

University Teachers' Strategies in Dealing with Disruptive Classroom Behaviours in Nepal

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Abstract

Unwanted behaviours of students that impede the normal functioning of the classroom has become a centre of concern of the majority of the teachers and university teachers are also no exception to this matter. This paper is an attempt to explore teachers' approaches and strategies in dealing with "disruptive" behaviour in Nepalese university classrooms. Using non-random sampling, 15 university teachers who have more than five years of teaching experience in the corresponding fields were chosen as the participants of the study. The tools for data collection were an open-ended questionnaire and a semi structured interview and they were administered following all ethical considerations. The study, based on Dreikurs's mistaken model for classroom management (1968), found that teachers divided teachers' talking time (TTT) and students' talking time (STT), minimized their talking time, played an instrumental role in not allowing students to divert the academic discussion into non-academic ones. Then, the teachers and students collectively formulated dos and don'ts before the semester began and whenever there was a disruption in most of the contexts, those rules and regulations were acknowledged and stopped students from monopolizing classroom discussion.

Keywords: *University teachers, disruptive behaviour, teachers' approaches, strategies,*

Introduction

Inappropriate behaviours which obstruct the normal functioning of the classroom can be termed disruptive behaviours (DBs). The term "disruptive" refers to problematic instances and noise that spoils normal discipline in educational settings (Stanfeld, Haines & Brown, 2000). It is a cover term for students' behaviour which is socially and academically unacceptable while teaching and learning activities are going on. Students' behaviour can often be variously interpreted as misbehaviour, problem behaviour, immoral behaviour, delinquent behaviour, maladjusted behaviour, deliberately disruptive behaviour, disruptive behaviour (Porter, 2008). Charles (1999) defines DB as "behaviour which is taken inappropriately for the setting or situation in which it occurs" (p. 2). Such behaviours have been further divided into five categories which include aggression, dissolution, defiance of authority, class disruptions, and goofing off. According to Charles (1999), the first three types are more serious while the rest are less serious misconduct found in a classroom. Mishra (2009) characterises DB as the conduct that interferes with the college or college supported activities, including yet not constrained to the exercises related to classroom considering learning, teaching, research, academic or innovative works, management, service or the arrangement of correspondence, computer or emergency administration related to classroom teaching and learning.

As teachers, we have experienced that identifying learners' learning attitude and behaviour becomes a major responsibility of a teacher and supporting them in their learning comes next. Charles (2008) explains that DB violates class rules, humiliates others, and is incompatible with the legal or social norms of society. DB interferes with institutional discipline comprising classroom-related actions such as studying, instruction, research, intellectual or creative endeavours, management and other services (Mishra, 2009). In one survey, teachers throughout the state of New York agreed that managing disruptive children in classrooms as the most stressful problem in their professional lives (Gallup, 2013).

Classroom disruption is a serious concern for both teachers and educational institutions across the world. Because of classroom disruption, teachers become unable to complete the lesson they have prepared to present in a particular class (Howard, 2013). Undisciplined behaviour of students seems to be one of the common problems in schools. For example, Hong (2012) reported that many teachers from all around the world leave the teaching profession because of the stress they get from students' behaviours. Students' classroom disruptive behaviour is one of the major issues that sensitises the problem of recruiting and holding qualified English teachers in the United States of America (Pedota, 2007). Walker et al., (2003) reported that inadequately prepared and amateur teachers with diminutive urban school experience were unable to deal with students at risk engaging in long-lasting patterns of inconsiderate behaviour and misbehaviour in urban school classes in the USA. Moreover, experienced teachers refused to teach students with disciplinary issues and rather they left the schools and moved to the city's private English medium schools (Walker et al., 2003).

In Nepalese contexts, DB has been creating a serious problem for English teachers. For example, Karki (2017) concluded that secondary level English language teachers faced the problem of not paying attention to studies, involvement in addictive behaviour, and, getting angry with a minor matter Classroom became disruptive because secondary level English teachers have not prepared lesson plans effectively, and have not used teaching aids and materials (Budha, 2012). Shrestha (2016) listed problems of classroom management among secondary students comprising of no training for classroom management, and, lack of coordination between lesson plans and teaching-learning activities. As there are limited studies, for example, Karki, (2017); Budha, (2012); Shrestha, (2016), that were oriented towards students' DB but little focus has been paid towards the strategies and approaches that university teachers employ to mitigate the classroom DB of their students. Therefore, this paper attempts to address the gap in the existing literature.

