

## **Exploring Effective Classroom Management Constraints in EFL Context: A Phenomenological Inquiry**

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### **Abstract**

For years, effective classroom management and the constraints which affect teachers' classroom management have been of much concern to both teachers and teacher educators. Despite such paramount importance, this issue has been far less explored in general and the Iranian EFL context in particular. Therefore, the current study employed a phenomenological inquiry to delve into the constraints which set hurdles in the way of effective classroom management. To that end, 20 Iranian EFL teachers from different branches of the same English Language Institute were selected through purposive sampling and interviewed in person to extract thick and in-depth data. The interviews then were transcribed verbatim and their content was inductively analyzed to let frequent themes emerge. Results of the analysis indicated that four major themes, namely 'institute-related', 'learner-related', 'teacher-related', and 'social-cultural differences' frequently manifested. It should be noted that each main theme also comprised several sub-themes. Some stakeholders such as teachers and teacher educators could benefit from the findings to promote the quality of EFL teachers' classroom management.

**Keywords:** classroom management, effective classroom management, constraints, EFL teachers, EFL classroom

## 1. Introduction

Classroom Management (CM) is one of the most cited factors in the teaching career. In order for schools to achieve their educational objectives, teachers need to play an undeniably critical role that could not be materialized in poorly managed classrooms (Jones & Jones, 2012; Marzano et al., 2003; Uysal et al., 2014). Classroom management obtains more prominence when it comes to language teaching classrooms since the subject and medium of instruction are the same. For this reason, English instructors might encounter some classroom management challenges that teachers for other majors might not happen to deal with (Linse & Nunan, 2005).

Effective teacher-student relationships are referred to as effective classroom management which is also known as the actions which are taken by the teachers to foster academic as well as the socio-emotional learning environment (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). Therefore, teachers must develop supportive relationships among students and optimize students' access to learning. Besides, group management methods along with social skills and self-regulation should be promoted by the teachers to make pupils more responsible (Marzano et al., 2003). Similarly, Brophy (2006) emphasized that CM should establish a facilitative learning climate in which students are inspired to invest in their learning more eagerly. CM skills seem to be of higher priority and demand, especially for novice teachers as they are always stressed to function appropriately when it comes to administration, curriculum, and behavior problems (Stoughton, 2007; Bauman & Del Rio, 2006). That is why a plethora of studies have attempted to investigate the causes of classroom management constraints so as to provide teachers with workable suggestions and solutions to cope with such thorny issues (e.g., Guardino & Fullerton, 2010; Marzano et al., 2003; Osakwe, 2014; Salehizadeh et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, to the best knowledge of the researchers, the challenges and problematic issues, teachers' coping with the related problems, and the main factors leading to inappropriate CM have yet to be investigated in-depth. Moreover, the review of the related literature documented that almost all the studies were undertaken based on a quantitative approach which is limited because they do not capture the required intricacies and complexities of classroom management constraints which are heavily context-bound (Cohen et al., 2011). Given this, a research method, which falls within a naturalistic and interpretive paradigm, is required to accrue comprehensive and context-sensitive data from the teachers themselves. Hence, this study aims at exploring the main constraints, which hinder effective EFL teachers' CM from the teachers' eyes. To be more specific, the following question was raised: What are the perceptions of EFL teachers about the EFL classroom constraints influencing their classroom management practice?

## 2. Review of Literature

The review of the related literature shows that the studies on classroom management can be elaborated from three perspectives: definition and theories of classroom management, characteristics of appropriate and effective classroom management, and constraints of effective classroom management.

### *2.1. Definition and Theories of CM*

Classroom management has been defined as the teachers' ability to cooperatively manage time, space, resources, students' roles, and behaviors to provide a climate that encourages learning (Osakwe, 2014). In addition,

procedures and routines that the teachers use to maintain the classroom quiet and smooth, to Brown (2007), are referred to as classroom management.

Rogers (2015) contended that teaching would be less stressful and demanding for those teachers with sound classroom skills who can fulfill the educational requirements of their pupils. Also, Mastrilli and Sardo-Brown (2002) highlighted discipline as the most stressing concern during their practices. However, classroom discipline reflects the strategies used by the teachers to deal with incorrect actions or behaviors conducted by the students. Likewise, Victor (2005) distinguished the two terms of discipline from management as the former being an instrument which shapes, corrects, and inspires proper behavior and the latter refers to effective strategies for reducing misbehavior in the classroom setting.

However, some others to play it safely try to use the two terms together without making a distinction between the two terms. In addition, others look at classroom management as incorporating classroom discipline (Kohut & Range, 1986; McCormack, 1994). The current trends in classroom management approaches fall into three categories which are interventionist, non-interventionist, and interactionalist (Wolfgang, 2005). In the interventionist model, teachers take disciplinary approach, and rules are made by them accordingly. Non-interventionists contend that the classroom issues must be managed before their occurrences. Moreover, Pupils are involved with their work and they are aware of what they are expected. Interactionalists, on the other hand, use a combination of interventionist and non-interventionist approaches. They allow teachers to make changes in their classrooms by determining how their students desire to be treated. Besides, interactionalists hold teachers and students responsible for classroom management.

