The Effectiveness of Strategies Used by Teachers to Manage Disruptive Classroom Behaviors: A Case Study at a Religious School in Rawang, Selangor

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ABSTRACT: Studies have indicated that there is a positive correlation between disruptive behaviors and low academic achievement which resulted in other problems such as absenteeism, school drop-out and delinquent behaviors. Lack of knowledge and skills and failure in managing classroom disruptive behaviors have caused frustration, stress and burnout among teachers which pushed teachers to leave the profession especially novice teachers. The pervasiveness of classroom disruptive behaviors implied that strategies employed by teachers to manage disruptive behaviors are not effective. This requires immediate attention and action to find effective solutions. Therefore, this exploratory study attempts to discover the common classroom disruptive behaviors; to identify strategies used by teachers in managing misbehaviors; and to find out to what extent the strategies used by teachers were actually effective in managing classroom disruptive behaviors. This is especially critical in religious schools since the majority of teachers teaching in religious schools in the state of Selangor had no formal training in education; and they were not trained in classroom management, thus have no exposure on handling student classroom disruptive behaviors. Participants of this study were 14 teachers from a religious school in the district of Rawang, Selangor. Data collected using self-constructed instrument and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. Findings of this study revealed that majority of classroom disruptive behaviors were low-

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level disruptions; nonetheless they were burdensome to teachers which led to teacher frustration. Majority of teachers used ineffective punitive measures to handle student misbehaviors. Implications from the study were discussed.

KEYWORDS: Classroom disruptive behaviors; classroom management; teacher frustration; behavior management strategies; intervention programs

Introduction

To shape good behavior is one of the primary aims of education. Recently, we have been exposed to news and videos on social media of behavior problems among students. The comments in the media made by the Malaysian public clearly showed that we are becoming anxious on the issue of deteriorating students' behavior. Majority of schools in Malaysia can be categorized into two separate public education system, one is education system provided by the federal government (public school) and the other is education system established and managed by religious departments (religious department refers to the department which manages the Islamic affair of Muslims) of all states in Malaysia. Public school allocates limited time to teach Islamic knowledge which is compulsory according to Islamic teachings. Therefore, these religious schools were established to fill the gap and because of the demand by parents who want their children to be well educated in Islamic knowledge and possess good moral character. Schools operated by religious departments lack expertise in education administration and management; lack funding and lack of trained teachers (Rosnani Hashim, 2004). Teachers who teach at these schools are well trained in Islamic knowledge but not in education. Therefore, they lack knowledge and skills in pedagogy especially in dealing with classroom disruptive behaviors.

Review of literature revealed that there is a correlation between troublesome classroom behaviors and a gamut of antisocial, aggressive-disruptive behaviors and psychiatric problems (Thomas, Bierman, Powers, and The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2011). Studies have shown that classroom disruptive behaviors have led to more serious problems than distraction and loss of valuable time during teaching and learning process. Student classroom misbehavior is linked with student disengagement which correlates with alienation by peers and truancy (Soodak, 2003; Zyngier, 2007). Students who

misbehaved were reported to perform worse or fail academically (Caspi, Moffitt, Newman & Silva, 1996; Morrison, Anthony, Storino & Dillon, 2001; Marzano & Marzano, 2003; Finn, Fish & Scott, 2008; Freiberg, Huzinec & Templeton, 2009; Angus, McDonald, Ormond, Rybarcyk, Taylor, & Winterton, 2009) which escalated to other severe problems such as dropping out of school and delinquency (Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber, Moffitt & Caspi, 1998; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Gutierrez & Shoemaker, 2008). Furthermore, research findings have revealed that classroom behavior problem is a predictor for a myriad of social, behavioral, and psychiatric problems; such as antisocial behaviors, violence, high-risk sexual behavior, drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse (Kellam, Brown, Poduska, Ialongo, Wang, & Toyinbo, 2008; Kellam, Mackenzie, Poduska, Wang, Petras & Wilcox, 20011).

