



Challenges and Strategies in Managing Disruptive Behaviours: Insights from Vietnamese Novice EFL Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Classroom management is crucial in fostering positive interactions and minimising disruptions to support student learning. However, it is common for novice teachers to face significant challenges in managing disruptive behaviours due to limited training and experience, impacting their teaching effectiveness and job satisfaction. In Vietnam, these challenges are heightened by the new competency-based curricula and students' limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, which can reduce learner engagement and increase disruptive behaviours. This study explores the perceptions and strategies of Vietnamese novice EFL teachers in managing disruptive behaviours in secondary school classrooms. Using a qualitative design, data were collected from 14 novice teachers in secondary schools across Vietnam through reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that novice EFL teachers frequently encounter disruptive behaviours, such as lack of concentration, chatting, incomplete homework, and off-task activities, which can hinder their teaching effectiveness. Additionally, the surveyed teachers primarily relied on teacher-centred strategies to maintain control, occasionally adopting student-centred approaches and, in some cases, passive strategies. The findings suggest some implications for enhancing classroom management training to combine theoretical and practical application, while also increasing support from experienced teachers and school administrators. Such support could equip novice teachers with the tools necessary for effective classroom management in EFL settings.

1. INTRODUCTION

Creating a classroom environment that fosters positive interactions, minimizes disruptions, and supports focused learning is essential for effective education (Dewi et al., 2020). To achieve this, teachers are expected to manage students' disruptive behaviours effectively. However, novice teachers, typically defined as those with less than three years of experience (Graham et al., 2020), often find classroom management challenging due to limited training and experience, leaving them vulnerable to the impacts of disruptive behaviours (Dickson et al., 2014). The challenges faced in the initial stages of teaching can undermine their effectiveness and job satisfaction, potentially leading to higher attrition rates within the profession (Whalen et al., 2019).

In Vietnam, novice teachers face additional challenges in managing disruptive behaviours, which are intensified by the demands of implementing the new, competence-based curricula (Hang et al., 2022). Moreover, with limited opportunities to use English outside the classroom, many students perceive the language as unnecessary (Nguyen et

al., 2023). This perception often reduces students' motivation, as they struggle to see the relevance of learning English in their daily lives. Consequently, low engagement fosters disruptive behaviours, with students becoming inattentive, distracted, or disengaged during lessons (Tran, 2021).

Research has illuminated these challenges in Vietnamese educational contexts. Hang et al. (2022) investigated classroom management competence among novice primary and secondary teachers in subjects such as Math, Literature, and History and emphasised their struggles in maintaining conducive classroom environments. Such difficulty is not limited to primary and secondary education but is also prevalent at the higher education level. Specifically, Thuy (2024) explored how novice EFL university teachers in Vietnam regulate their emotions in response to student behaviours, such as discipline issues and lack of engagement. The study revealed significant difficulties in addressing these challenges, which not only undermined teaching effectiveness but also negatively impacted student engagement, highlighting the need for targeted support in teacher training programs. While these studies provide valuable insights into novice teachers' experiences in different contexts, they do not examine the classroom management challenges or strategies used by novice EFL teachers.

Secondary school classrooms, in particular, represent an important and distinct context for research. Students at this level navigate behavioural and developmental changes alongside increasing academic pressures (Pascoe et al., 2020), which may amplify disruptive behaviours (Akman, 2020). For novice EFL teachers, these factors create additional challenges in fostering an effective learning environment (Maharani & Fithriani, 2023).

Building on the insights from previous studies, this study seeks to explore the experience and strategies novice Vietnamese EFL teachers use to manage disruptive behaviours in secondary schools. This research aims to provide insights into how classroom management evolves during the early stages of a teaching career and to offer recommendations for better supporting novice teachers within the Vietnamese educational system. The following research questions are formulated to investigate these aspects:

- (1) How do novice Vietnamese EFL teachers experience and perceive disruptive behaviours in secondary school English classrooms?
- (2) What strategies do novice Vietnamese EFL teachers use to manage disruptive behaviours in their classrooms?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Novice EFL teachers and the teaching practicum in Vietnam

The teaching practicum, as described by Zeichner (1996), is a core component of teacher education programs, allowing students to gain real-world teaching experience under supervision (Al-Jaro et al., 2020). This offers novice teachers the chance to engage in authentic teaching environments, practice various techniques, and develop key assessment skills (García-Noblejas et al., 2023).

