

# A Phenomenological Study on Teachers' Perception of Classroom Management Challenges in Higher Vocational Colleges in China

Huanhuan Sun<sup>1,2</sup>, Cheok Mui Yee<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Guangzhou City Construction College, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China

<sup>2</sup> University Tun Abdul Razak (UNIRAZAK), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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**Abstract:** For years, effective classroom management has been of much concern to both teachers and teacher educators. Despite such paramount importance, this issue has been far less explored in higher vocational college context in particular. Therefore, this study employed a phenomenological inquiry to delve into the lived experiences of teachers in vocational colleges, and explore these teachers' perceptions of challenges related to classroom management so as to better understand and support them. 12 teachers from vocational colleges in China were selected through purposive sampling and data were collected by means of semi-structured Interviews. The interviews then were transcribed verbatim and their content was inductively analyzed to let frequent themes emerge. The results of the study show that teachers have been subjected to a number of problems, which result in their great pressure and frustration. Results of the analysis indicated three major themes about the problems, namely "college-related", "student-related", "teacher-related" frequently manifested. It should be noted that each main theme also comprised several sub-themes. Some stakeholders such as teachers, teacher educators, administrators, supervisors could benefit from the findings to promote the quality of classroom management in vocational colleges. In this research, we also found that during study, teachers do not acquire sufficient knowledge for effective class management.

**Keywords:** Classroom Management; Vocational College; A Phenomenological Study.

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## 1. Introduction

Classrooms are complex social and cultural settings with multiple events occurring simultaneously (Poole & Evertson, 2013; Akin et al., 2016). Classroom management is important in establishing an environment in which instruction and learning can occur (Gokalp & Can, 2022). Nowadays, classroom management has been ranked as one of the major problems that teachers face (Rosas & West, 2009; Wubbels, 2011; Albayrak & Ateskan, 2022) because in regular classrooms, the available time is spent not only on learning activities, but also on non-curricular activities, organizational issues, or disciplinary problems (Kunter et al., 2007).

Despite such paramount importance, this classroom management has been less explored in higher education context. In fact, in higher education classrooms, there has been an increase in the number and severity of behavioral incidents, such as cheating, texting, sleeping during class hours, leaving the classroom without permission, chewing gum, talking, arriving late, making sarcastic remarks (Alberts, Hazen, and Theobald 2010; Baker, Comer, and Martinak 2008). College teachers meet great challenges to maintain positive and organized learning environments in order to achieve their goals of instruction for student achievement (Brophy 1988; Emmer, Evertson, and Worsham 2006). More and more, it is incumbent upon college teachers to intervene in the classroom to address behaviors that can interfere with teaching and learning.

However, finding solutions to the specific circumstances in the classroom is not easy because classroom management is accepted as a complicated issue (De Jong 2005; Postholm 2013; Shindler 2009). Before making decisions related to problems in the classroom, one needs to assess the many variables: instructors' characteristics, the physical

arrangement of the classroom, the structure of the classroom environment, instructional management, and the procedures and rules of the classroom. The definition of classroom management changes based on the views, focus, goals, and philosophy of the teacher. Therefore, this study seeks to explore classroom management from teachers' perspectives. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore with a sample of Chinese vocational teachers their perceptions of classroom management challenges. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated from the interviews would afford new insights about the problems in the eyes of teachers and so inform teacher education practice.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Research Design

The study aims to explore the teachers' perceptions of classroom management challenges in higher vocational colleges in China based on their lived experiences. A qualitative phenomenological study is employed. In simple terms, phenomenology can be defined as an approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Teherani et al., 2015). It explores the lifeworld of the subjects and seeks to understand what matters to them and how they make sense of what they experience" (Zahavi, 2019). Phenomenology design of this study focuses on immersion into teachers' world and trying to understand from their perspectives, rather than the researcher's own, how they make meaning from their lived experiences using their own words (Dodgson, 2023). Data were gathered from the teachers' lived experience in classroom, from within the Chinese higher vocational colleges context, by discovering the teachers' perceptions grounded in the data.

