



Managing Unexpected Classroom Challenges: The Role of Teacher-Student Interaction in Promoting Engagement and Learning

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Abstract

Background: Managing unexpected classroom situations—sudden questions, sensitive discussions, behavioral disruptions—is a fundamental challenge in modern education, transforming controlled classrooms into dynamic, unpredictable spaces. This review examines management strategies, emphasizing effective teacher-student interaction's key role in enhancing learning processes.

Materials and Methods: This narrative review systematically searched Persian and English literature up to March 2025. Keywords focused on unexpected classroom situations, classroom management, teacher skills, teacher-student interaction, and active learning. The databases searched included SID, Magiran, CIVILICA, PubMed, ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science. Screening involved two phases—title/abstract and full-text—conducted independently by two researchers. Study quality was assessed using the STROBE checklist.

Results: This review demonstrated that managing unexpected classroom situations is essential, as teachers' rapid, flexible responses preserve student focus and motivation. Challenges—disruptive behaviors, diverse needs, sudden questions, sensitive topics—are effectively managed through enhanced emotional intelligence, strengthening communication, alleviating stress, and fostering psychological safety. Key strategies include active interaction, clear behavioral rules, interactive teaching methods, positive reinforcement, and time management. Paired with cognitive flexibility and specialized training, these prepare teachers for complex conditions, boosting intrinsic motivation, active participation, and effective learning environments. Emotional skills training and organizational support further enhance classroom management.

Conclusion: Managing unexpected classroom situations like sudden questions or disruptions is vital for maintaining focus and learning quality. Quick, flexible teacher responses transform challenges into opportunities, boosting motivation. Active interaction, clear rules, interactive teaching, positive feedback, and time management enhance classroom environments. Emotional intelligence facilitates emotion control and better stress decisions. Training with psychological/organizational support creates safe, effective learning spaces.

Key Words: Classroom management, Unexpected situations, Emotional intelligence, Teacher-student interaction, Adaptive strategies.

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1- INTRODUCTION

Managing unexpected situations in the classroom—such as sudden questions, sensitive discussions, behavioral disruptions, or even large-scale crises like pandemics—represents a fundamental and complex challenge within contemporary educational systems. These unforeseen events transform classrooms from carefully controlled and planned environments into dynamic, often unpredictable spaces. Such disruptions not only disturb classroom order but can deeply affect students' motivation, interaction, and overall learning quality (2-5).

To effectively confront these challenges, teachers must be equipped with a variety of skills including emotional intelligence, cognitive flexibility, and the ability to apply efficient managerial strategies. Such skills empower teachers to transform potential disruptions into valuable instructional opportunities. Furthermore, employing approaches like fostering active interaction with students, reinforcing positive behaviors, and setting clear and consistent behavioral expectations are essential competencies that contribute both to effective classroom management and the enhancement of the learning environment (6-8).

A lack of preparedness and specialized training in managing unexpected classroom situations can severely hinder teachers' ability to maintain control and manage crises, leading to reduced teaching efficacy and heightened occupational stress (9, 10). Conversely, well-developed teacher-learner interactions and skillful management of unforeseen situations play a pivotal role in improving student learning outcomes and satisfaction levels (11-13).

Given the profound impact that managing these unexpected events has on instructional quality as well as the

psychological well-being of both teachers and students, this review focuses on addressing current gaps in research. It seeks to provide a comprehensive framework and roadmap for educational policymakers and teacher training programs. The emphasis is on enhancing adaptive skills and resilience, thereby mitigating the negative consequences arising from unforeseen classroom conditions (14, 15).

The aim of this review is to critically examine and analyze strategies for managing unexpected classroom situations, with a particular focus on the vital role played by effective teacher-student interaction in promoting the learning process and improving educational outcomes.

2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

2-1. Study Design

This study employed a structured narrative review based on a systematic search of Persian and English sources up to March 2025. The search combined keywords related to managing unexpected situations, classroom management, teacher managerial skills, teacher-student interaction, learning enhancement, and active learning environments in both languages. To minimize bias and improve accuracy, two independent researchers conducted the search, screening, and selection processes. Disagreements were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer (16).

