MANAGING DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR OF STUDENTS IN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Siti Khasinah

Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Indonesia
skhasinah1@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article describes students' disruptive behaviors in language classroom that may greatly affect language teaching and learning process, especially in ESL or EFL classes. Teachers should know what disruptive behavior is to enable them to deal with problems occurred in their classroom or to take preventive actions to keep their students well-behaved during the class. This can reduce the occurrence of misbehavior of students in their classroom. To prevent disruption in the classroom, teachers should establish behavioral expectations in the first day of the semester and the expectations can be based on students attendance, arrivals and departures, class participation, full English speaking, and other appropriate conducts in the syllabus and discuss them at the outset of the term. The agreement is then assigned as a learning contract or a code of conducts with which bounds the whole class. Consequently, whenever students are misbehaved, teachers and other students will directly know and recognize that the behaviors are out of the code. There are factors reasoning students to behave badly, so teachers as trouble solvers have to find appropriate strategies that are effective in helping students keep the code. Otherwise, the disruptions will escalate quickly and the problems will increase in numbers rapidly and finally, teachers will have to work very hard to avoid teaching failure and "losing face" when they cannot manage the disruption as listed in the expectation.

Keywords: *disruptive behavior; managing language classroom*

INTRODUCTION

Disruptive behavior of students is also known as students' misbehavior or negative class participation. This kind of behaviors often disrupts classroom teaching and learning process since it affects teachers and other students as well. Sometimes,

some of the behaviors can be tolerated if they only irritate the class but they do not escalate and disturb the whole class. This issue is closely related to disciplinary matter that warrants careful treatment from teachers. Teachers should be prepared to this kind of classroom climate even before the problem arises, when the problem is beginning and mainly when the problem has exploded.

The ability of teachers to manage those constraints is really needed. Knowing students personally, indeed, help teachers in reducing behavior-related problems in English classroom. Besides, classroom management, methodology, lesson planning, and students' motivation can be potential control of teachers to hinder disruptive atmosphere in their classroom (Ur, 1996). Motivation in language class is more than a way to develop students' interest. As said by Richards and Renandya (2002) that language is not knowledge that is kept in mind, but a skill to be used.

Being undisciplined belongs to all age groups of students, young learners and also adult learners. Related to this, Harmer (1991) says that there are lots of ways of disrupting a class. Further, he says that disruptive behavior is not confined to only one age group. Young children can be incredibly noisy and unruly while teenagers can be truly uncooperative and unresponsive. In addition, adults are disruptive in different way such become disagree with teachers and distract classmates to follow them.

DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary ("Disruptive and Behavior", 2017) defines the word disruption within three contexts: "to break apart, to throw into disorder and to interrupt the normal course or unity of" whilst it gives three ideas of the word behavior: "the manner of conducting oneself, the way in which someone behaves and the way in which something functions or operates".

Additionally, the University of Houston Student Handbook (2017, p. 68) defines disruption as "obstructing or interfering with university functions or any university activity. Disturbing the peace and good order of the university by, among other things, fighting, quarreling, disruptive behavior or excessive noise, including but not limited to, a disruption by use of pagers, cell phones, and/or communication

devices". In accordance with this, (College of San Mateo, 2013, appendix O) states that disruptive and inappropriate behaviors are "actions that interfere with the instructional, administrative or service functions of the College. Assessing disruptive behavior can be a highly subjective process. For example, some behavior patterns, such as students talking in class, can be experienced as disruptive in some situations or simply irritating and frustrating in others". In addition, Charles (2004, p. 2) defines misbehavior as "behavior that is considered inappropriate for the setting or situation in which it occurs". In context of classroom climate, students' misbehavior can be defined as any action or activities that are perceived by teachers as disruptive to learning environment (Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf, 2009).

Although all definitions above give general understanding of the meaning of disruptive behavior in language classroom, analyzing the terms and understanding their meanings gives deeper insight into what disruptive behavior is.