From the perspectives of teachers, classroom management of disruptive behavior is one of the utmost concerns during teaching and learning process; and one of the primary contributors to teacher frustration, stress and burnout (Travers, 2001; Dorman, 2003; Evertson & Weistein, 2006; Friedman, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2006; Beaman, Wheldall & Kemp, 2007; Kokkinos, 2007; Clunies-Ross, Little & Kienhuis, 2008; Australian Education Union, 2008). Recurring low-level disruptive behaviors challenged teacher classroom management skills which caused anxiety among novice and pre-service teachers (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011; Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014). They reported that teacher education and training have not prepared them well in the skills of managing classroom misbehaviors (Barret & Davis, 1995; Meister & Melnick, 2003; Stoughton, 2007; Duck, 2007). A review of teacher education curriculum offered by International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) proved that teachers are not well prepared in classroom management. Managing classroom disruptive behaviors is only a small subtopic discussed in pedagogy course. This resulted in lack of skills in managing classroom disruptive behavior which was reported as one of the predictors of novice teachers leaving the profession (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003; Gonzales, Brown, & Slate, 2008). They also stated that another significant factor that influenced teachers to choose the specific behavior management techniques is teacher's assumption about human nature, specifically student natural tendency. Teacher who views student as naturally bad would choose classroom management strategies

for the purpose of controlling student's behavior through punishment, force, and reward. Conversely, teacher who views student as innately good would guide student through discussion and dialogue to establish and encourage good behavior.

Students' classroom disruptive behaviors ranged from low-level nuisances to severe behavior problems. The pervasive classroom disruptive behaviors are mostly trivial and low-level disturbances. Examples of such troublesome behaviors are being late for class; disengaged during teaching and learning process; talking out of turn; making distracting noises; arguing with other students; easily angered by others; losing temper; moving around the classroom unnecessarily; and disobeying teacher's instructions (Bowen, Jensen, & Clark, 2004; Wakschlag, Leventhal, Briggs-Gowen, Danis, Keenan, & Hill, 2005). Severe behavior problems occur less frequently but difficult to handle. Instances of severe misbehaviors include stealing; fighting; bullying; and verbally abusing teachers and other students (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014). Concisely, disruptive behavior is defined as "an activity that causes distress for teachers, interrupts the learning process, and activity that lead teachers to make continuous comments to the student" (Arbuckle & Little, 2004: 60) or any "activities which disrupt and impede teaching and learning processes" (Thompson, 2009: 43). Even though researches have highlighted that the most frequent classroom misbehaviors are trivial and mild, however the loss of time and the difficulty to manage the misbehaviors have led teachers to stress and burnout.

Research findings revealed several classroom management strategies and intervention programs implemented by teachers to deal with this problem. Some of the strategies used include changing the physical environment of the classroom (Guardina & Fullerton, 2010); punitive measures such as controlling students behavior through negative and coercive interactions to ensure compliance (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Slee, 1995), referrals, suspensions, calling parents (Wakschlag, et al., 2005), more strict school rules (Way, 2011), reprimands and redirections (Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 2001), sanctions (Kohn, 2006; Maguire, Ball, & Braun, 2010), and disciplinary strategy through step system. This disciplinary strategy applies intensification of negative corrective measures beginning with, for instance, giving warning, in-class time out, out of class time out, redirection to a school

leader, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and the most extreme punishment is permanent exclusion from school (Raby, 2010). The assumption underpinning step system is that when bad behavior is corrected, student learning will also be enhanced (Maguire, Ball, & Braun, 2010). However, studies indicated that punitive measures and harsh punishment may create unruly, boisterous and disordered classroom environment (Madsen, Becker, & Thomas, 2001); cause disobedience and rebelliousness among certain students (Way, 2011); reinforce student hostility and destructive behaviors (Rinke & Herman, 2002); lead to negative outcomes including being dismissed by peers, academic failure, and further deterioration of antisocial behavior (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992); and contribute to defiance and detachment, common misbehavior, and school violence (Angus et al., 2009).

