EFFECTS OF CLASSROOM DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

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Abstract: One of the most stressful aspects of teaching is dealing with disruptive behaviour in the classroom. Teachers report the impact of these behaviours on the people concerned. The current study explored the effects of disruptive behaviour being exhibited in the secondary school classrooms of Brunei Darussalam. Six teachers teaching in Year 8, 9 and 10 were selected using a purposive sample method. A semi-structured interview was conducted in three different public schools. The teachers were interviewed individually on two occasions to gather information on the impact of this phenomenon. The interview data were coded and categorised using thematic analysis. Through this analysis, four themes were generated, that is, effects on the teacher, impact on other students, teaching and learning process and the student (disrupter). The results revealed that the six teachers go through different emotional problems due to disruptive behaviour and had health-related issues. It also showed that teachers’ were mostly concerned with the loss of their instructional time. As a result of this, these teachers were unable to deliver the curriculum within the allocated time. The teachers’ reported that the impact is not only the disruptively behaved child but the learning of the rest of the students were also hindered due to the behaviour issues. The implications of the findings for teachers and further research are discussed.

Keywords: classrooms, young adolescents, disruptive behaviour

1. Introduction

Teachers experience disruptive behaviour in their classrooms on a daily basis. These behaviours are exhibited by students across all levels of schooling. However, these behaviours are found to be occurring more in secondary schools. Thus, this particular phenomenon leaves teachers and others concerned affected in different ways though the types of disruptive behaviour faced by teachers vary widely from individuals and contexts.

The disruptive behaviours that exist in the contemporary classrooms are dealt by teachers all across the world (Närhi, Kiiski, & Savolainen, 2017; Nash, Schlösser, & Scarr, 2016; Yuan & Che, 2012). The behaviour issues undermine the effective teaching and learning process which is the core business of the school. Hence, this phenomenon has negative impacts not only the students in the classroom who are there to learn or the particular student who behaves disruptively, but also teachers who have negative effects on them personally as professionals (Nash & Schlösser, 2015). Thus, it is crucial to find out the effects of this phenomenon that is prevalent in the classrooms so that the focus on teaching and learning can be enhanced. The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of disruptive behaviour by young adolescents in the secondary school classrooms of Brunei Darussalam.
2. Literature Review

Classroom disruptive behaviour in secondary classrooms is a concerning issue for the whole school community. These acts of behaviour disrupt the conducive learning environment as well as diverts the teachers focus from the teaching and learning process. The literature encompassing on this phenomenon reveals that teachers’ spend a significant amount of time on dealing with the disruptive behaviour while trying to cover their daily lessons in the classrooms (Houghton, Wheldall, & Merrett, 1988; Little, 2005; Malak, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2017; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Shen et al., 2009). Additionally, student misbehaviour has been associated with reduced instructional time (Aloe, Shisler, Norris, Nickerson & Rinker, 2014). In the multivariate meta-analysis of student misbehaviour and teacher burnout paper by Aloe et al (2014), they contend that teachers report spending a significant amount of time dealing with problem behaviours and approximately one-third of the teachers in the study indicate that misbehaviour interferes with their teaching. Similarly, Crawshaw (2015) in his review of international research on secondary school teachers’ perceptions of student misbehaviour, highlighted that one in twelve secondary school teachers reported that more than ten minutes of learning per hour was lost due to behaviour problems. Furthermore, among his other findings, 39 per cent of principals and teachers were reported to spend 20 per cent of their time – equivalent to one day per week –on behaviour management.

In a much more earlier study by Merrett and Wheldall (1984), 119 British primary teachers in 29 schools were surveyed and it was found that 62% of the teacher participants felt that they spent too much time on dealing with students’ classroom misbehaviours. After four years, the same authors conducted a second survey with a random sample of 198 British primary teachers in 32 schools. Hence, 51% of the sample claimed that they spent too much time maintaining classroom order (Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). A study by Wheldall and Beaman (1994) carried out in Australia found similar views, in particular, 48% of Australian teachers reported that they spent more time managing classroom behaviour than they ought to. These studies were focussed on teachers and findings show only the teachers view. Taking both teachers and students perspectives of disruptive behaviour, Cothran, Kulinn, and Garrah (2009) conducted a similar study. Surprisingly, it showed that both groups largely agreed that student misbehaviour negatively affected class time, content, and attitude. Therefore, disruptive behaviour undermines the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the interference with the learning results in reduced opportunities for students to learn. Furthermore, if these behaviours persist in classrooms, the specified content maybe not be fully covered in the specified time.

