Classroom to Reduce Student Disruptive Behavior: An Action Research
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Abstract
Disruptive behavior, considered to hinder teacher’s instruction, student’s learning, and the classroom environment, is a significant problem faced by teachers daily. With this significance in mind, this study adopted an action research (AR) method to explore the common disruptive behavior that secondary English as a foreign language (EFL) students exhibit in the language classroom, whether or not seating arrangements can help solve this issue and students’ perceptions regarding this type of behavior. A total of 32 students (males = 20, females = 12) with the age range between 12 to 14 from Dechentsemo Central (public) School in Bhutan participated in this study. Data were collected using observation and semi-structured interviews. The overall findings revealed six common types of disruptive behaviors in the language classroom, most of which could be reduced to a certain extent by using seating arrangements as an intervention strategy. Further, the semi-structured interviews data revealed that the present participants acknowledged that disruptive behaviors in the classroom have negative effects on learning and learning outcomes. On the whole, this study built on the previous literature on the importance of frequent change of seating arrangements in the classroom and its positive influence on students' disruptive behaviors in the language classroom.

Introduction
Classroom management is one of the most important dimensions of the teaching and learning process. It is believed that good classroom management helps establish an effective and conducive learning environment (Kubat & Dedebali, 2018); improve students’ learning outcome (Slater & Main, 2020); effectively deal with children who have behavioral issues (Zulkifli et al., 2019), and help reduce students’ disruptive behaviors in the classroom (Affandi et al., 2020). For these reasons, classroom management has become the frequent subject of research in the educational field (George et al., 2017), including in the EFL contexts (e.g., Habibi et al., 2018; Soleimani & Razmjoo, 2016). Consequently, although there are several evidence-based strategies highlighted by previous studies on classroom management, a little is discussed on disruptive behaviors of students and how it is being managed by secondary teachers in the EFL context, Bhutan. This study was conducted considering teachers should be aware of practices to overcome disruptive behaviors in the classroom in order to effectively conduct the classes and for the success of students’ learning (Simonsen et al., 2008).

Disruptive behavior is roughly defined as inappropriate behavior of students in the classroom that impedes both learning and teacher’s instructions (Gómez Mármol et al., 2018; Nährhi et al., 2017). Some of the most common disruptive behaviors include learners’ inappropriate gestures, talking with classmates, physical and verbal aggressiveness, moving in the class, shouting, and not respecting the classroom rules (Esturgó-Deu & Sala-Roca, 2010). Fact that disruptive behavior in the classroom is an undeniable problem faced by teachers of all generations (Abeygunawardena & Vithananapathirana, 2019), many research studies have been

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carried out investigating the causes of this disruptive behavior and developing possible intervention strategies (Rafi et al., 2020). Although there is a vast literature on students’ disruptive behavior in the field of education, little has been done in EFL classrooms, particularly in the Asian context. As each region, country, local setting/context and school have a different learning environment, culture, and tradition, there was a need to conduct a study in Bhutan regarding the issue of disruptive behavior. As evidence-based intervention strategies were not regularly followed by institutions/schools to reduce disruptive behavior (Dufrene et al., 2014), this study was conducted to specifically investigate how seating arrangements can help reduce students' disruptive behavior in the language classroom.

**Literature Review**

**Disruptive behavior**

Disruptive behavior in the classroom is one of the most widely expressed concerns among teachers and school administrators (Duesund & Ødegård, 2018; Nash et al., 2016). The belief is that the presence of disruptive behavior or discipline issues in the classroom negatively affects students learning (Gómez Már mol et al., 2018) and lowers students’ academic performance (Granero-Gallegos et al., 2020). Not only students are affected. Cameron and Lovett (2015) asserted that disruptive behavior in the classroom was one of the factors which adversely shaped teachers’ attitudes about teaching, and also highlighted those teachers show less interest in teaching when students exhibit disruptive behavior in the classroom. Moreover, students’ disruptive behavior is considered to have a direct link with the mental, physical and emotional well-being of teachers and may deteriorate teachers’ ability to educate the students to some extent (Shakespeare et al., 2018).

**Cause of disruptive behavior**

There seem to be several reasons why students exhibit disruptive behavior in the classroom. Many are associated with the community, parents, teachers, and students themselves. Factors such as a bad influence from the community, a lack of preparation and low teaching quality, poor parenting, students’ attitude towards learning, and students’ emotional and mental problems (Khasinah, 2017) can cause unsuitable behavior in the classroom. Likewise, Latif et al. (2016) also noted others including large classes, teachers’ biased attitudes toward students, and students’ desires to get attention in the classroom as other reasons students exhibit disruptive behavior in the classroom.