## 2.2. Participants

In a phenomenological study in which the participant includes individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. The participants of the study were selected purposefully through maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990). Because the researcher wanted a study in which a wide range of voices spoke. This allowed including a wide range of variation on certain dimensions in participating teachers aged from 28 to 65, with different sources such as teachers directly from their graduate universities, being retired from other university, from enterprises, holding degrees of bachelor, master and PhD, including one teacher from administrative position. Their teaching experience in higher vocational colleges ranged from 3 to 15 years. All teachers had given classes in different subjects. Phenomenology involves a range of 3–10 individuals (Creswell, 2022), and this study involved 10 teachers with 5 female and 5 male.

## 2.3. Data Collection

Data collection in phenomenological research often includes multiple in-depth interviews with participants. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Data were collected through semi-structured, face-to-face, and in-depth interviews. To probe the content validity of the interview protocol, expert opinions were taken from two supervisors and necessary revisions were made to on the basis of given feedback. Then two pilot interviews were conducted to assure the comprehensibility and effectiveness of the questions as well as to assess the flow of the questions and timing, and minor corrections were held. Interviews nearly lasted 60-90 minutes.

According to Miller and Crabtree (1992, p. 24), the researcher must “bracket” her/his own preconceptions and enter into the individual's life-world and use the self as an experiencing interpreter. Therefore, during the interview, the research attempted to understand the world from the teachers’ point of view, to unfold meaning of their experiences. With the permission of participants, all interviews were audio-

recorded for later analysis. Then, the recordings were transcribed verbatim into written transcripts to provide a textual representation of the data collected. The recorded interviews and transcripts of each interviewer were assigned a code and stored in separate documents.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

In qualitative studies, data analysis involves breaking the data into manageable parts, searching for patterns, and synthesizing them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Correspondingly, theme analysis was used to analyze the data. First, all the audio-recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim by using a computer-based word processing program, and each transcription was read several times by the researcher in order to gain familiarity with the content. And with the help of the initial concepts from the relevant literature and the research questions as guidelines, each transcription was coded to derive relevant themes. As the initial categories were derived and themes were shaped around the emerging codes, they were subjected to refinement until the write-up stage. Finally, alongside the reporting of the findings and interpretations, all the themes related to the research questions were described and exemplified in detail through quotations which were translated from Chinese to English.

## 2.5. Validity and Reliability of the Study

Consent was sought and obtained, and participants were given the opportunity to withdraw at any stage. Anonymity has been protected for the participants and pseudonyms are used throughout this report. Survey limitations include the small sample size for staff. Further limitations include the fact that the study was only conducted in China, although it is hoped that the qualitative findings will provide sufficient detail to allow another researcher to ‘share in the researcher’s understandings and find instantiations of them in their own professional experience’ (Richards, 2003).

## 3. Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Summary of themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes	Description	Example
College-related	Recognizing more complicated work and requirements	Teachers universally acknowledge that rapid developments in vocational education have significantly raised the expectations for both institutions and educators.	“I found that teachers have a lot of extra work, such as guiding students, grading assignments, supervising practical training, and guiding students in competitions.”
	Feeling of stress and vulnerability	Teacher experiencing high levels of stress and vulnerability due to increasing demands and lack of support in classroom management.	“Nowadays, you can't be strict with students...but now you don't even dare to scold them.”
	Inner hope for effective support	Teachers aspire for effective support to meet heightened demands, ensuring optimal student outcomes and professional growth.	“Actually, if our school had something where everyone could share more, but there is no opportunity to communicate.”
Student-related	Low student competence	Teachers report that many students enter vocational schools with inadequate academic preparation.	“Some students start with zero foundation, having class once or twice a week. Relying solely on this method of classroom teaching, they completely fall behind.”
	Lack of interest in learning	Students' lack of interest in learning hinders academic progress, engagement, and overall educational outcomes.	“I won't work in this field in the future, so the teacher shouldn't care about what I do now.”
	Difficulty in management	Managing classrooms with disengaged or disruptive students is a persistent challenge for teachers.	“Once, a student was playing games. I told him that using the phone was bad, but he just kept playing.”
Teacher-related	Teachers Taking Responsibility	Teachers take responsibility for student learning but recognize that disengaged students also bear responsibility for their own learning.	“When faced with students' low engagement in class, I first conducted in-depth reflection.”
	Need for professional development	Teachers believe their need to continuously learn new teaching concepts and methods.	“Later, I pursued a master's degree while working... I always felt my research skills were weak, so I went back to study more.”
	Changing mindsets with experience	Teachers' mindsets and teaching attitudes evolve with their accumulated teaching experience.	“In life, many things can be tolerated, you become more accommodating. You must never lose your temper with students or curse them out.”

