

## YABANCI DİL ÖĞRENME ORTAMINDA DİSİPLİNİN ÖNEMİ

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### ÖZET

Sınıf içi disiplin eğitim öğretimin en önemli unsurlarından biri olduğundan, öğretmenlerin daha iyi bir sınıf içi öğrenme düzlemi oluşturabilmesi amacıyla disiplin sorunlarını dikkate almaları gerekmektedir. İyi bir öğrenme düzlemi oluşturmada disiplin problemlerinin öğrenmeye sürekli bir tehdit oluşturabileceği için, öğretmenlerin bu tarz disiplin sorunları (yıkıcı davranış) ile nasıl başa çıktığı ve izlenen stratejilerin hangi yönde olması araştırılması gereken konular arasındadır. Yabancı dil sınıflarında öğrencilerin yabancı dile karşı oluşturabileceği engellerle beraber ortaya çıkabilecek disiplin problemleri yabancı dili öğreten öğretmenler ve öğrenciler açısından hassas bir konu olabilmektedir. Bu çalışma, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Bölümünde öğrenim gören öğretmen adaylarının disiplin problemlerine bakış açılarını ve bu problemlerle başa çıkma teknikleri ve önerilerini ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada 45 öğretmen adayının görüşlerine yer verilmiştir. Veriler görüşme ve anket yoluyla elde edilmiştir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* İngiliz Dili Eğitimi, disiplin anlayışı, öğretmen algısı

### DISCIPLINE IN ELT CLASSES

#### ABSTRACT

As discipline is one of the most important aspects of teaching, teachers need to consider the discipline problems as to create a better environment where learning can take place in the most desired way. Since good learning conditions are critical and discipline problems are a constant threat to learning, discipline problems (disruptive behavior), how they are viewed by teachers and the strategies that are adopted to deal with discipline problems (disruptive behavior) should be investigated. As for the language classrooms where learners may have already formed barriers to learning the foreign language, dealing with discipline problems turns out to be a sensitive issue both for the language teachers and learners. This study aims to investigate ELT student teachers' views regarding the discipline problems (disruptive behavior) and their suggestions as to cope with these problems. The participants of the present study were 45 student

teachers enrolled at English Language Teaching Department. The data were obtained through interviews and questionnaires.

**Key Words:** *English Language Teaching, discipline, teachers' perceptions*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Classroom management and discipline problems have long been among the issues of research and many studies have searched into the classroom management problems that both novice and experienced teachers encounter in their classes (Gordon cited in Parkay & Stanford, 2004, p.52; Chan and Leung, 1998). The issue of discipline in the classroom continues to surface as one of the most challenging problems in education (Kaliska, 2002). As Gordon (in Parkay and Stanford, 2004, p.52) puts it “the biggest barriers to teacher success are poor classroom management skills and disruptive students”.

### *Definition of discipline (disruptive behavior)*

Good (2003) defines discipline as “the process of redirecting immediate wishes, impulses, desires, or interest for the sake of an ideal, or for the purpose of gaining more effective, dependable action”.

Disruptive behavior as defined by Doyle (1986) refers to “any action by one or more students that threatens to disrupt the activity flow or pull the class toward a program of action that threatens the safety of the group or violates norm of appropriate classroom behavior held by teacher, the students or the school's staff”. In Kaplan, Gheen, and Midgley's (2002) opinion, disruptive behavior can be described as “talking out of turn, teasing, disrespecting others and getting out of one's seat”. According to Lawrence and Steed (in Kızıldağ, 2007) “disruptive behavior is any behavior that delays the learning process and normal routine of the school”. For Turnuklu (1999) the definition of the term may change from teacher to teacher in terms of definition, meaning and content, depending on their understanding and experience. In addition, Charles (1998) defines disruptive behavior as “behavior that is considered inappropriate for the setting or situation in which it occurs”. Levin and Nolan (1996) suggest that disruptive behavior “interferes with the act of teaching, interferes with other students' learning, is psychologically or physically unsafe, or destroys property”. McVeigh (2002) introduces a different perspective for discipline and he prefers to use the term “education resistance” rather than lesson or class disruption. As for the discipline in language classrooms, Escandon (2004) asserts that “disruption; that is, education resistance, shifts for most of the students' part from learning a foreign language to learning how to resist learning a foreign language”.