Types and examples of disruptive behavior in language classroom

According to Richards and Renandya (2002), there are three types of disruptive behavior commonly occurring in language class: 1) the back-row distractor: the student who always sits at the back and distracts others; 2) the nonparticipants: some students who are not taking part in the assigned class activities; and 3) the over exuberant student: the students who are smart but very dominant and monopolize all activities in classroom. Likewise, Cruickshank, Jenkins, & Metcalf (2009) state that there are several typical misbehavior problems that can exist in a classroom including aggression i.e., physical and verbal attacks, and displays of violence; immoral acts i.e., cheating, lying, and stealing; defiance of authority i.e., refusing to obey teachers or becoming unruly; disruptive behaviors i.e., talking loudly, calling out, and tossing objects; and off-task behaviors i.e., daydreaming and fooling around. From those types of behaviors, we can observe some examples of disruptive behaviors that can cause discipline problems in teaching English in classroom.

In the same way, the University of Washington (2017) mentions the following items as examples of disruptive behaviors such as aggression toward other students or faculty, threats of violence, unyielding argument or debate, yelling inside or

outside of the classroom, untimely talking, laughing, or crying, snoring in class, engaging in content on a laptop that others find disruptive, and listening to music at a volume disruptive to others. These eight examples are considered as low level disruption since the behaviors do not directly threat others; even though they lead to irritation and disturbance for others. The university gives other examples that are considered extremely disruptive, threatening, or dangerous behaviors including a student physically or verbally assaults lecturers or other students, a student appears to be on the verge of physically or verbally assaulting others, a student damages classroom furniture or property, and a student carries a weapon.

Other statements on the examples of disruptive behaviors are the ones from an article of *Tomorrow's Teaching and Learning* (2017), Ann Daniels (2013) and Richards and Farrel (2011) in which the followings are noted: arrivals and departures (late arrivers and early leavers), noisy students (talking and other disruptive noises), and other behaviors such as passing notes, sleeping, eating, overt inattentiveness, domineering students, distressed students, challenges to teachers' authority, disruptive students online, and even cheating.

From the arguments above, it can be said that students can produce several inappropriate behaviors that directly or indirectly distract teachers and other students and can finally affect English teaching and learning process.

Causes of disruptive problems in language classroom

Disruptive behaviors of students can be caused by several reasons. Teachers themselves can be a major factor affecting the behavior of students together with the students and institutions (Harmer, 1991). For example, unprepared teachers can easily be detected by students, which soon leads to cause problems in classroom. Even if teachers are well prepared, teachers may still get trouble because of the students and institutions. Khajloo (2013) claims that if students become motivated by their love for their English teachers, they will be more interested in learning English; although this fact may scientifically be unacceptable.

Moreover, based on the finding of their research, Ghazi, Shahzada, Tariq, & Khan (2013) list a number of factors that can cause inappropriate behaviors such as

inconsistent parenting, uncaring parents, over-protective parents, poverty, poor quality teaching, teachers' negative attitude, lack of motivation from teacher, load shedding and lack of alternative, bad influences of a local community, students' psych-problems, and classroom poor conditions. Similar to Harmer (1991), they note that teachers and students are the factors causing misbehavior. However, they add other factors such as parents, learning facilities, and environment as supportive factors due to the occurrence of the problems.

Preventing disruptive behaviour in language classroom

Preventing disruptive behavior in the classroom can be done by establishing or creating a positive classroom climate. Brown (2001) suggests teachers to build up rapport, to balance praise and criticism, and to generate energy. Rapport is a relationship or connection between teachers and students that produces a positive energy in the language classroom. Rapport is developed by showing interest in each student as a person, openly soliciting their ideas and feelings, valuing and respecting what they think and say, and developing genuine sense of vicarious joy when they learn something or when they succeed. Additionally, teachers should give feedback on students' progress in English, work with them as a team and not against them and to relax, and teachers laugh *with* them and not *at* them. Alternatively, teachers should balance in praising and criticizing students to make them become effective. Meanwhile, the students are energized by the praise and then openly welcome the criticism. Moreover, the experience during learning process drives teachers and students to take the energy with them when the class ends and bring it back to class the next meeting.

