

## The Relationship between Iraqi EFL Teachers' Professional development and Their Classroom Management

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### ABSTRACT:

The present study investigated the relationship between Iraqi EFL teachers' professional development (PD) and their classroom management techniques. The former is a general term that means developing yourself professionally and the latter relates to improving your classroom management abilities by learning new strategies and techniques, motivating students, and having all students practicing by asking questions. The study included participation of 275 EFL teachers of both sexes and different ages. They were chosen according to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula, with a confidence level of 95%. from different language schools. As instruments. the Classroom Management Techniques questionnaire (Diaz, Gonzalez, Ramirez, & Munoz-Parra, 2018) and Teachers' Professional Development scale (Evers, Kreijns, & Van der Heijden, 2016) were used to collect the required data. The findings made it clear that Classroom management correlated positively and significantly with Professional Development ( $r=.42, p<.05$ ). The results of the complementary interview phase made it clear that teachers strongly agreed with need for PD programs and thought the higher the level of the teacher's professional activity, the higher the scientific level of the students can be expected

**Keywords:** classroom management, EFL teachers, gender, professional development, strategies, techniques

### Introduction

In the present ever changing moments in the status of education, the teacher's skills and performance within the classroom are developing with the advent of the various technologies. Most officials, educators, teachers and administrators agree that teaching the fundamentals of knowledge is one of the solutions that may be effective in confronting the activities of the modern era, as it includes a comprehensive and profound change in students' behavior. The process of transferring ideas to the minds of students imposes teachers to transcend traditional methods of teaching and follow modern methods in the age of technology, since education has become increasingly important for individuals and societal success.

Although some researchers see the concept of teachers' professional development as a not clearly defined term, Evans (2002) defined teacher professional development as "the process by which teachers, alone and with others, review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching" (Evans, 2002, p. 79). "Through professional

development, teachers acquire and develop knowledge, skills, planning, and practice with children, young people, and colleagues. This process is the keystone of the educational development to meet the expectations of the society" (Borko, 2004; Dede, Whitehouse, Breit & McCloskey, 2009; Desimone, Smith & Ueno, 2006).

As mentioned above, teacher professional development is a noteworthy agenda in the field of educational psychology and research. Accordingly certain scholars paid more attention to the value of professional-development advantages like education authorities, schools, teacher unions, etc., and teachers' perceptions on professional development (Torff, Sessions & Byrness, 2005).

Stress management and/or classroom management, which Iwanicki, (1983, p. 27) considers as "a reality of teaching", are an unavoidable parts of teaching pedagogy because the teaching profession is fraught with stressors. These interactions may lead to some level of stress and exhaustion that may affect teachers' classroom management. While understanding of the behavior of individuals is of utmost importance, it is also necessary to comprehend both teacher and student behavior, as well as the factors that influence their actions, thoughts and behaviors. Students are likely to enjoy school far more than they currently do. However, they may not enjoy all of the learning activities and tasks assigned to them. Yet they may still be influenced by the teacher's behavior. Important studies by behavioral scientists have provided some practical insights into why many students dislike school and how teachers' behavior can affect students' attitudes toward school and learning in recent years. As one of the most delicate arts and crafts, teachers must engage in a wide range of human interactions in order to effectively carry out organized learning activities.

The teacher as a classroom manager should, among other things, provide context for the growth of social and psychological characteristics of students. They are also responsible for students' education and academic progress. This can be done by, for example, learning students' names, using eye-contact, and learning about students' types of personalities (Diaz et al., 2018). Classroom management aims to improve the teaching and learning process for both teachers and students benefit from well-managed classrooms. In well-managed classrooms, due to creation of an inspiring condition, teachers can work easily, lessons are learnt smoothly, and students effectively understand and grasp the learning goals. Putting in the nut shell, The goal of professional development is to change our professional thinking, knowing, feeling, and doing.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As an attractive and warmly received topic in the teaching profession's educational research literature, classroom management / leadership is one of the most important features of teaching. When proper class management is used, teaching can be more effective. sometimes it makes no difference how good the teacher is; success is impossible unless the learning environment is well directed and class is properly managed. Accordingly, "class management is often regarded as the fundamental