In addition to losing instructional time, literature shows that disruptive behaviour in classroom hinders and disrupts other students learning as well (Malak et al., 2017; Sullivan, Johnson, Owens, & Conway, 2014). Wang, Hall, and Rahimi, (2015) study revealed varied types of behaviours which prevented others from learning and specifically ‘disturbing other students’ was identified as disruptive behaviour. Another study by Merrett and Wheldall (1984) identified disturbing others as the most problematic behaviour. Similarly, the survey by Wheldall and Merrett (1988) reported that the second most troublesome and most frequent behaviour was ‘hindering other children’ (25% and 21%, respectively). Both these studies were conducted in the UK by the same authors with a four-year interval in between. However, a similar study conducted in a different context, that is in Australia showed complementing findings. The study of Wheldall and Beaman (1994) with Australian teachers identified hindering other children (14% and 18%, respectively) as both the most troublesome and the most frequent misbehaviour. These studies findings show that a substantial
proportion of students in secondary school classrooms engage in behaviours that are interfering other students learning. Thus, to sum up the effects of disruptive behaviour, a respondent in the study of Lawrence, Steed, and Young (1984), identified three victims of disruptive behaviour, that is, the disrupter himself, the teacher and other pupils.

As can be seen from the above discussion, teaching does not include the delivery of content only. It involves managing the behaviour of the students which leaves the teachers exhausted. Teacher burnout has been an important focus of educators as the teaching profession is distinguished from other occupations by their demanding and emotionally stressful relationships. According to Aloe et al., (2014), burnout comprises three components: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment. Consequently, teacher burnout found to be as a two-dimensional construct in Brouwers and Tomic, (1999) study, one as being emotional exhaustion and the other as negative attitudes. The study highlighted that teachers who suffer from burnout experience several problems, such as deteriorating relationships with students and colleagues, decreased mental and physical well-being. Markedly, it was revealed in Aloe et al., (2014) study that students misbehaviour related significantly with the three dimensions of teacher burnout. In addition, it was found that student misbehaviour was one of the factors related most strongly to teacher burnout. However, Spilt, Koomen, and Thijs (2011) takes a different view and argue that we need to take a relationship perspective in order to fully understand the influence of student misbehaviour on teacher stress.

Nevertheless, disruptive behaviour has a high impact on the teacher’s professional lives, and most importantly the wellbeing of the teacher. Studies show that there is a relationship between teacher burnout and grade level taught, such that secondary school teachers tend to experience higher levels of depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment than elementary school teachers (Aloe et al., 2014). Chang (2013) study result showed that teachers who regulated emotions by avoidance (e.g., disengagement from stressful situations or suppression of emotion) were found to report higher levels of burnout. Yet, proactive teachers’ tend to foresee potential risk and thus, may be more prepared to face problems without feeling threat or loss from discipline issues in the classroom according to Chang (2013). Therefore, classroom ‘disruptive behaviours’ need to be well addressed and well managed so that teachers are psychologically prepared to carry out their teaching roles effectively in their classrooms.

Apart from the teacher, other students and teaching and learning being impacted due to disruptive behaviour, the student or students who behave disruptively are also identified as having severe negative effects on themselves. Not only in schools but in adulthood as well. Aggressive and delinquent behaviours are associated with academic underachievement (Barriga et al., 2002; McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Moreover, two additional problem behaviours were not associated with underachievement in Barriga et al., (2002) study, that is, social problems and thought problems. This finding is contrasting to McEvoy and Welker (2000) who states that antisocial behaviour and academic failure reinforce one another in school and family. Furthermore, attention problems and academic underachievement are important risk factors for many negative adult outcomes (Barriga et al., 2002).

Students who misbehave in school life tend to be involved in antisocial behaviour in their adulthood. Schaeffer, Petras, Ialongo, Poduska, & Kellam,( 2003) argue that a significant number of children appear to be “late starters”, engaging in average levels of aggressive behaviour in the early childhood years but proceeding to engage in serious antisocial
behaviour in adolescence and adulthood. In the study of Schaeffer et al., (2003), a comparison was made on youth gangs and the association with crime and gang membership patterns of involvement in crime in Asian gangs and American gangs. It revealed that Asian youth typically engage in less intensified violence (e.g., assault, robbery and extortion offences were most common) whereas shootings, gun violence, homicide, and intensified assaults appear to be more common in American gangs. Similar findings were revealed in the study of O’Brien, Daffern, Chu and Thomas (2013) which examined the association with crime or participating in youth gangs or gang membership of students with aggressive behaviour.

