

# Coping Strategies Employed by EFL Teachers to Avoid Classroom Management Constraints: Scale Development and Validation

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## Abstract

Classroom management constraints and how English teachers cope with or remove them effectively have significantly impacted EFL teachers and teacher educators. However, the coping strategies employed by teachers with high and low levels of expertise have not been thoroughly explored yet. To this end, 22 teachers in one language learning institute in Tehran were interviewed, and the main coping strategies used by the teachers were extracted through qualitative analysis of the interviews. Then, the extracted strategies were worded into items carefully. The questionnaire of EFL teachers' coping strategies was validated for the purpose of the study. After running exploratory factor analysis, the findings revealed that the participants used twenty-three coping strategies under two sub-constructs: problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies. One hundred EFL teachers with high and low levels of expertise (fifty in the high and fifty in the low group) responded to the coping strategy questionnaire. The results revealed that highly expert teachers used the extracted coping strategies more frequently. Furthermore, the researcher confirmed that teachers need in-service training courses on coping strategies to manage their classes efficiently. The results have implications for stakeholders, namely English language teachers, teacher educators, language institutes, education departments, and EFL curriculum developers.

**Keywords:** Classroom management (CM), Constraints, Coping strategies, High/Low levels of expertise

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## INTRODUCTION

Classroom management (CM) has been the topic of a great number of studies that scholars in the field of education delved into (e.g., Akman, 2020; Brophy, 2006; Kalantarypour & Modirkhamene, 2021; Khany & Ghoreyshi, 2013; Vairamidou & Stravakou, 2019; Özen & Yıldırım, 2020). According to Brophy (2006), classroom management is a teacher's attempt to establish an effective atmosphere for teaching and learning purposes. Also, Savage and Savage (2009) investigated CM from two angles of preventing the problems from occurring and how to respond when the problems appear. Therefore, along with classroom management, the challenges and constraints teachers encounter have been the focus of research (e.g., Kayıkçı, 2009; Salkovsky, Romi, & Lewis, 2015; Debreli & Ishanova, 2019; Shakerkhoshroudi, Beh-Afarin, & Nikoopour, 2020). Similarly, Yazdanmehr and Akbari (2015) placed emphasis on the room to investigate the constraints troubling EFL teachers at the level of English Institutes in Iran since most studies revolve around the problems secondary school instructors are challenged with. However, Shakerkhoshroudi et al. (2020) explored the constraints influencing EFL teachers' classroom performance. The results revealed that the explored constraints originated from four sources of institute policies, teachers, learners, and social-cultural differences. Additionally, coping strategies to deal with the disruptions and misbehaviors in the classrooms were the area of interest of researchers in the field (e.g., Skinner, Edge, Altman, & Sherwood, 2003; Olley, Cohn, & Cowan, 2010; Lampadan, 2014; Takkaç-Tulgar, 2019). According to the findings of the studies mentioned above, it can be inferred that it is of much significance to deeply delve into the coping strategies which teachers with low and high levels of expertise need to employ while facing classroom constraints. This study attempted to identify and classify the coping strategies used by Iranian EFL teachers to manage the classrooms effectively.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Coping is how individuals deal with problems in life cognitively, effectively, and behaviorally (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Identifying responsible behavior and raising misbehaving students' awareness of their wrong conduct and their impact, accordingly, on other classmates could be helpful and make them more committed to schoolwork (e.g., Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2005; Lewis & Burman, 2008). Lewis (2001) contended that in order to make undisciplined students more accountable, it is best to engage them further in decision-making and notify them of the consequences of their destructive behaviors on other classmates.

Skinner et al. (2003) mentioned five coping strategies: problem-solving, support seeking, avoidance, distraction, and positive cognitive restructuring to cope with the stressors in the classroom. In addition, Lewis, Roache, and Romi (2011) specified three more coping styles: social problem solving, passive-avoidant, and relaxation. Kyriacou (2009) stated that palliative techniques do not lessen the effect of stress. In contrast, direct-action aims at the sources. In addition, another study done by Dick and Wagner (2001) revealed that teachers following avoidance techniques suffered more from burnout than those making the most of adaptive coping strategies. By comparison, Tran (2015) discovered that teachers using avoiding techniques ended up aggression and employing punishment facing disruptive conduct opposing those who utilize social problem solving and relaxation strategies.