2-2. Source Search

Reputable domestic databases—SID, Magiran, CIVILICA—and international databases including PubMed, ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science were searched. Bibliographies of selected articles were manually reviewed to identify additional studies. All relevant sources available up to August 2024 were included without time restrictions.

2-3. Inclusion Criteria

Included studies focused on managing unexpected classroom situations, emphasizing teacher skills and challenges in formal educational settings, published in Persian or English. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method designs consistent with the research aims were accepted.

2-4. Exclusion Criteria

Studies exclusively about non-teaching occupations, non-original reviews, letters, conference reports without full texts, unpublished theses, and studies lacking sufficient data were excluded. Disagreements on inclusion were resolved by consensus among two researchers and a third reviewer.

2-5. Screening Process

Screening was conducted in two stages: independent review of titles and abstracts by two researchers to remove irrelevant studies, followed by full-text review based on eligibility criteria (16).

2-6. Quality Assessment and Scoring

The STROBE checklist includes 22 items that assess the quality of reporting in observational studies such as cohort, case-control, and cross-sectional designs. Each item evaluates important sections like the study title, participant selection, data analysis, and discussion of bias. Reviewers score each item as "Yes" if fully reported, "No" if missing, or "Unclear/Not Applicable" if information is insufficient or irrelevant. The total score is the number of "Yes" items out of 22; higher scores indicate better reporting quality and lower risk of bias. Studies scoring 16 or more out of 22 are generally considered to have acceptable quality, while those scoring less than 14 frequently show major flaws such as poor participant flow or missing confounding adjustments, leading to their exclusion from quantitative synthesis but may still be included narratively for

completeness (17, 18). Two independent reviewers typically perform scoring and resolve discrepancies through discussion to ensure objective assessment.

2-7. Ethical Considerations

No institutional review board approval was required, as this review analyzed published literature only, involving no human subjects, primary data collection, or personal data. All sources were properly cited with full attribution. The study followed ethical standards for systematic reviews, ensuring transparency, reproducibility, and integrity (16).

3- RESULTS

This review examines teachers' strategies for managing unexpected classroom situations and their effects on student engagement and motivation. All included studies showed moderate to high quality based on STROBE (17) and CASP (18) checklists. Findings are organized into six main areas (**Table 1**):

3-1. Importance of Managing Unexpected Situations

Teachers typically follow structured mental teaching plans, yet sudden questions, sensitive topics, or disruptive behaviors frequently disrupt this flow. Rapid, intelligent, flexible responses are crucial for maintaining classroom focus, enhancing teacher-student interaction, elevating learning quality, and boosting student motivation. These skills create and sustain dynamic, effective learning environments (19-22; **Table 1**).

3-2. Challenges and Role of Emotional Intelligence

Classroom management challenges profoundly threaten teaching efficacy, including disruptive/aggressive behaviors, diverse student needs, workload pressures, resource constraints, unforeseen disruptions, crisis skill gaps, and communication barriers (23-27). High

emotional intelligence transforms these obstacles by enabling emotion recognition/regulation, creating psychological safety, reducing anxiety, enhancing interactions, and elevating intrinsic motivation (23, 25).

EI empowers thoughtful decisions under pressure, prevents burnout, resolves conflicts, boosts collaboration, and minimizes miscommunication. Targeted EI training is essential for sustainable teaching excellence, optimal learning outcomes, and enriching educational experiences for teachers and students (26-31).

3-3. Key Teacher Strategies

Proven approaches empower teachers to master unexpected situations:

- Active interaction fosters dialogue/participation, eliminating ambiguity and igniting motivation (19, 32).
- Clear behavioral rules with consistent reinforcement slash disruptions, maintaining calm classrooms (33).
- Interactive methods (problem-based learning, group activities, modern technology) capture attention and boost participation (34).
- Positive reinforcement (feedback, praise, rewards) fortifies motivation and strengthens relationships (35, 36).
- Time management/nonverbal skills sustain focus and cultivate serene atmospheres (37, 38).