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## ***2.2. Effective CM***

Effective classroom management is an integral factor that promotes a good teaching-learning environment and is concerned with the teachers' attitudes, skills, desires, a setting of expectations, and positive actions. In addition, a well-managed classroom should achieve a balance between consistent disciplines and praise (Lakshmi, 2010). According to Pianta (2006), in order to have an effective classroom management, something more than having an environment which results in successful teaching is required and it is essential to create an interaction between teachers and students. As Asiyai (2011) believes, a classroom in which communication takes place effectively, students are engaged constantly, and teachers ask questions regularly, is called an effectively managed classroom. Oliver et al. (2015), undertook another research on using a self-monitoring checklist by the teachers and tried to see if it helps them to maintain classroom management practices. They found that self-monitoring checklist proved to be fruitful in the classroom. Similarly, Guardino and Fullerton (2010) found that through teachers' using effective CM skills pupils' classroom engagement increased, and accordingly their challenging behaviors reduced. More recently, Marashi and Assgar (2019) investigated EFL teachers' Effective CM and how it affects learners' anxiety and learning strategies. The findings revealed a significantly negative correlation between the two variables. That is those teachers who use more classroom management techniques their learners experience less anxiety. As a matter of fact, those learners learn the foreign language more enjoyably.

## ***2.3. Constraints of CM***

What enhances learning is the creation of a positive environment which in turn fosters class participation (Qinglan et al., 2010). However, a poorly

managed classroom has a negative impact which results in CM problems (Kayıkçı, 2009). Instances of CM problems are personal ones such as family, home, and financial factors along with feelings of inadequacy. Similarly, time, students' demotivation, large-sized classroom, and socio-cultural differences among the students and teachers are inhibiting factors for effective classroom management. In another study, Salkovsky et al. (2015) have listed the most important inhibiting factors which keep teachers from practicing their effective CM strategies as personal pressure (too little energy available, work overload, and stress) and school-level unsupportiveness (from peers and school administration). Similarly, Dias-Lacy and Guirguis (2017) investigated the possible challenges new teachers are encountered with and the ways to cope with them. They also believed that what might trouble inexperienced teachers' work is the feeling of stress, not having proper assistance, and not being able to manage behavioral and academic-related issues. Recently, Debreli (2019) has found out that the use of L1 and mobile devices, asking irrelevant questions, talking too much and lack of interest in classroom participation are among the issues EFL teachers are challenged with. The strategies teachers followed to handle the mentioned misbehaviors were affective and body language was found to be useful.

Moreover, 300 Australian teachers were studied by Lewis and Burman (2008) to find out the constraining factors hindering teachers from practicing their best performances in the classroom. They found that excessive workload, classroom size and layout, and lack of support from the school administration were the most frequently reported CM constraints. Sezer (2017), also studied the novice teachers' perceptions of the most dominant disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Findings showed that, to novice teachers, chattering, distraction, engaging with mobile phones, chewing gum, abusing classmates, and disrupting

the class were the main classroom management problems. Furthermore, Kapur (2018) studied the effects of classroom management on students' behavior and the results showed that academic performance, effective communication, responsibility and duty, leadership skills, elimination of negative feelings, managerial functions, eradication of violence, and promotion of ethics and standards, and formulation of rules and policies were the main coping strategies for solving classroom management problems.

### 3. Method

In the current study, a phenomenological inquiry was employed to delve into the constraints keeping EFL teachers from implementing their effective CM. A phenomenology inquiry "is an attempt to deal with inner experiences unproved in everyday life" (Merriam & Tisdell, p. 7). It is conceived as a qualitative research approach in which a lived experience of a phenomenon for different individuals is delineated and interpreted in the most direct manner without being colored or influenced by pre-defined frameworks of knowledge or wisdom. In the current study, constraints of effective CM are construed as the target phenomenon. It should be underscored that describing the commonalities of a lived experience is the prime purpose of a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The reason why this method was adopted by the researchers is to identify the meaning behind the human experience as it is related to a phenomenon or notable collective occurrence (Creswell, 2009).

#### *3.1. Sampling and Participants*

This study was conducted in the EFL context of Iran where English is rarely used as a medium of genuine communication beyond the borders of the

classroom no matter if it is taught in public or private sectors (Miri et al., 2017). EFL teachers who were invited to participate in this study were chosen among those working in the private sector. To select them, purposive sampling was used since it could assist the researchers to have a homogenous sample of participants who possessed the first-hand experience of the target phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

In fact, the participants were all selected from different branches of the same language institute in the capital city of Iran, Tehran, to neutralize or lessen the effects of some intervening factors such as the context of teaching and textbooks on CM. After obtaining the written consent, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant to ensure the confidentiality of the data and stimulate the participants to express their opinions more freely. It should be mentioned that the process of the data collection was not curbed until the data saturation occurred and not new information was revealed by the participants. More precisely, having interviewed 20 of the participants, the saturation happened. The demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Variable		N
<b>Certification</b>	BA (Bachelor of Arts) of TEFL	8
	MA (Masters of Arts) of TEFL	12
<b>Gender</b>	Male	9
	Female	11
<b>Teaching experience</b>	5-10	8
	10-15	7
	15-20	5
	25-30	6
<b>Age</b>	31-35	7
	36-40	7

**Table 2**  
*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Variable		N
<b>Certification</b>	BA (Bachelor of Arts) of TEFL	8
	MA (Masters of Arts) of TEFL	12
<b>Gender</b>	Male	9
	Female	11
<b>Teaching experience</b>	5-10	8
	10-15	7
	15-20	5
	25-30	6
<b>Age</b>	31-35	7
	36-40	7

### ***3.2. Data Collection Procedure***

To develop a semi-structured interview checklist, the ensuing steps were undertaken. Initially, the researchers perused the related literature on classroom management extensively and extracted major themes. Then they read them several times and condensed them into some items. Afterward, the items were refined and trimmed by the researchers in terms of content and language so as to capture various aspects of CM. Following this, the initial draft of the checklist was given to a panel of five experts in the field of TEFL to be examined in terms of both content and language. Subsequently, their comments and suggestions were collected and applied so as to make the required amendments to the checklist. The interview checklist included questions addressing the teachers' beliefs about the constraints of effective classroom management, and the main factors which led to the constraints of effective classroom management (see Appendix).

