



ISSN (P): 2616-9738
ISSN (E): 2616-9746

UMT Education Review (UER)

Volume 3 Issue 2, Fall 2020

ISSN_(P): 2616-9738 ISSN_(E): 2616-9746

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/uer>

Issue DOI: <https://doi.org/10.32350/uer.32>

Homepage: <https://journals.ugt.edu.pk/index.php/uer>

Journal QR Code:



Article:

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Online Published:

Fall 2020

Article DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.32350/uer.32.02>

Article QR Code:



Citation:

Saleem, A., Muhammad, Y., & Masood, S. (2020). Classroom management challenges and administrative support in elementary schools: Experiences of novice public-school Teachers. *UMT Education Review*, 3(2), 29–46.

[Crossref](#)


NUMBER OF REFERENCES

42


NUMBER OF FIGURES

00


NUMBER OF TABLES

00



A publication of the
Department of Education, School of Social Sciences and Humanities,
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

Classroom Management Challenges and Administrative Support in Elementary Schools: Experiences of Novice Public-School Teachers

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore classroom management challenges that novice teachers experienced in their early years of profession. Moreover, this study explored the administrative support novice teachers received from school administration concerning classroom management. We drew on interview data to explore novice teachers' experiences who had less than three years of experience during their first job in public elementary schools. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of ten novice teachers. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the experiences of novice teachers. The analysis came up with four themes: Responsive administration, helping hands, struggling with workload, and supportive principal. The study's findings revealed that most of the teachers faced over-crowded classes and a high workload in their initial time. Most of the teachers had received support from the administration; however, the administration was helpless regarding many challenges that the novice teachers faced in their early years. Many administrators did not help the novice teachers deal with over-crowded classrooms, the extra workload in the form of periods per week, and the management of students' behaviors.

Keywords: administrative support, classroom management challenges, elementary public-schools, novice teachers

Introduction

Many novice teachers in elementary public-school in Pakistan have a teacher education degree; however, for most of them, the class's actual management is a different experience from studying the course classroom management (Alwi et al., [2015](#)). Novice teachers, especially those who just start teaching in an actual classroom, usually consider classroom management a daunting task since classroom management requires skills "in the organization and presentation of lessons in such a way that all pupils are actively engaged in the process of learning" (Laslett & Smith, [2002](#), p. 2).

Studies worldwide provide evidence that novice teachers face many classroom management challenges, primarily because of the lack of administrative support; hence they find it challenging to retain jobs (e.g., Burkman, [2012](#); Husain et al.,

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2016). On the other hand, the research has also highlighted that most challenges that novice teachers faced during their early years in classroom management are administrative (Ashraf & Ismat, 2016; Leroy et al., 2007; Webb, 2007). The common challenges are the following: lack of administrative support, lack of teaching aids, higher workload, over-crowded classes, administrative duties, and relationships with colleagues as well as parents. Novice teachers need deliberate efforts from the principals to overcome these challenges, which hinder classroom management and decrease the overall efficiency of a novice teacher (Ali, 2017; Grant, 2017a).

The novice teachers in Pakistan also face administration related challenges (Ayub, 2018). However, the principal's support in administrative matters is generally absent in schools (Dayan et al., 2018). The principals do not generally listen and guide novice teachers (Khalid et al., 2016). As another point, according to government rules, there should be a student-teacher ratio of 40:1 in primary and elementary schools in Pakistan (Mbiti, 2016), but teachers have to teach over-crowded classrooms with 60/70 students (Karim, 2006; Mansoor, 2015; Mujahid & Noman, 2015). Therefore, the overcrowded classes in schools are an intense issue for teachers, especially for novice teachers, in Pakistan. The high workload is also proven to be a challenge for novice teachers, which increases stress and decreases the effectiveness of classroom management (Sohail et al., 2016a). Moreover, administrative duties frustrate novice teachers. The teachers in Pakistani public schools have explained that although they have fewer classes to teach than private teachers, the administrative tasks, especially endless paperwork, frustrate them and make classroom management difficult (Chughati & Perveen, 2013; Malik & Jumani, 2016).