In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) oversees teacher training programs, which are typically offered at institutions like Vietnam National University and Saigon University (Nguyen, 2015). The teaching practicum is regarded as a central component of teacher education. It serves as a critical phase for providing the pre-service teachers with the opportunity to put their knowledge of the subject matter and pedagogical content to good use in a classroom setting, thereby enhancing their pedagogical competence. In Vietnam, the teaching practicum is a mandatory part of teacher training programs across all universities and is specifically designed (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Despite its significance, studies have consistently highlighted systemic issues that undermine the effectiveness of the practicum in Vietnam. Several challenges have been identified, including insufficient mentoring (Lap et al., 2022); weak cooperation between universities and schools (Vo et al., 2018); as well as heavy workloads and administrative demands on trainees (Le, 2023). These factors limit the practicum's ability to prepare pre-service teachers effectively. Another key issue is the disproportionate emphasis on theoretical coursework over practical training (Nguyen, 2020; Tran, 2021). This imbalance often results in early-career teachers experiencing 'reality shock' as they transition to real classrooms, where they must adapt their university-taught methods to meet the exam-focused priorities of school environments (Nguyen, 2020). These systemic shortcomings point to a broader need for structural reforms in teacher training programs, particularly in mentorship and curriculum design.

Building on these systemic challenges, Tran et al. (2023) examine the perceptions of Vietnamese EFL pre-service teachers during the practicum, providing a closer look at how these issues affect individual trainees. While the practicum was found to enhance professional values, trainees frequently expressed frustration with managing classroom dynamics that diverged from their expectations and the theoretical models studied in their coursework. Unlike Vo et al. (2018), Nguyen (2020) and Tran (2021), who focus on systemic factors, Tran et al. (2023) demonstrate the emotional and practical struggles trainees face when dealing with unpredictable classroom behaviours and adapting to teaching complexities. These experiences reveal the urgent need for teacher education programs to include practical classroom management training and provide structured, supportive mentorship during the practicum. Such reforms could help bridge the persistent theory-practice gap and better prepare novice teachers for real-world classroom demands.

2.2. Disruptive behaviours

Disruptive behaviours, as defined by Houghton et al. (1988), include actions that interfere with teaching and learning, such as inattentiveness, noise, and disobedience. These behaviours manifest in various forms, including verbal abuse, aggression, noncompliance, and personal attacks on teachers and peers (Majani, 2020). Levin and Nolan (1996) classify such disruptions into four broad categories: verbal interruptions, off-task behaviours, disrespect, and physical movements. Similarly, Dobmeier and Moran (2008) develop a continuum of disruptive behaviours, categorising them into three types. The first type is “inattention,” referring to behaviours that disrupt the learning process due to a lack of focus on activities. The second type, “acting-out,” includes rule-breaking and overtly expressing negative emotions like frustration or anger. Examples include arriving late, taking phone calls, or refusing to participate. The third type is “threatening/harmful/violent” behaviour, which involves actions intended to cause harm to others or damage property, such as swearing or physical aggression. Expanding on these classifications, Ghazi et al. (2013) identify 23 specific types of disruptive behaviours among secondary students in Pakistan, ranging from attempts to gain influence among peers to engaging in physical disturbances. Although these behaviours may initially seem mild, they can significantly disrupt the flow of teaching and learning if not addressed (Majani, 2020).

Research has extensively examined common disruptive behaviours in classrooms. For instance, Wangdi and Namgyel (2022) concluded from their observation data that there are six prevalent types of disruptive behaviours in secondary school settings: talking with peers, laughing or yelling loudly, arriving late to class, changing seats, gazing out the window, and doodling unrelated images. In line with these findings, Sezer (2017) reported that novice teachers frequently encounter disruptive behaviours, including chattering, distraction, mobile phone use, chewing gum, and general classroom disruption. Likewise, Majani (2020) noted that student-teachers in Tanzanian secondary schools often faced issues like verbal interruptions, inattentiveness, and refusal to participate. The consistency across these studies illustrates that even seemingly minor disruptive behaviours, such as chatting or distraction, can significantly interfere with the teaching and learning process if not managed effectively. The impact of such behaviours is substantial, as they consume valuable instructional time and resources, diverting focus away from effective teaching practices (Majani, 2020; Sezer, 2017). Moreover, these disruptions decrease student engagement and achievement, which can have long-term consequences on academic success (Felder & Singh, 2020).

2.3. Classroom management

2.3.1. Definitions of key terms

Classroom management refers to the process with which teachers create and maintain an orderly learning environment (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). In educational contexts, this often includes managing student behaviours, fostering engagement, and optimising instructional time (Reschly et al., 2020).

2.3.2. Significance of classroom management

Minimising disruptive behaviours and fostering a conducive learning environment are central to effective classroom management, particularly in EFL classrooms (Felder & Singh, 2020). A well-structured classroom allows teachers to pre-empt disruptions, such as off-task behaviours or talking out of turn, by establishing clear expectations and consistent routines (Burden, 2020). These proactive strategies create a positive atmosphere where students remain engaged and distractions are significantly reduced. As a result, teachers can prioritise instruction over discipline, improving both teaching efficiency and student participation.

