



PRIMARY RESEARCH

# Investigating primary school teachers' views about their classroom management behavior

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**Keywords:**Classroom management  
Classroom management behavior  
Teacher  
Primary school**Received:** 18 December 2015**Accepted:** 21 January 2016**Published:** 26 April 2016

**Abstract.** This study aims to investigate the views of primary school teachers about their classroom management behavior about different variables and to detect their autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire behavior often displayed in classrooms. Three hundred four participants, 257 female and 147 male teachers from Adana were voluntarily involved in this descriptive survey model. The "Teachers' Perception of Classroom Management Scale" (TPCMS), developed by Terzi (2001), was used to collect the data. SPSS 21 was used to analyze the data, the Mann-Whitney U test was used for a paired comparison, and Kruskal Wallis tests were used for multiple comparisons besides the descriptive statistics. After the study, it was detected that teachers "always" display democratic behaviors, "sometimes" display autocratic behaviors, and "rarely" display laissez-faire behaviors. The most common democratic behaviors of the teachers are "explaining the rules with reasons, speaking without shouting, assessing tests objectively, and prioritizing group work." According to the teachers' perception, the most common laissez-faire behavior is "only helping the students when they ask for it," The most common autocratic behaviors are basing the educational activities on the subject and maintaining a distance towards the students. According to the results, there are significant differences among the levels of authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire behaviors concerning gender, age, the type of school they have graduated from, professional status, level of class, and receiving classroom management training.

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## INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is a skill requiring making decisions about the seating order of students, teaching, materials, social relations, behavior management, discipline, etc. (Emmer and Mary, 2005; Jones and Louise, 2004). According to Lemlech (1998), classroom management training is very important for teachers to manage their classes more efficiently. In addition, the research reveals that teachers' behavior towards classroom management reflects their views on

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learning, teaching, and the students (Dooley, 1997; Edwards, 2003; Hoy and Anita, 1990; Martin et al. 1994, 1995; Miller, 2003). There are many different classifications about teachers' classroom management approaches, attitudes and profiles in the related literature. Dreikurs (1996) classified teachers as autocratic, democratic and permissive (In Wolfgang, 2005, 44-45), Santrock described them as authoritarian, authoritative, laissez-faire and indifferent (1996), Wolfgang (1995) classified teachers as interventionist, non-interventionist and internationalist, Deaton (2013) differentiated between teacher-centered and student-centered. In this study, the teachers' classroom management behavior was addressed as autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire.

Teachers who are described as autocratic with regard to classroom management keep their students at a distance. They make educational decisions on their own, state them to the students and expect students to obey them. It is important to retain authority. The teacher determines the classroom rules to explain to the students what they may face if they do not obey the rules. Behavior is controlled by rewards and punishments. The educational process is based on theory. The teacher does not care about the students' interests, needs, opinions or suggestions. The teacher is the only person responsible for planning and running the lesson (Glasser, 1999; Robbins and David, 1998). Democratic teachers, on the other hand, try to understand their students and try to address their needs. They establish the classroom rules together with the students and explain the reasoning behind them. Sharing the authority, encouraging participation, and interaction are very important. They care about how students learn and they are open to communication. They encourage students to express their emotions and thoughts (Chambers & Hardy, 2005; Martin et al, 1998). Teachers with laissez-faire behaviors usually have as less as possible points of contact. Their expectations and classroom rules are not very clear. These teachers, who do not take good care of lesson preparations, are more interested in their own needs. Since they are not consistent and employ the classroom rules very rarely, discipline problems rather than learning stand out in their classrooms (Good and Jere, 2007).

Teachers have various classroom management styles and they can employ different management styles at the same time. However, only one of these can be superior to the others (Alexander-Rami, 2011). It is important to detect how teachers manage their classrooms and which behavior they mostly exhibit there in order for trainings about developing classroom management skills to become more effective. Ways to organize and manage educational processes are very important on every single level of education. However, younger students are much more affected by their teachers' behavior and teachers then become the main model for their academic, social, and emotional development (Gordon, 1996). In this respect, primary school teachers' views about classroom management were investigated in this study in terms of different variables and their autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire behavior in their classrooms.