In the first phase of data analysis process each interview was carefully read in order to capture the wholeness of the content. The interview text was read several times, as open-minded as possible.

The impression was that higher vocational teachers did experience the challenges according with classroom management, like primary and middle school teachers. Regarding classroom management, teachers commonly face problems such as low student enthusiasm during class, frequent disciplinary issues, and balancing strict requirements with maintaining student acceptance and engagement etc. How to handle classroom discipline and unexpected situations, as well as finding a balance between strict requirements and maintaining student acceptance and enthusiasm may seem no difference with those in other types of schools. But the problems they are living with mean different for these vocational teachers.

The second phase is structural analysis, which involves several stages in order to explain the text. The text was divided into meaning units, i.e. a sentence or several sentences with similar meaning in relation to the aims of the study. Each meaning unit was then transformed by condensing and abstracting to give a formulated meaning concerning teachers' lived experiences of classroom management problems. The formulated meanings were then related to each other, reflected on and organized into 3 themes related to environment, teacher and students, with 9 sub-themes based on similarities and differences in meaning (Table 1). The themes and sub-themes are presented below and illustrated by quotations from the interview texts.

### **3.1. Theme1: College-related Challenges**

Teachers face challenges like increasing complexity, balancing teaching with doing research, collaboration, social service, curriculum development, and administration etc. This detracts from core teaching responsibilities, with a focus on metrics impacting evaluations. High expectations and classroom discipline stress are exacerbated by surveillance. Teachers seek support, mentorship, and targeted training to improve practical skills and foster growth.

#### **3.1.1. Recognizing More Complicated Work and Requirements**

Teachers universally acknowledge that rapid developments in vocational education have significantly raised the expectations for both institutions and educators. Besides traditional teaching duties, teachers are increasingly tasked with research, industry collaboration, community service, curriculum development, competition preparation, student mentorship, and administrative responsibilities. These additional tasks consume considerable time and energy, often detracting from the core focus on teaching.

For instance, one respondent described the stark contrast between the simplicity of tasks in the corporate world and the multifaceted responsibilities in educational settings. Teachers not only deliver lectures but also manage numerous ancillary tasks, such as student consultations and frequent meetings. She said: "In corporate work, you only need to focus on completing your project, and you don't have to worry about other things. But in school, there are many trivial matters. Besides teaching, you have to deal with various things, such as students approaching you anytime, school meetings, etc." (D)

Another teacher highlighted the substantial workload

beyond regular teaching duties, which they had not anticipated. "I found that teachers have a lot of extra work, such as guiding students, grading assignments, supervising practical training, and guiding students in competitions. Course development, teaching tasks, and professional development tasks all consume time beyond teaching hours, which I did not anticipate".(G)

The emphasis on quantitative metrics in educational management, such as class participation rates and mobile phone usage policies, directly impacts teacher evaluations and career advancements. Teachers argue that excessive focus on these metrics overlooks the actual quality of education and student development. Consequently, they spend considerable time and effort meeting these superficial requirements, which detracts from meaningful teaching.

#### **3.1.2. Feeling of Stress and Vulnerability**

The increasing demands on teachers to ensure high teaching quality while managing classroom discipline have placed them under significant stress. Teachers reflected on the pressure of balancing school expectations with the need to avoid conflicts with students, leading to a heightened sense of vulnerability in classroom management. This dual burden has increased their psychological stress, making them cautious and concerned about potential criticism or sanctions for any missteps.