Addressing the diverse learning needs of students is another crucial aspect of classroom management. Unmet needs often lead to frustration, disengagement, and disruptive behaviours. It is emphasised that strong management

practices help teachers develop supportive and adaptable learning environments (Marashi & Assgar, 2019; Ozen & Yildirim, 2020). By tailoring instruction to accommodate varying language proficiency levels, teachers can prevent disengagement and disruptions while fostering an inclusive setting that encourages active participation. In addition, effective management strategies are instrumental in reducing language learning anxiety. Marashi and Assgar (2019) claim that these strategies enhance focus and engagement, contributing to a psychologically safe environment where students feel confident taking risks in their learning.

The influence of classroom management extends to academic achievement, making it a vital component of effective teaching. Research underscores its dual impact on reducing disruptive behaviours and improving learning outcomes. Nisar et al. (2019) state that well-managed classrooms promote student performance by providing a calm and organised atmosphere that enables teachers to focus on instruction. Aligned with these findings, Habibi et al. (2018) note that addressing key factors such as low motivation and unclear rules can reduce behavioural issues, contributing to a more productive learning environment. These studies collectively demonstrate that effective classroom management promotes both engagement and cognitive development, ultimately supporting improved academic outcomes for students.

2.3.3. Classroom management models and approaches

Classroom management models can be broadly categorized into two main approaches: teacher-centred and student-centred. Teacher-centred models focus on teacher authority, aiming to establish and maintain control over student behaviour by creating a structured environment with clear rules and guidelines (Markina & García, 2022). In contrast, student-centred models shift the responsibility to the students, encouraging them to take ownership of their actions and develop self-regulation skills, fostering autonomy in managing their behaviour (Franklin & Harrington, 2019).

- Teacher-centred approaches

+ *Effective Momentum Management Model*: Jacob Kounin's (1970) research on classroom management emphasises that prevention strategies are more effective than intervention strategies. His model focuses on key concepts such as withitness, which refers to the teacher's ability to remain aware of everything happening in the classroom, thus preventing issues before they escalate. Another concept, overlapping, stresses the teacher's ability to handle multiple tasks simultaneously, such as addressing misbehaviour while continuing to instruct. Finally, movement management involves maintaining momentum and smooth transitions during lessons to keep students engaged and minimize disruptions. Thus, by applying these strategies, teachers can maintain an organized and productive learning environment where students remain on task and disruptions are minimized (Akhter & Akhter, 2021).

+ *Assertive Discipline*: The Assertive Discipline approach is designed to help teachers assert control over classroom behaviour through clear rules and structured consequences (Canter, 1979). The model is based on the idea that behaviour is a choice, and no student should disrupt the learning environment. Teachers create a discipline plan outlining specific rules, with positive and negative consequences for compliance or misbehaviours. The plan also includes a hierarchy of consequences, escalating from warnings to removal from the classroom. This method emphasises the importance of both rewards and penalties in maintaining order and ensuring that teachers lead their classrooms effectively (Cantrell, 2023).

- Student-centred approaches

+ *Discipline with Dignity*: Mendler and Curwin's (1983) Discipline with Dignity draws attention to the teacher's responsibility for managing student behaviour while maintaining the students' dignity. The philosophy behind this approach encourages teachers to promote positive behaviour without undermining students' self-respect or motivation. The approach is designed to foster a positive classroom environment, especially for students who may have persistent behaviour issues and feel disconnected from traditional methods of discipline. The core principles of this model include: viewing student behaviour as a natural part of teaching, always treating students with respect, recognising that misbehaviour can be a response to poor teaching, and prioritising responsibility over obedience. By promoting responsibility instead of strict adherence to rules, this method encourages students to think critically about their behaviour, fostering long-term positive change rather than mere compliance (Azzahra & Hidayat, 2023).

+ *Choice Theory*: Developed by William Glasser (1999), Choice Theory posits that students control their behaviours and are responsible for their actions. It identifies five basic needs—survival, love and belonging, power,

freedom, and fun. Teachers help students meet these needs by creating a safe, supportive environment where students choose responsible behaviours.

The Choice Theory includes a method which is named Reality therapy. It involves “establishing a safe atmosphere characterized by appropriate boundaries, informed consent, and clear expectations, as well as firmness, fairness, friendliness, and courtesy” (Weiner & Craighead, 2010, p. 2982). Referring to the classroom environment, the reality therapy aims at building a strong relationship between teachers and students by developing rapport and reliance to control the class. The role of teachers in this theory is to teach students about total behaviours and make them realise that they are the only individuals who can control their behaviours. Besides, educators need to empower and support their students when they are making responsible decisions (Walter et al., 2008).

Glasser (2000) indicates that the Choice Theory is more of a preventative approach. Because the theory provides students with understanding of their needs and their ability to choose appropriate behaviours that fulfill these needs, the Choice Theory can be applied to other aspects of a student’s life and it can help the students in making effective behavioral choices for various settings.