## METHOD

This is a descriptive survey model study. Primary school teachers working at schools in the city of Adana formed the focus group of the study. To detect the study sample, 30 primary schools were randomly chosen and 304 teachers from

those schools, 157 female and 147 male teachers, participated on a voluntary basis. The data were collected through the "Teachers' Perception of Classroom Management Scale" (TPCMS), developed by Terzi (2001). The scale consists of the three sub-dimensions; autocratic (A), democratic (D) and Laissez-faire (L) and 34 items (behaviors). Since the 16th and 33rd items of the scale are the control items, they were not evaluated. It has a 5-point Likert Scale (5-always, 4-mostly, 3-sometimes, 2-rarely, 1-never). The data were collected by school visits during the 2014/2015 spring semester. The questionnaire usually took about 20-25 minutes to be completed and there were no problems reported. Besides the descriptive analysis, the data were also analyzed by Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal Wallis tests and the significance level was determined to be 0.5. The average scores of the teachers 1.00-1.80 were classified as "never"; 1.81-2.6 as "rarely"; 2.61-3.40 as "sometimes"; "3.41-4.20 as "often" and 4.21-5.00 as "always".

### FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics about the scores the participants received through the questionnaire.

**TABLE1.** The results of the descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev.
Autocratic	304	1.36	4.27	2.74	.52
Democratic	304	1.00	5.00	4.27	.47
Laissez-faire	304	1.20	4.50	2.24	.43

According to the findings in Table 1, teachers "always" ( $=4.27$ ) exhibit democratic behavior, sometimes ( $=2.74$ ) exhibit autocratic behavior and rarely exhibit ( $=2.24$ ) Laissez-faire behavior.

Table 2 below shows the results of the Mann-Whitney U test according to the variables of gender, the department they graduated from, marital status and training background in classroom management.

As can be seen in Table 2, female teachers in the autocratic behavior group, male and single teachers in the Laissez-faire behavior group, and teachers who graduated from different departments in the democratic behavior group had significantly higher scores. No significant difference was found in the democratic behavior scores of the participants with respect to gender or in the autocratic and laissez-faire behavior scores with respect to the school they graduated from. As can be seen in Table 2, taking classroom management training or not did not cause a significant difference in the scores of the participants.

Table 3 illustrates the results of the Kruskal Wallis test based on years of experience, age, level of class and class size.

As Table 3 shows, the scores of participants teaching in 2nd grade with 6-10 years of experience were higher in democratic behavior as those scores of the participants with 11-15 years of experience in laissez-faire behavior. The class size and the age did not result in a big difference in the scores of the teachers. Additionally, young teachers' scores were higher for autocratic behavior while participants of the 41-50 age group had higher average scores in democratic behavior.

**TABLE 2.** The results of the Mann-Whitney U tests

Sub-scales	Groups	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	U	p
Gender						
Autocratic	Female	157	163.21	25624.00	9858.000	.02*
	Male	147	141.06	20736.00		
Democratic	Female	157	147.09	23093.50	10690.500	.26
	Male	147	158.28	23266.50		
Laissez-faire	Female	157	142.73	22408.00	10005.000	.04*
	Male	147	162.94	23952.00		
Degree programs						
Autocratic	Education Faculty	196	157.96	30960.50	9513.500	.14
	Others	108	142.59	15399.50		
Democratic	Education Faculty	196	145.07	28433.50	9127.500	.04*
	Others	108	165.99	17926.50		
Laissez-faire	Education Faculty	196	150.99	29595.00	10289.000	.68
	Others	108	155.23	16765.00		
Marital status						
Autocratic	Single	35	173.00	6055.00	3990.000	.141
	Married	269	149.83	40305.00		
Democratic	Single	35	166.64	5832.50	4212.500	.311
	Married	269	150.66	40527.50		
Laissez-faire	Single	35	166.64	4401.50	3771.500	.05*
	Married	269	150.66	41958.50		
Receiving classroom management training (lesson, course, seminar etc.)						
Autocratic	Yes	60	149.83	899.000	7160.000	.79
	No	244	153.16	373.000		
Democratic	Yes	60	154.84	920.50	7169.500	.81
	No	244	151.92	37069.50		
Laissez-faire	Yes	62	163.93	9835.50	6634.500	.26
	No	244	149.69	36524.50		

