshly, but in ways that they understand; when they make mistakes, explaining to them instead of being mad at them.” T46 described the friendly approach as “You have got to watch your tone. Your voice should be friendly.”

Secondly, it is seen that one of the most powerful aspects of the elementary school teachers was teaching. The most noticeable code in this category was “drawing attention to the lesson.”

In this category, the teachers' *"being very softhearted"* emerged as one of the weakest aspects of them. As another item, the *"compassion in punishment"* theme was found to be the second weakest aspect of them.

In the teaching category, the teachers' *"getting tired at the last lessons of the day"* and *"failure to have students participate in the class"* were found to be the weakest aspects of the teachers.

#### 4.2 What are the problems faced by teachers in classroom management?

In this section, findings on the second research question — "What are the problems faced by teachers in classroom management?" — are given. Problems that the teachers frequently encountered in classroom management were gathered under certain codes by also presenting the frequency of encounters (Table 3). These codes were categorized under the headings of behavioral rules, personal characteristics, and communication.

**Table 3:** Problems encountered in classroom management

Problems encountered in classroom management	Codes	f	%
<b>Behavioral rules</b>	Children with disciplinary problems	6	13
	Student fights	1	2
	Students' lack of knowledge of ethical rules	8	17
<b>Personal Characteristics</b>	Age difference	3	6
	Needs of individuals requiring special education	7	15
	Differences in students' learning pace	5	10
	Attention deficit	2	4
<b>Communication</b>	In-group discussion skills	4	8
	Students' self-expression	4	8

Table 3 shows the most frequently repeated codes and emerging categories based on the analysis of the problems of the elementary school teachers in classroom management. The problems that the teachers most frequently encountered were divided into three categories, including behavioral rules, personal characteristics and communication. Among these, personal characteristics were seen as the most common problem. The second most frequently mentioned problem was identified as the category of behavioral rules. The third most frequently mentioned problem was identified as the category of communication problems. Five of the teachers stated that they did not encounter any problems. The most frequently mentioned problem faced by the teachers in classroom management was *students' lack of knowledge of ethical rules*, which was in the category of behavioral rules. One of the teachers, T45, articulated one of the problems as *"Students are always difficult to control because of the problems caused by the students who do not know the behavioral rules."* And, another teacher, T39, stated that *"The lack of basic social skills especially of the first-grade young children adversely affects the classroom environment."* "The needs of individuals requiring special education", listed in the category of personal characteristics, emerged as a major problem. With regard to this problem, a teacher (T24) said that *"Talented children are very difficult to control."* Another teacher (T27)

expressed that *“It is difficult to hold back very energetic students. Moreover, the lack of proper professional and psychological knowledge required for students who have different problems makes management difficult.”*

### 4.3 What kind of solutions did the teachers offer to manage a classroom in an ideal way?

In this section, findings on the third research question – “What kind of solutions do teachers offer in order to manage a classroom in an ideal way?” – are given. In this context, the teachers’ opinions were gathered in the categories of communication, experience, school administration, and materials (Table 4).

**Table 4:** The teachers’ opinions on ideal classroom management

The teachers’ opinions on classroom management	Codes
<b>Communication</b>	Healthy communication
	Doing extracurricular activities
	Including students in classroom management and determining the rules together
	Teaching behavioral rules to children in advance
	One-to-one attention
<b>Experience</b>	Extracurricular activities facilitate engagement
	Ensuring engagement
	Including students in classroom management and determining the rules together
	Equipped teachers needed
<b>School administration</b>	Providing motivation
	Establishing a suitable school environment
	Reducing classroom sizes
<b>Materials</b>	Making rules more appropriate
	Technological materials should be used
	Updating the materials required for the course
	Suitability of educational materials and textbooks to student levels

Table 4 shows the categories that emerged during the analysis of the data concerning the opinions of teachers regarding the ideal classroom management. The teachers noted the importance of communicating with students in a healthy way. In this regard, T1 noted that *“First of all, the teacher should know the student very well, always be patient with the student and sincere to the student. Then, managing students will be easier.”* Another teacher (T43) stated that *“It is important to work with students on behavioral patterns and make them more conscious, and it is important to listen to students’ opinions about classroom management.”* When the most frequently mentioned opinions were coded in the category of experience related to the teachers’ opinions about the ideal class management, the following view emerged: *“a teacher must be equipped.”* In this regard, T25 shared his opinions as follows: *“The pedagogical education offered to teachers is very old and inadequate. Teachers should be trained to be equipped with new educational methods.”*



Another teacher (T30) shared his views as follows: *“In classroom management, a teacher’s authority is very important. He or she should be able to use voice and body language well. Ensuring that everyone is educated in a quiet environment in mutual respect depends on being an equipped teacher.”* The most frequently indicated items with regard to administration among the opinions of the teachers in terms of the ideal class management category included an ideal school environment and a school where the rules were transformed into a more suitable form. In this context, *“it would be good for all staff of the school to have seminars given by the administration to create a good school climate,”* said T13. This way he pointed out that it is important that the ideal school environment should be ensured by the administration. Finally, the argument that *“using materials contributes to managing a class in the ideal sense”* constituted one of the categories emerging from the opinions of the teachers. In this respect T48 pointed out the use of materials by saying that *“Use of books and educational materials facilitates classroom management, and makes lessons interesting and entertaining.”*

## **5. Conclusion and Discussion**

In this study, the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers and their suggestions for problems and class management were examined with a phenomenological approach in terms of real-life experiences of the teachers. The factors that played a role in the classroom management behaviors of the teachers were gathered in two general themes. These were a social culture and a friendly atmosphere.