For instance, one interviewee mentioned: "Nowadays, you can't be strict with students. In high school, teachers could discipline the troublemakers, but now you don't even dare to scold them. This has led to a decline in academic atmosphere and respect for teachers". (D)

The implementation of surveillance mechanisms in classrooms, such as high-definition cameras and unannounced inspections, has further exacerbated this stress. Teachers feel constantly monitored, which inhibits their ability to teach creatively and flexibly. For instance, one respondent described the intense anxiety induced by sudden classroom inspections, which affected their teaching performance. (A)

#### **3.1.3. Inner Hope for Effective Support**

Despite the challenges, vocational teachers express a desire for more effective support to alleviate stress and enhance teaching quality. They highlight the need for a supportive work environment and mechanisms for sharing experiences and best practices. Teachers believe that platforms for collaboration and exchange can foster mutual learning and professional growth.

Firstly, vocational teachers need a supportive work environment and mechanisms to reduce their workload. One interviewee expressed: "Some teachers are willing to communicate, but we haven't found the right person or opportunity to do so".(D)

Another noted the lack of systematic experience sharing and support mechanisms within schools, suggesting the need for more communication and support systems to share successful experiences and teaching methods, promoting mutual learning among teachers "Actually, if our school had something where everyone could share more, but there is no opportunity to communicate."(J)

Teachers mentioned the lack of systematic mentorship from experienced teachers, relying more on self-exploration and learning. They believe that new teachers need a good environment and support from experienced colleagues, and they actively learn and consult with colleagues. "If, of course,

as a new teacher, he needs a good environment, including this kind of mentorship between colleagues, that's the best, being able to have mentorship."(E)

Moreover, teachers advocate for more targeted training programs that address practical teaching skills rather than just ethical and ideological education. They feel that current professional development initiatives fall short in equipping them with the tools needed for effective classroom management and teaching.

Teachers mentioned that current teacher training lacked practical teaching skills training. They believe that schools should offer more teaching skills training based on teachers' needs to help them improve their teaching and classroom management abilities. A teacher mentioned, "The initial focus of teacher training is mainly on political education and teacher ethics." He believes this training approach is insufficient to address the issues in actual teaching and hopes that schools should provide more teaching skills training based on teachers' actual needs to help them improve their teaching standards and classroom management abilities. (F)

## **3.2. Student-related Challenges**

Teachers face challenges with students' low competence and disengagement, requiring adjustments in teaching methods. Poor academic preparation, learning attitudes, and etiquette complicate classroom management. Distractions like mobile phone use and lack of respect for authority undermine teaching effectiveness. Despite efforts, teachers often feel powerless, and management strategies are frequently ineffective, highlighting the need for better support and strategies to improve student engagement and competence.

### **3.2.1. Low Student Competence**

Teachers commonly believe there is a gap between students' overall competence and their expectations. This gap manifests primarily in students' low academic foundations, learning attitudes, abilities, and basic etiquette.

Teachers report that many students enter vocational schools with inadequate academic preparation. This disparity necessitates adjustments in teaching content and methods to meet students' actual capabilities. One teacher recounted their nervousness during initial classes, realizing that students' basic knowledge was insufficient, requiring slower and more tailored instruction.(G)

One teacher described their first teaching experience: "The first time I taught, I remember feeling quite nervous, especially sweating a lot... their foundation wasn't really good." This initial experience required them to adjust the pace and method of their teaching.(C)

One teacher felt that the content they taught in their first class was too much for the students to digest, realizing the need to adjust the content and methods for better understanding: "It was a bit fast, like you were outputting a lot. Basic computer applications, then you output a lot, but they absorbed very little."(F)

Another teacher mentioned, "Some students start with zero foundation, having class once or twice a week. Relying solely on this method of classroom teaching, they completely fall behind." (H)This competence gap not only increases the difficulty of teaching but also raises the demands for classroom management.

Teachers expressed their worries about students attitudes towards learning. Respondent J noted, "The core problem is that students completely refuse to learn, demonstrated by

playing games and taking out their phones to play."