The administrative style of leading the school has been found very significant while dealing with teachers. Teachers need administrative support, which increases their level of motivation to perform and handle everyday challenges (McClelland, 1987). Like other professionals, teachers need achievement, affiliation, and power to flourish and establish themselves as effective teachers (McClelland, 1987). According to Webb's (2007) study, around one-third of teachers leave the profession due to a lack of support from the principal, which they are expected to extend to motivate staff and reduce the challenges they face during classroom management. On the other hand, the overall support from school administration decreases job burnout and increases the tendency to adjust to the school environment. The support from all the administration, particularly from the principal, gave a peaceful and comfortable environment to the teachers (Brunsting et al., 2014). This constant support from the administration allowed them to adjust

to school, and also it became the source of better classroom instruction. Hence, such support from the school administration has a better impact on a teacher's interaction with the pupils.

Literature Review

The support from the principal is the vital need of novice teachers. However, it is observed that mostly this support is not available to novice teachers in Pakistan (Saleem et al., [2020](#)). Novice teachers are generally given low achieving and overcrowded classes at the start of their careers. This trend needs to be changed with the support of principals. Otherwise, retaining novice teachers in the school may become a challenge for the principal (Kalogrides et al., [2013](#)). Novice teachers experience a lack of support from the administration, particularly the principal, providing material support (Saleem et al., [2020](#)). They elaborated that the absence of support in terms of the instructional material affects their overall classroom management. They have experienced many extended challenges due to this missing facility (Castro et al., [2010](#)).

Teaching in an overcrowded classroom has been found very difficult (Saleem et al., [2020](#)). The teacher cannot give attention to each student in class while teaching. Besides, maintaining discipline and proceeding with educational activities are very difficult in overcrowded classes. Particularly the teachers in developing countries have experienced this challenge. Overcrowded classes demand more effort/attention from teachers and increase teachers' workload, significantly decreasing instruction time (Marzano et al., [2005](#)). Teaching 50 and above students are found common in India. The teachers said that 15 minutes of their class are generally wasted in attendance. The rest of the time is served in maintaining the discipline to create a conducive environment for teaching (Mooij, [2008](#)). The teachers in Uganda and Malawi reported that they were teaching 100 students per class. Many under and over-age students in elementary school and teaching the overcrowded classes became almost impossible in such an environment (Kremer et al., [2013](#)).

The challenges of overcrowded classrooms are immense, especially in Pakistani public schools. The average teacher/student ratio is more than 50 students and one teacher. Whereas in public-schools in actual classes, the class strength is sometimes found more overcrowded than this (Mbiti, [2016](#)). Tharparkar and Ghotki have the highest student-to-teacher ratio in Sindh, a Pakistani province, with 47 students to one teacher (Mujahid & Noman, [2015](#)). Students to teacher ratio are misquoted according to the school principals in Punjab; they have been informed that it is 60-70 students to one teacher instead of 35 students to one teacher, as mentioned in the

official reports (Mansoor, 2015). The Pakistani teachers reported that teaching overcrowded classes was very difficult; they could not give individual attention to students. Sometimes, they had to use corporal punishments to maintain discipline in class (Batool et al., [2017](#)).

Besides, the quality of education declines when teachers have to work more under challenging conditions. The statistics of 100,000 American teachers have shown that they have been experiencing a high workload than teachers in other countries, and they had to give classroom instruction for 27 hours each week. Moreover, the teachers reported that their working hours were 45 hours per week, the high workload reducing their performance in classes (Darling-Hammond, [2014](#)). In Tanzania, it was found that non-teaching responsibilities take the teachers' energy, and minimal time for planning for teaching was left. Even in some instances, they left their instructional responsibilities to complete administrative work (Davidson, [2007](#)). Whereas in Indian public-schools, it has been found that teachers experience stress due to a high workload. They complain about various work demands expected by the administration from them (Jahan, [2017](#)).

Especially in developing countries, teachers have to perform a lot of administrative duties, along with teaching. For example, in China, the teachers have to do extracurricular activities, engage with parents, and make supervisory papers for other districts. The teachers in China have to work for extra hours to provide tutoring for admissions in high schools as part of their job (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, [2012](#)). In Indian rural schools, the teachers have been operating schools themselves due to the principal's unavailability, filling the managerial forms to cleaning the school, or maintaining the student's record. The teachers have been working to gather data for the census and administer the school's constructional work (Luschei & Chudgar, [2017](#)). Similarly, teachers in Pakistan reported that many paperwork, administrative assignments, and continuous classes make teaching exceedingly complicated. Teachers reflected that less workload would improve performance (Ayub et al., [2018](#)).