2.4. Previous research on classroom management in general and classroom management in EFL classes in particular

There has been considerable research examining classroom management strategies and their effectiveness, particularly in the context of EFL classrooms. Ozen and Yildirim (2020) explore teachers’ perspectives on classroom management through qualitative methods, revealing that teachers’ approaches are shaped by their experiences, the need for professional growth, and the dynamics of classroom environments. Macías and Sánchez (2015) identify classroom management as a persistent challenge for pre-service foreign language teachers, with most participants acknowledging it as a serious issue during their practicum.

The recent research by Thilagaratnam and Yamat (2021) demonstrates the effectiveness of Lee and Canter’s Assertive Discipline, claiming that a structured set of well-developed rules would foster positive behaviour in students. Similarly, Soheili et al. (2015) found that Dreikurs’ Logical Consequence model significantly improves students’ interpersonal relationships with teachers and their academic performance in elementary schools in Iran. More recent research by Poullet and Pinchot (2021) examines the influence of Glasser’s Choice Theory in online courses. The results show that when students are granted control over their learning activities, they tend to exhibit higher levels of responsibility and self-esteem.

Despite these findings, there is limited research on how novice EFL teachers, particularly in Vietnam, manage classroom behaviours. Given the unique challenges faced by teachers in different educational contexts, further investigation is needed to address these gaps and develop effective strategies for managing classrooms in EFL settings.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Research design

The current study adopts a qualitative approach, utilising journal entries of classroom practice and interviews to explore the complex and dynamic nature of novice teachers’ classroom management experiences. This approach was selected as a single interview might not fully capture the intricacies and evolving aspects of these experiences. Diary methods have long been recognized as a powerful tool for data collection in classroom-based EFL research (Arndt & Rose, 2023). According to Rose (2020), this method allows data to be collected in the original setting and in real time, thus enhancing the immediacy and authenticity of the data gathered. Employing diaries aligns with the study’s aim to sensitively capture teachers’ lived experiences, providing a depth and nuance that a single method alone might not achieve (Hughes & Tarrant, 2019).

It is important to note that scholars use varying terminology when referring to diary methods. Rose (2020) defines a diary as a less-structured record that captures a learner’s feelings, thoughts, and reflections. In contrast, logs are more structured, often requiring specific and consistent entries. Journals, however, are an intermediary form; they include both short, structured responses and space for more extended, reflective entries, accommodating unexpected thoughts or feelings that may arise during the recording process. For consistency, the present study uses the term ‘journal’, as this format includes components that participants must complete in a prescribed manner, while also allowing for longer, more individualised, and contextualised responses. Building on the reflective data captured

through journals, semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine unexpected themes (Nasir et al., 2022). This combination provides both a comprehensive overview of teachers' experiences and detailed insights, which is essential for addressing the research questions (Amaratunga et al., 2002).

3.2. Participants

In this study, the participants were chosen using a purposive non-probability sampling approach, in accordance with specific criteria to ensure they accurately represent the entire population or establish well-aligned groups (Tiwari & Panwar, 2014). Hence, the sample of the current research includes 14 recently graduated Vietnamese teachers with less than three years of teaching experience. Twelve females and two males participated, all of whom were aged from 22 to 25. These teachers worked in various secondary schools across different cities in Vietnam, including Da Nang, Hai Phong, Hanoi, and Saigon. The background information of these participants, such as gender, age range, highest education level, years of teaching experience, school type, and student numbers per class is summarized in Table 1. The identities of the participants were kept anonymous in the study, as pseudonyms.

Table 1. Participants' profiles

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Highest level of Education	Type of school	Total years of teaching	Students per class
1	Anh	Female	Bachelor	Public	2	40-50
2	Chi	Female	Bachelor	Public	1	40-50
3	Dung	Male	Bachelor	Private	1.5	20-30
4	Giang	Female	MA	Public	3	30-40
5	Hien	Female	Bachelor	Private	1	20-30
6	Huong	Female	Bachelor	Public	2	30-40
7	Huyen	Female	Bachelor	Private	1	30-40
8	Khuyen	Female	Bachelor	Private	1.5	20-30
9	Lam	Male	MA	Public	3	30-40
10	Le	Female	MA	Public	2.5	40-50
11	Linh	Female	Bachelor	Private	1.5	20-30
12	Minh	Female	Bachelor	Public	2	40-50
13	Ninh	Female	Bachelor	Private	2.5	30-40
14	Phuong	Female	MA	Private	3	20-30

3.3. Ethical considerations

In order to maintain the anonymity of participants, their names in this study have been changed to pseudonyms. The participants were also informed that they are free from coercion; in other words, they could withdraw their participation at any time without any adverse consequences. Additionally, data such as documents with personal information or audio recordings were strictly protected and used solely for research purposes.