ingredient in ensuring the success of teaching" (Yilmaz, 2009; Halstead & Jiamei, 2009). In this relation, in the current study, it is hypothesized that there could be a link between teachers' professional development (PD) and classroom management. Accordingly, the present study aims to investigate the significant inter-correlation between the components of PD and classroom management techniques in the context of EFL teacher education. It is considered beneficial for both teachers and students. Needless to say, that it is advantageous to school management.

Although numerous studies have been conducted on the difficulty of teaching English in both the Arab world and the rest of the world, with varying perspectives, teaching English in Arab countries, particularly Iraq, experiences difficulties that can hinder teaching practitioners from duly carrying out their duties. It is true that Iraqi teachers face challenges similar to those faced by teachers in other Arab and non-Arab countries, yet some of these challenges can be considered as unique and deserve special attention for research.

### **Review of Literature**

The word "profession" originated from the Latin word "profiteri," meaning "to state publicly," since a profession is an occupation in which one publicly declares a skill. Professional development has a confidential role in different aspects of education, including teacher training, advanced professional learning, and generally formal education. Thus, the term "professional development" refers to the increase in the professional knowledge, competence, and effective performance of teachers and educators (Imants & Vanderwal, 2020). It is also defined as a continuous process of group and individual training that empowers teachers individually, in groups, and even in professional associations to make complex decisions, identify and solve problems, and communicate with students (Bett & Makewa, 2020).

Teacher development is so important which can guarantee educational improvement and success. Khan & Begum, (2012) considered teachers' Professional development as a source for upgrading their knowledge and skills in various sectors which can create a foundation for behavioral change in teachers and help them to attain the desired level of professional development. Teachers' performance will increase if opportunities for learning, information, and skills are provided in schools and classes.

Teacher's professional development is important because it enhances the quality of teachers' knowledge and skills and also it has a direct impact on students' learning quality. Though apparently the teachers are the recipients during this process, but the final beneficiaries are the education in general and students in particular. The need for professional development is not limited to teachers, this professional improvement not only involves teachers but also various professionals, such as lawyers, engineers, and healthcare professionals. Accordingly, in the context of teacher development, the goal of professional development is to empower teachers' adaptations, knowledge, and skills in order to improve their educational

skills. Furthermore, professional development has a central role in increasing students' learning achievements

Teachers should be given more time and attention to engage students in learning tasks, in addition to in-class activities. The teacher should be made aware of his significant role as a professional and citizen in the community, as an agent of change and development, and should be given the opportunity to do so. Stated otherwise, the teacher is the director of the learning setting, the originator, the designer of the curriculum, and the ongoing and purposeful attempt to change his pupils' lives.

With regard to the abovementioned points, professional development can be considered as nonstop learning opportunities that make enhancements to an individual's skills, knowledge, and attitudes to grow as a professional in a job. In today's ever-changing educational settings, there is a need for professionals to be up-to-date and fresh in their learning of new knowledge and skills and be equipped to perform well in the unpredicted educational scenes. Hence, professional development, which includes learning opportunities (project sessions, lesson plan sessions, conferences, seminars, webinars, and workshops), is key in this regard for optimizing employees' personal development and job growth and promotion.

Teachers' ability to direct the class, organize the teaching process and manage the students' behavior is highly important in achieving positive educational outcomes. To Aliakbari and Bozorgmanesh (2015) Classroom management “entails the activities to organize and direct classes to achieve specific goals” (p 2). According to Oliver and Reschly (2007), Classroom management strategies are the techniques and initiations used by teachers to create and maintain an environment in the classroom that permits pupils to learn as much as possible.