To collect the data, each teacher was then interviewed face-to-face in the context of his regular classroom. Initially, the interviewer, the first researcher,

tried to set the scene by asking each participant some general questions. Then he posed main questions in the checklist to elicit the pertinent data; however, more follow-up questions were asked to clarify the responses and encourage further elaboration. All data collection was completed over 2 months and ended up the data saturation. That is when no further new information or themes emerged to add to the researchers' understanding of the factors which led to effective classroom management. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes on average. All the interviews were audiotaped to be transcribed accurately.

### *3.3. Data Analysis*

To begin with, the first researcher listened to each interview twice to familiarize himself with the data. Then he transcribed them verbatim so as to capture the subtleties of responses. Afterward, the data were analyzed through Moustakas's method (1994) of inductive data analysis. First, the first researcher read the transcripts twice to get more acquainted with the data and form a big picture of them. Then he reread the transcripts and color-coded the stipulated constraints by the interviews. Meanwhile, the researcher-maintained memos so as not to miss the minutiae of the data (Moustakas, 1994). Afterward, the first researcher reread the extracted codes and attempted to cluster the ones that were related to each other and label them as a separate theme (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Following this, another coder, who has published several qualitative papers on teacher education, was asked to double-check the initial codes and the way they had been categorized. It was revealed that they agreed upon the codes to a great extent (Cohen's Kappa: .84); however, both coders then discussed the points of difference and reached complete consensus through negotiation. Finally, each theme was exemplified by at least one direct quotation from one of the interviewees' responses.

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### ***3.4. Research Quality***

To guarantee the validity of the study, the conversations were recorded for accurate interpretations (Maxwell, 1992). While informants were engaged in discussions, notes were taken, and member checking was incorporated (Padget, 1998) by returning transcripts to participants for the informants' verification. Data were collected at the beginning of the academic year to guarantee easy access to the participants (Robson, 2002). Hence, to reduce the impact of the researcher's status on participants' responses, the interviewer has done his best to establish a trusting professional relationship with the participants.

Trustworthiness or reliability of methods and research practices in qualitative research is concerned with dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) or the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions (Silverman, 2000). Therefore, the dependability of the research was increased in three ways. Firstly, all participants were provided with the same questions which were carefully worded (Robson, 2002). Secondly, interviews were transcribed as accurately as possible and returned to participants for verification. Finally, according to Radnor (2001), all procedures of the research including transcripts, drafts, and final reviews of data were documented, according to which the study can be replicated or reconstructed.

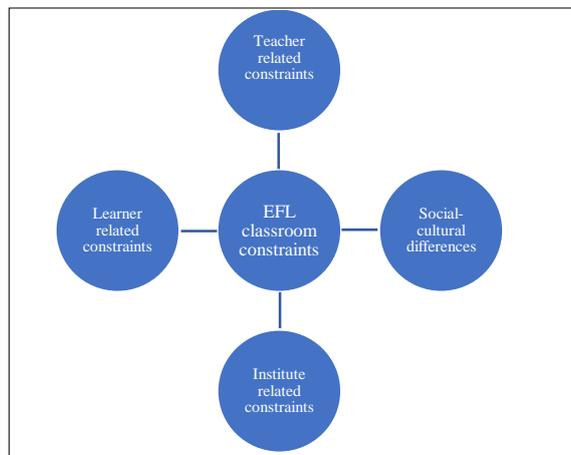
## **4. Results**

The interviewees' responses were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Four types of constraints that influence classroom management practice were extracted as shown in Figure 1 below. Each type of constraint is

explained and exemplified by direct quotations from the interviewees in the following sections.

**Figure 1**

*EFL Classroom Constraints that Influence Classroom Management*



**4.1. School/Institute-Related Constraints**

This category consists of eight Subthemes which are presented in the following table.

**Table 2**

*School/Institute Related CM Constraints*

<i>Subtheme</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
Institute policies	20	100%
Classroom size	19	95%
Classroom time	18	90%
Syllabus prescribed by the school	16	80%
Evaluation method	13	65%
Teacher-parents' correspondences	12	60%
School/Institute expectations	14	70%
Educational facilities	10	50%

The first extracted classroom management constraint as reported by almost all participants (n=20, F=100%) was coded as school/institute policy. The interviewees argued that top-down policies imposed on teachers by schools and institutes make interference with teachers' performances in the classroom. That is, they have to abide by the policies handed down to the teachers by school authorities. The following quotation exemplifies the theme.