Olley et al. (2010) mentioned that the most systematic way to control school misbehavior is to suspend or detain them. However, Crowe (2010) suggested some strategies to cope with challenging students, such as coming to know about students through their former teachers to know their triggers. Teachers can help students more when they know their learners' learning styles. Besides, teachers can find positive qualities of students through collecting some personal information from the students themselves. Involving students by designing engaging lessons was the advice Tomlinson

(2012) gave to teachers and finding the students' negative behaviors and respecting them. In addition, the need for love and belonging for students with weak social skills from their teachers was emphasized. In addition, Schussler (2009) emphasized engaging students academically and providing them choices that improve their conduct in the class. Arranging the curriculum to prompt pupils to behave is not acceptable. Instead, teachers should control their classroom behavior so that students see their success.

Moreover, teachers ought to plan their lessons carefully and respect their students and attempt to find their redeeming features and find the roots of misbehavior. Also, they are required to meet students' needs for love and belonging, especially those with poor social skills who are thirsty for their teachers' attention. One way to involve students academically is how teachers manage their classes, which provides the students the learning opportunity, ending in their behavioral improvement. The classes should not be organized to prompt appropriate behavior but to trigger students to see their success personally. These strategies should heighten the students' spirits and prevent them from frustration but promote teaching and learning (Shawer, 2010; Tomlinson, 2012).

By the same token, Guercio (2011) contended that teachers ought to initiate their school year by building relationships with pupils and recognizing students' needs. To Partin (2009), teachers with a proactive approach to instruction encounter less misbehavior in the classrooms. To that end, teachers can get to know their pupils before the start of the school by seeking help from former teachers or students' families and finding triggers before negative behavior's happening, which might be of great help to safeguard future troubles. Also, a teacher can come to know about the specific details of students' daily lives and discover some of the positive qualities of all the students (Crowe, 2010).

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009), teachers who use active coping strategies get help socially and emotionally, face challenges positively, work with parents, or change their methodologies. Besides, inexperienced teachers use both direct and indirect coping strategies at the

onset of their teaching career. They do their utmost to depersonalize, keep healthy, accept, and self-talk (Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2011). Further, the inexperienced teacher might be overwhelmed with numerous decisions, and they are supposed to have the satisficing capabilities. They might not resolve the vague problems and make appropriate decisions, but they can find short-lived solutions to the difficulties (Le Maistre & Pare, 2010). Another helpful factor that assists teachers to survive and thrive despite all the challenges is their resilience (Mansfield, Beltman, Bradley, & Weatherby-Fell, 2016). Howard and Johnston (2004) defined resilience as the teachers' ability to manage what happens to them.

Besides, Akbari and Eghtesadi (2017) investigated Iranian EFL teachers' coping strategies to keep from burnout. They found that these teachers are more friendly with their students, share their obstacles with their co-workers and principals, and work on their CM strategies. They also reflect on their work, learn continuously, follow moral ethics, and use a traditional teaching style. Furthermore, Kalantarypour and Modirkhamene (2021) studied whether EFL teachers' coping styles and how they manage their classes could lead to their students' better achievement. They found that teachers did not turn to coping techniques to scaffold troubles in the ranks; however, they relied on their management skills.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Detailed analysis of the studies on coping strategies for effective classrooms reveals that this area needs further exploration. More specifically, the types of strategies employed by the EFL teachers with high and low levels of expertise have been neither explored qualitatively nor compared quantitatively. As the study's findings both theoretically and pedagogically contribute to the field, it is of much significance to investigate how EFL teachers deal with classroom management constraints and whether or not the developed model for coping strategies has acceptable psychometric values. To be more specific, the study focused on coping strategies used by EFL

teachers with high versus low levels of expertise to deal with classroom management constraints. Also, the researchers attempted to investigate the psychometrics of the constructed coping strategies questionnaire used for the purpose of study.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

Two groups of participants were involved in the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study. Teachers for the qualitative phase were selected from one branch of Milad Language Institute in Tehran through purposive sampling. After obtaining the written consent and assigning pseudonyms to teachers, the researchers started interviewing the teachers, and when the 22<sup>nd</sup> teacher was interviewed, the data saturation criterion was met. The second group included 100 EFL teachers (high/low levels of expertise) employed at Milad Language Institute who were chosen for the piloting phase through convenience sampling. Moreover, the participants were assured of the confidentiality of their data, and the research purpose was explained to them as well.

### **Instrumentation**

Semi-structured interviews containing open-ended questions were conducted to firstly understand the phenomenon of coping strategies from participants' own perspectives about the coping strategies they use while encountering constraints in their classes. More specifically, the researchers studied the literature on EFL teachers' coping strategies in the face of constraints. The researchers constructed some questions that elaborated on how EFL teachers deal with disruptions in the classroom. Then, the questions were worded accurately, refined, and peer-checked to be understandable and clear by two other applied linguists, experts in a qualitative research study.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

The researchers selected a group of EFL teachers as the informants. The researchers studied the literature on EFL teachers' coping strategies in the face of constraints. The researchers constructed some questions that elaborated on how EFL teachers deal with disruptions in the classroom. Then, the questions were worded accurately, refined, and peer-checked to be comprehensible and clear by two other applied linguists, experts in a qualitative research study. Next, the researchers selected informants to interview in person at their workplaces. After finishing each audio-taped interview, the researchers transcribed them verbatim and analyzed their content. The interviewing was stopped when no further code was elicited. All the interviews were in the form of a word document and labeled as interviews for EFL teachers' coping strategies.