In a study, Nasser and Shabti (2010) examined the relationships between professional development programs (PD), background characteristics, Patterns of motivation, program characteristics, and satisfaction among educators. Data collection was done by using a questionnaire. from 499 educators in 38 PD programs the configuration of the study was carried out at a center for educational personnel development. Six of these programs were created for preschool teachers, 19 for elementary school teachers, eight for high school teachers, and five for all teachers. Thirty-one of the programs were designed for Hebrew speakers, while seven were designed for Arabic speakers. In terms of PD program topics, 20 were dedicated to subject matter, nine to personnel with non-teaching responsibilities, and nine to curriculum and personal enrichment. The findings revealed that there were differences in satisfaction among participants who displayed different patterns of motivation and had different perceptions of the PD program's contribution.

Aliakbari & Darabi, (2013). Conducted research on the relationship between efficacy of classroom management and teachers' personality. their findings revealed significant relationship between teachers' education level and classroom management efficacy. The results of the study further

support the need to provide classroom teachers with leadership training in addition to their professional knowledge. In another study with relatively similar focus, Aliakbari and Bozorgmanesh (2015) devoted attention to Assertive classroom management strategies and students' performance. Pearson correlation was applied between students' achievement and each part of teacher management strategies the results indicated for a positive relationship between teachers' assertive classroom management and students' performance.

### **Methodology**

The goal of this study, as indicated earlier, was to investigate the relationship between Iraqi English language instructors' classroom management and their continued professional development. The study sought answer to this question: "Is there a link between Iraqi EFL teachers' classroom management and their continuous professional development?"

The design of the present study was correlational since Correlational research studies the relationship between or among the variables (Fitzgerald, Rumrill, & Schenker, 2004). In such a quantitative research works, the researcher deals with collecting, editing, and analyzing numbers (Monka, Quist, & Skovse, 2020). The study was further extended with an interview phase to check how strongly the variables are perceived.

### **Participants and Environment**

The study adopted purposive sampling. 275 EFL teachers participated in it. Participants included both genders, different ages, and various educational backgrounds. The sample was drawn from 1000 male and female English teachers who worked in various language schools using purposive sampling based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula at a confidence level of 95%.

To detect a more transparent record of teachers' view of the importance of the variables under study, professional development and classroom management, and their perception of the direction of the relationship, if any, ten teachers were randomly chosen among the participant for an interview.

### **Instrumentations**

Two questionnaires were employed: Classroom Management Techniques and a Professional Development Questionnaire (PD). For the former, a 60-item classroom management questionnaire (Daz, González, Jara-Ramrez, & Muoz-Parra, 2018) is used to assess teachers' classroom management skills. And to measure the latter, a 25-item questionnaire (Evers, Kreijns, & Van der Heijden, 2016) was used to study teachers' professional learning practices and opportunities for professional growth. Furthermore, the reliability of the questionnaires revealed that the adopted questionnaires obtained acceptable Cronbach alpha indexes.

## Procedure

As previously stated, in this study, 275 EFL teachers participated. First, the participants were assured that all information received would be kept private and utilized solely for the purposes of the study. Then, the online questionnaires were sent to the teachers who agreed to participate, aiming to find the relationship between Iraqi EFL teachers' professional development and their classroom management. After gathering the data, the data was summarized in SPSS software for further analysis.

## Results

To determine the normality of the data distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used. This test determines whether the distribution is different from a comparable normal distribution. If the p-value is non-significant ( $p > .05$ ), we can conclude that the distribution of a sample is not significantly different from that of a normal distribution, and thus it is normal. The distribution is not normal if the p-value is significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 1 displays the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results. As can be seen, the sig value for all variables obtained is greater than .05. As a result, we can safely assume that the data is normally distributed across all variables

**Table 1. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnova test**

Variables	df	Sig
Professional Development	275	.074
Classroom Management	275	.114

In Table 2 Professional Development descriptive statistics are presented, including the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Professional Development Scale**

Scales	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Up to date	275	5.00	20.00	17.8727	2.95375
Experimenting	275	5.00	20.00	16.2691	2.33201
Reflecting	275	5.00	20.00	14.7709	2.44245
Collaborating for improving lessons	275	5.00	20.00	17.8836	2.47047
Collaborating for school development	275	5.00	20.00	13.2582	3.29602
CPD Overall	275	25.00	100.00	80.0545	9.60653
<b>Valid N (listwise)</b>				275	

The mean score of teachers' reports in total Professional Development is 80.0545, with a standard deviation of 9.60, as shown in Table 2.