To create a conducive and good learning atmosphere is necessary, but Charles (2004) and Marsh (2008) stress that teachers emphasize good human relations skills to gain good relationship and interaction in their classroom. First, general relation skills that includes friendliness, keep smiling and speaking gently even with trouble-makers, positive attitude, trying to solve the problem not to dwell on them, ability to listen, respecting other opinions, and ability to compliment genuinely. Second, relation skills with students including giving regular attention, talking to students frequently but briefly, giving reinforcement, motivating and

encouraging students, showing willingness to help, and being a model for desired behaviors and manners. Third, relationship with parents that covers regular communication using notes, phone calls, and letters, setting a clear verbal and written communication, explaining a clear expectation, and focusing on students succeed not on their failure. From these skills, it seems that he emphasizes that communication, warmth, and supports can facilitate productive and joyful classroom activities which can, further, lead to a positive classroom climate in which no disruptive behavior may occur.

Another way to hinder students' misbehavior is by making an agreement or a code of conduct. It is a kind of learning contract created on the first day of English class that can be a written form that, if needed, is spelled out, or just unspoken rearrangement. Harmer (1991) promotes that a code of conduct involves teachers and students to design what behaviors are allowed and which are not permitted in classroom. This prevent students to behave badly such as arriving late, interrupting classmates when they are speaking, leaving homework at home, eating or drinking, and paying less attention to their teachers or less class participation.

Another argument is proposed by Ur (1996). She notes that these kinds of problems should be handled even before they arise and she suggests three main preventive ways. First, creating careful planning. Teachers with well-prepared lesson plans can earn students' attention and win their trust. Likewise, teachers can avoid vacuum moment in which students fill with distracting activities. Second, creating clear instructions. Instruction is very important in teaching and learning process especially in learning English as ESL or EFL. Teachers, sometimes, fail to give clear instructions in teaching. As a result, students become uncertain of what they have to do and then start asking and even making noises using L1. It is a necessity to communicate important information dealing with the tasks and activities that the students should do. Third, keeping in touch: Teachers should be alert since the beginning of the class towards what is going to happen in the classroom and make sure that students are aware that their teachers are keeping in touch by using their "six sense" to control their students. Meanwhile, the teachers themselves can easily detect disruption which may arise in their classroom.

Handling disruptive behaviour in language classroom

As mention previously, disruptive behaviors can disrupt teaching and learning process. Therefore, teachers have to react positively to establish a safe and comfortable classroom. According to Bellon, Bellon, & Blank (1996), responding or reacting to students' inappropriate behaviors is, indeed, a process of helping students control themselves in order to enable them to work and learn productively in their classroom. Teachers need to focus and concentrate in doing so, since, as claimed by Cruickshank, Jenkins, and Metcalf (2009), there is no foolproof strategies in correcting misbehavior and no single discipline technique is considered able to solve various types of disruptive behaviors. Consequently, teachers should be professionally, carefully, and effectively select and consider the context of problems and also the personality and motivation of their students before, as problems solvers, taking actions.

As managers of classroom, teachers should undertake quick and positive actions (Albert, 2003; Marzano, Marzano & Pickering, 2003). Some experts believe that the problems caused by students' misbehaviors can be prevented and solved by planning lesson thoroughly, developing positive interaction with students, and conducting lesson effectively (Barry & King, 1998, Hansen & Childs, 1998, Hendrick, 2001). Cruickshank, Jenkins, and Metcalf (2009) propose an answer for the question on how teachers decide to manage misbehaved concerns. First, deciding to what extent the intervention will interfere or disrupt the class activities. Second, basing how to intervene on the nature and severity of the disruption, the doers, and the time it occurred. Third, discussing with students that "fair is not always equal" can sometimes cure the problems.