In addition, the quantitative phase was undertaken in different stages. In stage one, the developed questionnaire was validated through administering the questionnaire to the participants recruited for the validation phase. The data collected from 100 participants were submitted to factor analysis, and the reliability of the questionnaires was estimated. In stage 2, the validated questionnaire was administered to 100 participants through either electronic mails or face-to-face meetings with the participants at the language institutes in which they were employed. The participants were coded as either teachers with low or high levels of expertise using a nominal scale (one as teachers with low expertise level, two as teachers with high expertise level). The two groups' scores on all items of each questionnaire and the sum of the items of each factor were estimated and analyzed through running appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics.

## **Data Analysis**

In the qualitative part, all the interviews were recorded; however, the interviewees were aware of the recordings. Then, all the audio records were transcribed with the help of two colleagues. Along with the interview

transcript, the researchers used field notes to keep the collected data. Then, the data were checked and fractured to identify and collect similar phenomena into the same group (Creswell, 2012). As a result, more themes were developed, and the researchers continued the coding process to find the exceptions that did not match the analysis. After that, the redundant codes were eliminated, and the codes were clustered into themes.

In addition, the quantitative data were submitted to exploratory factor analysis, namely principal axis factoring (PAF) with direct Oblimin Rotation. Before conducting PAF, the suitability of data for factor analysis was examined. That is, first, the researchers checked the normality with skewness and kurtosis measures of the items. Also, to check the suitability of the data for factor analysis, the researchers ran a KMO test. Moreover, the collected data from teachers with low or high levels of expertise were submitted to descriptive statistics (mean, SD, and Frequencies) and inferential statistics (Levene's test for estimating the equality of variances and one-sample t-test for comparing the groups' means).

## **RESULTS**

### **Research Question 1**

The extracted coping strategies were coded and fell into two sub-constructs: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. Each type of coping strategy is explained and exemplified by direct quotations from the interviewees in the following sections:

#### ***Problem-focused coping strategies***

The subthemes of problem-focused coping strategies are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Problem-focused coping strategy

Subtheme	N	Percent
1. Attempting to solve the problem	17	77.2%
2. Putting more effort into my work	15	68.1%
3. Improving my relationship with students, colleagues, and administrators	14	63.6%
4. Finding a way to make the noisy students silent	14	63.6%
5. Joining teacher-parent-school meetings.	13	59.09%
6. Involving language learners in and out of the institute for their class activities	13	59.09%
7. Learning to get adapted to school policies	15	68.1%
8. Trying to have more sense of humor	14	63.6%
9. Trying to be punctual	13	59.09%
10. Sharing my policies with the students in the first session	12	54.5%
11. Highlighting the value of the learners' punctuality and order	12	54.5%
12. Moving in the classroom and avoiding being monotonous	10	45.4%
13. Consciously blocking out the problem (ignoring)	9	40.09%
14. Not letting others know some of my CM problems	9	40.09%
15. Avoiding challenging topics in my classes	10	45.4%
16. Skipping the unnecessary materials	11	50%

The first extracted coping strategy reported by almost all teachers was their attempts to solve the problems in the classroom (n=17, F=77.2%). For instance, T1 stated, "Two of my students were not in speaking terms, and this affected our pair work and group work tasks. So, with the help of their friends, we reconciled them." The second subtheme was to put more effort into their work (n=15, F= 68.1%). Below, one of the teachers stated, "to motivate unwilling students, I prepared several clips and short videos to play inside the class and involved them." (T2)

The next extracted coping strategy as reported by 16 interviewees (80%) was thematically coded as "Improving my relationship with students, colleagues, and administrators." This is in line with T3, who mentioned, "I noticed some of my colleagues were close to their students and co-workers, so I tried to learn from them and follow their leads. Besides, from then on, I shared my CM challenges with trustable colleagues, and it really worked." The fourth subtheme was to make noisy students silent (n=14, F=63.6%). As an example, T5 quoted "some of my students were noisy and almost out of control, and nothing was working for them. Therefore, I asked for their parents, and with their assistance, I could control their noise."