In the third place, Pearson correlation was employed. The results of the correlation between Iraqi EFL teachers' professional development and classroom management are shown in Table 3. Classroom management correlated positively and significantly with Professional Development ( $r = .42$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Table 3. Results of Correlation significant at 0.01 level  
(Pearson Correlation)**

Professional Development	N	Sign 2-tailed .000
t		
Classroom management	275	42**

The results of descriptive statistics illustrated the positive relationship between professional development and classroom management.

Having found such results, the authors decided a new phase of research. To learn about the teachers' view about the finding and their readiness for starting teacher development programs, ten teachers were randomly interviewed. Quite expectedly, they expressed agreement with the need and obvious role of teachers' PD plans, yet they could easily name barriers and obstacles for that. Among the reasons why PD is not seriously considered, the interviewees referred to the evaluation system at work for teachers which, they thought, does not differentiate well from good or the best. They thought the system does not appreciate well performed teachers.

Another important point mentioned in the interviews was the absence of teachers' PD in the education ministry and department. The respondents maintained that they have not been informed about any defined program to be administered nor have they been called for participation in such courses. It seems that such an important factor in education has been left to teachers. Respondents rightly mentioned the need for institutionalized planning and introducing the PD programs. In other words, they considered it as a responsibility which the educational officials have not fulfilled.

### Discussions

In response to the research question, quantitative data revealed a positive relationship between professional development and classroom management. Such a finding, no doubt, has certain contribution to education. It makes every scholar working in the field to consider how to take advantages of that. Kwakman (2003) notes the fundamental professional learning activities such as staying current, experimenting which directly reflect on teachers' practice, and help them appreciate the change or, when necessary, change faster. According to Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006). Collaboration, collegiality, and shared values are important PD cornerstones. In line with their findings, Khan and Begum (2012) viewed teacher professional development as a means of updating teachers' knowledge and skills in a variety of fields, resulting in improved teacher performance. Furthermore, more professional-development opportunities for teachers in classroom management are now available, and there has been debate about the role of practical teaching techniques in teacher education and certification programs, as well as whether such programs overemphasized education

theory at the expense of practical, applied skills that teachers will need in the classroom, such as classroom-management strategies. Educators who understand the importance of negotiating contextual, cultural, and lexical meaning will only accept the teaching of the more formal and non-contextual functional aspects of language to a limited extent because they are abundant in mainstream textbooks in the native language, almost exclusively speaking to native speaker input dialogues. They will explicitly invite students to consider other ways of thinking and reasoning besides their own. Learners will come to see their own point of view as just one of many. They will engage in written conversations or communication while remaining conscious of their role in the interactive setting. They will understand the complexities of creating context, naming topics, and engaging in various types of interaction.

### **Conclusion**

Direct positive correlation was reported for the relationship between teacher professional development and teachers' classroom management. This finding makes further research on the predicting power of one over the other necessary. In other words, further research is needed to check whether one is caused by the other or both are caused by other factors.

As it was also found teachers valued the opportunity and necessity to constantly improve their professional development. Such honest declaration is promising and demands a positive and warm welcome on the official sides.

According to the results of the interview, there was a correspondence between stages of professional and educational development, therefore it is suggested that such finding be attended seriously and the ministry of education design and introduce PD courses for teachers nationwide.

Since classroom management is one of the most demanded skills for teachers which has influential role in the process of teaching and learning, the educational system should consider in-service programs to help teachers remain up to date.

Since the present study was limited to one state, similar research projects are recommended to be undertaken in other provinces and even nationwide to record the Iraqi teacher's community of practice perception of the professional development and classroom management.

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