*T1: "we as teachers have no authority to practice what is in our minds because school regulations are obstacles. For instance, I know playing games in the classroom will expedite learning process and engages learners in learning activities but school/institute managers restrict our activities."*

The second extracted theme of the constraint was coded as classroom size. The majority of the participants (n=19, F=95%) argued that in some classes more than 25 students are seated and sometimes there are not enough seats for all the students. Teachers on such occasions need to spend some time on seating arrangement and accommodating all the students in the classroom. Therefore, they might be distracted and feel incapable of solving the problems caused by a huge number of students in the classroom. As an example, one of the teachers stated:

*T2: "one of my classes was very packed so I tried to manage my class but really it was a pain in the neck and most students were nagging and making noise. But when we took the case to the principal, he just held out on me."*

The third extracted theme was coded as classroom time. Most of the teachers (n=18, F=90%) argued that time constraint annoys them and usually they have to rush to finish the lessons on time and when the number of the students are too many, it would be a difficult task to answer all the raised questions which in turn causes a distraction for the class. Below, one of the teachers' statement is mentioned:

T3: *“one problem I have with some institutes I work for is the time allocation they assign for advanced courses such as IELTS, TOEFL, etc. However, they just care about their pockets. They never think that how I can handle all students’ problems in time and when I take the case to the supervisor, he never supports the teachers and encourages us to wrap things up.”*

The fourth extracted theme was coded as *Syllabus prescribed by the institute*. Another disturbing factor for the teachers is the fact that they have to follow the exact syllabus prescribed by the institute managers/supervisors ( $n=16$ ,  $F=80\%$ ). Teachers’ hands are tied and it closes doors for creativity from teachers’ sides. One of the teachers’ statements below highlights the extracted theme:

T4: *“Once I complained about the syllabus preassigned by the institute to the supervisor, he just asked me to follow the rules of the institute. Also, most of my colleagues were dissatisfied with the tests designed by the institutes but they were mostly irresponsive.”*

The fifth extracted theme was coded as an evaluation method. Some of the teachers were upset about the ways institutes evaluate their students ( $n=13$ ,  $F=65\%$ ). Everything is decided in advance and teachers have no say in evaluating their pupils. In addition, all the evaluation tools are bound to some tests which were not acceptable by a great number of teachers. Examples of two teachers’ statements are mentioned below:

T5: *“once one of my good students could not take the test due to some personal problems and I was happy with his performance in the classroom. But the supervisor did not accept his excuses for his absence and I couldn’t help him either. This was disappointing I believe.”*

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*T6: "I was not happy with the evaluation chart the institute assigned for us. Therefore, I confronted the supervisor to discuss my ideas but he was not responsive, even though it was the problem of most of my colleagues."*

The sixth extracted theme was coded as Teacher-Parents correspondences. Some of the teachers were not comfortable with their ways of communicating with students' parents (n=12, F=60%). According to the institute's rules and regulations, no teachers were supposed to have any direct communications with their pupils or their parents. One statement is mentioned below as an instance:

*T5: "one rule which institute pushes is for the teachers not to exchange any phone numbers directly with kids' parents, but parents repeatedly ask us for our numbers. This is a problem for almost all my colleagues."*

The seventh extracted theme coded was school/institute expectations. A great number of teachers were complaining about the expectations which institutes had from them (n=14, F=70%). Schools/institutes expect teachers to strictly follow the regulations, to be passionate with the students, to be on time, and not to complain about the teaching time, classroom size, etc. and to teach all courses assigned to them. The following example exemplifies the theme:

*T5: "we are under a lot of pressure to meet the assigned tasks by the principals. Owing to work overload and time constraints we think we are on the verge of burnout."*

The eighth extracted theme was coded as Educational facilities. Although these days private centers have much better facilities compared to the past, still there are some shortcomings which some teachers were not happy about (n=10, F=50%). That is, schools/institutes do not do their best to provide the required materials and facilities for the teachers and to put an appropriate number of students in each class. One of the interviewees stated:

T4: *“Sometimes I think classes are like cash machines for institutes since they don’t care what the capacity of the classes are but to earn their money at the end of the term. So, a large number of students are placed in small classes.”*

#### **4.2. Learner-related Constraints**

The next main constraint was thematically coded as a learner-related constraint which includes psychological and behavioral challenges.

**Table 3**

*Learner-related CM constraints*

<b>Subtheme</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Unpunctuality	16	80%
Unwillingness	15	75%
Demotivation	15	75%
Noise	14	70%
Use of mobile device	13	65%
Use of L1	14	70%
Stress & anxiety	14	70%
Too much closeness	12	60%

The first frequently reported constraint as reported by the majority of the teachers is students’ unpunctuality (n=16, F=80%). Participants stated that some of the students don’t arrive on time. That is, they interrupt teachers by their late arrivals. One of the participants argued:

T7: *“... while I am teaching students, suddenly someone knocks on the door and asks for attending the class and this happens repeatedly which distracts me and students and sometimes I lose classroom control.”*

The second reported constraint was coded as Learners’ unwillingness to participate in classroom activities. Teachers were complaining reiteratively about students’ indifference and reluctance in participation in the classroom

activities and their lack of interest to speak and engage (n=15, F=75%). An example was mentioned by one of the teachers which are as follows:

T8: *"...what drives me crazy sometimes is to see some students' lack of participation and their constant indifference to get engaged in the pair-work and group work which are assigned and it is like they are waiting for the class to finish."*