As another point, parental involvement has significant importance in the education of the child. However, novice teachers face two kinds of challenges with parental involvement. They have a challenge in communicating with parents about their child's performance and dealing with uninvolved parents (Saleem et al., [2019](#), [2020](#)). The novice teachers experience challenging situations while communicating with the parents about their children's performance, conflicts, and behavioral issues. The absence of mentor teachers in schools to educate novice teachers about effective communication with the students' parents is also felt. This concern of

novice teachers creates a challenging situation for them whenever they interact with the parents (Melnick & Meister, [2008](#)).

In short, factors such as crowded classes, admin tasks, communication challenges with parents are significant issues for novice teachers. Exploring the experience of novice teachers in their class management processes in the Pakistani context would be useful in illuminating the associated class management complexities.

Methods and Materials

This study used a qualitative methodology (Merriam, [2009](#); Merriam & Tisdell, [2016](#)) to explore the classroom management related challenges and administrative support experienced by novice elementary public-school teachers in Lahore. The following research questions directed this study:

- (1) What were the administrative challenges experienced by novice teachers during their classroom management?
- (2) What kind of support did novice teachers receive from the administration regarding resolving the challenges of classroom management?

A semi-structured interview method was used to investigate the perspectives of novice teachers. This questioning method was compatible with constructivism and essential to discover the construction of meanings described by the study participant. The experiences of administration related challenges and support were explored through this method.

The data were collected from ten novice elementary public-school teachers from various schools in Lahore. The researchers developed a semi-structured interview guide to explore the experience of novice teachers. The first researcher developed the interview guide related to novice teachers' challenges due to a lack of administrative support. The interview guide had two questions and six probing questions related to administrative support, and the challenges faced by novice teachers due to the lack of this support, administration support in over-crowded classes, high workload and non-teaching duties, and dealing with the challenge of parental involvement. Four pilot interviews were conducted to try out questions.

The purposive sampling technique was used to select individuals and research sites, which could help understand novice teachers' challenges and administrative support (Patton, [2015](#)). The research sites for this study were elementary public-schools of Lahore. Administratively the Lahore is divided into nine towns having 87 male and 143 female public elementary schools. Ten novice elementary public-school teachers who had less than three years of experience participated in this

study. The researchers contacted the teachers and asked them if they are willing to participate in the interview. The interview site was selected, keeping in view the participants' preferences, a facility available in a public university, located at a place accessible to all participants. After seeking permission from both principal and novice teachers, the first researcher briefed the novice teacher about the purpose of conducting an interview and allowed the participant to ask questions in order to inquire about anything he/she considered essential to know. The participants were briefed that identities shall not be disclosed at any stage, transcription and report writing, or even after publication of the report. When the novice teachers were satisfied with the purpose of the interview, then the interviews were conducted. It took almost two weeks to complete the interviews of the ten novice teachers. The duration of each interview was approximately 50 to 70 minutes.

Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis using NVivo 12 was used to manage the data and to support data analysis. The five-stage framework approach (Ritchie & Spencer, [1994](#)) was found more detailed and systematic, hence opted as the primary approach used in this project. NVivo 12 was used to ensure rigor and transparency in the analysis processes without compromising creative and reflective analysis. The five key stages to qualitative data analysis involved in 'Framework Analysis' are familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation. In the familiarization stage, the first researcher immersed herself in the data by listening to tapes and reading transcripts several times, identifying key ideas and recurrent themes. Since this was voluminous data, the researcher selected reviewed interviews of novice teachers working at different fieldwork stages to include in the final analysis. It was ensured that the selection was reflective of the gender and age of diverse participants of the study. The selection provided the first researcher not only "an overview of the richness, depth, and diversity of the data" but also a point of departure for "the process of abstraction and conceptualization" (Ritchie & Spencer, [2002](#), p. 179). Since the first version of the thematic framework was heavily rooted in a-priori issues and categories were mostly descriptive, it was applied to some transcripts to refine categories and make them more responsive to emergent and analytical themes. In the indexing stage, the thematic framework was systematically applied to the transcript data. All the transcripts were read and annotated according to the thematic framework, which was not a mechanical or automatic process. It required inferring and deciding on the meaning of each transcript passage—not only keeping in view part but also a whole transcript—and recording the appropriate indexing reference.