Table 4 shows the average of the teachers' questionnaire items scores, ranged from highest to lowest. As can be seen, the most frequent democratic behaviors by teachers in classrooms were: explaining the rules with reasoning, grading the exams objectively, taking good care of a democratic life culture, basing education on the interests and needs of the students, and creating multi-directional communication in the classrooms. Basing the education on theory, keeping the students at a distance, encouraging students through grades, and punishing misbehaviors were the most common autocratic behaviors while only helping students when they asked for it is the most frequent laissez-faire behavior.

**TABLE 3.** The results of the Kruskal Wallis tests

	Sub-scales	Groups	N	Mean Rank	df	$\chi^2$	p	Mann Whitney U
Professional status	Autocratic	1-5 years	98	155.80	2	.729	.69	
		6-10 years	141	153.94				
		11-15 years	65	144.41				
	Democratic	1-5 years (A)	98	134.54	2	7.287	.02*	B > A
		6-10 years (B)	141	165.62				
		11-15 years (C)	65	151.11				
	Laissez-faire	1-5 years (A)	98	151.24	2	10.224	.00*	C > A C > B
		6-10 years (B)	141	139.87				
		11-15 years (C)	65	181.81				
Age	Autocratic	21-30 ages	49	160.59	2	2.492	.288	
		31-40 ages	137	158.15				
		41-50 ages	118	142.58				
	Democratic	21-30 ages	49	142.09	2	3.176	.204	
		31-40 ages	137	146.68				
		41-50 ages	118	163.58				
	Laissez-faire	21-30 ages	49	147.04	2	.275	.872	
		31-40 ages	137	152.43				
		41-50 ages	118	154.84				
Level of class	Autocratic	1.year	68	141.37	3	7.317	.06	
		2. year	90	138.02				
		3. year	75	166.54				
		4. year	71	166.68				
	Democratic	1. year	68	138.74	3	9.459	.02*	2 > 1 2 > 4
		2. year	90	174.62				
		3. year	75	152.55				
		4. year	71	137.58				
	Laissez-faire	1. year	68	158.79	3	3.574	.31	
		2. year	90	149.14				
		3. year	75	139.27				
		4. year	71	164.72				
Class size	Autocratic	Less than 20 students	37	159.01	2	.694	.61	
		21-30 students	204	154.15				
		31-40 students	63	143.33				
	Democratic	Less than 20 students	37	149.59	2	1.307	.52	
		21-30 students	204	149.55				
		31-40 students	63	163.75				
	Laissez-faire	Less than 20 students	37	152.15	2	3.411	.18	
		21-30 students	204	158.05				
		31-40 students	63	134.73				

**TABLE 4.** Average scores for the scale items

	Items	$\bar{X}$
Democratic behaviors	I explain the reasons why I establish rules	4.69
	I grade the exams objectively	4.58
	I give importance to a democratic life culture	4.53
	Education is based on the needs and interests of students	4.50
	I provide multi-directional communication from teacher to students and students to students	4.36
	I explain my feelings about undesired situations without blaming the students	4.33
	I establish classroom rules, roles and responsibilities together with the students	4.31
	I use teaching methods involving students and their active participation	4.23
	I offer alternatives for students rather than clear-cut limitations	4.20
	I talk with a soft tone of voice but without shouting	3.66
	I give priority to group work	3.56
Autocratic behaviors	Everything I do in class is based on regulations	4.29
	My educational activities are based on knowledge	3.87
	I keep my students at a certain distance	3.29
	I encourage my students to succeed with grades	2.74
	I punish students when they misbehave	2.72
	I establish classroom rules and principles on my own and expect my students to obey them	2.71
	I am the only source of information for students in class	2.63
	I am authoritarian towards my students to show respect	2.50
	I avoid talking to my students during the lesson since off-topic talk disturbs the educational activities	2.13
	My students are shy or aggressive in my classes	1.75
	I am disturbed by criticisms of students about me	1.46
Laissez faire behaviors	I help my students only when they ask for it	3.56
	I avoid to act as a teacher and an authority	3.19
	I face classroom management problems that I cannot cope with	3.09
	My students show behaviors accepted by the society	2.76
	My students are as free as possible	2.54
	I think planning educational activities is a waste of time	2.09
	I am an inaccessible person in the eyes of my students	2.01
	Off-school activities such as tutoring or doing other business are much more interesting for me	1.79
	The aims of the school or classes do not influence my teaching style	1.39
I grade my students according to my daily mood	1.32	

