



THE ROLE OF MENTORSHIP IN ENHANCING NOVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT SKILLS

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ABSTRACT

The present article aims at highlighting the importance of mentorship in the development of classroom management skills among novice English language teachers. It identifies the numerous difficulties that new teachers grapple with in the classroom such as overcrowded classes, cultural diversity and scarce resources. This paper highlights the importance of mentorship in the enhancement of practical skills, cultural sensitivity, self-confidence and reflective practices. Some of the recommendations include the design of a well-defined mentorship program, the provision of scenario-based training and the integration of technology in peer learning.

Introduction

The importance of classroom management is that it is the heart of the teaching process and a key factor in the achievement of the educational goals in the classroom especially for the beginning English language teachers who are confronted with specific difficulties in organizing the classroom, engaging the students and meeting the needs of the multiple learners. These challenges are even more challenging in the linguistically diverse and the resource constrained environment. This makes mentorship programs crucial since they help the new teachers to overcome these challenges.

Challenges in Classroom Management for Novice Teachers

Classroom management is probably one of the most challenging aspects of teaching especially to new teachers who do not have enough practical experience on how to meet the needs of the students in the classroom. All these challenges are influenced by both internal and external factors such as large class size, cultural and linguistic diversity of the students, and lack of resources among others (Fantilli & McDougall 2009). These challenges can affect the teaching efficacy, the student achievement and in extreme cases lead to teacher's frustration or burnout (Ingersoll & Strong 2011).

One of the biggest problems that new teachers face is the management of student behavior. The meta-analysis conducted by Goldstein (2010) revealed that new educators battle with the issue of building authority and creating a classroom atmosphere which is accepting of all learners (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). This equilibrium is even more difficult to achieve in multicultural and multilingual environments because different cultures have different set of rules. For example, behaviours that would be considered as unacceptable in one culture can be quite common in another culture hence creating conflicts that cause tension within the



classroom (Alharbi, 2019). Lack of training makes many new teachers to misinterpret such behaviors or respond to them in a culturally insensitive way thus complicating the issue of classroom management (Sali and Kecik, 2018).

The above-mentioned problems are compounded by large class sizes. The findings indicate that over populated classes especially in under resourced public schools make it difficult for new teachers to individualize students or handle instances of misbehavior (Chandran et al., 2022). The teachers feel that they cannot set rules or stick to certain procedures because they are in charge of so many students. They receive insufficient support, so they tend to react rather than prevent and manage instances of disruption, which reduces the students' chances to learn (Wedell, 2008).

Another big challenge is how to involve students in activities that are meaningful and participatory in the learning process. New teachers tend to teach in a very structured way and tightly controlled manner, which does not involve students in the decision-making process and reduces their interest and creativity (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In classrooms with language differences, students who have difficulties with language may have even more difficulties to find connection with lessons. This can result to lack of interest or being excluded or excluded from the learning process, which in turns make the management of the classroom difficult (Johnson, 2009).

These challenges are further exacerbated by resource limitations especially in the rural or economically challenged areas. New teachers especially have no access to some of the most important teaching materials such as textbooks, visual and aids, other technology teaching materials that are necessary for the delivery of active learning and engagement. According to Brown (2007), these resources are important since without them teachers tend to fall back to the traditional methods of teaching where they deliver a lecture to the students with little or no engagement from the students (Murray & Christison, 2019). The inability to use the principles of differentiated instruction also hinders their capacity to meet the diverse needs of the students as evidenced by Gibbons (2002).

New teachers also suffer from low confidence and self-efficacy that greatly hinders their ability to control and foster proper behavior in students. According to Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory, teachers with low self-efficacy will have a harder time dealing with disruptive behaviors and may view misbehavior as a sign of their incompetence thus increasing stress and the likelihood of burnout. This theoretical training versus real life classroom practice gap poses a challenge to new teachers' preparedness and deters them (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001).