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach is adopted to explore the effects of disruptive behaviour in classrooms. Based on anecdotal accounts on the prevalence of disruptive behaviour, three government secondary schools were selected. Two local teachers from each school teaching to Year 8,9 and 10 were selected by using purposive sampling methods as informants. Six teachers, two males and four females participated in this study. The teachers were coded T1-T6, respectively.

A semi-structured (self-constructed) interview guide was used for each individual interview. During the interview, further questions, prompts and probes were done to explore the effects of this phenomenon. The participants were asked to describe the effects of disruptive behaviour being exhibited by students in the classrooms based on their experience.

Data were analysed by general qualitative analysis in which codes and categories were derived inductively from the data. For overall comprehension and to become familiar with the data, the six transcripts were read repeatedly (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The first level of coding was done by clustering similar words and phrases that formed meaningful units. The second level of coding and categorization were carried out by grouping the similar codes which reflected the themes. Thus, four major themes were derived from the data.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The themes that emerged from the data were teaching and learning, impact on other students, student (disrupter) and teacher. The themes are discussed below.

4.1 Teaching and Learning

The study found that the core business of the school, that is the teaching and learning process was disturbed due to disruptive behaviour. Thus, the six teachers in the study reported that the phenomenon has an impact on the teaching and learning process. Loss of instructional time was the greatest concern of T1. She expressed her concerns about the contact time being lost due to the disruptive behaviours of her students. Additionally, she made a comparison to her previous school as the phenomenon at the present school had taken her by a surprise. She described vividly the effects of disruptive behaviour on her teaching and learning in the following narrative.

“One period is half an hour. It’s the same in my previous school. In my previous school, I think 70 to 80 per cent of half an hour or one-hour lesson is on teaching activities. But here, I think it’s reduced to 50 per cent on teaching. So, other than that is
housekeeping...so, it’s really challenging to carry out lessons and then other disruptive behaviours such as...late coming to class so 10 minutes in the other school I won’t tolerate. But here, I have to tolerate because it’s their behaviour or it’s their culture maybe. Over here, come in 10 minutes late, I have to give around 10 to 15 minutes for housekeeping, so it reduces my teaching time, content teaching time (T1).

Likewise, T6 described how she tried to keep the order in class and the time she spent on dealing with the phenomenon during her curriculum time.

For me, of course, it disturbs the flow of the learning... I have to call his name repeatedly... get them to keep quiet, pay attention, sit down, behave yourself so the routine continues... I have to gather back their attention it will take time...sometimes it will take approximately 13 to 15 minutes to scold them and then to get back my energy to teach again so it takes time for me...I wasted 10 to 15 minutes of teaching and learning because of disruptive students (T6).

The narratives of T1 and T6 described the situation in the classroom and the impact on the teaching time. Thus, T3 described how disruptive behaviour disrupts his lesson which leaves him with an incomplete lesson being delivered by the end of the period as in the excerpt below.

It disrupts the lesson. I mean we have to address the problem. I mean like discipline right away. So, it disrupts the lesson as well, can’t continue the lesson...and the lesson is not being delivered at the end (T3).

While T1, T6 T3 speak of the loss of instructional time and unable to deliver the lesson, T2 proclaimed what happens as a result of losing instructional time, that is, unable to cover the syllabus within the allocated time frame. T2 tried to make the students understand what learning is and the importance of learning as part of her everyday lesson. As a result of this, she too stated that she loses her contact time but most importantly unable to deliver the syllabus on time as explained in the excerpt below.

Every day, every day, in every lesson, I will say something. That is why it did affect my lesson. Some other classes, they are already in the third chapter, twelfth chapter or thirteenth. But I’m still at chapter eleven because a lot of talking is going on (T2).

Similarly, T4 described how the disruptive behaviour deviated her from staying on the main focus, the teaching process leading to the incomplete syllabus as stated in the following narrative.

(a long sigh) because of handling them in person we lose our main focus...our main focus is to teach. Instead of doing teaching we are doing the advising, counselling. First, we spend 10 to 15 minutes just to make them settle down, so we lose our main focus of teaching...disruptive behaviour does not allow my syllabus to be accomplished on time (T4).

In the same regard, however, more specific on the subject, T5 reported on his experiences. Being an English language teacher who needed his students to learn, develop and master the skills, T5 also struggled with his time in dealing with behaviour issues as well as in his lesson delivery. He described in the narrative below.
Wasting the lesson time...with all these disruptions, it is preventing students to reach level four or level five of learning which is the mastery level. Once they reach mastery level, they can teach other students. So, if they want to reach level one which is learning, maybe time to develop it before they get through it. Disruptive behaviour prevents that (T5).