“Joining teacher-parent-school meetings” was another extracted subtheme (n=13, F=59.09%). For example, T6 mentioned, “I always cherish parent-teacher, teacher-school meetings, since I believe I learn a lot from these seminars. I sometimes get to know more about my students and their family backgrounds. Also, I benefit from my more experienced colleagues’ tips and guidance. Another subtheme was to involve language learners more in and out of their class sessions (n=13, F=59.09%). One instance was stated by T8 “As I believe in task-based teaching, I always encourage my learners to write about their daily life and what they usually do during the day. This will engage them more in their lessons and motivate them to study more.” One more subtheme was adapted to school policies (n=15, F=68.1%). T7, for instance, exemplified that “After years of teaching, I have learned that the best thing is to adapt to institute policies and respect them unless I understand that they don’t know their jobs. Otherwise, it is best to abide by the rules and not to challenge them.”

Moreover, having a sense of humor was another interesting subtheme (n=14, F=63.6%). T9 stated, “Once I accepted a class and came to know that students were not interested in learning at all. In the first session, I broke the ice and started teaching by making jokes and spicing up the spirit of the class. Surprisingly learners were so happy and were competing with one another to attend the class activities”. punctuality was another subtheme extracted from interviews (n=13, F=59.09). For instance, T10 mentioned, “to teach my learners to be punctual and not to be late for the classes, I decided to be on time and even sometimes in time so that I could form this habit in my students.” The tenth extracted subtheme was for the teachers to share their policies with students in the first session (n=12, F=54.5%). One teacher stated, “Speaking from experience, I usually share my thoughts with my students in the very first session. Straightforwardly, I inform them of all my expectations and concerns. Therefore, no excuses will be accepted later.” (T12)

The next subtheme extracted was highlighting the value of the learners’ punctuality and order (n=12, F=54.5%). For instance, T13 pointed

out, "in order to encourage other students to be more punctual and organized, I praised all the organized students and even sometimes used to buy them gifts. Besides, I tried to make them role models and even encourage them to assist disorganized students." The twelfth subtheme was to move in the classroom and avoid being monotonous. T14 quoted, "I always try to change the seat arrangements in the classes so that students could see each other and also, I could move around and energize them. Besides, I can monitor their work easier." Some teachers attempt to ignore some inconveniences in their classes. This was another subtheme, and T16 stated, "in one of my classes, students were so rude. All former teachers were complaining about them, and I had to accept it as well. It was so difficult to manage them, so I ignored them. As a result, it bothered me a lot. I used to self-blame and always prayed for help. Finally, I had to leave that institute."

The next subtheme was teachers' hiding their CM problems rather than sharing them with others. For instance, T17 mentioned, "I was always behind my syllabus and also didn't know how to heat up discussions in the classroom to encourage my students to participate more. However, I am used to bottling up all these problems and not sharing them with others." The next extracted subtheme was to avoid challenging topics in the classes. For instance, T18 quoted, "I noticed topics such as political issues or others create chaos in my classes. Therefore, I decided not to raise them in my classes and explained to my students the reasons why I prohibited them from being discussed." The sixteenth subtheme extracted from interviews was to skip unnecessary classroom materials. Another example was mentioned by T19 "After years of teaching, I have enough experience to manage to finish my lessons according to the syllabus. If I think I am short of time, I skip unnecessary parts and stick to the important ones."

### *Emotion-focused coping strategies*

The subthemes of emotion-focused coping strategies are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Emotion-focused coping strategies

Subtheme	N	Frequency
17. Talking to the administrators and giving each other support	14	63.6%
18. Seeking guidance from the others	14	63.6%
19. Asking a professional for help	12	54.5%
20. Focusing on the positive aspects of my job and profession	15	68.1%
21. Making time for leisure activities	13	59.09%
22. Playing sports	11	50%
23. Praying for help and do some yoga or meditation	11	50%

The first extracted subtheme reported by some teachers was coded as talking to the administrators (n=14, F=63.6%). For instance, T19 stated, "once, I felt that some parents or others from out of the class were interfering with my work inside the class. Therefore, I took the case to the supervisor, and they assisted me in resolving that issue." The next coded subtheme was seeking guidance from the others. Some teachers emphasized that they reach out to their more experienced colleagues for help in case (n=14, F=63.6%). One teacher mentioned, "when I feel desperate and do not know what to do, I usually turn to a more experienced teacher who is also a friend and seek his tips and guidance, and often it works." The third coded subtheme was asking a professional for help (n=12, F=54.5%). One of the teachers stated, "once I had trouble teaching one task of listening to my students and the support from the colleagues wasn't useful. I reached out to a TEFL expert for help, and he introduced some good articles and books and provided some very useful hints." (T21)