UH Hilo student conduct code (2017) promotes procedures that teachers can take whenever they encounter disruptive students. Some of them relate to the way to communicate the disruption to the misbehavers gently and respectfully. Tell them that the behavior benefits no one. Remind them of the agreement assigned in the first day of class. If this comes to failure, talk to them personally and politely outside of classroom to stop the disruption. Ask for their reasons for misbehavior and then decide how to assist them. If the problem is serious, teachers had better send them

to counseling center. Additionally, if the disruption escalates, share the problem with the authority.

In other case, Cruickshank, Jenkins, and Metcalf (2009) highlight several types of intervention strategies that can be followed by teachers, based on disruptions they encounter. First, extinction: teachers ignore minor distraction such as attention-seeking misbehavior since the behavior will disappear when it is withheld. Second, mild desists: it can be a kind of nonverbal intervention strategies such as establishing eye contact, facial expression, body language, gesture, and reinforcement. It can also be verbal intervention such as slowing down the voice, pronouncing things more distinctly, and pausing briefly. Third, reprimands (verbally) help teachers remind students of what they have done and show them that teacher do not tolerate the misbehavior. Fourth, time-out: it is a soft punishment such as excluding students from class activities, asking students to put their heads on the table, or sending them to time-out room. Fifth, giving severe punishment is the last choice in intervening misbehavior. Though the use of radical verbal and corporal punishment is sometimes effective, teachers should be very careful since this strategy can be against the school policy and also state laws.

The ability of teachers in managing class disruptions can be varied. That is why the following measurement can be taken including first, acting immediately: the actions will be more difficult if the problems are unsolved soon after the occurrence. Second, stopping the class: handling things that get out of hand first before restart teaching. Third, reseating: changing the position of the students' seats. Forth, changing the activities: replacing lockstep activity into tasks that fully involve all students. Fifth, after class talk; and, sixth, using institutions if the disruption cannot be held and if teachers have to give up.

In managing a certain type of misbehaviors, teachers should move through stages as follow: first, the back-row distractor. Dealing with this type of disruption, teachers should keep eye contact while speaking, use no mid-sentence, and invite the students to a private talk to find out the cause. Next, the non-participants. To overcome this behavior, teachers can ignore the behavior if others are not disturbed, move through their desk and offer help, check whether they behave the same way in

other classes. Third, the over-exuberant students: Thank them and immediately ask others to speak, tell them that they can talk more in groups, and later, talk to them personally (Richards and Renandya, 2002).

Take, for example, when an English teacher assigns students to work in pair or group in a speaking class. If one of them is a dominant student, she or he will domineer all speaking time. Consequently, this will disappoint or irritate others for having less proficiency in speaking English. Therefore, the teacher should manage this situation to avoid the over exuberant student from monopolizing the team and make her or him share the equal time for all members. According to Hedge (2008), this kind of issue is very sensitive. Besides, Brown (2001) highlights another issue in ESL speaking class of when several students who share the same L1 sit together in the same group. They will speak or whisper in L1 that frustrate the other members of the team. Accordingly, it needs teachers' intervention such as moving the students to another group or telling them the value of group work in the speaking class. As a matter of fact, Richards and Renandya (2002) and Harmer (1991) state that it is difficult for an English teacher to force students to use full English in class. In some cases, they agree if teachers let students use L1 purposively to, for instance, when explaining a difficult thing to the class.