### *Forms of disruptive behavior (resistance)*

Charles (1998) describes five types of disruptive behavior as follows:

Aggression: physical or verbal attacks on the teacher or other students.

Immorality: acts such as cheating, lying, and stealing.

Defiance of authority: refusals sometimes hostile to do as the teacher requests.

Class disruptions: talking loudly, calling out, walking about the room, clowning, tossing objects.

Goofing off: fooling around, out of seat, not doing the assigned tasks, dawdling, daydreaming.

In addition to Charles, McVeigh (2002) and Escandon (2004) introduce a list of forms of resistance (disruptive behavior) as follows:

Bodily dispositions (e.g. sitting in a place far from other students, not maintaining eye contact with the instructor)

Absence (e.g. repeated absence, not attending class during important evaluation periods)

Not responding and pretending not to know (e.g. making a conscious effort to ignore what is being asked of them)

Neglect and forgetfulness (e.g. willful inattention, forgetting materials such as pens, textbooks, and notebooks)

Indifference (e.g. sleeping in class, daydreaming, not taking notes)

Inaccuracy (e.g. disregarding lecture points, failing exams)

Rudeness (e.g. making noise, chattering, snickering at lectures)

*Causes of disruptive behavior*

Robertson et al (2003) identified five causes of disruptive behavior in the classroom as follows:

**Immediate pat off:** If a student talks, it is because he or she has something to say.

**Attention seeking device:** the purpose of disruptive behavior can put the students in the limelight and keep them as the center of attraction by the teachers and the students

**Excitement:** Students can search for excitement by interfering with the progress of the lesson

**Malicious teasing:** by purposely provoking a confrontation with the teacher or by subjecting the teacher to subtle forms of ridicule, students can get excitement in the eyes of their peers.

**Avoiding work:** students can avoid the hardship of doing work by passive resistance

**Models used to handle discipline problems**

It is quite well-known that not every learner should be treated in the same way when dealing with a discipline problem in the classroom. For this reason, many different models and techniques have been proposed by scholars as to help teachers handle discipline behaviors in their classes. Kızıldağ (2007) introduced the models for maintaining discipline in the following table

**Table 1. Classroom Management Models**

Name	Year	Model
Jacob Kounin	1971	Instructional Management Model
Rudolf Dreikurs	1972	Social Discipline Model
Skinner	1953-1973	Behavior Modification Model
Haim Ginott	1971	Behavior Modification Model
Lee and Marlene Canter	1976,1992	Assertive Discipline Model
Fredrick Jones	1979,1987	Positive Discipline Model
Linda Albert	1989,1996	Cooperative Discipline Model
Thomas Gordon	1974,1989	Supportive Discipline Model
William Glasser	1992	Reality Discipline Model
Berne and Harris	1969	Communication Model
James Dobson	1970	Behavior/Punishment Model
Barbara Coloroso	1994	Inner Discipline
Alfie Kohn	1996	Beyond Discipline

#### *Research on Disruptive Behavior*

Studies on disruptive behavior focus on such issues as the definition of disruptive behavior, strategies used by teachers to handle disruptive behavior in the classroom, the causes of misbehavior, or the effects of disruptive students on teachers. In a study by Houghton, Wheldall, and Merret (1988), it was found out that talking out of turn and hindering other students were seen as the most problematic behaviors. McNamara (1987) found during a survey that “inappropriate talking” was the most disruptive behavior. He also found out that “aggression, verbal abuse, and physical aggression very seldom were cited as a day to day problem. In a study by Little (2003), “disobedience, idleness, slowness, unnecessary noise, and aggression” were found to be among the most specific classroom behavior problems. Also, a study by Jones, Ling and Charlton (in Kızıldağ, 2007) revealed that the most recurring disruptions were the maintenance of instructional efficiency, reinforcement, persuasion, conflict and crisis conflict. Rydell and Henricsson (2004) found out that there is a relationship between teacher orientation and the strategies they use to handle the discipline problems in class. Corrie (1997) investigated how teachers could handle the most disturbing behavior. She concluded that none of the teachers could describe why they acted as they did. However, in her research Corrie (1997) found out a clear link between teachers’ classroom practice and their professional knowledge.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Participants**