The third theme which drew the attention of the researchers was students' demotivation. Some teachers complain that sometimes it is impossible to motivate certain students and it is as if they do not care at all about learning English (n=15, F=75%). An example is pointed out below:

T3: *"...a problem I face in some of my classes is to motivate my students. However, sometimes it seems next to impossible. When I face them, I get that they are here by the force of the family and just to keep up with the Jones."*

The fourth extracted theme from the teachers' interviews was coded as Noise. That is, some students are noisy and naughty which distracts other peers and the teacher will lose control over the class and the lessons (n=14, F=70%). Below is one quotation from one teacher:

T5: *"...while teaching, sometimes I notice some noisy students talk with each other and make fun of others and it is very demanding to teach and at the same time control them. Therefore, if you decide to punish them, there are lots of factors to think of which keep you from taking any steps which might have consequences for me as well."*

The fifth item coded was the learner's use of the mobile device in the classroom. As per the rules of the institutes, students are not allowed to use or even carry mobile devices in the classroom, however, mostly they are ignorant of this rule and do not listen to their teachers (n=13, F=65%). The following example is stated by one teacher:

T8: *“when I am teaching, I see that some students secretly carry mobile and use certain applications and the rest will be distracted and I cannot control my class. One cannot find how they bring the mobile to the classroom and how they use them.”*

The sixth coded theme was the use of L1 in the classroom. As per the rules of the institutes, neither teachers nor the students are allowed to speak L1 in the classroom which causes a great number of challenges for the teachers (n=14, F=70%). One of the teachers' statement is mentioned below:

T9: *“... Although it is recommended by the school and the teachers, students turn to their mother tongue and they don't take the rules seriously. Often, they make fun of students who use L2 mostly in the class.”*

The seventh extracted theme coded was learners' stress and anxiety in the classroom (n=14, F=70%). Below, one example is stated by one of the teachers:

T8: *“Once when I was teaching, I noticed one of my female students got a panic attack and was overstressed. When I asked her friends, they said it was not her first time and she is so stressed in the classes.”*

The eighth extracted theme quoted by the interviewee was students' friendship with each other. Often, when some students know each other for a long time, they tend to make noise in the class and cause chaos in teachers' work (n=12, 60%). Below is an example explained by an instructor:

T6: *“after a few sessions I came to know, one of my classes was almost out of control and the class seemed to be chaotic. When I examined all factors very closely, I noticed some of the students knew one another for years so I changed their places and finally order came back to my class.”*

### 4.3. Teacher-related Constraints

The result of the study showed that other sources of constraints were related to teachers. This theme consists of three subthemes: behavioral, psychological (job satisfaction, emotion regulation, self-efficacy, Autonomy, self-regulation), and pedagogical (teachers' teaching literacy, assessment literacy, classroom management literacy, material development literacy, educational technology literacy).

**Table 4**

*Teacher related CM constraints*

Subtheme	Categories	N	Frequency
Behavioral		17	85%
Psychological	Job satisfaction	14	70%
	Emotion regulation	13	65%
	Self-efficacy	13	65%
	Self-confidence	13	65%
	Autonomy	13	65%
Pedagogical	Self-regulation	12	60%
	Teaching literacy	17	85%
	Assessment literacy	10	50%
	CM Literacy	15	75%
	Material Development literacy	14	70%
	Educational technology literacy	10	50%

The first code extracted was the behavioral constraint which teachers are challenged within the classroom. That is, instructors are unable to maintain an interpersonal relationship with their students and also with their colleagues which affects teachers' work in the classroom (n=17, F=85%). One example is exemplified below:

T10: *“sometimes I feel I am not made for this job. I don’t understand my students and even cannot communicate with them appropriately. Unluckily, it is not just about my students, I have trouble relating to my colleagues.”*

The second extracted theme was psychological constraints which in turn encompasses five categories:

**1. Job satisfaction:**

Some teachers are dissatisfied with their job due to some reasons such as work overload, underpayment, job insecurity, etc. (n= 14, F=70%). In the following, there is one sample quotation from a teacher:

T11: *“when I compare myself with my friends and see their living conditions, I feel bad for myself and always ask myself why I picked teaching as a career. I try very hard and work a lot but gain nothing.”*

**2. Emotion regulation:**

Teachers’ inability to regulate their emotions was one fact extracted from their interviews (n=13, F=65%). Sometimes, teachers are unable to manage their overwhelmingness. An instance of overwhelmingness stated by a teacher is in the below:

T12: *“every now and then, I feel I cannot take it anymore. Due to work and time pressure, I cannot manage my time, and it feels like I want to escape.”*

**3. Self-efficacy:**

Another challenging factor that teachers were complaining about was their low level of efficacy which affected their work in the class (n=13, F=65%). Below, there are two examples stated by two teachers:

T10: *“I thought to myself I might be depressed or not enough motivated to teach. I cannot encourage my students to try harder.”*

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T12: *“when I see the results of my students’ exams at the end of the term, I blame myself. I feel they don’t care about the results. Maybe I should have tried harder to increase their motivation...”*

#### **4. Autonomy**

One extracted theme from the teachers was their dependency on the school/institute which keep them from performing their preferred classroom management techniques. Therefore, they feel they do not have enough authority in what they do in and out of the classroom (n=13, F=65%). One instance is exemplified in the below:

T13: *“whenever I want to make a decision on my own and do some tasks in the class, I feel I should first check with the principals or supervisors even if I don’t agree with them. However, we have to follow the rules and regulations of the school/institute.”*