The fourth extracted subtheme was to focus on the positive aspects of the job and profession (n=15, F=68.1%). T22 exemplified the subtheme, "when I compare my job with those of others and the appreciation they get in the society, I feel down and sometimes think of quitting my profession. However, in the end, when I see the differences and the social status of my

job, it helps me to forget its shortcomings for a while.” Another subtheme extracted was coded as making time for leisure activities (n=13, F=59.09%). One of the participants argued “last year I felt like I was getting depressed. Therefore, I stopped teaching shortly and started a new hobby. I enrolled in calligraphy classes and joined some groups who used to take short trips. These activities helped me to be back on track. This time even my performance was much better.” (T23)

The sixth subtheme was to play sports (n=11, F=50%). T24 exemplified the subtheme, “after teaching for long hours continuously; I noticed I have pains all over my body. Therefore, I decided to join a gym three times a week. Not only did it help me to be in a better shape, but it energized me as well.” The seventh extracted theme was to pray for help and do some yoga or meditation (n=11, F=50%). For example, one teacher stated, “once I was so exhausted and didn't know what to do. Therefore, I started praying for help. The least it could do was to relax me. Also, I attended some meditation classes and started doing yoga which was of great help.” (T25)

## **Research Question 2**

### ***Validation of EFL Teachers' Coping Strategies Questionnaire***

After perusing the literature on CM and coping strategies, the researchers explored 23 coping strategies on a 5-point Likert scale which were entered into SPSS software. Besides, the researchers examined the suitability of data for factor analysis and the normality of the data (through skewness and kurtosis measures of the items) before conducting PAF. Also, items' statistics ranged between -2 and +2 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Then, to estimate the sampling adequacy for the analysis, the researchers applied the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure (Table 3). The data showed that KMO was 0.82, more than the minimum value of 0.6 suggested by Tabachnick et al. (2013). Finally, to check the correlation between items,

the researchers calculated Bartlett’s test of sphericity, and it was found that the items were correlated largely enough to perform PAF.

**Table 3:** KMO and Bartlett’s test for sampling adequacy

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.82
1. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity	2. Approx. Chi-Square	3. 3.0053
	4. Df	5. 253
	6. Sig.	7. .000

After running PAF, an initial 2-factor solution emerged with eigenvalues exceeding 1, explaining 57% and 24 % of the Variance, respectively. Also, the results of Parallel Analysis showed only two factors with eigenvalues exceeding the corresponding criterion values for a randomly generated data matrix of the same size (23 variables × 100 respondents) (Pallant, 2016). The 2-factor solution explained a total of 81.79 % of the Variance.

**Table 4:** Total variance explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total
1	13.117	57.032	57.032	13.117	57.032	57.032	13.116
2	5.696	24.764	81.796	5.696	24.764	81.796	5.701
3	.890	3.870	85.666				
.	.	.	.				
23	.000	.001	100.000				

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. When components are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

Oblimin rotation was performed to interpret these two factors. Besides, items with loadings of 0.4 and above are included. As shown in the pattern matrix below (Table 5), none of the 23 items was deleted, and all items had a loading factor above 0.4. Results are shown in Table 5.

**Table 5:** Pattern matrix for extracted copying strategies

<i>Pattern Matrix</i>	Component	
	1	2
1. Attempting to solve the problem	.962	
2. Putting more effort into my work	.917	
3. Improving my relationship with students, colleagues, and administrators	.944	
4. Finding a way to make the noisy students silent	.979	
5. Joining teacher-parent-school meetings.	.911	
6. Involving language learners in and out of the institute for their class activities	.918	
7. Learning to get adapted to school policies	.901	
8. Trying to have more sense of humor	.948	
9. Trying to be punctual	.941	
10. Sharing my policies with the students in the first session	.916	
11. Highlighting the value of the learners' punctuality and order	.834	
12. Moving in the classroom and avoiding being monotonous	.848	
13. Consciously blocking out the problem (ignoring)	.935	
14. Not letting others know some of my CM problems	.909	
15. Avoiding challenging topics in my classes	.676	
16. Skipping the unnecessary materials	.880	
17. Talking to the administrators and giving each other support		.805
18. Seeking guidance from the others		.857
19. Asking a professional for help		.945
20. Focusing on the positive aspects of my job and profession		.949
21. Making time for leisure activities		.932
22. Playing sports		.879
23. Praying for help and doing some yoga or meditation		.924

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. a. Rotation converged in 2 iterations.

The detailed analysis of Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed that the 23 items were reduced to two components: (a) problem-focused coping strategies (b) emotion-focused coping strategies. The overall internal consistency of the scale was estimated by Cronbach Alpha, which was found to be 0.92.

