



THE ROLE OF PRE-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING IN DEVELOPING EFL TEACHERS' CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY FOR BETTER TEACHING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

Teachers' role in improving the quality of the educational system is unquestionable. However, in order for teachers to fully and effectively play their role and help achieve the required educational objectives they have to be well-trained before their induction and the literature provides much evidence of this (Bozkuş, 2021). Hence, teacher pre-service training is a crucial stage in the early development of a teacher. The current study makes use of a mixed-method approach, including a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and observations to investigate the role of pre-service teacher training in developing EFL novice teacher classroom management competency. The participants were 43 Moroccan EFL novice middle school and high school teachers. The results showed that participants found classroom management challenging mainly due to the short and insufficient period of training in general and practicum in specific as well as the prioritization of theory over practice during training. Consequently, those novice teachers found themselves in a state of confusion about how to deal with such challenges which had an impact on their performance in the classroom.

Keywords: pre-service teacher training, classroom management, novice teachers, EFL education, practicum

1. Introduction

Classroom management lies at the heart of the teaching and learning process. Along this line, it is one of the primary tasks of teachers to establish a well-managed classroom environment that is critical to creating a dynamic and productive experience for both the teacher and the student (Bozkuş, 2021, p. 434). In connection to this, Breaux (2005) has early concluded that *"learning cannot take place in a chaotic atmosphere"*, and adds that if teachers are disorganized, they will be unable to command organization from their

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students as students tend to follow the example of their teachers hence *“learning will suffer dramatically”* (p. 5). Teachers are therefore required to be well informed about the different classroom management practices available and to use them effectively in order to create such a conducive learning environment. This is asserted by Korpershoek et al. (2014) who state that *“effective classroom management strategies support and facilitate effective teaching and learning”* (p. 7) and hence the achievement of the required educational outcomes.

However, many teachers find themselves struggling with creating and maintaining productive classroom environments due to the continuous occurrences of students' disruptions and misbehavior (Rosenberg et al., 2021, p. 4). This situation is of serious concern because it affects the academic performance of students these days (Sunday-Piaro, 2018, p. 941). And, since several stakeholders seem to expect positive learning outcomes from the school in which learning starts and takes place in the classroom, it is the teacher who finds himself in a stressful situation as classroom management is considered one of the most difficult responsibilities for teachers (Caner & Tertemiz, 2015 as cited in Sánchez-Solarte, 2019, p. 182).

One of the best ways to help teachers to early develop the competency of classroom management early and navigate such a challenge in the future is pre-service teaching which is of great importance when it comes to preparing future teachers to do their jobs more effectively because one of its primary requirements is to provide beginning teacher with a wide 'toolbox' of classroom management strategies to rely on and use when necessary (Klamer-Hoogma, 2012). The current study is designed to investigate the role of pre-service teacher training in equipping novice teachers with such a toolbox to overcome classroom management challenges.

2. Literature review

2.1 Pre-service teacher training

Pre-service teacher training generally refers to the total of experiences and activities through which an individual learns how to become a teacher (Freeman, 2001 as cited in Castañeda-Trujillo & Aguirre-Hernández, 2018, p. 159). Another more specific definition is provided by Samsujjaman, (2017) who defines it as *“the set of policies, procedures, and provisions designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and skills that help them perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school, and wider community”* (p. 1995). During the period of training, student teachers, who can be defined as the students *“enrolled in a teacher preparation program who must successfully complete degree requirements including course work and field experience before being awarded a teaching license”* (Ryan et al., 2017, p. 4), are exposed to different modules that are intended at enhancing their training experience; those modules mainly aim at familiarizing and developing student teachers' knowledge of teaching and competencies of teaching practice and pedagogy (Moore, 2004 as cited in Farooq & Shahzadi 2006; Naylor & Sayed, 2014, p. 10). The training is carried out through watching *“examples of different tasks, dissecting and*

analyzing the work, watching demonstrations, and then moving to practice under close supervision and with detailed coaching aimed at promoting improvement" (Ball & Forzani, 2009, pp. 497-498). Hence, pre-service teacher training combines both theoretical knowledge and practicum same as any other profession to better prepare teachers of the future.