As for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, the cause of discipline problems have been reported to be a low level of student engagement when students cannot understand the lesson taught in the classroom and experience minimal progress of target language; learning difficulties caused by their difficulty in understanding vocabulary, and grammar in the English language; attention-seeking when students want to attract teachers’ and peers’ attention; fatigue when students are sleepy and bored, and the influence of technology when students use mobile phones and other electronic gadgets in the middle of class activity (Jati et al., 2019).

**Preventing disruptive behavior**

Admittedly, much of the previous research in the field does not discuss how intervention strategies assist in reducing or overcoming the disruptive behavior of students, particularly in the language classroom. This is not surprising since the teachers’ abilities differ in terms of classroom management skills (Khasinah, 2017). Intervention strategies most often proposed in the literature to combat discipline issues in the classroom are, for example: praising, motivating, or reinforcing students; maintaining a positive/close relationship with students; formulating basic classroom rules at the beginning of the courses; adapting student-centered learning, and frequently changing the seating arrangements (Rafi et al., 2020).

**Intervention strategies used in this study**

Much is written on the benefits of the seating arrangement on the classroom learning environment including students’ academic performance, students’ cognitive ability, participation in class, and general behavior. For instance, Tobia et al. (2020) asserted that children become more logical, creative, and exhibit better classroom behavior when they were seated individually on a single desk. Likewise, Pichierri and Guido (2016) noted that classroom seating arrangement is a crucial factor that can have a significant influence on students’ academic performance. These authors supported this statement with their findings which showed that the students sitting in front of the class significantly outperformed the students who were seating on
the back rows. Additionally, Egounlèti et al. (2018) pointed out that the seating arrangement facilitates students' participation, especially when they are seated in pairs or groups. In general, previous research seems to suggest that seating arrangements can have a positive effect on teaching and learning in language classrooms.

- Therefore, the study had the following objectives:
- To investigate the most common disruptive behaviors among seventh grade EFL students in the English language classroom.
- To examine whether an intervention strategy such as seating arrangements as used in this study could help reduce students’ disruptive behavior in the classroom.
- To explore students’ perceptions about classroom disruptive behavior.

Methodology

Context

This study was conducted in one of the countries which has been the least studied, Bhutan (Wangdi & Tharchen, 2021). For this reason, readers need to understand the context of the study to allow them to understand the importance of carrying out this action research (AR). Bhutan is a small land-locked country located in South Asia with a population of approximately 775,000 people. To date, more than half (57.4%) of the Bhutanese population live in rural areas. The first modern school in Bhutan was established in 1914 by then the first king of Bhutan, Gongsa Ugyen Wangchuk. Ever since then education has been the primary focus in Bhutan. The present overall literacy rate for over 6 years is 66% (73% male and 59% female). Although this is a great achievement for a developing country like Bhutan, as with any other country, Bhutan's education system faces a lot of challenges. One of the prominent challenges that Bhutanese students face is mastering the English language. The English proficiency level of the Bhutanese students is still below the expected competency even to date (Choeda et al., 2020). As Wangdi and Tharchen (2021) stated that having research done by the teachers themselves helps promote their pedagogical knowledge, teaching practices, and students learning outcome at large, thus this study was conducted with the hope to help students learn English properly in the classroom without any disruptions.

Participants

It should be noted that this study was classroom-based AR. Therefore, this research employed a convenient sampling technique to recruit the participants. A total of 32 secondary students from Dechentsemo Central (public) School in Bhutan participated in this study. These students were studying with the researcher, who was also a classroom teacher. Out of the 32, twenty were boys and twelve were girls aged between twelve and fourteen. The majority of participants were thirteen years old (nineteen students), followed by fourteen years old (eight students), and twelve years old (five students). They were in grade seven and they took a basic English as communication course.

Ethical considerations

First, researchers asked written permission from the head of Dechentsemo Central (public) School in Bhutan. After getting a letter of consent from the head of the school, the consent letter from classroom teachers and students' parents was acquired through emails. For this, an email consisting of a brief explanation of research objectives was sent to classroom teachers and students’ parents. They were informed that the data collection would be done solely for research purposes and it would neither hinder nor affect the teaching schedule nor students’ grades in any way. Following this, verbal consent from students was also obtained. After having permission from the school head, classroom teachers, student parents, and students themselves the researchers started collecting the data.