3.4. Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure consisted of two primary components: reflective journals submitted through Google Forms and semi-structured interviews. The participants were instructed to complete reflective journals using an online form created through Google Forms. To guide them in completing these journals effectively, a brief online meeting was conducted, detailing the main points for journal entries. These points included:

- Disruptive behaviours observed during lessons;
- Classroom management strategies deployed and their effectiveness;

- Challenges related to managing student behaviours and implementing management strategies.

An example of a high-quality reflective journal entry was presented during the workshop, giving participants a clear idea of the expected depth and structure. The participants were asked to submit their journal entries through Google Forms on a weekly basis over a six-week period, corresponding to half of a school semester. In total, 84 entries were collected through this process.

An event-contingent design is a data collection method where participants are instructed to provide entries or reports immediately following the occurrence of a specific event or experience (Rose, 2020). This design ensures that participants record their reflections when the details, thoughts, and emotions related to the event are still fresh in their minds, thus enhancing the accuracy and authenticity of the data collected. In this study, the participants were required to complete a journal entry immediately after each lesson they taught, aligning with this approach to capture real-time insights into their classroom experiences. Rose (2020) emphasises that event-contingent methods are particularly effective in educational settings, as they facilitate the recording of authentic and detailed responses, allowing researchers to gain a more accurate understanding of the participants' lived experiences.

At the end of the six-week period, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all fourteen participants. Prior to the interviews, the participants were briefed on the study's objectives, and it was highlighted that there were no right or wrong responses, fostering an environment conducive to open and honest communication. The interviews were held via video calls using Zoom. Each interview was conducted in English and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

To facilitate in-depth discussions, the researcher employed open-ended questions, mirrored the participants' responses neutrally to encourage further reflection, and ensured a supportive atmosphere to allow them to freely express their experiences (Weller et al., 2018). The interviews were recorded using the built-in recording function in the Zoom platform, and detailed notes were also taken for additional reference.

3.5. Data analysis procedure

After collecting teachers' journal entries over six weeks via Google Forms and conducting interviews, the Google Form entries were downloaded and organized for analysis, while the Zoom interview recordings were transcribed. The transcripts were then sent to the participants for review through a member-checking process (Birt et al., 2016), ensuring accuracy, transparency, and accountability.

The transcribed data were organized systematically in a Microsoft Excel file, categorising entries for sorting, coding, and analysis. The researchers employed thematic analysis, a method effective for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process involved familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for and reviewing themes, and defining them to understand the participants' experiences comprehensively.

An inductive approach was used, allowing themes to emerge organically from the data, capturing the immediacy of reflections in the journals and the in-depth insights from interviews (Terry et al., 2017). To maintain consistency and rigour, two researchers independently coded the journal entries and interview transcripts (Clarke et al., 2015). They identified codes directly related to the research questions and constructed themes based on these codes. The independently developed codes were then compared, and similar ones were grouped to form broader themes. The researchers discussed their findings and reached a consensus to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis.

To illustrate the thematic analysis process and its outcomes, Table 2 below presents two key sub-themes under the main theme of disruptive behaviours experienced by Vietnamese novice EFL teachers.

Table 2. Selected thematic analysis excerpt – Types of disruptive behaviours observed in Vietnamese EFL classrooms

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Example extracts from participant interviews
Types of Disruptive Behaviours	Lack of Concentration	Difficulty Focusing During Lessons	Dung: "When students were not paying attention, they missed key points, which means I had to repeat myself and answer questions that could have been avoided."
		Difficulty related to the English language	Minh: "It's not just grammar; it's the overall difficulty of the English language. Students lost focus when they encountered anything unfamiliar, whether it was vocabulary, reading, or writing tasks."

	Off-Topic Conversations	Ninh: “My students often talk about topics unrelated to the lesson.”
Chatting with Peers	Natural Communication Distraction	Huong: “Chatting is something every teacher encounters. It’s difficult to manage because students naturally want to communicate, and it can be hard to keep them focused on the task.”

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Experiences of disruptive behaviours among Vietnamese novice EFL teachers

The findings from both the journal entries and semi-structured interviews demonstrate that all Vietnamese novice EFL teachers encountered disruptive behaviours in their lessons. The journal entries highlighted that the participants frequently faced such behaviours, often dedicating a substantial amount of time to managing students’ conduct. This is consistent with Vo et al. (2018) who reported that novice teachers in Vietnam frequently struggle with classroom management due to insufficient preparation during their practicum, particularly regarding strategies for managing student behaviour in real classroom settings.

In the interviews, the participants elaborated on their experiences. Chi stated, “I frequently encounter students trying to disrupt the class.” Anh also noted: “It’s something we all face. Some students secretly use phones to text, and others speak without my permission.” Hien built on Anh’s experience by explaining how novice teachers often struggle to manage disruptive behaviours in English classes. Initially, she focused primarily on lesson planning, assuming it was her main challenge. However, she soon realised that without effective strategies to address disruptive behaviours, even the most well-prepared lessons could fall apart. She reflected: “As a new teacher, I first thought my main challenge would be planning my lessons. But then I realised that no matter how much I prepare, if I cannot manage disruptions like students talking over me or using phones, the lesson will not succeed.”