Literature Review

Studies investigated how teachers plan their lessons, teach lessons, organise learning materials and engage students in learning tasks in the classroom to address the issues of classroom disruptive behaviour of their students. For example, Fecser (2015) in an American study concluded that teachers emphasised good relationships and trust in the students for classroom management. He reported the activities like, keeping a predictable schedule, providing alternative measures, teaching students about good manners and consequences, movement break and utilising logical consequences of the behaviour as supplementary approaches teachers implemented to manage the classroom. Earlier, Gallup (2013) reported that the strategies the teachers adopted during the class activities included making the classroom condition relaxing, staring at the one who tried to hamper the functioning of the classroom and reminding the discipline and decorum of the classroom. Teachers' strategies of dealing with disruptive behaviours of students may be context-specific, especially associated with the school environment, socio-cultural background and teachers' professional qualities (Day & Gu, 2013). For example, teachers in American schools apply various strategies to minimise disruptive behaviours of students such as enquiry with students (Kuhlenschmidt & Layne, 1999), formulation of specific rules (Ali & Gracey, 2013), displaying classroom incidents on the board as soon as the behaviour occurred in the classroom (Bucher & Manning, 2007) and

engaging students in a systematic interaction in the classroom (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In Romania, teachers considered seating arrangement and space management in the classroom for educational activities and interactive teaching strategies to prevent unwanted behaviours of students (Popescu, 2014). In the Netherlands, in a similar context, teachers diagnose students' social background, plan their lessons to fulfil the requirements of diverse students and involve students in a diverse way (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). However, Goleman (2006) argued that in Germany, teachers were unable to diagnose and address students' hostile behaviour and impulsivity. A Spanish (Cruickshank et al., 1995) study suggested teachers build up a rapport with students, make equilibrium between praise and criticism in the classroom and generate energy to prevent disruption in the English classrooms.

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) reported that in England, teachers were stressed by classroom disruption as the most problematic aspect of classroom teaching and classroom management and that teachers adopted classroom rules and recorded behavioural problems. The survey of Howard (2013) among the Association of Teachers and Lecturers in the UK indicated that 99% of teachers dealt with disruptive students, 71% considered leaving the profession because of students' bad behaviour in the classroom and 37% suffered from mental health problems. Howard (2013) reported that teachers allowed interaction, used non-threatening language and properly managed the seating pattern of the students to control students' mischievous behaviours. Moreover, a survey (Sadik, 2017) in Spain found that student's disruptive behaviour was one of the major inhibitors for classroom management and teachers used non-verbal clues, took the issue to the discipline in charge of respective college and openly talked about the cause as the strategies to mitigate the problem of classroom disruption. However, Adiguzel and Culha (2016) recounted that in Indonesia, teachers considered classroom management as one of their regular activities in the classroom and that they were capable enough to address the issues of classroom management. Yoşumaz's (2013) study of Iranian teachers about their approaches to classroom management revealed the fact that even teachers used many techniques like reminding the religious values about discipline but paid more attention to male students' behaviour than female ones. Finally, the studies state that teachers around the world applied various approaches, and strategies to deal with issues of classroom management. Although some teachers could maintain a good rapport with students by adopting various strategies, some teachers found the issue more stressful and even wanted to change the profession.

However, the issue has received little attention in the Nepalese context. For example, Budha (2012) conducted research among secondary and lower secondary English teachers revealed the strategies Nepalese teachers employed comprised of preparation of lesson plans, used adequate teaching aids and materials, involved students in-class works, and promoted student-student interaction. Later, Shrestha, (2016) listed the challenges facing teachers in Nepal was not having a clear-cut policy of the Government of Nepal regarding the ways to manage disruptive behaviour, no training for teachers about classroom management, lack of coordination between teachers' lesson planning and teaching in the classroom. More recently, Karki (2017) attributed the occurrence of disruption towards large class size, not practising disciplinary habits, lack of coordination between lesson plan and real teaching among the secondary teachers in Nepal. Even so, those previous studies could not cover strategies and approaches university teachers have adopted in dealing with the disruptive behaviours of their students. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate teachers' approaches to managing classroom behavioural issues-particularly laying attention towards the problems of mitigating disruptive behaviours.

Objective and Research Question

The primary aim of this study is to explore university teachers' perceptions of the issues of classroom disruption and the strategies and approaches they formulate in dealing with such issues. To

address this objective, the study is an attempt to address the following research question:

- How do the English language teachers of the community colleges in Nepal perceive disruptive behaviours of their students and in what ways do they deal with such behaviours?