In this study, the participants were 45 student teachers enrolled at English Language Teaching Department, Çukurova University. The participants, all Turkish, ranged from 20-21 years of age, and had an upper-intermediate level of English due to a university entrance exam they took prior to their placement in their present department. All participants, upon graduation, will be awarded with a BA Degree in teaching English as

a foreign language, and will be functioning as English teachers at state or private educational institutions.

## **2.2. Instruments**

The data were collected through a questionnaire and interviews. The researchers distributed the questionnaire and collected it two weeks following the distribution date. To ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire, piloting was done with 15 teachers. The split-half method was used to calculate the reliability coefficient using Pearson product formula. The reliability coefficient obtained was later subjected to the Spearman Brown prophecy formula to obtain the reliability of the full test (Koul, 1984). A correlation coefficient of 0.73 (considered reliable) was obtained. Content analysis was conducted in order to analyze the open-ended questions. Content validity was ascertained in consultation with educational management specialists from the University of Cukurova, Adana, Turkey.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant face to face. The duration of interviews with each participant ranged from 7 to 9 minutes. During the interview, the following issues were taken into consideration: 1) One question was asked at a time, 2) The interviewer verified unclear responses, 3) Students were asked open-ended questions, and 4) Leading questions were avoided, and unbiased questions were preferred. Each interview was recorded and transcribed and the transcription was sent to each participant for review. The interviews were initially reviewed using a data analysis technique referred to as "skimming the cream" (Smith, 1978) where the researcher brainstormed the dominant themes emerging from the interviews. An in-depth analysis was then undertaken where the data was analyzed according to the overall structure of the interviews. Each idea in the interview transcription (be it a sentence or paragraph) was coded. Themes were then categorized in order of dominance. The findings from the interview data were then triangulated with the questionnaire data. The interview findings were overall consistent with the findings from the questionnaire.

## **3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This part presents the results of the questionnaire and interview data which were subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analyses. For the quantitative part item by item analysis was used and the analysis was conducted by using SPSS program.

**Table 2. The Causes of Discipline Problems**

	Chi – Square sig.	Yes		No	
		f	%	f	%
Lack of motivation	.000	45	100	---	---
Teacher’s attitude towards students	.000	44	97.8	1	2.2
Class atmosphere	.000	43	95.6	2	4.4
Teacher’s methodology	.000	42	93.3	3	6.7
Teacher’s lesson plan	.000	41	91.1	4	8.9
Boring lessons	.000	39	86.7	6	13.3
Students’ indifference	.000	37	82.2	8	17.8
Teacher’s personality	.000	36	80.0	9	20.0
Class size	.000	36	80.0	9	20.0
Students’ peers	.000	36	80.0	8	17.8
Characteristics of family	.000	35	77.8	10	22.2
Socio economic level	.025	30	66.7	15	33.3

The analysis of the results displayed in Table 2 reveals that the causes of the discipline problems vary. In the broadest sense, the problems stem from three main categories: student-based problems, teacher based problems, and classroom based problems. The item “lack of motivation” with the highest frequency suggests that 45 percent of the prospective teachers believe that when students lack motivation they may display misbehavior in class. When interviewed and asked to elaborate on lack of motivation, participants stated that the reason for demotivated students might be attributed to classroom practices. In other words, participants believe that as students lose their interest during the lesson, they start to misbehave in different ways. The frequencies for the items “teacher’s attitude towards students” (44), “class atmosphere” (43), “teacher’s methodology” (42) all confirm that teachers and the atmosphere they create in class highly contribute to discipline problems in language classes. The lowest frequency of the items belongs to the item “socio economic level” (30).