### ***Problem-focused coping strategies***

As shown in Table 5 above, Factor 1 with loading items of 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 measured problems are coping strategies. The main coping strategies related to the problem in terms of the magnitude of loading factor are as follows: Mostly loading factors are above .80, and item four, which reads, "Finding a way to make the noisy students silent," obtained the highest loading factor of .979 and item 15 which reads, "Avoiding challenging topics in my classes" obtained the lowest loading factor of .676.

### ***Emotion-focused coping strategies***

Factor 2 (with the loading items of 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, and 23) measured the coping strategies related to emotions. The main coping strategies related to the emotions regarding the magnitude of loading factors are listed as .805, .857, .945, .932, .879, and .924, respectively.

## **Research Question 3**

The third research question aimed at comparing perceptions of teachers with low and high levels of expertise about the coping strategies they use to deal with classroom management constraints. In so doing, the two groups' mean scores on the two components of the coping scale and their components and the items comprising each component were submitted to separate independent sample t-test. As the two groups' scores on all items proved to be normally distributed and the variances of the two groups were equal, the researchers were safer to employ independent sample t-tests as a parametric test. Results are presented in the following Tables.

**Table 6:** Comparison between teachers with high and low levels of expertise' use of copying strategies

	Means		Levene's test		t-test		
	LE	HE	F	Sig.	T	Df	P
1. I attempt to solve the problems which occur in my classes.	3.3200	4.2000	.037	.848	4.843	98	.001
2. I work harder and put more effort into my work when a problem occurs.	4.2000	3.3400	.397	.530	4.975	98	.001
3. In the face of problems in my classes, I improve my relationship with students, colleagues, and administrators.	3.2600	4.2000	.083	.774	5.281	98	.001
4. I try to find a way to make noisy students quiet in the class.	3.9778	2.8444	.001	.973	5.089	98	.001
5. I enjoy attending teacher-parent-school meetings.	3.24	4.2000	.786	.378	5.557	98	.001
6. Teacher-parents' correspondences affect my classroom management.	3.4000	4.2000	.008	.929	4.484	98	.001
7. I try to learn to get adapted to school policies.	3.3000	4.2000	.033	.855	5.093	98	.001
8. I try to have more sense of humor in my classes.	3.0800	4.1600	1.258	.265	6.198	98	.001
9. I try to be more punctual.	3.0200	4.1600	.614	.435	5.595	98	.001
10. I share my policies and expectations with the students in the first session.	3.2000	4.2400	.000	1.000	5.787	98	.001
11. I highlight the value of the learners' punctuality and order for the classroom.	3.0200	4.1600	.005	.943	6.321	98	.001
12. I move in the classroom and avoid being monotonous.	2.98	4.0800	.055	.815	5.656	98	.001
13. I consciously ignore the problem.	3.14	4.1800	.260	.611	5.706	98	.001
14. I hide some of my classroom management problems from others.	3.02	4.1200	2.974	.088	5.493	98	.001
15. I avoid challenging topics in my classes.	3.04	3.9000	.424	.517	4.126	98	.001
16. I skip unnecessary materials in my classes.	3.28	4.1600	.148	.701	5.036	98	.001
Problem-focused strategies	50.92	66.56	.600	.440	5.916	98	.001

Generally speaking, it can be strongly argued that the difference between the teachers with low or high levels of expertise' means on problem-focused coping strategies is statistically significant, favoring the teachers with high levels of expertise ( $p=0.001 < 0.05$ ,  $df=98$ ). That is, teachers with high levels of expertise are better than teachers with low levels of expertise in terms of the use of problem-focused coping strategies. Their mean scores on emotion-related strategies are compared in Table 7.

**Table 7:** T-test for comparing teachers with low or high levels of expertise's use of emotion-focused coping strategies

	Means		Levene's test		t-test		
	LE	HE	F	Sig.	T	Df	p
1. I talk to the administrators, and we give each other support.	3.3200	4.2000	.037	.848	4.843	98	.001
2. I seek guidance from others.	3.2600	4.2000	.083	.774	5.281	98	.001
3. I ask a professional for help.	3.2400	4.2000	.786	.378	5.557	98	.001
4. I focus on the positive aspects of my career.	3.3000	4.2000	.033	.855	5.093	98	.001
5. I make time for leisure activities.	3.0200	4.1600	.614	.435	5.595	98	.001
6. I play sports to free my mind.	3.2000	4.2400	.000	1.000	5.787	98	.001
7. I pray for help and do some meditation.	3.0200	4.1600	.005	.943	6.321	98	.001
Emotion	50.9200	66.5600	.600	.440	5.916	98	.001

As seen in Table 7, it can be strongly argued that the difference between the teachers with low or high levels of expertise' means on all items related to emotion-focused coping strategies is statistically significant, favoring the teachers with high levels of expertise ( $p=0.001 < 0.05$ ,  $df=98$ ). That is, teachers with high levels of expertise are better than teachers with low levels of expertise in terms of the use of emotion-oriented coping strategies.