Methodology

The present study is descriptive in nature as it utilizes descriptive data since it collected the strategies and approaches of university teachers' to deal with students' disruptive behaviour as data was collected in a natural setting without any intervention (Denzin, 2019). The participants in the study consisted of 15 English language teachers teaching in different universities and colleges in Nepal. Those universities teachers were selected using a convenient sampling procedure as most of them have at least five years of teaching experience with university-level students and the selection of them was made based on the convenience of the researchers as suggested by Kumar (2019). An online questionnaire (open-ended questions) was prepared and after though piloting, it was sent to respective teachers with sufficient guidelines and information about the questionnaire. Those questions contained information about rules and regulation formation, types of actions they take while they encounter misbehaviour, teachers' actions and decisions about the issues of students' classroom disruptive behaviour. In addition, a semi-structured interview was conducted with those university teachers as the purpose of the study was to elicit comprehensive, lived, and rich information within their frame of reference (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2010; Denzin, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The interview contained questions about the strategies and approaches those teachers devised to deal with the issues of classroom disruption. The semi-structured interview and questions in the questionnaire and were guided by Dreikurs's Mistaken Model of Classroom Management (1968) which asserts to use a democratic approach to deal with the issues of classroom management. Moreover, the interview was conducted with prior information and informed consent, anonymity and assurance about confidentiality about the information provided by the participants were maintained.

Data Analysis

The data from the interview were transcribed in the following way adopting the thematic analysis procedure of Braun and Clark (2006). The following steps of data analysis were followed during data analysis

- a. **Step 1 – Familiarization with the data** - We transcribed the data, read it several times and initial notes were made to generate ideas for coding
- b. **Step 2 – Generation of initial codes** - The transcripts were independently analysed to identify the pattern in the data and some ideas were grouped in a meaningful way.
- c. **Step 3 – Ensured reliability of coding** - The result was compared and necessary changes were made. Those codes were identified as directed by the research questions.
- d. **Step 4 – Search for themes** - Those codes were listed into various possible themes. Based on the prepared codes, six themes were developed
- e. **Step 5 – Review of themes** - Smaller themes generated from codes were merged into a bigger theme. A thematic map comprising six themes were developed with the working title.

- f. **Step 6 – Defining and naming themes** - Further refinement of those themes were made and they were revised to make them concise and reader-friendly.

Findings

Preparation of Rules and Regulation before Classes Begin

Researches done during late 1960s encouraged teachers to formulate rules and regulations about classroom management, urged to provide verbal/non-verbal praise and, whenever possible recommended them to ignore minor mistakes committed by the students (Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009). In the present study, the university teachers have different reactions towards the formulation of rules and regulations before the commencement of class. The study found that most of the teachers set rules and regulations or dos or don'ts about optimal classroom behaviour before beginning the class. For example, one of the participant teachers reported the following:

Yes, I make the rules before beginning the class mostly at the beginning of the session and if necessary I make changes. I also encourage students to prepare classroom rules and regulation collectively and paste on the wall in front of the classroom and based on those rules, decisions about misbehaviours will be made (T-5).

Furthermore, it was found that the rules and regulations were not pre-formulated but when there was disruption, only at that time rules were made to address such rules and regulations violations (T-3). All dos and don'ts are formulated in collaboration with students and its acknowledgement is made at first (T2 and T-9). Likewise, full authority was given to students to make classroom rules by one of the teachers and they were also made accountable for all the consequences and violations (T-8). However, some teachers reported that they did not make rules for class before the class (T-1, T-7 and T-10).

Therefore, the study found that most teachers pre-formulated rules for the class before the session or semester began whereas some teachers gave authority to the students regarding the formulation of rules and regulations. On the other hand, very few teachers were found not preparing rules at all before beginning the class but in some cases, the teachers made rules only after the class was disrupted. Thus, regarding the issue of preparation of rules before the commencement of the class, different teachers have a different perspective towards rules and regulation formation but the point of reconciliation that can be drawn is that either they pre-formulated rules before the beginning of the class or specified those rules once misbehaviour is encountered.

Specification of TTT and STT

Teachers always do their best efforts to make their students participate in-class activities, use English as the target language while doing the activities at the same time and specify when they have to make the presentation and when they have to allow students to speak. However, we found that Teacher Talking Time (TTT) is still high while Student Talking Time (STT) is still low (Patte, 2019) since most of the teachers spent a significant amount of time delivering lectures. Fisher (2005), in a study, identified lower-order tasks in classroom evaluation which consists of checking students' understanding, and higher-order tasks to develop cognitive skills, and to express an opinion and enhance the discussion. The present study found that the majority of the teachers' allotted teachers talking time and student talking time. For

example, one of the teachers reported the following:

Yes, I specify the talking time for teachers and students separately. The first 25 minutes of the class is specified for me to teach and the remaining time is separated as students' talking time where I encourage students to participate in classroom discussion. In students talking time, I encourage them to speak themselves or talk to me about the issue being discussed (T-6).