These findings indicate that Vietnamese novice EFL teachers often face challenges with classroom management, especially when they lack effective strategies and practical experience (Majani, 2020). This is further supported by Tran (2021), who highlights that Vietnamese novice EFL teachers often struggle to adapt to the demands of real classroom settings. These difficulties are particularly evident when they encounter behaviours such as disengagement and defiance, which their training programmes did not adequately prepare them to address. Moreover, Goldstein and Brooks (2007) observe that adolescents often undergo mood fluctuations during their later educational years, which may exacerbate disruptive behaviours.

While the journal entries consistently emphasised the prevalence of disruptive behaviours, some inconsistencies emerged during the interviews. A few participants seemed hesitant to report frequent incidents, possibly due to concerns that admitting to these disruptions might be perceived as a sign of weakness or ineffective classroom management. This hesitation may stem from concerns that acknowledging such issues could reflect negatively on their classroom management abilities. In Vietnam, this hesitancy is closely tied to the cultural concept of ‘saving face,’ which serves as a mechanism of social control. Teachers may avoid discussing challenges that could be perceived as undermining their professional image or competence (Nguyen, 2017).

This cultural factor likely influenced the participants’ willingness to openly discuss the frequency and impact of disruptive behaviours during the interviews. Such pressures align with findings by Le (2023), who observes that novice teachers often refrain from sharing their struggles due to societal expectations to appear competent. This reluctance not only limits opportunities for open dialogue about classroom challenges but also hinders access to professional growth and mentorship, which are critical for addressing classroom management issues effectively.

4.2. Types of disruptive behaviours observed in Vietnamese EFL classrooms

The analysis of journal entries and semi-structured interviews identified six key disruptive behaviours frequently observed in the classroom context: lack of concentration, chatting with peers, not completing homework, and engaging in irrelevant activities during lessons.

Among these, lack of concentration stood out as a primary concern for many participants. The novice teachers frequently expressed challenges in maintaining student focus, particularly during grammar lessons, as students struggled to engage with the material. Dung commented, “When students were not paying attention, they missed key

points, which means I had to repeat myself and answer questions that could have been avoided.” He emphasised that grammar lessons often led to disengagement due to the complex rules and structures differing from students’ native languages. This finding corresponds with Hai’s (2022) study on junior high school students in Vietnam, which found that grammar-related oral exercises often provoke anxiety and discomfort. Such emotional responses hinder students’ ability to focus and engage with the material, ultimately making it harder for teachers to assess comprehension and maintain student interest. In contrast, Minh argued that the issue extends beyond grammar, stating, “It’s not just grammar; it’s the overall difficulty of the English language. Students lose focus when they encounter anything unfamiliar, whether it’s vocabulary, reading, or writing tasks.” These varied responses suggest that while grammar lessons may challenge students, the broader struggle with language complexity also plays a significant role. Islam and Stapa (2021) support this view, stating that the complexity of English, with its unique structures, can be overwhelming for students, especially those with lower proficiency levels.

Another commonly reported disruptive behaviour was chatting with peers, which the participants found particularly challenging to manage. The teachers noted this issue as prevalent, especially during pair and group activities in English classes designed to foster communication. Ninh observed, “My students often talk about topics unrelated to the lesson,” illustrating a frequent challenge. Similarly, Huong stated, “Chatting is something every teacher encounters. It’s difficult to manage because students naturally want to communicate, and it can be hard to keep them focused on the task.” These insights concur with Phan and Nguyen (2024), who noted that Vietnamese classrooms often face systemic challenges such as insufficient class time and multi-level student proficiency, which make managing group work particularly difficult for teachers. Huong and Huong (2021) explain that, while group activities are designed to enhance communicative competence, students frequently prioritise social interactions over academic tasks. This tendency reflects the collectivist cultural values in Vietnamese classrooms, where maintaining social bonds may take precedence over completing academic objectives.

In terms of homework completion, the interview data revealed varying perspectives among participants. While all interviewees acknowledged it as a common issue, only a few viewed it as significantly disruptive to classroom dynamics. Some teachers felt that incomplete homework contributed to disengagement while others considered it a minor concern that did not greatly impact other students’ learning. Despite these differing views, these novice teachers generally agreed that students who failed to complete homework were more likely to exhibit additional disruptive behaviours, aligning with Sezer (2017), who identifies homework non-compliance as a key aspect of classroom management challenges. Further supporting these findings, Vu (2022) pointed out homework non-compliance as a widespread issue in Vietnamese classrooms. This issue is linked to systemic challenges, including the pressures of an overloaded curriculum and the limited competence of teachers to address individual learning needs (Vu, 2022).