Since the aim of Islamic education is to develop excellent moral character epitomized by the moral character of Prophet Muhammad, the detrimental effects of unresolved classroom disruptive behaviors would impede the achievement of the aim of Islamic education. Al-Attas explains that Islamic education is to produce a well-balanced personality which resembles the personality of Prophet Muhammad (1980). Therefore, this study aims to explore the strategies used by teachers in managing classroom disruptive behaviors and to discover the extent to which the strategies used were effective in dealing with disruptive behaviors. This is to bring into consciousness the damaging effects caused by problematic classroom behaviors that necessitate urgent actions. This study also provides much needed evidence to support educator and practitioner's proposal for implementation of teacher professional development and intervention programs in schools. Specifically, this study provides understanding of the consequences of unresolved classroom troublesome behaviors to students as well as teachers; and to highlight the prevalence of common disruptive behaviors in classroom is the result of ineffective strategies used by teachers. Further, this study contributes significantly to the existing literature on classroom management specifically in dealing with student disruptive behaviors in classroom since literature on this issue is really lacking in Malaysia. Search for studies done in Malaysian context especially in religious schools proves futile. Many studies in Malaysia

were focused on disciplinary problems but not specifically on disruptive behaviors in classroom during teaching and learning sessions.

Methods

This study attempted to discover the prevalence of classroom disruptive behaviors in one primary level religious school operated by Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor (Selangor Religious Department) in district of Rawang, Selangor. This case study employed survey method to collect data regarding the common classroom disruptive behaviors committed by students during teaching and learning sessions and the strategies used by teachers in dealing with those disruptive behaviors. From the review of literature (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens & Conway 2014; Sun & Shek, 12; Thomas, Bierman, Powers, & The Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2011), we constructed an instrument which consists of two parts. Part A listed 32 disruptive behaviors frequently committed by students and one question asking participants to list other disruptive behaviors which occurred in their classrooms. Part B listed 14 classroom management strategies reported in literature (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion 1992; Wakschlag, et al., 2005; Raby, 2010; Way, 2011); one question whether they have employed any intervention program; and one open ended question asking participants to describe other strategies that they may have used in dealing with classroom disruptive behaviors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to get further understanding on the effects of classroom disruptive behaviors to teachers. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis. Participants in this study were 14 teachers selected from a population of 30 teachers who taught primary one to primary five students in a religious school in Rawang, Selangor. The findings of this study may not be generalized to other religious schools operated either by Jabatan Agama Islam Selangor or by any other religious department in Malaysia.

Findings and Discussion

Even though teachers were given a list of 32 common classroom misbehaviors, however, teachers encountered with 24 problem behaviors. Teachers only indicated disruptive behaviours listed in the check-list given, however, no teacher specified any other classroom disruptive behaviours particular for their students. Table 1 shows the most frequent classroom disruptive behaviors committed by students. The recurring misbehaviors were trivial or low-level disturbances. The

most common disruptive behaviors were disturbing friends, taking friends' things without permission, making disturbing noises, talking out of turn, continuously calling for teacher, looking out the window while teachers were teaching, walking to friends' desks, task disengagement, not paying attention to teachers, and mocking their friends. Only two teachers reported that their students had committed serious misbehavior such bullying, vandalism, and rebellious against teachers; however these problem behaviors occurred infrequently. Nonetheless, 10 teachers reported that their students were involved in fighting at least once or twice in a week. These findings were consistent with studies conducted by Bowen, Jensen, and Clark (2004); Wakschlag, et al. (2005); and Sullivan, Johnson, Owens and Conway (2014). The survey conducted by Sullivan and his team which was responded by 1380 teachers from South Australia revealed that teachers had to face with low-level disruptive behaviors almost on daily basis; and the most common classroom disruptive behaviors were talking out of turn, avoiding doing schoolwork and disengaging from classroom activities. Similar findings were also reported by Sun and Shek (2012). They explore teachers' perceptions on student problem behaviors in the classroom in Hong Kong schools. Their study shows that the most frequent misbehaviors encountered by teachers in classroom were disengagement from classroom activities, talking out of turn, and verbal aggression (teasing classmates, quarreling and using foul language). This study revealed that common low-level disruptive behaviors occurred not only in this specific religious school but also in Hong Kong and Australia.