In the charting stage, an illustration of the data as a whole was built up. For this purpose, coded "data were 'lifted' from their original context and rearranged according to the appropriate thematic reference." A chart helped in seeing the range of novice teachers' perspectives on each issue or theme. The organizing of cases in all themes was kept the same, thus facilitating the easy review of each case in the whole data set. Having sifted and charted all the transcript data according to core themes, the researcher reviewed all the charts—and different experiences and perspectives on each issue or theme were compared and contrasted. Several patterns and connections were identified, and explanations for these patterns were sought internally within the data.

Moreover, salience and dynamics of issues were weighed up to search for a meaningful structure within data. These analytical techniques were meant to piece together an overall picture of novice teachers' perspectives on classroom management challenges experienced in their early years of profession and the administrative support novice teachers received from school administration about classroom management. The analysis came up with four themes: Responsive administration, helping hands, struggling with workload, and supportive principal.

Findings

This section provides findings first and then elaborate on the findings with proper quotations from the participants. The participants were novice public school teachers who were mostly struggling with classroom management issues and seeking cooperation from the administration. Responses were categorized around four broad thematic topics below.

Responsive Administration

Half of the participants reported that they had sought help from the principal and other administrative staff. They explained that their principal, administrative staff, and even teacher were very responsive and cooperative. They had extended help to novice teachers whenever they had felt like it. As one of the participants stated: "Yes, we get help from both. Our head is very cooperative. He tries to fulfill all the needs which are possible for him to provide." (Teacher 9).

Few participants expressed that they had sought help from the principal and administration. However, the challenges were enormous; even the administration could not do anything in this regard. They expressed that the principal could not help when the school's size was small (and physical capacity is not enough), there was a shortage of teaching/non-teaching staff, and classes were over-crowded, or

the necessary facilities were missing in the school. As one of the participants reported:

Yes, we do discuss, but the matter of fact is that the challenges are too huge even they cannot do anything for us. For example, the school's overall size is small, and there is a high load of students in the school. There is no possible solution to such huge challenges. (Teacher 2)

Few participants also expressed that they tried their best to solve the classroom management challenges on their own. They believed that when they were unable to resolve classroom management challenges after an effort, they sought help from the principal and teachers. As one of the participants stated: "I solve low-level challenges on my own. But when I realize that I cannot solve a certain problem on my own. Then I discuss it with principal and teachers" (Teacher 3). Interestingly, another participant reported that she sometimes sought help from the principal when she encountered any classroom management challenge. However, she expressed that sometimes the principal would consider us incompetent and unable to settle issues independently. She expressed that due to this reason, she did not frequently seek support from the principal. As the respondent reported:

Sometimes, the principal provides me help regarding classroom management. Mostly, I have to deal with challenges in class on my own. At times when you share the challenges of your class with them, she interprets it differently. She thinks I am unable to settle things. (Teacher 4)

Helping Hands

Most of the participants explained that they were getting adequate help from the school administration, principal, non-teaching, and teaching staff. They expressed that a school could not inculcate education successfully without the whole staff's contribution and that a teacher could only teach effectively in class when he/she had the support from everyone in the school. As one of the participants stated: "I am receiving adequate help from everyone. A school is an institute that cannot run without the contribution of each of its members. A single person cannot run the school successfully" (Teacher 10).

Most participants explained that both teaching and non-teaching staff helped them in effectively managing classrooms. They expressed that whenever they needed anything, the non-teaching staff did their best to help them. As one of the participants reported:

I think you are asking about administrative staff like security guards and sweepers. Yes, they help me in classroom management. These children are too young, and I need frequent help from a sweeper to send children to toilets for cleanliness. The

Guard goes to buy stationery for me when I need it for any of the classroom activities. (Teacher 1)

On the other hand, few participants expressed that they were not receiving any help from the principal and other administrative staff. They knew that whatever they need to do, they had to do on their own. As one of the participants reported: "No, I don't find any help. Whatever I want to do, I have to do on my own" (Teacher 5). Another participant reported that she always discussed her challenges with the principal; she would either help her or ask to wait, thus solving the problem with the allotment of funds or the required facility. As the respondent stated:

Yes, we receive help...but in most cases, help is not available on the spot. The teacher has to discuss it with the principal, and at times the principal asks the teacher to wait for some time and work patiently. The problem is mostly resolved over time. (Teacher 3)

Some participants communicated that the principal and administrative staff did not provide any kind of help regarding classroom management. The non-teaching staff did not listen and obey the instruction of the teacher. The principal simply told them that there was no budget for audio-visual aids and other facilities. They did not have any option other than to teach in such a situation. One of the participants stated: "We often get the response that we do not have a budget for these things. You have to teach in such a scenario" (Teacher 5).