Furthermore, the study found that some teachers have not exactly separated time as a TTT and TTT but preferred their students to talk more than teachers (T -9 and T-1). However, T-2 did not specify teachers and students talking time but as per the need, he allowed students to talk. In a nutshell, the majority of teachers have reported that the initial session of the classroom teaching and learning was for TTT and the later session was for SST (T-5, T-8, and T-4)

Consequently, the study disclosed that the most of the teachers were aware of separating time for the teachers and students to talk whereas few teachers provided time for the classroom interaction whenever the necessity is felt. Even so, some were very conscious about specific time for themselves and students. The study further revealed that within STT teachers preferred them to talk to each other and the reason behind it might be they learn better from their peers.

Teachers' First Action towards Unnecessary Noise

Controlling students' unwanted behaviour can take long time which directly hampers teaching learning activities, even teachers can be frustrated and such lead to failure on the part of students (Ruiz-Olivares, Pino, & Herruzo, 2010). Duesund and Odegard (2018) in their study found that most of the students reported that their teachers reacted to disruptive behaviour by "asking them to be quiet" or "raise their voice and tell them to be quiet". But in reality, teachers should be very active to take good initiation towards unexpected behaviour and noises in the classroom. The present study discovered that the most of the teachers first suggested keeping quiet and reminded the classroom rules as the first action towards unnecessary noise. For example, one of the participant teachers reported that:

I first politely suggest students stop making unnecessary noise. Even after that too, if there is noise, I remind them of the classroom rules that were collectively formulated before the commencement of the class. By doing so, I raise my voice so that they could understand that I am not satisfied with their behaviour. This is what I do as the first action to make class silent and create an environment for learning (T-2).

Furthermore, the study found that some teachers used staying silently and listening to their unnecessary noise as the first action towards the unnecessary noise (T1). But in the case of some teachers even giving a stern look at the students was also the first action (T-7). Some teachers even reminded the rules and even the class did not become silent, the teachers gave stern looks with being silent (T-3, T-8, and T-10). Additionally, some teachers asked questions to the students who were making noise as the first action to handle the unwanted noise and the actions those teachers made (T-4 and T-6).

Thus, teachers had different perspectives towards their first action towards unnecessary classroom noise and the majority of the teachers reported reminding students about rules and regulations that were formulated before class commences, giving stern looks, remaining silent and asked questions to those students. In a nutshell, the teachers played an active role as the first action towards the unwanted classroom behaviour.

Specific Approaches to Deal with Disruption

Disruptive behaviours are problems not only due to their immediate effects on classroom processes but also because they interfere with the development of cooperation and pro-social attitudes that are one of the most important objectives of schooling in most countries (Araujo, 2005). Studies like, (Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2005) have shown that coercive strategies, that have an aversive character, seem to be associated with increasing disruptive behaviour, whereas supportive strategies, that help to develop and construct adaptive behaviour patterns, seem to have the opposite effect. Moreover, using democratic approaches like providing attention, counselling in private and praising in public helped minimize disruption in the class (Driekurs, 1968). The present study discovered that the most of the teachers used supportive approaches to handle disruptive behaviour. For example, one of the participant teachers reported that:

I prefer to use supportive strategies rather than coercive strategies to deal with disruption. In my experience, I have found the harsh approaches developed negativity in students towards teachers so; I use supportive strategies. I do not proceed towards penalisation but implementing supportive strategies, worked in my context (T-13).

Furthermore, the study found that some teachers used strict rules and regulations and were even penalised for unanticipated behaviours (T-5). Whereas, some teachers took the help of the administration to deal with the disruption (T-12 and T-15). In some cases, the teachers were found taking the help of parents to deal with disruption in serious cases (T-11). Even when the case was found worse, the invitation of psychologists and psychiatrists were also invited (T-2). Praising good habits in public and counselling in private (T-4), making the student stand up and bombarding questions to humiliate (T-6), and comparing the disruptive student with a decent student and urging the disruptive to behave like decent (T-10) were strategies employed by the teachers to mitigate the issue of disruptive behaviours in their classes.

Overall, the study found that the approaches used to deal with disruption depended on the nature of disruption and how did the teacher respond to the behaviour. Various approaches were used which varied from the positive approaches to coercive approaches depending on the nature of disruption. Finally, some actions teachers took included supportive strategy, penalisation, being hyperactive as some of the strategies for dealing with disruptive behaviour.