Ur (1996), as partly mentioned above, advises teachers to respond immediately *when the problems are in the beginning*, through several strategies. First, dealing with it quietly: quiet, but clear-cut actions can directly solve the problems. Second, don't take things personally. Avoid personal conflict with the students and forget the bad behavior soon after they are withheld. And, third, don't use threats but be consistent to put sanction into practice. Further, Ur (1996) adds that teachers should act quickly *when the problems has exploded*. She suggests three ways to respond to the problems. First, teachers explode themselves. Show them that you are angry, but do not lose control. Second, giving in. And, third, making offers they cannot refuse. Similar to the idea of Ur, Harmer (1991) lists several actions teachers should not do since the attitude of teachers as models greatly affects classroom. To avoid students' misbehavior, then the following statements such as going to class well prepared, being consistent, issuing motivation not threats,

managing the voice, giving interesting classes, having positive attitude to learning, and keeping the code, can be very useful for teachers to adopt.

All the strategies discussed can be considered by English teachers in managing language classroom disruptions. Teachers only need to identify and select which action is appropriate as a solution for a particular case to make it works effectively.

CONCLUSION

Disruptive behaviors in an English classroom are commonly found such as the back-row distractor, the nonparticipants, and the over exuberant students; however, this issue is not to be taken as a serious or major threat to the language learning process. Some misbehaviors are also considered "mild", which teachers of English should be able to properly handle before, while, and after the occurrence. Some actions, ranging from ignoring misbehaved students, reprimanding them, to giving severe punishment, are suggested for teachers on how to prevent and to cure the disruption in classroom immediately and effectively. Still, these actions should be selected wisely according to the level of seriousness of each misbehavior.

REFERENCES

Albert, L. (2003). *Cooperative discipline* (3rd ed.). Circle Pine: American Guidance Service.

Barry, K & King, L. (1998). *Beginning teaching and beyond* (3rd ed.). Katoomba: Sosial Science Press.

Bellon, J. J., Bellon, E. C., & Blank, M. A. (1996) *Teaching from a research knowledge base*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. San Francisco: Longman.

Charles, C. M. (2004). *Building classroom discipline* (7th ed.). New York: Longman.

College of San Mateo. (2013). *Faculty handbook 2012-2013*. San Mateo: College of San Mateo

Cruickshank, D. R., Jenkins, D. B., & Metcalf, K. K. (2009). *The act of teaching*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Daniels, A. (2013). *Dealing with disruptive student behavior*. Retrieved from http://www.livestrong.com/article/147291-what-is-disruptive-behavior-in-the-classroom/

"Disruptive and Behavior" (2012). Retrieved from http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/disruption

Ghazi, S. R., Shahzada, G., Tariq, M., & Khan, A. Q. (2013). Types and causes of students' disruptive behavior in classroom at secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *American Journal of Educational Research*, *1*(9), 350-354.

Hansen, J. M & Childs, J. (1998). Creating a school where people like to be, *Educational Leadership*, *63*(4), 172-174.

Harmer, J. (1991). *The practice of English language teaching*. London: Longman.

Hedge, T. (2008). *Teaching and learning in language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hendrick, J. (2001). *The whole child* (7th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Khajloo, A. I. (2013). Problems in teaching and learning English for students, *International Journal of Engineering Research and Development, 7*, 56-58.

Marsh, C. (2008). *Becoming a teacher: knowledge, skills, and issues.* Australia: Pearson.

Marzano, R. J., Marzano, J. S., & Pickering, D. J. (2003) *Classroom management that works: research-based strategies for every teacher*. Alexandria: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development.

Richards, J. C. & Farrel, T. S. C. (2011). *Practice teaching: a reflective approach*. New York: Cambridge Univ Press.

Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: an anthology of current practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The University of Houston Student Handbook. (2017). Retrieved from Civilityflier.pdf

The University of Washington. (2017). *Disruptive behavior in the classroom*. Retrieved from http://dsl.uw.edu/faculty/disruptive-behavior-in-the-classroom/

Tomorrow's Teaching and Learniq. (2017). *Dealing with disruptive student behavior.* Retrieved from https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/1353

UH Hilo Student Conduct Code. (2017). *Disruptive student behavior in the classroom.* Retrieved from https://hilo.hawaii.edu/studentaffairs/conduct/disruption.php

Ur, P. (1996). *A course in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.