Interestingly, a teacher reported that he had never asked for any help from the principal and other staff. He considered it his insult not being able to solve the challenges of class on his own. As the respondent reported:

No, I have never asked for help. I consider it my insult to seek help from the administration about managing my classroom. Also, small children are more obedient than adults. In government schools, the students are more obedient, and they do not make the classroom challenging. (Teacher 6)

Struggling with Workload

Most participants reported that the administration took no action regarding the excessive teaching load, over-crowded classes, administrative duties, and lack of teaching aids. They were of the view that administration in public-schools was non-cooperative. They expressed that the administration told them that they had to work under such situations during their job. Thus, they did not provide any help to teachers. As one of the participants reported:

Till primary school, one teacher has to teach for a whole day to a particular class. The principal does not do anything for overcrowded classes. Sometimes we have

more than 50 students in our classes. While teaching, the teacher has to manage the class. The teacher must take attendance in the register, manage the register, and maintain students' monthly records. After school time, the teacher stays in the school for 15 minutes to half an hour and works for the next day. We make weekly lesson plans and even make AV aids at that time. Our performance is monitored very closely, but the volume of work we are doing is invisible (Teacher 1)

Few participants reported that they did not have any free period; instead, the administration/principal did not do anything in this regard. They explained that now they had become used to this challenging working environment. As one of the participants reported: "I have six-periods, and the total number of periods is 6. But I am now used to it. I complete my lesson planning from home" (Teacher 7).

On the other hand, fewer participants reported that their principal had tried to provide them help regarding class strength, provided free period to teachers, and tried to solve teachers' problems. They said that their principal made a section of classes when they had observed an over-crowded class. They also expressed that their principal listened to their challenges and tried to solve them. As one of the participants stated:

Recently, the principal made two sections of class 5 since the number of students crossed 70. In terms of workload, it depends upon the capabilities of the teacher. If the teacher is capable, then he/she is given more work. Otherwise, the principal does not coerce the teacher. We have more teachers than the requirement of the school. We have 11 teachers. Yes, each of the teachers has 1 or 2 free periods. There are very few administrative works for which the principal asks us to do. Our principal is leading this school as a family. Nobody says to others that this is not my work; this is your work, so I will not do it. Our head discusses all the matters with us. She never shows bossy behavior with us. (Teacher 6)

Supportive Principal

Many teachers expressed that they were satisfied with the support of the principal. They elaborated that they always discussed their classroom management challenges with the principal. The principal listened to them and tried to solve them as much as they could within their powers. For example, a participant stated: "Yes, I am satisfied with the support of the principal. She is cooperative and responsible. Whatever help we seek, she provides us" (Teacher 1).

Few participants also reported that they were 50% satisfied with the support of the principal. They expressed that their principal was moody. Thus, the support of the principal was entirely dependent upon their mood. As one of the participants stated: "You can say 50% satisfied. Our head is very moody. The help related to

classroom management is entirely dependent on the mood of the principal" (Teacher 4).

A participant, however, reported that she was not satisfied with the support of the principal initially. She found that her principal gave her space to teach as she liked, then she found support in her behaviors. As this respondent stated:

Initially, I was not satisfied with the support of the principal...but, eventually, I found satisfaction in her help. She gave me much space to do things as I liked. At the start, I was given a high workload. Every teacher used to say she will do everything! So, I was aggressive. However, the principal supported me. (Teacher 3)

Similarly, another participant reported that she was not at all satisfied with the support of the principal. She found it exceedingly difficult to teach in such an overcrowded classroom. She complained to the principal, and she was told that the teaching staff was not adequate in the school. As the participant reported:

I am not at all satisfied with the support of the principal. It is challenging for a teacher to teach such an overcrowded class. They do not do anything regarding this. I think the principal cannot do anything. They do not have staff; then how can she help me? (Teacher 2)

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore classroom management challenges that novice teachers experienced in their early years of profession. Moreover, this study explored the administrative support novice teachers received from school administration about classroom management. For these purposes, interview data were analyzed through ten novice teachers from Pakistani public schools.