## DISCUSSION

Findings of the qualitative phase of study revealed that two types of coping strategies were used by teachers: problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies. Interestingly, some coping strategies pertinent to ‘problem-focus coping strategies’ are in conjunction with coping style classification provided by Lewis et al. (2011); namely, ‘social problem solving’ and subthemes such as attempts to solve the problem, put effort into my work, go to meetings and look at the problem, and improve the relationship with others. Subthemes such as ‘consciously block out the problem (ignore)’ and ‘not to let others know how teachers feel’ fall into the passive avoidant coping style.

Establishing rapport with students and socializing with colleagues and administrators were other coping strategies mentioned in the literature (Akbari & Eghtesadi, 2017). Relating to students is known as positive encouragement (Laugaa et al., 2008). Besides, according to Botwinik (2007), creating a support system, especially with your colleagues, can make the job less stressful. Moreover, finding a way to control playful students was another coping strategy that is consistent with Merc and Subaşı’s (2015) research, which proposed solutions to manage noisy and naughty students in the classroom such as changing students’ seats, maintaining eye contact, individual talk after the class, etc. In addition, involving learners, another extracted subtheme, is supported by the findings of Wilson, Jones, Bocell, et al. (2015). Such engagement not only affects learners’ abilities and skills positively but assists them for better adjustment in schools.

Learning to get adapted to institute policies was another extracted subtheme that agrees with Rice, McFarlin, Hunt, and Near’s (1985) model suggesting the mutual impact of individuals and the environment. However, a lack of congruence between the two produces stress (Voydanoff, 2005). Having more sense of humor was discovered to be another coping strategy that is in line with the finding of Abel’s (2002), who found out that teachers

with more sense of humor used more positive reappraisal and problem-solving coping strategies compared with the less humorous teachers. The next subtheme of the problem-focused coping strategy was the teacher's punctuality. Similarly, Kor, Vosoughi, and Alemi (2019) investigated EFL/ESL teachers' coping strategies to manage misbehavior, and one of the emerged themes of their study was the rule system. Punctuality and order were two rules which teachers and students were compelled to follow, and the result of controlling misbehavior was great. In the same vein, Sun and Shek (2012) found that classroom order was significant for teachers to manage their classes better and facilitate learning.

The next subtheme, teachers' strategies to avoid monotonous classrooms, is somehow similar to the finding of Merc and Subaşı (2015). To encourage indifferent students, teachers turned to games and worked on their areas of interest to cheer them up. Further, avoiding challenging/controversial topics was another extracted subtheme. However, teachers are generally in two minds about how to deal with these topics. Some teachers reported positive attitudes towards these topics, whereas others have negative feelings that avoided them (e.g., Evripidou & Çavuşoğlu, 2015; Yoshihara, 2013). Also, skipping the unnecessary materials was another coping strategy to manage time in the classroom. This is consistent with a study by Küçükoğlu (2014) who delved into the factors that end up in teacher burnout. The study revealed that teachers have to devote more time to particular tasks and plan and prioritize.

The second primary coping strategy is 'emotion-focused coping strategies.' The three subthemes of talking to the administrators and supporting each other, seeking guidance from the others, and asking a professional for help were called social problem solving by Lewis et al. (2011). Besides, according to Salkovsky et al. (2015), there is a negative correlation between making time to relax, playing sports, retaining a sense of humor, focusing on the positive, and working on their self-image and high-stress levels and teachers' lack of energy. In the same way, this study also showed that teachers focus on the positive aspects of their jobs, make

time for leisure activities and sports to cope with the inhibitors in the classrooms. Similarly, Lewis et al. (2011), also under the coping style of relaxation, introduced four coping strategies of making time for leisure time, playing sports, trying to be funny, and accepting best effort to cope with disruptions in the classroom. Generally speaking, the findings of the study echo the suggestions made by some of the researchers in the field (e.g., Admiraal, Korthagen, & Wubbels, 2000; Akbari & Eghtesadi, 2017; Lewis et al., 2011; Millward, 2005) which indicate that teachers employ different coping strategies to solve the emergent classroom management problems.