#### **5. Self-regulation:**

Some teachers could not regulate their professional behaviors in the classroom which caused them a great number of challenges in their dealing with effective CM principles and even disrupted their relationships with their students (n=12, F=60%). An example is mentioned below:

T13: *“I believe I am not capable of managing my class and cannot lead students’ relationships in the classroom. Even, sometimes I forget the basics of my expertise and I feel I am unable to transfer the message to my pupils.”*

#### **6. Self-confidence:**

In the process of interviews, some teachers were found to lack enough confidence to perform their best in their classes (n=13, F=65%). An instance exemplified below:

T10: *“when I have an observation from my classes, even my students understand I am stressed. I sometimes forget my English and my voice shakes and I am short of breath.”*

The third teacher-related extracted theme was the pedagogical constraints. This subtheme consists of five categories which are as follows:

### **1. Teaching literacy:**

Teachers were concerned about the knowledge of theories and methodologies and their overall skills to build pupil’s comprehension, writing skills, and communication skills (n=17, F=85%). One comment of an interviewee is as follows:

T14: *“although we went through a certain training course, I feel sometimes I get stuck in teaching some skills and components. Even sometimes I get desperate.”*

### **2. Assessment literacy:**

Teachers’ knowledge of how to assess their students was one of the concerns teachers had during the interviews which for some of them was a demanding task (n=10, F=50%). This was another code, elicited from interviewees. An example mentioned below:

T16: *“sometimes I don’t know what learners know and what they have gained in the classrooms to assess their work properly. Even designing test items and assigning scoring rubrics for students are demanding. I try to get help from some more experienced teachers but it is not always possible.”*

### **3. CM literacy:**

Teachers’ knowledge of how to manage classes, students’ emotional, academic, and moral growth were frequent concerns interviewees had (n=15, F75%). For instance, two statements of the teachers are mentioned below:

T 14: *“dealing with students who make noise in the class and students with emotional problems troubles me all the time. Sometimes, to make rapport among students and help them communicate easier, I change the seat arrangements which is not bad after all.”*

T 17: *“once I remember one of my students felt ignored by me because I might not have had enough eye-contact with him which was not on purpose. Soon I got the message and talked with him and clarified the misunderstandings.”*

#### **4. Material Development literacy:**

Another point which teachers were complaining about was lacking the knowledge of how to develop materials for their classes in case they need to (n=14, F=70%). This was one of the biggest challenges, teachers had even the experienced ones. One instance is explained as below:

T 17: *“although at institutes, we have the syllabus and everything seems to be preplanned but sometimes we need to improvise and add or omit some parts which are troublesome.”*

#### **5. Educational technology literacy:**

Some teachers were complaining about their limited knowledge of using technology in the classroom and the weakness they felt when compare themselves with their students' technology literacy (n=10, F=50%). An example elicited from one teacher is in the below:

T 18: *“when it comes to using technology in the classroom, I am a mess. However, I am adapting myself to the situation. Sometimes, when something goes wrong in the class as an example equipment does not work, I get stressed and seek help from my students. As a result, a lot of time is wasted and I feel a bit ashamed when I see my students are much better than me.”*

### 4.3. *Social-Cultural Differences Related Constraints*

Another extracted theme was coded as social and cultural differences which in turn is twofold: students' different backgrounds and parents' interferences

**Table 5**

*Social-Cultural Differences Constraints*

Theme		N	Frequency
Social-cultural differences	Students' different backgrounds	13	65%
	Parents' interferences	10	50%

The first extracted theme was students' different backgrounds. That is, Teachers were complaining about their lack of knowledge about their students' backgrounds and social status which would surprise them as they move along (n=13, F=65%). One quotation is brought here as an example:

T 19: *“once I was teaching the topic of “traveling abroad” and some students shared their experiences of their trips to various countries and as further, we went on, I noticed some students were resistant and were avoiding the discussion. So, I came to know some of them didn't even travel abroad at all. Or it happened when some students were talking about their shopping, the rest were challenging them and addressed them as “moneybags”, etc. “*

Moreover, another extracted theme that was troubling some teachers was parents' interferences with teachers' work in the classroom (n=10, F=50%). For instance, one statement of a teacher is mentioned below:

T 20: *“one family who used to live in Canada and returned to Iran wanted their kid to study in our institute, but the parents were suspicious about my abilities as an EFL teacher. The class I was teaching was being monitored by CCTV, so they spent hours supervising my instruction and it took sessions to earn their trust.”*

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## 5. Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to find the perceptions of EFL teachers about the classroom management constraints influencing their classroom management practice. The interviews with the participants were content analyzed and the main constraints were categorized thematically as the school/institute related constraints, learner-related constraints, teacher-related constraints, and social-cultural differences

Concerning the first constraint, it could be argued that this finding is echoing the suggestions made by some of the researchers in the field. The first sub-category of the institute-related constraints was an institute policy. This finding is in line with Salkovsky et al. (2015) who argue that if the policy-makers and administrators at the school/institute level do not support the teachers, they will leave the profession, and soon they will face burnout.

The second sub-category was classroom size which is in line with the findings of Khan and Iqbal's (2012) study on overcrowded classrooms and their effect on teachers' work. They concluded that it was impossible to teach effectively in crowded classes and they would encounter instructional, discipline, physical, and evaluation constraints. In addition, the third subcategory was classroom time. Similarly, Teyfur and Celikten (2008) emphasized that when there are no rules in the classroom, it affects the learning environment and the teachers cannot manage their time to finish their lessons in the classroom.