A teacher from the industry remarked, "Students used to be physically passive, now they are mentally passive, which is terrible. They don't want to use their brains at all, what can a teacher do?"(E)

### **3.2.2. Lack of Interest in Learning**

Student engagement is crucial for effective teaching, yet many teachers struggle with students' lack of interest. Common issues include students using mobile phones, playing games, and not paying attention during classes. Teachers note that these behaviors significantly disrupt the learning environment and diminish their teaching enthusiasm. One teacher lamented, "Students are just not studying," which presents a huge challenge for teaching.

A newly hired teacher described their experience: "I had not anticipated that the vast majority of the class would be inattentive. In reality, only a few actually listening." (C)This phenomenon not only affects the teacher's motivation but also negatively impacts the classroom atmosphere.

Teachers noted that some students do study but are not paying attention in class because they have their own plans and focus on other urgent or useful tasks. A teacher stated, "At that time, students were busy preparing for the undergraduate entrance examination, not listening in class, and only focused on their entrance exam studies. My class couldn't proceed until the entrance exams were over."(B)

Some students view vocational courses as irrelevant to their future careers, leading to disengagement. For example, one teacher mentioned that students often believe that the skills taught will not benefit them professionally, resulting in resistance and apathy towards learning. He provided an example of a student who outright said in class, "I won't work in this field in the future, so the teacher shouldn't care about what I do now." This aversion to professional courses leaves teachers feeling very frustrated. (H)

### **3.2.3. Difficulty in Management**

Managing classrooms with disengaged or disruptive students is a persistent challenge. Teachers often feel powerless in enforcing discipline without facing backlash.

All teachers mentioned encountering students using phones in class, with some experiencing conflicts when trying to manage phone usage and student conversations. One teacher described, "Once, a student was playing games. I told him that using the phone was bad, but he just kept playing."(D)

One teacher commented, "Students' thirst for knowledge is very low, they can't be managed, and you can't be too strict. You can only hope for the well-behaved ones, and ignore those who are indifferent to learning." (A) This sense of helplessness is common among many teachers.

One respondent shared their frustration, noting that students' lack of respect for authority and increased resistance to disciplinary actions make effective classroom management difficult. He remarked, "The main anxiety now is that not only schools but society also caters to students, spoiling them so they don't respect teachers." This challenge to teacher authority makes classroom management more stressful and difficult. (I)

Additionally, teachers found that many students have psychological issues, making them feel that they need to focus on students' academic performance as well as their mental health to avoid conflicts. One respondent noted that some students were excluded in group activities, worsening their psychological problems.(G)

Many teachers reported that their classroom management often felt merely formal and ineffective. One teacher stated, "To cope with the school's classroom management system, I can only manage formally. I see through this, I just deal with it." (C) This formality in management does not effectively solve problems and leaves teachers feeling more powerless and frustrated.

Teachers expressed that dealing with students' low competence and lack of interest in learning, they try to manage the classroom, but the actual effectiveness is often disappointing. Despite implementing various management strategies, the results are not always satisfactory.

### 3.3. Teacher-related Challenges

Teachers balance responsibility for student learning with the need for professional development and evolving mindsets. They engage in self-reflection and seek advice to improve teaching methods and classroom management. Despite their efforts, they face challenges with disengaged students. Teachers emphasize the need for continuous learning, both in teaching techniques and psychological understanding, to enhance their skills and effectiveness. Experience shifts their attitudes from strictness to understanding, fostering better teacher-student relationships. However, they also acknowledge limitations in their control over classroom dynamics, and adjust their strategies to better manage these challenges.

#### 3.3.1. Teachers Taking Responsibility

Teachers take responsibility for student learning but recognize that disengaged students also bear responsibility for their own education. Vocational teachers, when dealing with students' classroom behavior, often engage in self-reflection about their teaching methods and content. One respondent stated, "When faced with students' low engagement in class, I first conducted in-depth reflection. I realized that it might be due to my teaching methods, content, or communication style with students. So, I started actively seeking solutions." (A) This self-reflection and proactive adjustment demonstrate the teachers' serious fulfillment of their responsibilities.

Many teachers also seek advice from experienced colleagues when encountering classroom management issues. For example, one teacher mentioned, "Later, I thought it was best to ask the experienced teachers in the school, so I consulted them about what to do in such situations. They gave me some advice." (A) This attitude of seeking help and learning reflects the teachers' enthusiasm and responsibility for solving problems.