**Table 3. Discipline Problems**

	Chi – Square Sig.	never		sometimes		often		always	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Making noise	.000	1	2.2	2	4.4	16	35.6	26	57.8
Using cell phones	.000	5	11.1	7	15.6	9	20.0	24	53.3
Students talking to each other during the lesson	.000	1	2.2	5	11.1	18	40.0	20	44.4
Prolonged chattering	.003	4	8.9	7	15.6	14	31.1	20	44.4
Fighting among students	.000	4	8.9	1	2.2	19	42.2	20	44.4
Gum chewing	.025	5	1.1	9	20.0	12	26.7	19	42.2
Overt inattentiveness	.002	3	6.7	7	15.6	16	35.6	19	42.2
Coming to class without any preparation	.000	1	2.2	6	13.3	20	44.4	18	40.0
Cursing by students	.005	3	6.7	8	17.8	16	35.6	18	40.0
Cheating	.000	2	4.4	6	13.3	19	2.2	17	37.8
Sarcastic nonverbal reactions	.819	----	-----	14	31.1	14	31.1	17	37.8
Class clowns	.000	1	2.2	8	10.8	24	53.3	11	24.4
Passing notes	.352	7	15.6	15	33.3	13	8.9	10	22.2
Students getting out of their seats	.000	1	2.2	13	28.9	20	44.4	10	22.2
Sleeping in class	.000	2	4.4	19	42.2	14	1.1	9	20.0
Late comers	.000	3	6.7	20	44.4	12	26.7	9	20.0
Homework not being done	.057	----	-----	21	46.7	16	5.6	8	17.8
Calling out	.000	3	6.7	11	24.4	24	53.3	7	15.6
Eating and drinking	.000	5	11.1	16	35.6	17	37.8	6	13.3
Late homework	.000	2	4.4	21	46.7	16	5.6	6	13.3

Table 3 shows quite an even distribution of the frequencies of the items that prospective students believe to be discipline problems. However, the highest frequency for the item that is always viewed as misbehavior belongs to “making noise” (57.8 %). That is, 57.8

percent of the participants believe that students' making noise in class is always a discipline problem for them. The second highest frequency for the item always regarded as a discipline problem is "using cell phones", which could be regarded as a part of making noise in class. The list below displays the five most frequently chosen discipline problems (the list is based on the choice "always") and related verbatim are presented:

1. Making noise (f: 26; 57.8%)

*Whenever a student starts talking in a loud voice it disturbs not only me but all the other students in the class. I think this is a very serious problem as I believe that learning can take place only if the students are listening to the teacher or the other students.*

*Some students forget that they are in a classroom setting and start chatting with the person next to them and they can even talk about irrelevant topics. I also believe that these students are the ones who have little interest in the lesson.*

*I think making noise in the classroom is a very serious verbal disruptive behavior. When a student makes noise it sometimes causes other students to make noise as well.*

2. Using cell phones (f: 24; 53.3%)

*I see some students text messaging and I try to warn them non-verbally yet most of the time they go on what they are doing and this totally bothers me in class.*

*I can easily relate discipline problems with using cell phones in class because this is what happens most of the time in my class. The interesting thing is that most students are not aware that they are causing problems in class.*

3. Students' talking to each other (f: 20; 44.4%), fighting among students (f: 20; 44.4%), prolonged chattering, (f: 20; 44.4%)

*I am fed-up with trying to warn the students not to chat during class hours. When students go on talking for more than two or three minutes I lose my concentration and this affects my students.*

*A classroom is not the right place for chatting and I think students know this well. However, without any serious reason they may attempt to chat for a long time. I try to warn them verbally because I believe it works much better than non-verbal warning in my class.*

*When some students are engaged in private conversation, others feel that they have the right to do the same thing and it becomes hard to manage the class then.*

4. Gum chewing (f: 19; 42.2%)

*In my opinion gum chewing is a serious disruptive behavior because some students even forget that they are in a classroom setting. To me, gum chewing is an indication of disrespectfulness.*



*Some students overreact when I tell them to stop chewing gum because they think that it causes no harm yet I believe that it is one of the serious disruptive behaviors.*