The second objective of the study was to make a comparison between teachers with high versus low levels of expertise with regard to the use of coping strategies to deal with classroom management constraints. Results revealed that teachers with high levels of expertise were more comfortable with coping strategies facing constraints in the classroom compared with teachers with low levels of expertise who had a hard time dealing with challenges in the classroom. Some of the findings of this research are consistent with those of other studies. For instance, Le Maistre and Pare (2010) argued that more experienced teachers turn to more problem-solving strategies when encountered with top-down policies of the institutes. Besides, Chaaban and Du (2017) explained that novice teachers faced more challenges with classroom management. Similar to the findings of this research, Chaaban, and Du (2017) found that experienced teachers sometimes try to avoid and ignore the problems in the classroom or at the administrative level. However, according to Castro et al. (2010), avoidance might not be an appropriate solution to classroom issues for inexperienced teachers. Furthermore, the researchers in this study confirmed that highly expert teachers were more comfortable with seeking help or advice from other colleagues and more professional parties, which is in contrast with the finding of Caspersen and Raaen (2014). They concluded that inexperienced teachers expected to receive assistance from colleagues more than experienced teachers. Furthermore, the results of some research confirmed that new teachers are suffering from work overload and too much

responsibility, which leads to stress and anxiety. They try to reach out to more experienced teachers or mentors for guidance which contradicts our findings. (Ko et al., 2000; Fantilli & McDougall, 2009). In another research, Mehrpour and Mirsanjari (2016) found out that the novice teachers and experienced teachers did not differ from each other in expertise in terms of dealing with classroom challenges which are different from the findings of our study.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

Concerning the coping strategies employed by teachers to avoid and solve consequences caused by classroom management constraints, the teachers who participated in this study attempted both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. This happens while the number of employed problem-focused coping strategies exceeded that of emotion-focused coping strategies (16 vs. 9). The coping strategies are mainly employed to solve the problems related to language learners' behavior, to solve the problems caused by sociocultural differences, and to some extent, to get rid of unjustified policies imposed on teachers concerning types of syllabi, teaching methods, lesson plans, and evaluation strategies. To do away with the extracted problems and constraints, teachers need to be well-aware of the nature of the constraints and the appropriate strategy for on-the-spot or delayed solutions to the problems. Moreover, to achieve this competence, teachers need to receive both in-service and pre-service teacher training courses on the likely classroom management problems and appropriate coping strategies. To train teachers efficiently, they need to be aware of the differences between what is happening in the classrooms and what they have in mind. According to Moghadam and Mehrpour (2017), the best way to engage teachers to develop professionally is to raise their awareness.

The findings also revealed that teachers' expertise affects their perceptions of classroom management constraints; i.e., teachers with higher levels of expertise do not have the same beliefs in the extracted classroom

management constraints than do those with low levels of expertise. Similarly, it could be concluded that teachers with low levels of expertise need immediate professional development activities to foster their teaching efficiencies. It can also be concluded that teachers with low levels of expertise need to be either monitored or mentored by more experienced colleagues to receive immediate feedback to improve their classroom management practice. In contrast, teachers with high levels of expertise are the better users of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. Such a difference between these two groups of teachers might be rooted in the teacher education program in which effective classroom management and coping strategies for a classroom management problem were not appropriately taught to student teachers.

In conclusion, the researchers found that EFL teachers, in order to effectively manage the classrooms and overcome the constraints, need to have cognition of the most helpful coping strategies. As effective coping strategies, directly and indirectly, affect EFL learner outcomes, school and language institutes need to provide the teachers with an educational package including the most frequently occurring management constraints and effective coping strategies for each constraint. As different factors such as teacher personality type, gender, quality of working life, teaching certificate and the school typology might affect teachers' use of coping strategies, other interested researchers are strongly recommended to replicate this study and investigate how and whether these variables contribute to EFL teachers' use of coping strategies.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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### Appendix I

#### Coping Strategies Questionnaire

1. I attempt to solve the problems which occur in my classes.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
2. I work harder and put more efforts to my work when a problem occurs.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
3. In the face of problems in my classes, I improve my relationship with students, colleagues, and administrators.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
4. I try to find a way to make noisy students quiet in the class.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
5. I enjoy attending teacher-parent-school meetings.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
6. I try to involve language learners in and out of the institute/school for their class activities.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
7. I try to learn to get adapted to school policies.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
8. I try to have more sense of humor in my classes.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
9. I try to be more punctual.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
10. I share my policies and expectations with the students in the first session.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
11. I highlight the value of the learners' punctuality and order for the classroom.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
12. I move in the classroom and avoid being monotonous.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
13. I consciously ignore the problem.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never
14. I hide some of my classroom management problems from others.  
1.Always       2.Often       3.Sometimes       4.Rarely       5.Never

15. I avoid challenging topics in my classes.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
16. I skip unnecessary materials in my classes.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
17. I talk to the administrators and we give each other support.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
18. I seek guidance from others.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
19. I ask a professional for help.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
20. I focus on the positive aspects of my career.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
21. I make time for leisure activities.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
22. I play sports to free my mind.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never
23. I pray for help and do some meditation.  
 1.Always  2.Often  3.Sometimes  4.Rarely  5.Never