Additionally, teachers improve classroom content and management methods through reflection and adjustment. One teacher mentioned, "I review my lectures in my mind and then know how to organize my content." (C) Through continuous reflection and adjustment, teachers gradually find more effective teaching and management methods, ensuring improved classroom discipline and teaching outcomes.

However, teachers do not attribute all problems to themselves; they recognize the limitations of their efforts. One teacher remarked, "Honestly, I wanted to make changes, and I have tried many methods before, but many times they simply didn't work." (B) Another teacher described students' disruptive and non-cooperative behaviors in class, "If there are too many disruptive students, or those not paying attention, chatting, or influencing others, the classroom atmosphere deteriorates, and teaching becomes unpleasant, but there's really nothing you can do." (I)

#### 3.3.2. Need for Professional Development

The professional development of teachers is crucial for enhancing classroom management skills. Some teachers realize that with changes in the educational environment and diverse student needs, they need to continuously learn new teaching concepts and methods. For instance, one teacher mentioned that they became more adept at organizing classes through reflection and adjustment of lecture content to ensure students' understanding. Moreover, teachers need to focus on students' psychological well-being and overall growth, which requires them to have knowledge in psychology and education.

Vocational teachers not only need to improve their teaching methods but also advance their professional development. One interviewed teacher mentioned, "I don't feel very accomplished because I started late, and we used to be a regular college, so there wasn't much sense of achievement. Later, I pursued a master's degree while working, which isn't as solid as full-time study. I always felt my research skills were weak, so I went back to study more." (G) This perceived inadequacy in research skills drives teachers to continue learning and advancing their expertise.

The responsibility of teachers extends beyond imparting textbook knowledge; it also includes teaching life skills and interpersonal skills. One teacher emphasized, "As a teacher, you must be responsible to your students. Many teachers may feel irresponsible, but as a teacher, you must bear this responsibility." (A) This sense of responsibility motivates teachers to continually learn and improve themselves to better fulfill their duties.

#### 3.3.3. Changing Mindsets with Experience

Teachers' mindsets and teaching attitudes evolve with their accumulated teaching experience. Some teachers mentioned that with age and experience, their teaching attitudes shifted from being strict to becoming more understanding of students' needs. This change helps establish a more harmonious teacher-student relationship and improve the quality of classroom teaching. At the same time, teachers need to learn to let go of things beyond their control, such as students' cultural limitations or classroom discipline issues, and adjust their expectations to find more suitable teaching strategies.

As teaching experience and years accumulate, teachers' mindsets continue to change. One teacher mentioned that with increased age and experience, his teaching attitude and methods also changed. "When you are young, you tend to be very strict, contending and striving, but later, your temperament and personality get polished down, and you become more accommodating." (E)

When facing difficulties in classroom management, teachers also reflect on their management methods. For example, one teacher mentioned, "There was an incident where I had a conflict with a student... later I found out that the student had some psychological issues." (C) Through communication and understanding, the teacher realized the inadequacies in their management and emphasized the importance of maintaining principles and avoiding boundary-crossing behaviors.

Teacher J reflected on their interaction with students, "In life, many things can be tolerated, you become more accommodating. You must never lose your temper with students or curse them out." (J) Teacher K commented, "We do whatever the school asks us to do." (K) Teacher E described the challenges in engaging students, "The overly serious or somewhat rigid method I used at the beginning,

without much teaching experience, met with indifference. You don't get the results you want; you think you're doing good for the students, but they don't accept it or ignore you, and that sense of disappointment makes you reflect on yourself."(E)

## 4. Discussion

This phenomenological study delves into the perceptions of teachers in higher vocational colleges in China regarding classroom management problems. The findings highlight several core issues faced by these educators, mainly categorized into college-related, student-related, and teacher-related problems.

College-related challenges primarily revolve around the increasing complexity of teachers' roles, including research, industry collaboration, and administrative duties, which detract from their core teaching responsibilities. The pressure to meet institutional metrics further exacerbates these challenges, leading to significant stress and a sense of vulnerability among teachers. It appears that an increase in the external responsibilities bestowed upon teachers may paradoxically lead to a greater adherence to formalistic management practices based on metrics, rather than fostering a more creative and multidimensional approach to educational leadership. Additionally, teachers are more attuned to the dynamics of their immediate academic setting than to broader external influences, indicating a deeper responsiveness to the specific milieu of their colleges, even the department they are working.