Many novice teachers who responded to the interview questions sought help from their principals regarding classroom management problems. Some of them thought that the challenges were enormous that the administration could not solve them, whereas a few tried their best to resolve classroom management challenges independently. Besides, a participant reported that her principal considered her incompetent when asked for the principal's help. Principals provided help regarding high workload, over-crowded classes, and administrative duties. It could be concluded that most novice teachers had not received sufficient help regarding these challenges. Some said that their administration had tried and resolve these challenges by creating sections of the over-crowded class and provided free to the teachers, and few novice teachers had explained that they got used to this routine.

The majority of novice teachers were satisfied with the principal's support, some were somewhat satisfied, and few complained about their principals' moodiness.

As the findings of this study revealed that novice teachers experienced a lack of support administration regarding over-crowded classes, high workload, and non-teaching duties. Similar to the Pakistani case, in developing countries, the significant challenges novice and experienced teachers have to face, such as to teach over-crowded class, not enough teaching staff, teachers compelled to perform extra work, administrative duties such as paperwork are burdening for them (Marzano et al., [2005](#)). As another example, in India, a teacher has to teach 50 and above students on average. Teachers had complained that the class's initial 10-15 minutes is spent on taking attendance, and the rest of the time is spent on disciplining students, so the instruction time is reduced (Mooij, [2008](#)), and the teacher has to perform administrative works along with it (Jahan, [2017](#)). In Uganda and Malawi, it has also been found that a teacher has to teach 100 students. The teachers reported it has been impossible for them to teach effectively in such an over-crowded class (Kremer et al., [2013](#)).

The local perspective of novice teachers regarding administrative challenges shows that schools' overcrowded classes create particularly challenging situations, particularly for the novice ones, to teach and manage effectively in Pakistan. The high teacher-student ratio in schools in Pakistan is challenging for novice teachers (Mbiti, [2016](#)). Sohail et al. ([2016b](#)) have found that a high workload is also a challenge for novice teachers, which increases stress and hinders the effectiveness of classroom management. Novice teachers may leave jobs due to lack of administrative support such as support from the principal, administrative staff, and senior teachers. Besides, novice teachers experience time management as one of the most challenging tasks (Grant, [2017b](#)).

The research has also shown that novice teachers' challenges can be reduced when providing a convenient working environment. Many teachers leave their jobs at the start due to uncomfortable working conditions in their initial days. These conditions are linked with the classroom environment, relationships with colleagues and administrative staff, and facilities related to classrooms at the workplace, etcetera. (Leroy et al., [2007](#)). More novice teachers could be retained if the school gives them a convenient and facilitative working environment.

The study used a qualitative design coupled with semi-structured interviews with ten novice teachers. We considered reflexive issues in collecting data and data analysis, and we employed rigorous methodology mainly through the systematic analysis techniques using NVIVO 12. However, qualitative research's subjective

nature suggests that the analysis and conclusions drawn from this research might be influenced by the researchers' understanding of effective classroom management strategies.

Although this study employed qualitative research methods with a small sample of novice teachers, it is significant to illuminate classroom management challenges that novice teachers experienced in their early years of the profession and highlight administrative support received by novice teachers from school administration about classroom management challenges.

Conclusion

The study identified that novice teachers working in public schools face classroom management related challenges in their elementary classes, and some of these are related to the school administration. In most cases, the participants identified that their school administration is very responsive if they face any classroom management-related issue, and many of them provide help. The participants have shown confidence in their school principal's supportive behavior to tackle classroom management related challenges. Novice schoolteachers are new to the profession, thus need continuity in support from school administration regarding classroom management related issues. This support will help the novice teachers have a better self-concept and self-efficacy in becoming an effective teacher.

One of the participants' challenges was workload; they demanded an amicable solution by the school administration. However, administrators' help is not enough alone to critical challenges faced by excessive teaching load and overcrowded classrooms and thus needs upper management's attention.

Implications

1. The schools should have a very comprehensive induction program to orient novice teachers with school culture. Therefore, they will better understand the norms better and plan preventive and interventive strategies to manage their classes.
2. Support in the form of teachers' teams, quality circles, or formal and informal mentoring could be the ways to extend help and support to novice elementary teachers in many affairs, particularly in dealing with challenging behaviors in class.
3. The administration needs to realize further the impact of their help in helping the novice teachers resolve classroom management challenges. This realization could be possible by establishing a learning community where all

academic and administrative staff can share, listen, analyze, and strategize to overcome classroom management issues.

4. Workload management policies need to be readdressed as some of these are causing novice teachers' challenges in the effective management of their classes. This could be done by making sure the availability of needed human resources.

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