2.2. Classroom management

For the classroom to serve its purpose as a place for teaching and learning, it should be managed and organized. This calls for the concept of classroom management which usually refers to the *"actions taken to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to successful instruction"* (Brophy, 1996, p. 5 as cited in Macías & Sánchez, 2015, p. 83). Similarly, Sunday-Piaro (2018, p. 946) defines classroom management as *"the sum total of plan of actions taken by the teacher in the classroom to bring about a conducive classroom environment that supports teaching and learning leading to success and achievement"* he further adds that it is *"the action and direction a teacher takes to create a successful learning environment, having a positive impact on students' performance, given learning requirement and goals"* (p. 949). Both definitions stress the fact that the actions taken by the teacher are determinant in facilitating and promoting learning among students. This is confirmed by Bozkuş (2021) who argues that effective classroom management is indispensable to create a conducive learning environment and guarantee students' successful participation (p. 433).

2.3. Classroom management and teacher's performance

Sunday-Piaro (2018, p. 950) puts forward that *"the success of any educational system depends largely on the effectiveness of classroom management"*. Accordingly, classroom management needs to be effectively developed by teachers in order to achieve and maintain efficient teaching performance which will in turn promote students' academic performance. Similarly, Scheuermann and Hall (2016) consider effective classroom management as a marker of a teacher's success in the job as it brings about positive student outcomes. In this regard, Katitia (2015) argues that *"for the best students' achievements/performance to be achieved and realized there should be proper teacher preparation"* (p. 57). Such preparation provides novice teachers with a 'background' that will help them face the different challenges of the teaching profession including classroom management (Samsujjaman, 2017).

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research questions

The main aim of the present study is to identify the role of pre-service teachers' training in developing Moroccan EFL novice teachers' classroom management competency highlighting the factors that may hinder this development and its impacts on teachers' performance. To meet this aim, the following study will focus on the following questions:

- 1) To what extent do EFL novice teachers find classroom management challenging?

- 2) What are the factors that make classroom management challenging to novice teachers?
- 3) What are the impacts of ineffective classroom management on teachers' performance?

3.2. Research design

The research design for this study followed both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method has been useful in obtaining statistical data related to the early proposed questions. This quantitative data was supplemented by the collection of more in-depth qualitative data using observations followed by semi-structured interviews.

3.3. Participants

For questionnaire data collection, the study targeted 43 novice EFL teachers who were recent graduates of pre-service training programs at the time of the study. The reason behind targeting this category of respondents is that those teachers had just finished their training and were new teachers which allowed them to reflect on both the training and teaching experiences they had so far. Participants ranged in age from under 25 to above 40, of which 25 were males (58.1 %) and 18 females (41.9 %). 29 of those participants were high teachers, 13 were secondary high school teachers, and 1 preferred not to say.

For observations, two female teachers were observed, one was a high school teacher and the other a secondary school teacher. Both worked in the same school and were observed four times each over the course of a month. Those two participants were chosen using convenience sampling which is a sampling method opted for due to the following reasons: the physical proximity of the participants, their willingness to be observed, and their availability at the time of conducting fieldwork for the study ([Simkus, 2023](#)). Both participants were also asked to participate in semi-structured interviews following the end of the observations.

3.4. Instruments

To collect the data, the main questionnaire was designed using a content validity study which relied on data found in previous studies that fall under the scope of this present study's content domain. The questionnaire was later on reviewed by two teachers whose experience ranged between 3-5 years of teaching and one teacher trainer. Then to test validity, a pilot test was conducted.

In order to have an in-depth view of novice teachers' experiences, observations were conducted followed by comprehensive semi-structured interviews. The observation was designed to cover the aspects of classroom management and instructional skills and was recorded using common checklists based on the reference standard developed by Danielson's Framework for Teaching (1996, 2007) which was summarized by Santiago and Benavides (2009) to include four main areas of teachers' responsibilities that are divided into sub-components: planning and preparation, instruction, the classroom environment, and professional responsibilities. The latter was included in the semi-

structured interviews. The scale used is (1=Not observed, 2=More emphasis recommended, 3=Accomplished very well). The current study focused mainly on the aspects of instruction and the classroom environment.