The narratives of the teachers revealed that the most vital aspect of schooling, the learning as well as the teaching process was affected due to classroom disruptive behaviours. While teaching and learning took place, the teachers’ attended to either, to get students ready for the lesson or attending to occurring behaviours. As a result, the instructional time was lost because of attending to such issues. It is not uncommon for teachers dealing with disruptive behaviour issues to report loss of instructional time as it has been revealed in several similar studies (Crawshaw, 2015; Houghton et al., 1988; Little, 2005; Malak et al., 2017; McEvoy & Welker, 2000; Shen et al., 2009). Additionally, T2 and T4 highlighted that they were lagging far behind in covering the syllabus as a result of disruptive behaviour. This implies that disruptive behaviour prevented from achieving the set learning targets. This is a worrying issue as the specified learning outcomes should be achieved for the students to develop the skills and knowledge to reach the next level. Furthermore, this may have an impact on coping the content and achieving the competencies articulated in the higher levels. Hence, this finding is consistent with other studies which showed disruptive behaviour affecting the content delivery in classrooms (Cothran et al., 2009; Malak et al., 2017).

4.2 Impact on other Students

Three teachers from the study raised their concern of the students who were refrained from learning or neglected due to the unacceptable behaviours exhibited in the classroom. T6 described how the students of her class being disturbed due to disruptive behaviours as articulated in the statement below.

...that (disruptive behaviour) disturbs the other students, their needs...the learning of the students as well... (T6).

In a more elaborative manner, T3 articulated the same sentiment.

They roam around and disturbing their friends from studying and from learning as well. So, it’s not just him, I mean their friends are affected as well, not only the child (the disrupter) (T3).

In the same regard, T4 termed other students as ‘suffering’ due to ‘deviant’ ones as mentioned in the statement below.

The kids who like to learn are suffering ....so sad you know the students who are there to learn, who likes to study, who likes to listen to us they are suffered because of the deviant ones (T4).

The narratives from the three respective teachers, T6, T3 and T4 articulated other students learning in the classroom is hindered because of the disruptive behaviours, such as roaming around the class and disturbing those who are willing to learn. This means that teachers were well aware of the impacts of disruptive behaviour on the students who want to learn as they were described as “suffered”. Thus, these results lend support to other similar studies which
revealed that disruptive behaviour impacted other students learning in the classroom (Malak et al., 2017; Sullivan et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2015; Wheldall & Beaman, 1994; Wheldall & Merrett, 1988). Hence, the disruptively behaved students need to be tackled effectively so that each and every student in the classroom can learn in a meaningful way.

4.3 The Student (disrupter)

All the teachers highlighted their apprehensions for the students who exhibit disruptive behaviour because all the teachers wanted their students to become successful in life through excelling in their education. Hence, T3 and T5 shared two contrasting stories of their students who behaved disruptively. T5 shared an upsetting story of one of his students who had been a disruptive child in his entire school life and how he left the world as a young adolescent. T5 described.

... I had one student who died. Yeah, he died coz he was involved in a gang fight that was the speculation...this was like more than 10 years ago. His body was recovered, it was full of bruises and evidence suggested that he was beaten up. This boy, he was a disruptive behaviour case in a class all the time and no one can really control him...and not even the parents, so in the end, died. Messed up with the wrong people, I guess (T5).

While T5 described a sad story of a disruptively behaved student, T3, on the other hand, shared a success story of his student who behaved disruptively. T3 told the story in an inspiring manner.

I've seen some students change from what we say no hope at all to getting five O'level passes. He is now trying to get a job. I see that change...that's a good feeling, when you see him achieving at least five O'level passes. At first, when he came here, we had no hope for him and all and then we selected him to play football for the school. Motivate him or her, then they will surprise you with such results. It's really a nice feeling (laughs) (T3).

T3 shared a positive effect from a disruptively behaved student whereas, the narrative of T5 revealed a negative effect of disruptive behaviour on a student. The story of T3 means that if the teachers or the school are able to cater to what the students are good at, the disruptively behaved students can be changed. The ‘no hope’ student of T3 changed and excelled in his studies because the school was able to tap what the child was good at and provided him with the opportunity to utilize it. Hence, this shows that it is crucial to get to know the disruptive students, both what is making him to behave disruptively and to find the student’s interest or what the child is good at so that the teachers can create opportunities for the students. In contrast, the story shared by T5 is disturbing. According to T5, the student was a disruptive student all throughout his school life and it seems that the student was involved with not the right kind of people. Thus, the student’s involvement with gangs once out of school has to lead him on a wrong path which ended losing his life. This finding supports the findings that students with disruptive behaviour tend to be associated with crime or participating in youth gangs or gang membership in adulthood (O’Brien et al., 2013; Schaeffer et al., 2003). However, this is contrasting to Schaeffer et al., (2003) findings, where it was found that Asian gangs engage in less intensified violence.
4.4 Teacher

The teachers’ felt stressed and caused anxiety because of dealing with disruptive behaviours on a daily basis in the classrooms. The teachers’ expressed the emotions and feelings they go through as a result of dealing with this phenomenon. Teachers articulate:

Of course, I feel irritated in the class. I kind of find it irritating sometimes (T4).