Engagement in irrelevant activities, such as reading comics, listening to music with earphones, using mobile phones, or working on assignments for other subjects, was another frequently noted behaviour. The teachers described these activities as stress-inducing, consistent across all grade levels, and requiring ongoing management. Khuyen shared her frustration, stating, “It’s exhausting to constantly monitor when students are not engaged in the lesson. It drains my energy.” This illustrates the significant strain such behaviours place on novice teachers (Dean & Gibbs, 2023). In relation to this, Thuy et al. (2023) reported that Vietnamese EFL teachers often feel overwhelmed by the dual pressures of managing disruptive behaviours and meeting curriculum demands. The constant need for vigilance increases this stress, underscoring the importance of equipping teachers with effective strategies and providing institutional support to address these challenges.

4.3. Classroom management strategies used by Vietnamese novice EFL teachers

The findings reveal that Vietnamese novice EFL teachers predominantly employed teacher-centred strategies to manage classroom behaviour, while some incorporated student-centred methods and a few resorted to passive approaches when faced with challenges.

4.3.1 Teacher-centred strategies

The majority of the participants adopted teacher-centred approaches to manage classroom behaviour, focusing on establishing control through clear rules, structured consequences, and preventive measures. Many teachers emphasised the importance of setting and reinforcing these rules at the beginning of the academic term to maintain order.

The journal entries provided insight into specific strategies, such as enforcing “no talking during class activities,” “requiring students to raise their hands before speaking,” and “restricting movement without permission.” Giang mentioned, “I remind students of the rules at the beginning of each lesson to set expectations clearly.” In addition, Chi implemented point deductions for misbehaviour, explaining that this approach promptly restored order. These strategies shed light on the importance of rule enforcement and consistency, aligning with Kounin’s (1977) principles of maintaining teacher awareness and ensuring smooth transitions to minimise disruptions. Such structured approaches are consistent with models like Lee and Canter’s Assertive Discipline, which have shown effectiveness in promoting positive behaviour (Thilagaratnam & Yamat, 2021).

The preference for teacher-centred strategies in Vietnam is deeply rooted in its Confucian heritage, where classrooms traditionally emphasise authority, hierarchy, and respect for the teacher’s role (Hang et al., 2022). In this context, teachers occupy a dominant position, and students are expected to comply, reinforcing a sense of stability and order (Hang, 2019). Vietnamese novice EFL teachers often adhere to these strategies as they align with cultural expectations, providing a sense of predictability and control in managing classroom behaviour.

This reliance on teacher-centred methods is reinforced by Vietnam’s exam-oriented education system, which prioritises measurable academic outcomes over interactive or exploratory learning (Nguyen, 2020). Tran et al. (2023) observe that the pressure to meet performance benchmarks often compels novice teachers to focus on rigid, lecture-based approaches that are perceived to ensure classroom control and academic success. Additionally, a lack of professional development opportunities tailored to interactive methodologies leaves many teachers with few alternatives to teacher-centred practices during their early careers (Lap et al., 2022).

However, while these methods align with cultural norms and offer short-term control, they may not be effective in engaging students or fostering meaningful teacher-student relationships. The rigid structure inherent in teacher-centred approaches often limits opportunities for students to actively participate, think critically, and develop essential skills, as their role remains passive (Xhomara, 2022). Consequently, student motivation may decline, and the overall learning experience could become less interactive, hindering long-term educational outcomes (Franklin & Harrington, 2019).

4.3.2. *Student-centred strategies*

While the dominant approach was teacher-centred, some teachers also implemented student-centred strategies, adapting their instructional methods to manage classroom behaviour. Reflective and proactive strategies emerged as some teachers recognised that their instructional methods directly influenced student behaviour. Phuong noted, “I realised that when my instructions were not clear, students would become restless or disengaged.” Similarly, Khuyen observed, “If my explanations are too fast or not detailed enough, students start losing focus.” In response, these teachers adjusted their strategies by slowing down, providing step-by-step instructions, and incorporating interactive activities. This proactive approach demonstrates their commitment to continuous learning and adaptation, aligning with Postholm’s (2013) perspective on managing classroom complexity.

Research indicates that disruptive behaviours frequently occur when students perceive tasks as overly challenging or irrelevant (Chesebro & Lyon, 2020). When students view activities as unimportant, they are more likely to become disengaged and cause disruptions. In alignment with this, teachers like Phuong and Khuyen adapted their instructional methods to ensure the content was meaningful and connected to students’ experiences. By making lessons interactive and engaging, they aimed to maintain student focus and reduce off-task behaviour. This emphasis on creating meaningful lessons is echoed in Yao and Collins (2019), who found that collaborative group activities fostered engagement among Vietnamese students. By integrating tasks that encourage exploration and group problem-solving, teachers not only address behavioural issues but also create a platform for developing critical thinking and teamwork skills. Such strategies reflect the broader need to shift from passive learning to active participation in Vietnamese classrooms, a transition advocated in recent studies focusing on educational reforms in Vietnam (DeJaeghere et al., 2024).