3-4. Necessity of Adaptive and Flexible Skills

Adaptive skills transform unexpected disruptions into learning opportunities:

- **Cognitive flexibility & uncertainty acceptance:** Teachers embrace unpredictability, reframing sudden disruptions (unexpected questions,

behavioral issues) as valuable teachable moments that deepen understanding and spark curiosity (39-42).

- **Technopedagogical training + flexible learning approaches:** Comprehensive preparation equips educators to manage high-stress scenarios, navigate complex dynamics, and execute rapid, precise responses using digital tools and adaptive methods (43-46).

Outcome: Resilient teachers creating dynamic learning environments.

3-5. Effects on Student Engagement & Motivation

Successful implementation of effective strategies dramatically increases active student participation, enhances intrinsic motivation for learning, and significantly reduces disruptive behaviors. These proven approaches create safe, engaging environments that transform ordinary classrooms into dynamic spaces optimized for deep learning and sustained focus. Precise time management, interactive teaching methods, and positive reinforcement consistently maintain concentration while substantially improving learning quality. Most importantly, skilled teachers convert sudden challenges into valuable educational opportunities, resulting in markedly higher student motivation and satisfaction (21, 47-53).

3-6. Practical Recommendations

To effectively implement these strategies, the following comprehensive recommendations are proposed:

- **Design targeted professional development programs** focusing on enhancing teachers' emotional intelligence (emotion recognition, regulation, empathy) and adaptive

skills (cognitive flexibility, uncertainty tolerance) to equip educators for complex classroom dynamics

- **Provide specialized training** in effective rule-setting techniques combined with positive reinforcement strategies (praise, feedback, rewards) to establish clear expectations and minimize disruptive behaviors
- **Promote continuous use** of interactive teaching methods (problem-based learning, group activities, technology integration) while strategically leveraging unexpected situations as authentic learning opportunities

- **Establish organizational and psychological support systems** including stress management workshops, counseling services, and workload reduction initiatives to prevent teacher burnout

- **Offer training** in advanced time management and communication skills (verbal/nonverbal techniques) to maintain student focus, sustain motivation, and create calm, productive classroom atmospheres (6, 54-60).

Table 1: Summary of Strategies for Managing Unexpected Classroom Situations and Quality Assessment Results.

Category	Description/Strategies	Impact on Students & Outcomes	Quality Assessment (STROBE)	References
Managing Unexpected Situations	Quick, flexible responses to disruptions like sudden questions and disruptive behaviors	Sustained focus, enhanced engagement and learning quality	Moderate to High	19-22
Role of Emotional Intelligence	Emotion recognition, self-regulation, conflict resolution, psychological safety	Reduced anxiety/burnout, stronger motivation, better teacher-student relationships	Moderate to High	23-31
Teacher Strategies	Active dialogue, clear rules with reinforcement, problem-based learning, positive feedback, nonverbal time management	Increased participation, reduced disruptions, calmer atmosphere	Moderate to High	19, 32-38
Adaptive & Flexible Skills	Cognitive flexibility, technopedagogical training, accepting uncertainty	Effective stress management, turning challenges into learning opportunities	Moderate to High	39-46
Engagement & Motivation Effects	Safe environments via interactive methods and positive reinforcement	Higher self-efficacy, fewer negative behaviors, deeper sustained learning	Moderate to High	21, 47-53
Practical Recommendations	EI training, PBIS/restorative integration, organizational support, interactive teaching	Enhanced teacher preparedness, long-term resilience and equity	Moderate to High	6, 54-60

*Quality assessment of the studies was conducted using the STROBE checklist (17).

4- DISCUSSION

This review explores strategies for managing unexpected classroom situations, emphasizing how effective teacher–student interaction supports learning. Six main themes emerged: quick and flexible responses, emotional intelligence, essential teaching strategies, adaptive skills, effects on student engagement and motivation, and suggestions for training and support. Evidence-based, proactive approaches reduce disruptions and boost student motivation, resilience, and overall learning quality.