### **5.1 Social Culture**

The culture in which teachers grow up is an important variable affecting their classroom management skills and attitudes towards students. It is well-known that geography affects classroom management attitudes of teachers, especially the culture and anthropological structure of society. For example, people living in coastal areas may differ from those who live in land regions or mountainous regions, and who live in hot or cold climates. In this context, it can be argued, in general, that people living in cold climatic conditions have tougher and dull temperament, whereas people living in warm climate and coastal areas have more rapidly changing emotional attitudes, and softer and loose temperament (Koptagelilal, G., 1982).

The cultural experiences and historical conditions that come from the past significantly affect classroom management. It is possible to see the effects of culture in the methods applied by a Georgian teacher in classroom management. In Georgian culture, women and children are generally at the top of the list of what is considered sacred (Ustunyer, 2009). A Georgian might want to kiss and caress the child of anyone he does not know at all. As a matter of fact, every student is also a child. Teachers in this culture evaluate students who make mistakes based on this understanding. In this respect, many teachers see students as their child and therefore try to minimize the negative behavior of students by establishing too much sincerity. They treat children in the same way as they treat their own children. This is very normal for the teacher and is

not considered unreasonable by parents. In response to the questions asked in the study, the teachers offered to be sincerer with students against their behavior that negatively impacted the discipline or classroom management. The teachers stated that ties should be established with students outside the classroom. They stated that such problems can be solved more easily by spending a lot of time with children and meeting with them in different activities. The teachers with 15 years or more of experience stated that such excessive sincerity and lack of compassion caused disadvantages in classroom management. Despite that, they said that they continued to behave in a similar way while giving their cultural structure as an excuse.

We can also point out that a characteristic of the effect of traditions on Georgian teachers was that they would hesitate to express their opinions regarding the questions concerning the administration they answered during the study. We can say that the importance, especially, of friends and friendship found in the typology of the people of the countries in the Caucasus geography — the ability, if necessary, to sacrifice your life for them but not to disclose a shared secret — was effective in this regard. It can also be said that the hesitation to make any complaints about the school and administration due to the allegiance culture of the former Soviet administration was effective in their responding to the questions positively or not responding at all.

## 5.2 Friendly atmosphere

Trust is the students' sense of belief and attachment to their teacher without hesitation and suspicion. It is one of the most needed feelings for students who are beginning to school, are in a period of adjustment, and are experiencing various problems. It is important for teachers to provide classroom management in an unfamiliar environment, to demonstrate a positive attitude, and to form a learning environment. These feelings are important for ensuring a friendly environment in the classroom. In classrooms where a friendly atmosphere is not achieved, teachers usually exhibit attitudes such as the following (Yaman, Mermer & Murligil, 2009):

- To explain the rules that must be adhered to in their lessons at the beginning of the school term.
- To demonstrate very harsh behavior to students who disrupt the order in the classroom and report them to the school administration.
- To punish the entire class for the crime of a single student.
- To give low grades to students who do not listen to the lesson

The perception attributed by teachers to the concept of classroom management in an environment where there is no trust tends to be punishment of students. The emotional bond between the teacher and the student is more than instructional methods and classroom rules. Respecting students' privacy, using appropriate language, and avoiding excessive sincerity are important in communicating with students in a classroom environment and ensuring that students participate in the course. As the participants pointed out, communicating with the students in a healthy way is very important in ensuring classroom management. T44 replied to the question about this issue as follows: *"It may be more effective to approach students in a friendly way and address*

*them according to their age; to correct their misdemeanor not by treating them harshly, but in ways that they understand; when they make mistakes, explaining to them instead of being mad at them."*

One of the approaches that teachers follow against unwanted behavior in classroom management is the communication–listening model (Wolfgang, 2004). According to this approach, problems are solved through student–teacher collaboration, and the teacher creates a non-judgmental environment of trust within the classroom. The experiences of the participants in the study can be said to coincide with the communication–listening model. The creation of friendly atmosphere within the classroom provides the solution of problems based on friendship, empathy and dialogue when solving problems. Teachers' being optimistic about negative behaviors will prevent problems from recurring.

## **6. Recommendations**

It is important to know the economic, social and cultural aspects of the community where the teacher lives while planning education. Educational curricula should be developed by taking these variables into consideration, and necessary measures should be taken about the negativities that these variables will cause in the instructional environment.

Other external variables regarding the meaning attributed by teachers to the concept of classroom management should be investigated. It can thus be understood how the ideal classroom management should be.

One of the key environments that will contribute to the professional development and classroom management skills of teachers is the virtual learning environments. Through a virtual platform, teachers can share their views with each other. They can discuss the problems they encounter to create solutions and explore the solutions together.

In the light of both the literature and the opinions of the participants of this study, it is imperative that teachers take vocational development courses and in-service trainings after they begin teaching in order to improve their classroom management skills. If teachers are unable to train themselves in the required fields, they will have difficulties in classroom management. They will be unable to meet the demands of the culture and properties changing over time and the demands of the renewed instructional curricula. They will also be dragged into the burnout syndrome at an early age. Teachers who do not have the necessary equipment will cause negative effects on students.

A teacher must be able to show his compassion to students and communicate with them in a healthy way, before even teaching any information or skills. Only in this way, the teaching environment becomes effective, and student achievement is achieved and lasts for a lifetime.

### **About the Author**

Dr. Mehmet Emin Kortak completed his bachelor's degree in Mathematics; took teaching and administrative positions in both public and private secondary school and higher educational institutions in different countries; earned his master's degree in education management and doctoral degree in elementary school teaching. He is currently working at the research institute in IBSU University.

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