Discussion

The study explored the ways English language teachers of the university and colleges of Nepal perceived the DB of their students and the strategies and approaches they adopted to mitigate such behaviours. Although the study did not yield any significant findings, teachers employed democratic and psychological approaches to deal with such behaviours in English language classes (Driekurs, 1968) since college-level students are grownups and using corporal punishment caused more disruption. From the above findings, those teachers specified rules and regulations or dos and don'ts before the commencement of the academic calendar which is similar to the study of Mussa, (2015) since formulation rules and regulations yielded smooth management of the class. It is because after the collaborative formulation of rules and regulations, such rules and regulations were acknowledged and consecutive actions were taken accordingly which was agreed upon by all the English teachers in the study. Moreover, a study, (Hesse et al., 2015), concluded that acknowledging rules and regulations collectively formulated earlier helped in maintaining discipline and decorum. Moreover, as teachers have been found more active in delivering lectures, their talking times need to be reduced, students should be allowed to speak more sharing their

experience about the content being taught, and STT has to be increased. However, Krebt (2017) cautioned that STT should not liberate a particular student to monopolize classroom discussion, so special care should be given.

As the students of university-level are grownups, remaining silent, giving a stern look to the student who shows disruptive behaviour, and asking questions to those who impede the functioning classroom are the strategies that can be used to mitigate the issue of troublesome behaviour and Mueller (2009) asserted that asking the disruptive student stand up, remaining silent and giving a gazing can work to those who are conscious towards their career. Additionally, using corporal or harsh strategies to mitigate such unwanted behaviour was found counterproductive but some teachers still believed in it, however, from a pedagogic point of view, democratic actions towards disruptive behaviour (Dreikurs, 1968) have been found quite useful and effective. Nevertheless, (Colvin, 2021) pointed out that using corporal punishment is beyond imagination in this era, rather diplomatic strategies have to be employed. Finally, teachers used psychological strategies like praising in public and counselling in private, making the troublesome student stand up and bombarding questions and diplomatic strategies like making comparison and contrast between troublesome and a decent student and urging the former to behave like later were also the strategies and approach university-level English language teachers used to mitigate the disruptive behaviour of their students. Glorifying a student in public and taking action in private, wishing birthdays, and other achievements in the class helped in mitigating DBs (Skovholt & Trotter – Mathison, 2014). Hence, university-level English language teachers have to take immediate action once there is a disruption in the class.

Conclusion

The study explored how did English language teachers in the university and colleges in Nepal experience the DBs of their students and what strategies and approaches they employed to mitigate such behaviours. The findings of the study recommend that the formulation of rules and regulations or dos and don'ts about optimal classroom behaviour played a significant role to mitigate the occurrence of DBs. It is because whenever there occurred DB, the teachers have been found to have acknowledged those rules and regulations. Hence, university-level English language teachers are required to formulate rules and regulations or dos or don'ts about behaviours that their students are supposed to show in the classroom and if it can be done, the chances of occurring DB can be minimised in one side and on the other, the student should be made accountable for the consequences of the projected behaviour according to formulated rules and regulations. Also, teachers need to decrease their talking time and student taking time needs to be increased so that students can share what they have learned and based on that whether classroom discourse can proceed further or re-teaching has to be done can be ensured. Increasing the voice, giving a stern look making the student stand up and bombarding questions for humiliating in exchange for the unwanted behaviours are some other strategies that can be adopted to mitigate the issues of classroom unwanted behaviours. Additionally, a psychological approach like if a troublesome student does something good, s/he can be praised in public so that positive encouragement can be made and if the same student shows unwanted behaviour, s/he can be invited in private and counselling can be done so that the chances of occurring DB can be minimized. Moreover, troublesome students can be compared and contrasted with a decent student and the former can be urged to behave like that of later can also help in mitigating the disruptive behaviour of university-level English language students.

Finally, further studies are needed on the same area as it is very difficult to pinpoint the types of disruptive behaviours found in Nepalese English as Foreign (EFL) or English as Second Language (ESL) classrooms. As different types of disruptive behaviours impede the normal functioning of the classroom

and it is still unknown that which types of behaviour (s) are most prevalent in our university-level ESL or EFL classes. On the other side, more studies are needed to explore the reasons for showing disruptive behaviour as there are very few studies that dedicated their attention towards the specific reasons behind showing disruptive behaviour as these days different instances of disruptive behaviours have been found yielded by electronic gadget, the influence of peer and teachers' unprofessional treatment towards the students. Therefore, it is very essential to investigate different reasons for showing disruptive behaviour by university-level English language students in the Nepalese context.

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