Unexpected classroom events—ranging from spontaneous questions to disruptive behaviors—give teachers the opportunity to turn brief disruptions into moments of deep, lasting learning instead of just maintaining surface-level order (22, 61, 62). Proactive strategies, like clearly setting expectations from the start and using non-verbal signals such as eye contact, help prevent disruptions and create a creative, collaborative classroom atmosphere. Techniques like the Good Behavior Game support structured group activities that boost student focus and intrinsic motivation (63-65). By using these moments for dialogue and problem-solving, teachers promote active learning and enhance the quality of instruction (66).

Complex challenges—including aggressive behaviors and organizational pressures—can increase teacher burnout if emotional resources are limited. However, emotional intelligence (EI) transforms classroom interactions into opportunities for collective emotion regulation, fostering self-management skills such as emotional reflection and expression (23, 25). Frameworks like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) incorporate EI through systematic positive reinforcement, greatly reducing disruptive incidents. Restorative practices, through structured dialogues, rebuild trust and

reposition the classroom as a resilient community (67, 68). Together, these strategies shift teachers from reactive disciplinarians to emotional leaders who calm anxiety and build lasting motivation, moving beyond short-term, behaviorist solutions (68-70).

Effective strategies include active communication to clear up misunderstandings (19), regularly reinforcing flexible rules, and using interactive methods like problem-based learning. These are often paired with innovative techniques such as free-time rewards and gamification to personalize learning and boost participation (71-75). Cognitive flexibility and intentional non-verbal time management help teachers turn uncertainty into opportunities for social–emotional learning (SEL), shifting students from passive listeners to creative collaborators (76-81). As a result, classrooms become resilient environments where creativity flourishes because of, not despite, challenges.

The benefits of these approaches are evident in heightened student self-efficacy and reduced negative behaviors. Safe learning environments make education a more enjoyable experience, while collaborative classrooms have shown stronger resilience during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (67, 82-86). Over time, such classrooms promote educational equity and embed essential life skills like conflict resolution and problem-solving, turning everyday challenges into stepping stones for lifelong personal growth (87-91).

To achieve these benefits, this discussion highlights the need for comprehensive professional development programs that combine emotional intelligence training with PBIS, restorative practices, and digital monitoring, all backed by strong institutional support (92-96). Ongoing, evidence-based training aligned with organizational commitment is essential for

effectively enhancing teacher skills (97, 98). Additionally, the mostly qualitative and context-specific evidence points to the need for long-term, cross-cultural research on how teachers respond to unexpected classroom situations—an important step toward advancing educational innovation and refining culturally sensitive models of classroom management and teacher–student interaction (80, 81, 95, 99, 100).

5- CONCLUSION

Unexpected classroom situations—such as unplanned student questions, sensitive topics, or disruptive behaviors—disrupt the intended teaching process and fragment class focus. Teachers' ability to respond swiftly, flexibly, and thoughtfully is crucial for restoring order, sustaining engagement, and elevating learning quality. This capability transforms challenges into valuable opportunities, fostering dynamic environments that ignite students' intrinsic motivation.

Effective management requires strategies like promoting active student dialogue, establishing clear behavioral expectations, integrating interactive methods and modern technologies, and delivering consistent positive reinforcement. Skills in time management and nonverbal communication further create calm, structured classrooms that curb disruptions and deepen learning. Central to success is emotional intelligence, which equips teachers to recognize their own and students' emotions, maintain composure under pressure, and make reasoned decisions. Targeted training to build emotional intelligence and adaptability, coupled with psychological and institutional support, enables teachers to navigate challenges confidently, alleviate stress, and cultivate safe, supportive learning spaces that optimize student achievement and satisfaction.

6- AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Study conception or design: AH, HA; Data analyzing and draft manuscript preparation: AH, and HA; Critical revision of the paper: AP; Supervision of the research: AH and HA; Final approval of the version to be published: AH, AP, and HA.

7- CONFLICT OF INTEREST: None.

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