The challenges described above are compounded by the lack of mentorship and support systems at the workplace. Research evidence has pointed to the fact that new teachers thrive when they are exposed to mentorship programs that offer support, motivation and tips on how to handle the students in the classroom (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). However, in many educational systems, there are no structured mentorship programs or professional learning communities (PLCs) in place and new teachers are left on their own without the fundamental resources they need to teach effectively (Zakeri, Rahmany & Labone, 2016).

The Role of Mentorship in Classroom Management

Mentorship is an important source of support for new teachers, because it allows the new teachers to develop the necessary skills and confidence that they need to handle classes.



Teacher retention and motivation are major concerns in education and effective classroom management is a key factor that can contribute to addressing these concerns (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). This is because mentorship offers the new teachers a systematic way of learning and working thus enabling them to overcome these challenges.

The first benefit of mentorship is the establishment of practical and achievable behavioural interventions. Thus, the most important leaders who can aid novices in teaching profession – mentors – help novices to set up proper rules and consequences that will enable students to be disciplined, but at the same time, feel free (Mann & Tang, 2012). These mentors typically have a wealth of experience that they are willing to share with the new educators on how they can navigate certain situations. Thus, not only does this approach solve the presented problems, but it also builds the mentee's capacity to deal with similar problems in the future.

Another benefit of mentorship is that it enhances cultural and contextual awareness in classroom management. In diverse settings, it may be difficult for novice teachers to deal with students who come from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Gay, 2010). Thus, the mentors can fill this gap by sharing culturally appropriate strategies that may include the ways of involving students' culture in the lesson plans or changing the classroom practices to be more student-friendly. Such measures increase the student's participation and the overall inclusivity of classrooms thus making the learning environment more desirable (Banks & Banks, 2016).

Apart from suggesting useful management approaches, mentorship assists new teachers in boosting their self-confidence. According to Bandura (1997) self-efficacy is the confidence that a teacher has in order to handle classroom activities. Thus, the aspects of mentorship include consistent feedback and encouragement which make the teachers able to know their strength and their weakness as well. This process is repetitive, and by promoting the growth mindset, beginning teachers can better deal with the challenges that appear in the classroom with more optimism (Zakeri et al., 2016).

Another area of influence of mentorship is on reflective practice which is a critical component of professional development. Young teachers are taken through the process of reflection by their mentors to help them work through their practice, identify the effective practice and make data- driven changes. Reflective practices not only enhance classroom management but also prepare teachers to be more flexible and creative in the problem solving of various challenges (Farrell, 2018).

The programs for mentorship are formal and this makes the peer learning and collaborative networks used in the programs very effective. For instance, professional learning communities (PLCs) are forums through which novices can express themselves and get a chance to narrate their experiences, state their problems and find ways of solving them with the help of their colleagues (Lave and Wenger, 1991). These communities also address the feeling of isolation that many new teachers experience thus creating a forum through which mutual learning and development of the profession can be made (Avalos, 2011).

Strategies to Enhance Mentorship Impact on Classroom Management

To achieve this, educational institutions should adopt certain strategies in order to enhance the effectiveness of mentorship on classroom management. This is where formalized mentorship programs have to be developed. These programs must define what roles and objectives are to be taken on by whom and how the progress will be measured in order to



ensure that there is conformity. The mentor should undergo through training which should embrace modules on behavioral management, cultural sensitivity and promoting reflective practice according to Mann and Tang (2012).

The following suggestions can help integrate scenario based training and real time classroom observations into the mentorship programs that can help the new teachers gain practical experience. It helps the mentees to work on their responses to some of the difficulties that are likely to be encountered in the classroom. Observing the mentors in their natural environment helps one to understand the dynamics that are likely to be encountered in the field (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006).

The use of technology and creating communities of learners can also help in the enhancement of the mentorship. Virtual mentorship websites as well as online libraries of materials help to ensure that the materials are accessible and can be used in a variety of ways while PLCs provide environments where the teacher can continue the discussion and exchange of ideas (Zakeri et al., 2016). Implementing the strategies that have been discussed in this paper will enable mentorship programs to handle the problems associated with classroom management and thus enable novice teachers to succeed.

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