5. Cursing by students (f: 18; 40.0%)

*To me, the biggest discipline problem occurs when a student uses swearing in class. I know that I should stay calm and ignore the student yet such behavior decreases my motivation for teaching.*

**Table 4 Discipline Problems That Student Teachers Have In Their Classes**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Homework not being done	18	36
Making noise	17	34
Students' talking to each other	14	28
Late comers	10	20
Prolonged chattering	10	20
Inattentiveness	9	18
Class clown	8	16
Cheating	5	10
Sarcastic non-verbal reactions from students	4	8
Sleeping in class	2	4
Fighting among students	2	4
Cursing by students	1	2
Gum chewing	1	2

The results in Table 4 display the discipline problems that student teachers claim to have in their classes. The highest frequency belongs to the item "homework not being done". That is 36 percent of the participants consider students' not doing homework as an important discipline problem.

Most teachers think that discipline problems stem from classroom management issues. When students come to class unprepared or without their assignments they challenge the teacher's authority, which may be one of the serious discipline problems.

The items "making noise" and "students' talking to each other" also stand as important misbehaviors for the participants. When we analyze the first five items in Table 4, we see that three of the items are related with the misbehaviors inside the class (making noise, students' talking to each other, and prolonged chattering). In fact, these three behaviors seem to be closely connected as they all result in a kind of noise in class. The lowest frequencies for the misbehaviors belong to the items "cursing by students" and gum chewing.

**Table 5. Discipline Problems That Are Important For Student Teachers**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Making noise	18	36
Inattentiveness	15	30
Students' talking to each other	15	30
Coming to class without any preparation	15	30
Cheating	10	20
Cursing by students	7	14
Fighting among students	7	14
Sarcastic non-verbal reactions from students	5	10
Sleeping in class	3	6
Late comers	2	4
Eating and drinking	2	4
Chewing gum	2	4
Class clowns	1	2

The analysis of the item “the discipline problems that are important for student teachers” reveals that students’ making noise is the most important discipline problem for the student teachers. This finding is also in line with the results presented in Table 4 as the same item (making noise) was among the first three items that have the highest frequency. That is to say, more than half of the participants believe that making noise is an important discipline problem and they also claim to have this misbehavior in their classes. As for the problems with a lower frequency, we see that “late comers”, eating and drinking”, “chewing gums”, and “class clowns” seem not to be a significant discipline problem for the student teachers. When we compare the item with the highest and the lowest frequency we see that while “making noise” is a discipline problem for nearly half of the participants, “class clowns” is considered a discipline problem only for one of the participants.

**Table 6. Interventions Used to Handle Discipline Problems**

	Chi – Square sig.	never		sometimes		often		always	
		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Using eye contact	.000	1	2.2	4	8.9	4	8.9	36	80.0
Talking with students after class	.010	5	11.1	8	17.8	12	26.7	20	44.4
Communicating with parents	.264	6	13.3	13	28.9	11	24.4	15	33.3
Verbal warning	.002	1	2.2	11	24.4	19	42.2	14	31.1
Changing seats	.001	2	4.4	18	40.0	18	40.0	7	15.6
Threatening	.000	31	68.9	7	15.6	2	4.4	5	11.1
Ignoring	.000	7	15.6	27	60.0	8	17.8	3	6.7
Calling out misbehaving student's name	.000	6	13.3	20	44.4	17	37.8	2	4.4
Punishing the student	.000	24	53.3	14	31.1	6	13.3	1	2.2
Dismissing the student	.000	32	71.1	11	24.4	2	4.4	----	----

The analysis of the results in Table 6 reveals that the most frequently used interventions that prospective teachers claim to prefer fall into two main categories as minor interventions (eye contact and talking with students) and more extensive interventions (communicating with parents). The item “using eye contact” has the highest frequency among the other interventions. That is, 80 percent of the participants claim that they would use eye contact as to handle the discipline problem in their classes. By doing so, they believe that they show the students that they are aware of the misbehavior.