Student-related challenges include low academic competence and lack of interest in learning, which complicate classroom management and hinder educational outcomes. It's found that classroom management challenges are mainly attributable to student behavior by teachers. This kind of stereotypes influence teachers' perception of and behaviour towards students, thus shaping students' learning opportunities (Matheis et al.,2020). Recent evidence shows that teacher beliefs can impact student outcomes directly and they can also mediate policy implementation (Shwetlena, 2022). This attribution error can result in actions and measures that fail to address underlying issues contributing to disruptions. Thus, teachers' beliefs of students must be examined carefully so as to be rectified.

Teacher-related challenges refer to how they take responsibility, the lack of professional development and changing mindsets with experience. Teachers balance student learning with professional growth, using reflection and feedback to enhance teaching. Despite challenges with disengaged students, they prioritize continuous learning and adapt strategies to improve classroom dynamics. According to Onion Model put forward by Korthagen (2004), teacher reflection varies from the environment to behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity, and mission. From the three types problems teacher perceived in their experiences of classroom management, these respondents from higher vocational colleges are inclined to reflect from the environment to behavior, competencies, and few of them reflect their classroom management from beliefs, identity, and mission consciously, let alone systematically.

## 5. Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers in higher vocational colleges in China face multifaceted challenges in classroom

management, stemming from college, student, and personal factors. These challenges lead to significant stress and hinder effective teaching. Despite the difficulties, teachers demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility and a desire for professional growth. The findings underscore the need for systemic support, including targeted training programs and improved communication platforms, to enhance teachers' classroom management skills and overall effectiveness. Addressing these issues is crucial for improving the quality of vocational education and supporting teachers in their professional roles.

## 6. Limitations

This study has several limitations. Firstly, the research was conducted in a limited number of vocational colleges in China, which may not represent the experiences of all vocational teachers nationwide and potentially limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relies heavily on data from interviews, and future research should consider a broader sample and incorporate quantitative measures to validate and extend the findings. Furthermore, exploring additional contextual factors such as institutional policies and support mechanisms could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by vocational teachers.

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed to address the classroom management challenges in higher vocational colleges.

Colleges should strive to reduce the non-teaching workload of teachers to optimize work environment, allowing them to focus more on their core responsibilities. This includes streamlining administrative tasks and providing adequate resources to support teachers in their roles. Colleges should also provide comprehensive support and training programs tailored to the specific needs of vocational teachers. This includes creating platforms for experience sharing and collaboration, as well as offering practical skills training to enhance classroom management and teaching effectiveness. Teachers should implement strategies to improve student engagement and address psychological well-being. This involves fostering a supportive learning environment that encourages active participation and addresses the diverse needs of students. Implementing these recommendations can help alleviate the challenges faced by vocational teachers, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and supporting teachers in their professional development.

The teacher educators need to understand teachers deeply and pay more attention about the programs of classroom management. Because of a lack of alignment between the needs of these teachers and the support they received, administrative leaders should support these teachers by providing learning opportunities, resolving classroom management issues through communication, and providing resources for better classroom management. If vocational teachers are not adequately supported by administrative leaders, their struggles with classroom management will negatively impact the learning and growth of students and could cause them to leave the special education teaching profession all together.

Furthermore, teachers are encouraged to engage in reflective practice guided by the Onion Model, a framework that underscores the importance of introspection on practical

teaching experiences to cultivate a profounder self-awareness in the context of pedagogical strategies. This process is facilitated through coaching, peer coaching, and communities of practice, which provide a supportive environment for teachers to explore their core qualities and aspirations (Attema-Noordewier et al., 2011). Concurrently, it is imperative for teachers to introspect their professional roles from the perspectives of belief systems, identity, and mission, thereby evolving their mental models to align with the dynamic educational landscape and to continuously catalyze their professional growth.

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