## DISCUSSION

That most teachers display democratic classroom management behavior is a positive factor for the students, learning democratic values through self-awareness and getting ready for a democratic life. The reason for that is what teachers give importance to, what they perceive as bad and their behaviors implicitly form a value education for students (Doğanay, 2009). Many research studies show that students' stress and anxious levels decrease in democratic classrooms while compliance-based behavior such as self-control, self-

responsibility, collaborative work attitude, and discussion skills develop (Anyon, 1983; Chambers & Hardy, 2005; Doğanay & Sarı, 2004; Hawley, 2000; Hemmings, 2000; Sarı, 2007). The findings of the study show parallel results with the related literature and reveal that female teachers display autocratic classroom behavior more often than male teachers (Kutlu, 2006; Okut, 2011; Sadık & Sadık, 2014; Sadık & Türkoğlu, 2015; Yıldırım, 2012). Traditional and social roles, social expectations, as well as barriers in the professional and social life might be the reason for female teachers to show a more dominant behavior.

The results of the study illustrate that teachers with 6-10 years of experience exhibit democratic behavior while unmarried and male teachers with 11-15 years of experience show more laissez-faire behavior. Novice teachers' alleviated display of democratic behavior, compared with the other participants, might originate from their lack of professional experience and their inexperience in communicating with their students. Related studies reveal that novice teachers, who encounter misbehavior in classroom management, increasingly focus on controlling the classroom (Alkan, 2007; Akın, 2006; Çubukçu & Girmen, 2008; İlgar, 2007; Yıldırım, 2012). The fact that male and single teachers with 11-15 years of experience show laissez-faire behavior more often might originate from a burnout syndrome. Research shows that more experienced teachers become more hard-hearted and a relation between the marital status and burnout syndrome is supporting this view (Başol and Mehmet, 2009; Cemaloğlu and Dilek, 2007; Girgin, 1995; Gündüz, 2006; Tuğrul & Çelik, 2002; Torun, 1995; Tümkaya, 1996).

### CONCLUSION

According to the findings of the study, teachers teaching in the 2nd grade show democratic behavior more often than 1st and 4th grade teachers. This might be caused by the differences in child development and the multiple-choice test-based central exams employed to advance to higher level of education in Turkey. It is very difficult for 1st grade students (6-7 years old) to sit down at a specified seat during the lesson, to ask for permission to talk, to focus on the activities and to move together (Geçtan, 1982). This might be an explanation for 1st grade teachers to set stricter classroom rules, applying the rules rigorously, and employing rewards and punishments to manage the behavior more often. The central exams in our country force the teachers and the parents to think exam-result-oriented and they charge all responsibility to cover the exam topics on the teachers' shoulders (Baran and Taner, 2014; Şirin, 2000). Therefore, 4th grade teachers might try to avoid troubles in the education with their autocratic behavior but transfer information in full to encourage academic success.

In this study, the teachers' views about classroom management behavior were investigated and the teachers were found to mostly show democratic behavior, sometimes exhibit autocratic behaviors and rarely display laissez-faire behavior. The teachers' behavior and views have been compared through observing their classrooms.

### LIMITAIONS AND RECOMMEDNATIONS

At the end of this study, it was detected that receiving classroom management training or not did not make a significant difference in the teachers' behavior. In

subsequent studies, the content of the courses and trainings in their educational background and in-service classroom management trainings and their benefits could be investigated.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported by Cukurova University Department of Scientific Research Project (Project Number: 5547).

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— This article does not have any appendix. —