Table 1: Classroom disruptive behaviors

Disruptive Behaviors	Frequencies (n=14)				
	Not at all	Once or twice a week	Almost daily	Several times daily	Level
Disturbing friends	2	0	0	12	low
Taking friends' things	2	2	10	0	low
Making noises	1	0	0	13	low
Talking out of turn	2	0	0	12	low
Singing	10	0	4	0	low

Continuously calling for teacher	5	0	8	1	low
Swinging on the chair	9	4	1	0	low
Looking out the window	2	0	9	3	low
Walking to friends' desks	3	0	8	4	low
Task disengagement	0	4	0	10	low
Not paying attention to teacher	0	0	3	11	low
Reading other books while teacher was teaching	0	8	6	0	low
Disobeying teacher's instruction	1	4	9	0	low
Blaming other students	9	0	5	0	low
Using rude language	4	4	6	0	low
Making funny noises	10	0	4	0	low
Hitting their desks	8	2	3	1	low
Mocking friends	2	2	10	0	low
Breaking school rules	10	4	0	0	medium
Insulting friends	12	2	0	0	severe
Fighting	4	10	0	0	severe
Bullying	12	2	0	0	severe
Defying teacher's instruction	12	2	0	0	severe
Vandalism	11	3	0	0	severe

Table 2 shows the strategies used by teachers to deal with disruptive behaviors in their classroom. Majority of teachers used punitive measures to deal with student misbehaviors. The most popular techniques were scolding; advising students not to repeat the same mistakes; arguing with students; giving punishment; and asking accusing "why" questions. Surprisingly, no teachers reported that they have stated clear classroom rules that should be followed by students together with the consequences of not following the rules. All 14 teachers admitted that their techniques failed to reduce recurrence of classroom disruptive behaviors. Since these teachers have no formal training in education, they may have applied strategies that they have

gained through their experiences as students in school whereby teachers used the same strategies they observed their own teachers were using when they were in school. Since the strategies used on them were effective, they applied the same strategies on their students but were proven ineffective. Common practices employed by the school may also influence the strategies that teachers used to handle students' behaviors. Teachers explained that they have to deal with student misbehaviors one way or another. Even though they realized that their techniques had not reduced classroom disruptive behaviors but these were the only techniques that they knew. Furthermore, corrective measures and harsh punishment are still prevalent in religious schools throughout Malaysia.

Table 2: Strategies employed in dealing with classroom disruptive behaviors

Strategy	Frequency (n=14)
Scolding	12
Criticizing	5
Advising	14
Giving sarcastic remark	0
Arguing	14
Punishing	9
Caning/beating	1
Referring to school authority	2
Asking why	13
Time-out	1
Labelling	2
Stating clear rules	0
Praising	0
Discussion/dialogue	0

We have provided, in the Introduction section of this paper, many research findings that showed negative consequences of using punitive measures to control students' behavior. Not only the strategies failed to control student misbehaviors but they may reinforce the negative behaviors which could lead to negative life outcomes later in life (Bradshaw, Schaeffer, Petras, & Ialongo, 2010).

Teachers also informed the researchers that they have never been exposed to any intervention programs; and they were never trained in applying different strategies in dealing with student misbehaviors. They would welcome any effort by academicians and teacher educators to expose to and train them in various strategies and intervention programs to reduce classroom disruptive behaviors. Teachers also conveyed that student misbehavior, even though trivial, made them to lose their patience and to feel tired and frustrated.

Implications

Teachers, with or without classroom management skills, must deal with troublesome behaviors in their classrooms. Effective behavior management strategies lessen classroom misbehaviors (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999); improve academic achievement and promote school readiness (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004); and encourage interest in learning (Kunter, Baumert, & Koller, 2007). There is abundance of studies that evaluated and validated various behavior management strategies that can be applied by teachers. Teacher could choose strategies that work for them and that have the following criteria: the strategies are effective, that is, they reduce and prevent the occurrence of disruptive behaviors; easy to implement, which means they would not require outside of school support, would not take much time to prepare, and can be easily accessible; and the strategies used should not take much class time and disrupt the normal classroom activities (Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Cholewa, Smith-Adcock, & Amatea, 2010).