3.5. Data analysis

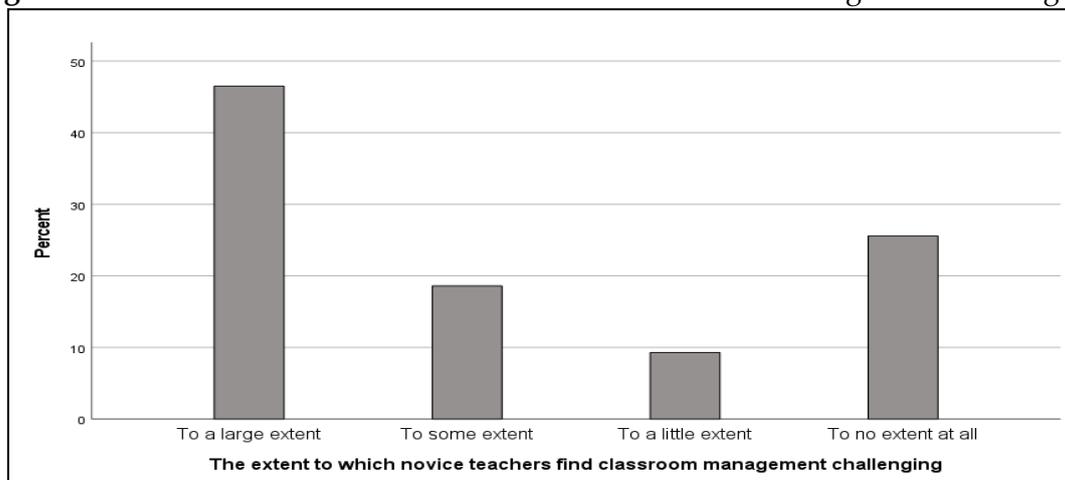
The analysis of data was mainly based on the research questions raised earlier related to the objectives of the study. The collected data from the questionnaires was computed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 26.0 (SPSS) software package after creating a corresponding codebook to the list of variables investigated in this study.

As for the classroom observations, the data collected was organized into themes that fulfill the demands of the research questions as well whereas the interviews were transcribed and themed to correspond to the sections investigated in the questionnaire and presented in narrative, excerpts, and direct quotations.

4. Results

The first question aimed to investigate the extent to which novice teachers find classroom management challenging. The results are shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The extent to which novice teachers find classroom management challenging



As can be seen in the figure, 46.5% of respondents reported that they found classroom management largely challenging followed by 18.60% and 9.30% who found it challenging to some extent and a small extent respectively whereas 25.58% answered that they did not find it challenging at all.

Concerning the observations, it was obvious that the observed that both teachers though to different extents struggled with classroom management both in the areas of “Instruction” and the area of “The Classroom Environment”.

For the first area which included the following criteria: communicating clearly and accurately, using questioning and discussion techniques, engaging students in learning, providing feedback to students, and demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness; it has

been noted that some of these elements were completely unobserved in most of the observations done, and even if they were involved more emphasis is recommended so they can be correctly fulfilled. For Teacher 1 (high school), who has been observed four times teaching different classes (both letters and scientific streams) and delivering different lessons (two grammar lessons, a communication lesson, and writing), there was a total absence of the techniques of “The use of different modes of teaching: whole class activities, pair and group work, individual work”. Other techniques that were similarly either unobserved or observed but need more emphasis are “Use of comprehension checking questions”, “Actively encouraging students’ questions”, “Asking questions to monitor students’ understanding”, “Restating questions and answers when necessary”, and “Waiting sufficiently for students to answer comprehension question” all of which are covered by a pedagogy that should be supplemented by practice opportunities within pre-service teacher training. It seemed as if the teacher was more focused on teaching students than actually involving them in the process of learning. As for Teacher 2 (middle school), she was more successful in fulfilling the criteria previously mentioned before.

The second area “The Classroom Environment” mainly includes the following elements: creating an environment of respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures, managing student behavior, and organizing physical space. It was observed that most of the observed teachers had problems at the level of “Maintaining order over disruptive situations.” Students exhibited also verbal disruptions, noncompliance, and being off-task which are all commonly identified as challenging behaviors that teachers need help with (Alter et al., 2013); however, unlike Teacher 1 who sometimes tried to manage these situations she mostly ignored these situations, and carried on with her delivering her lessons while students carried on with their disruptive behaviors, Teacher 2 who showed a somewhat satisfactory command of the different techniques including “Physical space” and “Classroom coverage” when managing these situations and tried to keep them under control for some time before they started again but with less intensity.

As for the language used in the classroom, it is worth highlighting that both teachers used English as a medium of instruction as well as a medium of addressing disruptive misbehaviors throughout the class period and during all observations even when students kept using Arabic in class. Both teachers used simple phrases to manage disruptive situations such as “*Silence, please*”, “*Quiet down, please*”, “*Stop speaking everyone*”, and “*Attention, please.*” When asked about this, they both stated that it was expected from them given the fact that they are teachers of English, and they also confirmed that they were advised by their teacher trainer during their training and by other teachers to use only English in class.