Phuong explained her method of using structured feedback sessions: “If a student interrupted the lesson or showed a lack of focus, I would take a moment after class to speak with them individually... I ask them to reflect on how their behaviour might affect their learning progress and the learning environment for others. When they could identify how their actions disrupted not only their own understanding but also their peers, they were more likely to

adjust their behaviour in future lessons.” This strategy aligns with the Discipline with Dignity model (Mendler & Curwin, 1983), as it encourages students to take responsibility for their actions in a respectful manner.

Minh shared a similar approach with a focus on group work: “During a group task, if students were not participating actively, I would stop and remind them of the task’s importance and how their performance would influence their group’s outcome. I’d then ask them to think about how they could contribute to the team effort. This often led to students realising that their behaviour had a direct impact, not just on their grades, but on their peers’ success as well.” Minh’s strategy highlights the importance of linking individual accountability to group responsibilities, motivating students to become more engaged and cooperative.

By engaging in personalised discussions and linking responsibilities to student actions, these teachers sought to foster self-regulation and accountability. This approach not only reduced disruptions but also encouraged active participation and reflection, demonstrating how adapting lesson delivery and constructively engaging students can positively influence classroom behaviour (Chesebro & Lyon, 2020). This principle holds particular relevance in Vietnamese classrooms, where Tran et al. (2023) found that the novice teachers who integrated collaborative tasks and personalised feedback reported improved classroom dynamics. These strategies enable students to recognise the direct impact of their behaviour on group success, fostering a stronger sense of responsibility and teamwork.

4.3.3. *Passive approaches*

A few teachers, when overwhelmed by challenging conditions, opted for passive approaches. This strategy illustrates the difficulties the novice teachers faced in managing large, disruptive classes.

Lam and Dung reported that they often chose to ignore disruptive behaviour rather than actively address it. Lam explained, “The class was too crowded, and I felt helpless. Sometimes it seemed easier to ignore the disruptions rather than try to control them.” Mahvar et al. (2018) describe this approach as an avoidance strategy, emphasising that ignoring disruptive behaviours fails to address their root causes and may worsen classroom management challenges. Majani (2020) further suggests that teachers might adopt this strategy as a means of preventing burnout and safeguarding their well-being, opting to avoid direct confrontation with disruptive students. This pattern aligns with findings from Lap et al. (2022), who observes that the pressure to meet academic benchmarks often leaves Vietnamese novice EFL teachers with insufficient time or energy to address behavioural issues comprehensively. Consequently, these teachers may prioritise instructional delivery over classroom discipline, inadvertently allowing disruptive behaviours to persist. Duesund and Ødegard (2018) warned that such avoidance strategies can have long-term consequences, as unchecked disruptions are likely to escalate, ultimately destabilising the learning environment for all pupils.

5. CONCLUSION

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by exploring the classroom management challenges faced by novice EFL teachers in Vietnam, particularly in secondary school settings. Among the most persistent issues are lack of concentration during grammar lessons and chatting during group activities, both of which significantly disrupt learning and increase teacher stress. Limited practical training, coupled with the complexities of the new competence-based curricula and cultural expectations such as ‘saving face,’ further hinders their abilities to manage these behaviours effectively. This research also reveals that Vietnamese novice EFL teachers primarily adopt teacher-centred strategies to assert control and authority in the classroom. While some employ student-centred approaches to foster engagement and accountability, passive strategies are occasionally used to manage larger or more challenging classes. However, reliance on passive strategies poses risks, as it may allow disruptions to escalate and negatively impact the learning environment.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that school administrators should prioritise creating supportive environments that alleviate teacher stress and enhance classroom management effectiveness. Strengthening partnerships between schools and parents is equally crucial for addressing students’ behaviours and fostering a collaborative approach to education. Moreover, teacher training programmes should focus on equipping novice teachers with the skills needed to manage disruptive behaviours effectively. This can be achieved by integrating specialised behaviour management courses, extended practicum experiences in real classrooms, and workshops facilitated by experienced educators. Such training should blend theoretical knowledge with practical application to prepare teachers for the realities of classroom challenges. In addition, novice teachers are encouraged to develop a

range of strategies to manage disruptive behaviours, engage in reflective practices, and seek professional development opportunities through workshops and mentorship.

This study has some limitations, including its small sample size of 14 novice EFL teachers from Vietnamese secondary schools, which may not capture the full diversity of perspectives and practices (Subedi, 2021). Future research could address this by including a larger and more diverse participant group, as well as perspectives from experienced teachers or administrators for a broader understanding of classroom management. Incorporating classroom observations could also enhance the methodology by capturing real-time practices and reactions, providing deeper insights into classroom dynamics (Nakata et al., 2020).

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