Research findings revealed that appropriate behavior management techniques such as general praise; behavior specific praise; and stating clear rules met the criteria of good strategies. These simple techniques can promote student classroom engagement and may decrease disruptive classroom behaviors (Gable, Hester, Rock, & Hughes, 2009; Henly, 2010; Kerr & Nelson, 2010; Wheeler & Richey, 2010; Pisacreta, Tincani, Connell, & Axelrod, 2011; Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff, 2012). Evidence-based behavior specific praise and stating clear rules techniques discovered and validated by Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff are more suitable for Muslim students since these techniques were extracted from Prophet Muhammad Tradition (hadith) which is one of the primary sources of knowledge in Islam.

Besides these behavior management strategies, studies have shown that some evidence-based intervention programs were effective in reducing classroom disruptive behaviors. These intervention programs have been evaluated by researches in a number of studies. Some examples of effective intervention programs are Good Behavior Game (Kellam et al., 2008; Kellam et al., 2011; Donaldson, Vollmer, Krous, Downs, & Berard, 2011); Fast Track Program (CPPRG, 1999; CPPRG, 2002); Raising Healthy Children (Brown, Catalano, Fleming, Haggerty, & Abbott, 2005; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2005); and The Incredible Years program (Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1997; Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs, & Aspland, 2001; Webster-Stratton et al., 2008).

Besides applying behavior management techniques and intervention programs, teacher can help reduce classroom disruptive behaviors by changing the physical and emotional environment in classroom. Positive classroom emotional climate promote healthy interactions, cooperation and trust between teacher and students and students and students which may lead to lesser classroom misbehaviors (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011). Teachers who provide structured, cooperative and supportive learning environment; encourage and reinforce good effort by students; teach students social and emotional regulation skills; use effective instructional practices; and clearly conveyed what are expected from their students were proven to experience reduction in student misbehaviors in their classroom (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004; Conroy, Sutherland, Vo, Carrs, & Ogston, 2013). Another influential strategy to manage classroom misbehavior is to have good personality and high social intelligence. Teacher with high social intelligence would create supportive and positive classroom environment that enhance intrinsic motivation among students through discussion, recognition, involvement, and hinting (Yahyazadeh Jeloudar & Aida Suraya Md Yunus, 2011).

Conclusion

The primary aim of Islamic education is to develop good moral character. Religious schools in Malaysia are entrusted with responsibility to instil Islamic knowledge and nurture good moral character. However, this noble aim would be very difficult to achieve when students misbehaviors are not treated early. From review of literature, this study has exposed

the negative consequences of classroom disruptive behaviors, even though trivial and low-level, they may lead to an array of negative consequences to the students themselves, to the teachers, and to societies at large. Classroom disruptive behaviors were still prevalent in this religious school and punitive measures employed by teachers were ineffective. Other studies also revealed that using punitive measures to deal with classroom disruptive behaviors were ineffective and what is worse is these measures may reinforce negative behaviors. This paper also has suggested some evidence-based intervention programs which are effective to handle classroom misbehavior so that teachers and school authorities could make further investigation for implementation. In addition, we have suggested for teachers to study simple techniques that they can employ in their classroom. More importantly, teachers should have positive personality, high social intelligence and strong motivation to change for the better.

Future Plan of the Research

Findings of this research revealed that teachers at this religious school need to be trained in classroom management, specifically they need to have knowledge and skills in managing classroom misbehaviors. A plan to give these teachers 2 days training on techniques of managing classroom disruptive behaviors is in progress. This training program aims to train teachers in motivating students through behavior specific praise and correcting mistakes by stating clear rules of what students can do and cannot do. These techniques were developed from extensive analysis of authentic hadith reported by Imam Bukhari and Muslim (Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff, 2012). For instance, techniques of correcting misbehavior by Prophet Muhammad were extracted from a thorough analysis of two authentic hadiths (hadith number 285 and 1094) reported by Muslim. When correcting mistake, we should use precise words in just one or two sentences; be general and do not specifically mention the wrongdoer's name or the word "you", this means the reminder or information is meant for all not just the wrongdoer; clearly explain the rule of what is not allowed and what is allowed. For example, to correct the mistake of a student who is talking while teacher is teaching, just say, "Students are not allowed to talk while teacher is teaching; teachers are to be respected, listened to and learned from" (Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff & Asyraff Hafdzan Abdullah, 2015).

This training program will be a part of future research to validate an intervention program to manage classroom misbehaviors developed from Prophet Muhammad Tradition.

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