Table 1: The sufficiency of training duration

	Yes	No
The sufficiency of training duration	30.2%	69.8%

Table 2: The frequency of classroom practice during training

	Yes	No
Classroom practice	51.2%	48.8%

In relation to the factors that make classroom management challenging to novice teachers, one of the main factors is the insufficiency of practicum during pre-service teacher training. In regard to this, respondents were asked whether they thought the training duration was sufficient or not. A majority of 69.9%, as shown in Table 1 below, reported that they found it of training insufficient whereas 30.2% answered that it was sufficient. The respondents were also asked whether they have benefited from classroom practice or not; the results as presented in Table 2, show that the answers were almost equally close as 51.2% reported that they have benefitted from classroom practice and 48.8% reported that they haven't. This was confirmed by both of the interviewed teachers. For instance, Teacher 1 argued that the practicum she had received was short and ineffective as she and a group of teachers with her were only able to observe another teacher for a week without engaging in any actual practice; she stated, *"In my opinion, the practicum was not sufficient at all and that the experience was not good and effective because it was brief"* she further added, *"We were supposed to have a two-week training, but we only benefited from one week, which was a week of observation. We just observed how the teacher teaches in his class which means we have not benefited at all."* In the same vein, Teacher 2 also explained that during her pre-service training, they were supposed to take part in two phases of practicum in a host school also confirmed that she as well did not benefit from practicum since it coincided with the end of the school year which shows that there is an issue at the level of planning of practicum. She said:

"The second phase of the training was scheduled for the end of May, so when we went to the school, we found it empty; students had already left. We did not benefit from the two weeks programmed for this second phase of practicum."

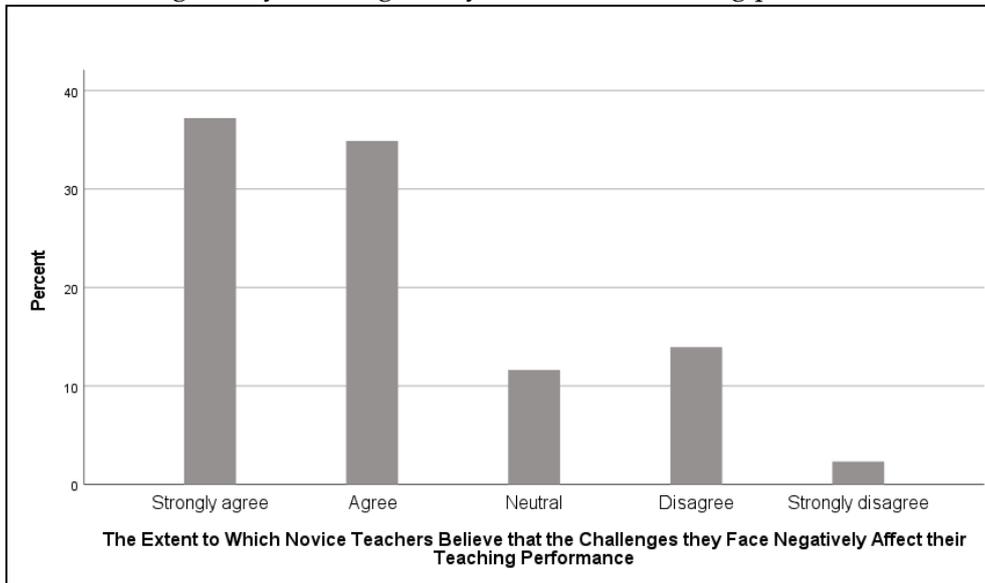
Another factor that was pinpointed by Teacher 2 is the prioritization of theory over practice during pre-service teacher training. She argued that most of the difficulties she was facing as a novice teacher were due to the imbalanced focus on theory over practice. Similarly, Teacher 1 highlighted this imbalance and argued that the focus should be on providing more practicum opportunities; she stated,

"The most important factor is the focus on what is theoretical more than what is practical. Therefore, we must focus on field training and give it more time than what is theoretical."