Additionally, two other subcategories of institute-related constraint mentioned by teachers have prescribed syllabus and evaluation methods which reflect Datnow's (2000) statement on teachers' roles in the educational hierarchy who are subordinates and are performing tasks assigned by more learned professionals. Besides, teachers have to abide by the curricular policy; otherwise, they will be regarded as defiant, selfish, and full of fears and worries (Berends,

2000). Another subcategory was coded as institute expectations. Along similar lines, Salkovsky et al. (2015) as well as Dick and Wagner (2001) found out personal pressures such as overload as one source of inhibiting factors keeping teachers from performing their preferred CM and would cause stress for teachers. Furthermore, educational facilities were also among the concerns of the teachers at institutes. This finding is also consistent with Ayeni (2017) suggesting that the major constraints faced by teachers were excessive workload, ill-equipped laboratory, ill-equipped library, shortage of instructional materials, lack of students' learning materials, and congested class size.

The second extracted type of constraint included learner-related constraints which are somehow supported by some researchers of the fields. The first subcategory of learner-related constraint was time management which was also one of the problems teachers were encountering in the classroom which was also reported by Sultana and Rashid (2013) who stated that that one of the problems teachers mostly complain about was students' time management which had a negative effect on pupils' academic achievement. Another subcategory of learner-related constraint is learners' unwillingness to participate in the classroom activities which is in line with a study by Abdullah et al. (2012) on students' participation in the classroom and how to encourage them to be more active. They found out classroom size, students' and teachers' personalities, and peer perception impacted pupils to speak up and communicate more efficiently. Malmir and Bagheris' (2019) study also revealed some of these aforementioned classroom constraints as mentioned by ESP teachers and students.

Learners' demotivation was the third learner-related constraint found in this study. Likewise, the findings of this study are similar to those of Aydin (2001) suggesting that students' lack of interest to study in general is rooted in their demotivation. The other learner-related constraint was students' noise in the

classroom. This finding confirms the findings of Gilavand and Jamshidnezhad (2015) who found out the noise in educational institutions negatively affect the learning as well as academic achievement of elementary school students in Ahvaz. Using mobile devices was another learner-related constraint that was found to be an impeding factor in the classroom.

However, Warschauer (2007) emphasized the facilitative potential of mobile technologies which impact subject content learning along with high-level skills such as communication, problem-solving, creativity. Besides that, some other scholars such as Warschauer et al. (2014) found mixed results. Moreover, stress and anxiety as other extracted subcategory of learner related constraints affect CM which is similar to the released report of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stating students' academic performance on subjects such as science, math, and reading can be influenced by anxiety about schoolwork (2015). Also, according to the World Health Organization (WHO) students will participate in education fully when they are healthy and secure emotionally (1996).

In addition, the use of L1 was another constraint. Debreli (2019) concluded the use of L1 as one of the important CM challenges. Despite its usefulness, teachers are mostly ashamed to permit the use of L1 in the class (Debreli, 2016). This emphasis on using L2 in the class as much as possible at the cost of their L1 comes from ACTFL's (the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Guidelines (2010). However, to manage the classroom efficiently teachers sometimes turn to learners' L1, not to mention that they are still concerned about its usefulness (Littlewood & Yu, 2009). Furthermore, students' closeness was one extracted subtheme that distracted students and teachers. This finding echoes Trussell (2008) stating when teachers decide where

to place students, it will stimulate their academic and social development and improves the teacher-learner relationship reduces distractions and aggression.

In addition, other studies highlighted factors such as students' lack of interest, laziness, noise, naughtiness, hyper activeness, inattention, talking without permission, etc. as distractors in the classroom which impede effective learning and CM (Sasidher et al., 2012; Merç, & Subaşı, 2015).

The third EFL CM constraint was coded as teacher-related consisting of three subthemes. The first subcategory is behavioral. According to Houghton et al. (1990) when teachers praise students at the individual levels, students' behavioral and educational performance will change positively. Besides, maintaining a positive relationship between teacher and students and improving improper behaviors will make students more attentive to classroom activities (Crowley, 1993).

Relatedly, the second sub-category is categorized as psychological which in turn falls into six parts. According to Locke (1969), job satisfaction refers to the joy one gets from class activities which in turn is a greater predictor of higher job performance level (Judge et al., 2001). On the other hand, low job satisfaction causes illness, absenteeism, and low morale which leads teachers to leave their professions (Ingersoll, 2001). The third sub-category of teacher-related constraint was Emotion regulation which is used to describe a person's ability to effectively manage and respond to an emotional experience. That is teachers' confidence in communicating their positive emotions and decreasing their negative ones (Bandura et al., 2003). Turner et al. (2003), likewise, found out that experienced teachers mostly do their best to up-regulate their positive emotions and down-regulate the negativities in the classroom which are features of conducting a productive learning environment. However, teachers mostly are

concerned about controlling their negative emotions and the level of confidence is for the positive ones.