*I use eye contact as a strategy to overcome discipline problems in my class because it saves time and effort and it is more effective as compared to verbal warnings.*

*Whenever I use eye contact with my students it works because they know that there is something to be corrected at that time.*

*I believe that two or three seconds eye contact is more effective than punishing the students using other means when there is a discipline problem in the classroom.*

The second highest frequency in the “always” category belongs to the item “talking with students” (44.4%). The item with the third highest frequency in the same category (always) belongs to “communicating with parents” which is a more extensive intervention.

*No matter how old the students are, they always feel uncomfortable when they feel that I will communicate with the parents. For this reason, I frequently use this strategy to deal with students causing discipline problems in the classroom.*

The reason for such a frequency order may be attributed to participants' starting with minor interventions and moving on to a more extensive intervention. As for the interventions that participants claim never to prefer, we see that 71.1 percent of the participants state that they never dismiss students, 68.9 percent claim that they never threaten the students and 53.3 percent state that they never punish the students when they misbehave in class. During the interviews, participants stated that they never use such interventions as they believe that those strategies may have some unexpected long term consequences.

**Table 7. Student Teachers' Favorite Strategies To Cope With Discipline Problems**

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Using eye contact	30	60
Verbal warning	22	44
Talking with students after class	15	30
Ignoring the student	4	8
Changing the strategy	4	8
Changing students' seats	3	6
Calling out misbehaving student's name	3	6
Setting the classroom rules beforehand	3	6
Giving responsibility to the misbehaving student	2	4
Punishing the misbehaving student	2	4
Threatening the misbehaving student	1	2

When we analyze the results in Table 7, we see that more than half of the participants (60%) seem to believe that eye contact is the most effective strategy to do deal with discipline problems in class. During the interviews, participants stated that the reason why they prefer eye contact is that it saves time and does not disturb the other students in class. The strategy with the second highest frequency is "verbal warning" (f: 22). For this specific strategy, participants stated that they warn the students verbally if eye contact does not work. They also added that using verbal warning in class also acts as a pre-warning for the students who may think of displaying misbehavior in class. Ignoring the misbehaving student, changing the strategy, changing the misbehaving student's seat or calling out misbehaving student's name are the strategies that less than half of the participants claim to use as to handle discipline problems in class. The strategy with the lowest frequency "threatening the misbehaving student" (f: 1) implies that almost all participants avoid using this strategy when dealing with misbehaving students.

#### **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this study, we aimed to figure out ELT student teachers' views regarding the discipline problems and their suggestions as to cope with these problems. We analyzed

the data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews as to search into learners' beliefs. The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- The causes of discipline problems may range from students' indifference to students' peers. However, the most significant causes of misbehavior in class seem to be students' lack of motivation (100%), teacher's attitude towards students (97.8 %), and class atmosphere (95.6%). This may suggest that teacher's role seems to be important in having discipline problems in class.
- Using cell phones and students' making noise in class are the discipline problems that prospective teachers consider to be serious.
- The most common discipline problems that participants claim to have in their classes are "homework not being done", "students' talking to each other" and "students' making noise".
- Cursing by students and gum chewing are the least encountered discipline problems.
- The interventions that student teachers claim always to use are "talking with students after class", "eye-contact", and "verbal warning"

## 5. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is well known that discipline problems appear as one of the most common classroom management issues both for the novice and the experienced teachers. However, the issue may be of greater significance for novice teachers as the transition from teacher education program to the teaching profession is mostly a challenging process. Several implications about the context of English language teaching can be deduced from the present study. The most common causes of discipline problems in the language classroom seem to be lack of motivation, teachers' attitude and class atmosphere. As for the most important problems which student teachers experience in their own classrooms, we see inattentiveness, students' being unprepared for the lessons, and ongoing talk by the students. Regarding the findings of the study, it can be concluded that a teacher training program as a part of student teachers' education program might be beneficial. In such a program, designing discussion sessions during which student teachers together with experienced teachers discuss real classroom situations, discipline problems, and strategies to handle the problems might help student teachers to develop appropriate preventive skills. Another implication of the study might be having student teachers be involved in personal reflections regarding discipline problems they encounter in their practice teaching and doing this as a part of the teacher education program might empower student teachers.

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