For the third question, respondents were asked about the extent to which they agreed that the challenges (mainly classroom management) they face in the classroom negatively affect their performance as teachers. As shown in Figure 2 below, while 11.63% of respondents preferred to answer that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the

statement, a majority of respondents strongly agreed (37.21%) and agreed (34.88%) that such challenges have a negative impact on their teaching performance whereas a small percentage of 2.32% strongly disagreed and 13.95% disagreed that those challenges do not.

Figure 2: The extent to which novice teachers believe that the challenges they face negatively affect their teaching performance



As far as the interviewees concerned, Teacher 1 expressed how her lack of previous practice during pre-service training led her to experiment in her own class; she stated,

“Since I had no practicum experience in a host school, I ended up in my own class assuming it responsibility alone. I started experimenting in my classes without any previous experience so I faced many challenges.”

This testimony, in fact, reveals a serious impact which is experimenting without any previous knowledge or experience inside the classroom. The experimenting can lead to an atmosphere of confusion which was evident in the observations carried out in Teacher 1 classroom. This confusion was taken advantage of by her students who repeatedly took action of the situation and demonstrated a wide range of disruptive behaviors like speaking out loud without permission, playing, and moving around also without permission. At different moments of the observations, she seemed like she almost had given up keeping things under control and just wanted to get done with the lesson plan for that class, which can be justified by her inability to assume full responsibility for the classroom which in turn can be said to have negatively affected her ability to create an environment of respect and rapport between her and students and to establish a culture for learning among her students. As for Teacher 2, she also showed some confusion, especially at the level of planning and delivering the lesson, because

during three of the four observations she taught the same lesson to different classes, and every time she changed the phases and content of the lesson; however, she did not let her confusion appear to her students.

5. Discussion

The present study aims to investigate the role of pre-service teacher training in developing EFL novice teachers' classroom management competency for better teachers' performance. The results of the research indicated that the majority of novice teachers found classroom management challenging to different extents. Two of the main factors behind this are the short duration and insufficiency of the practicum of teacher training as well as the prioritization of theory over practice during pre-service teacher training which aligns with similar findings of previous studies that have revealed many deficiencies that novice teachers suffer from including classroom management are due to inadequate teacher pre-service preparation (e.g., Flower et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2017). Regarding the impact of ineffective classroom management on teacher's performance, most teachers agreed that such a challenge negatively affects their performance as teachers. The main impact that was identified by the study is the confusion that leads to experimenting in their classes which aligning with findings from other studies affects instruction, teachers' performance, and students' learning in the long run (e.g., Scheuermann & Hall, 2016; Mitchell et al., 2017; Sunday-Piaro, 2018).

5.1 Limitations

Although the main research of identifying the important role of pre-service training in developing classroom management competency among novice teachers, there are some limitations. The small scope sample, especially that of interviewed novice teachers, is considered one limitation of the study. Hence, the results cannot be generalized to the larger local context of EFL novice teachers in Morocco. Also, the current study identifies only a few factors and impacts as observed and reported by study participants reflecting on their pre-service training and experience as novice teachers there are more factors and impacts related to the discussed issue of classroom management. Furthermore, this study has not investigated in depth the impact of EFL teachers using English as a medium of instruction and addressing classroom management issues which calls for further research on the influence of using English in developing an effective classroom environment, because it appears that even though there are several books that address classroom management in foreign language education, there are rarely any that target classroom this phenomenon from a theoretical or research perspective (Macías, 2018, p. 155).

6. Conclusion

The current study aimed to highlight the role of pre-service teacher training in preparing EFL novice teachers to deal with classroom management in their classrooms. The results

which were consistent with findings from previous studies showed that most novice teachers found classroom management challenging. Two main factors behind this were the short duration of pre-service teacher preparation and even shorter duration of practicum as well as the heavy focus on theory over practice during training. Consequently, the immediate impact which was observed through in-class observations and interviews was the teacher's confusion and experimentation in class without monitoring which resulted in students' disruptive misbehavior, being off-task, and lack of effective participation. Thus, it should be suggested that the duration of training and practicum become longer with better coordination between the training centers and host schools of practice and design efficient practicum practice opportunities that can help novice teachers improve their classroom management skills and strategies before induction in the classroom. Moreover, theory and practice should be given equal attention during training. Furthermore, novice teachers should be given enough support to navigate and handle the challenges they face after their induction.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author

Samira El-Asri an English language instructor. She is currently conducting her PhD research on the manifestation of critical thinking in speaking. Her main areas of interest include Critical Thinking, Language Teaching and Learning, Cross-Cultural Learning, and Teacher's Training.

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