In the same regard, T6 from School C who taught English language to five classes felt frustrated in dealing with behaviour issues.

I feel frustrated. I honestly, the first thing that comes to my mind is, I need to deal with it right now. If I let it pass, its gonna spread (T6).

While T5 and T6 found disruptive behaviours in their classrooms irritating and frustrating, T3 felt angry and T4 exhausted as described in the narrative excerpt below.

I get angry (laughs)...angry, worried and then why he or she did that and all...a feeling of sadness and also mad a bit (laughs out loud) ...it’s making me stress and then it’s hard for me to focus on the next lesson or the next class (T3).

Annoying (a deep sigh and laughs out loud) how to put in words. There are students who need my attention...stressed and then when I get exhausted, I don’t bother because how to drain any more when all the energies are being drained (T4).

The other two teachers mentioned having health issues. T1 who is new to school A had a breakdown due to the expectations not being met by her students.

I'll tell you the truth, I had a breakdown. Because I can see that this is not the school that I’m used to...so, I said to myself, let’s not focus too much on the result (T1).

T1 further explained how she managed her emotions by being aware of her health condition.

At first, I’ll be mad and annoying and angry...I rarely get angry with the students...I rarely get because we cannot fight with nature. It’s their nature...so when they behave disruptively, I only go up to sad, I don’t go up to stress or beyond that, because I was borderline having high BP. So, I don’t want to put that stress onto myself. That’s why I got stressed the first two weeks that I was here. But as I said, I lowered my expectation, I changed my mind on how to see things because I don’t want to be stressed yeah (T1).

On the other hand, T2 from the same school recently started experiencing a health problem because of the disruptive behaviour issues in her class. Further, T2 broke down in tears as she expressed her feelings in the excerpt below.

I'm getting tired...it makes me worry. The first thing is their result and then for later. What if their behaviour does not change? Still, like that until year 11. What will happen... (break down in tears). I feel like students are no longer like (cries and blows her nose) my previous students. So, I think I need to go somewhere else...now challenge is, increasing pressure from everywhere nowadays...I started to get headaches here (touches back of her head) since last year. I don’t usually get sick. I don’t usually get my MCs from the clinic. No. But since last year...(T2).
The narratives of all the teachers’ proved that these teachers face emotional problems due to the existence of this phenomenon in their classrooms. The results showed that it had negative effects on teachers themselves. It also revealed that teacher burnout exists among these teachers’ as a result of the negative emotions that they go through. This means that disruptive behaviour has severe negative impacts on teachers’ health. As professionals, the teachers’ had to deal with the students learning as well as their behaviour which in turn has drawbacks for them to carry out their responsibilities. The condition of T1 and T2 is evidence to teacher burnout as they had serious health problems caused by the student's disruptive behaviour (Aloe et al., 2014; Brouwers & Tomic, 1999; Chang, 2013). Above all, T2 was in a position to quit from her teaching career because of the pressure from school and most importantly due to disruptive behaviour from students which she found hard to handle.

The main purpose of the current study was to examine the effects of disruptive classroom behaviour from six teachers selected from three public secondary schools in Brunei Darussalam. The findings of the study established that disruptive behaviours have major negative effects on all the people concerned, namely, the teacher, teaching and learning, other students and the student who behaves disruptively (disrupter). This study confirms findings from previous similar studies. The findings contribute to our understanding of the views of six teachers’ on the effects of disruptive classroom behaviour in a small Islamic nation. Hence, it is vital to highlight that this study revealed a striking finding, that is, a disruptively behaved child does not always end up being a gang member or involved in serious anti-social behaviour in adulthood to become a threat to society. In fact, it showed that such a child can also be moulded and changed if the right attention and opportunities are given. An implication of these findings is that teachers need to identify and understand the student’s potential areas regardless of the student’s behaviour so that it is well attended to and developed. Future research should concentrate on the effects of disruptive behaviour on both the professional and personal lives of teachers as well as the type of relationship between the teacher and the disruptively behaved student.

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