Another challenging factor that affects teachers' work in the class is their low level of efficacy. Henson (2001) referred to teacher efficacy as a factor related to positive teaching conduct and students' achievement compared to teachers' low level of self-efficacy. Similarly, to Anthony and Kritsonis (2007), classrooms led by more efficacious teachers are more organized, better planned, student-centered, and humanistic. Besides, teachers respect students' ideas. By contrast, teachers with low classroom management skills tend to have high rates of aggression (Shernoff & Kratochwill, 2007). Moreover, Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) related classroom management dissatisfaction to a low sense of efficacy generating stress for the teachers which in turn brings about teacher burnout (Kokkinos, 2007). Professional autonomy was the fifth extracted subtheme. Huang (2005) defined teacher autonomy as their ability to control their own teaching and learning. By the same token, Wermke et al. (2018) compared Swedish and German teachers in terms of decision-making and control in the classroom. German teachers are more in control in different areas of their work, as opposed to Swedish teachers who are more concerned about control and are restricted by school policies.

According to Zimmerman (2000), self-regulation refers to the state where learners are motivationally, metacognitively, and behaviorally involved in their learning process. Teachers' self-regulation is connected to the effective CM, discipline, and student relationships and it will maintain their professional performance. This one was one coded theme by the interviewees.

Randi (2004) contended that teachers who are regarded as highly self-regulated are efficient. They will take the proper actions to lead effective teaching and learning. Similarly, as Tschannen-Moran, and Woolfolk Hoy

(2001) believe teachers' self-confidence in their ability to perform teaching tasks successfully. Self-confidence was the eighth extracted subtheme of teacher-related constraint. Also, they highlighted confident teachers' capabilities to experiment with new methodologies in the classrooms and to be flexible enough to accept new ideas.

The third subtheme of teacher-related constraint was coded as pedagogical which is subcategorized into five sections. To promote classroom management knowledge, teachers have to follow professional development programs combined with early college coursework (Pagano & Langley, 2011). Studies in several countries revealed that teachers are not mostly learned enough to develop and administer the results of various types of assessments (Bol et al., 1998; Wiggins, 1989).

As pointed out by Kayikci (2009), Teachers' CM skills could impact students' behavior in the classroom. In addition, in order to lessen students' challenges in the classroom, teachers have to communicate with their students to come to know about their characteristics. Also, they need to set clear rules and arrange the classroom environment properly to motivate learners. According to Cleaver (2014), when teachers adopt novel classroom technologies, they are encountered with a challenge called "double innovation." That is, firstly, instructors have to learn the technology and then apply it in their classroom.

The fourth found EFL CM constraint was social-cultural differences which is twofold. Howe (2005) stated that both parents and teachers have learners' interests in their hearts, however, how they can be of help might be different. Nevertheless, some scholars contended that parents' involvement even the educated ones might not bear fruitful all the time (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Feldman, 2003). Furthermore, Malik et al. (2011) expressed that teachers need to acquire some skills to deal with cultural diversity backgrounds. In so doing,

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schools and institutes have to implement special policies for all classrooms to follow.

## 6. Conclusion

In line with the findings, it can be concluded that teachers need to be aware of the main effective CM constraints so that they can use effective coping strategies to avoid the negative consequences associated with CM constraints. It can also be concluded that teacher trainers need to incorporate workshops on classroom management in their in-service and pre-service teacher training courses to make the student teachers and teachers well aware of the most effective CM strategies and help them how to avoid the consequences resulted from inappropriate CM strategies. As this study failed to address the interplay between teachers' gender, experience, and teaching certifications and their perceptions of CM constraints, the other researchers are suggested to carry out a larger-scale study to address the factors and variables which might somehow affect the teachers' perceptions about CM constraints.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

1. Have you ever encountered problems in the classrooms which disrupted your class order?
2. How do students challenge their teachers? How about your students?
3. Does students' distrust on their teachers cause challenges for the teachers?
4. Do students' expectations from their teachers and lack of their materialization cause challenges in the classroom?
5. Do textbooks and materials used in the classroom cause dissatisfaction from students' side and lead to challenges?
6. Does dissatisfaction from educational system affect students' proficiency who are better than their peers in terms of their language skills?
7. Do institute rules and arrangements such as books, supervisor's expectations, order, etc. affect what you have in your mind?
8. Does assigned syllabus cause challenge?
9. Are parents' expectations influential in teachers' classroom management and what are the potential challenges?
10. Does teachers and students' motivations affect what teachers have in their minds to implement in their classes?
11. Does the physical condition of the institute such as facilities, size, etc. affect teachers' work in the class?
12. Is supervisor's role supportive or unsupportive? If the supervisor supports you, will you be able to practice what you have in mind in the classroom?
13. Does the support or lack of support of the colleagues affect your performance in the classroom?
14. Is there any contradiction between your philosophy of teaching and the ruling educational philosophy in institutes? If so, what are the consequences?

15. Are parents' feedbacks and comments about their students' progress important for you?  
Do they change your teaching methods?
16. Has stress whether physical or mental or even boredom affected you?
17. Does the time of the class affect the way you teach or the methods you choose to teach?
18. How do you see the role of experience in the class? Does it affect your teaching method?  
has it ever happened the institute disagree with your teaching method or vice-a-versa (e.g. the materials used in classroom, etc.)?
19. What happens if you use a material which is not favored by the students and the case is taken to the supervisor and they vote in favor of the students? How upsetting will it be to you?
20. Does the content and the specific topics discussed in the classroom affect classroom management? Is it deterrent?
21. Do students' individual differences cause any constraints for the teachers?