Research design

This article summarises AR conducted by a classroom teacher, who was also a researcher as part of continuing professional development. AR is critical classroom-based inquiry conducted by teachers or academicians themselves to identify a specific classroom problem and concurrently to improve them (Zambo, 2007). Conducting AR by teachers themselves not only helps them grow professionally, but also improves their teaching practices (Makoelle & Thwala, 2019). AR may also enhance the level of teachers’ effectiveness and quality of education at large. In this sense, following Dickens and Watkins (1999) and a modified Lewin’s (1946) model that includes four cycles in conducting AR, (planning, acting, observing, and reflection), this study investigated to what extent the frequent change of seating arrangements in the
classroom helps reduce students’ disruptive behaviors. The AR model used in this research is presented below.

![Figure 1: Dickens and Watkins's (1999) AR model](image)

To carry out this study, researchers followed the following steps.

**Planning**
The researchers reviewed the current issues and practices available in the literature that discussed disruptive behaviors in the language classroom and how it negatively impacted teachers’ instruction and students’ learning. Having identified the aspect that we wanted to explore or use as an intervention strategy, we decided to explore the effectiveness of a frequent change of seating arrangements in reducing disruptive behavior.

**Action**

Step 1. Researchers observed two EFL classes for almost a month, eight classes to be precise (twice per week) to examine the most common disruptive behavior among the students in the classroom. In other words, the observation was done before the treatment (pre-intervention, hereafter). The data were recorded using two different instrumentations. First, for two classes, the researcher observed different types of disruptive behavior that the students exhibited and took note of it. Second, a daily checklist was used to identify the most frequent/repeating types of disruptive behavior among these students to compare with the post-intervention data.

Step 2. Researchers examined how the seating arrangements used as an intervention strategy in this study assisted in reducing disruptive behavior that students exhibited in the English language classroom. The students were observed two times per week (Monday & Wednesday) for three months. The treatment was the frequent change of seating arrangements. Each week, the students were exposed to different types of seating arrangements that included pair seating, change of pair, group seating, U-shape seating, double U-shape seating, circle shape seating, etc. To do this smoothly, the teacher collected a name card from each student in the first week of the term. This name card was used throughout the treatment to assign the seat to the students. The teacher randomly placed this name card on different tables before the class started. Each week, the students were instructed to find their name cards and seat accordingly for two consecutive classes (Monday and Wednesday). While grouping or pairing students, the teacher made sure that none of the group or pair consisted of only dominant or passive students (Storch, 2002). And, the disruptive behavior that students exhibited in the classroom during the treatment (post-intervention, hereafter) from each meeting was recorded using the checklist (See Appendix).

Step 3. The average of post-intervention data was then compared with the pre-intervention data to find out to what extent the intervention strategy used in this study helped reduce students’ improper behavior in the language classroom.

Step 4. Furthermore, ten of the 32 students (five males and five females) were randomly selected a week after the intervention for the semi-structured interview to explore their perceptions about disturbing behavior in the classroom. Each student was interviewed for seven to ten minutes in the English language. The data from each student were recorded for thematic analysis following the guidance of Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis included, transcribing, coding, collating, checking themes, generating clear names for themes, and finally compiling extracts of interviews to answer the research objectives. First, transcripts from interviews were evaluated and analyzed to identify potential common themes. The derived/potential themes from the participants’ responses were further refined by researchers during multiple readings. Finally, a few themes were identified that best-fit participants’ responses to the perception about disruptive behavior in the classroom.
**Observation**

This study employed a qualitative AR method. Data collection involved a naturalistic type of observation and semi-structured interviews carried out after the intervention. The naturalistic observation allowed researchers to observe students in their everyday context/environment. This enhanced construct validity of collected data in identifying the common disruptive behavior in the language classroom (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019). All observations were done using a set of weekly checklists designed by the researchers (See Appendix).

**Reflection**

After completing the observations, students were interviewed on their perceptions of classroom disruption. The interview was done to understand in-depth views of how students view undisciplined behavior when they see their friends exhibit it in the classroom. Following this, the findings were discussed and reported in this paper for future implications.

**The conceptual framework of this study**

A brief conceptual framework of the study is presented below in Figure 2.

**Data collection and analysis**

Data were collected through observation using the checklist (See Appendix) designed by the researchers for this study. As mentioned earlier, participants were observed for sixteen weeks until their mid-term examination in the academic year 2019-2020. As for analysis, this study used SPSS 26 statistics software to compute (in percentile) and compare the number of students who exhibited disruptive behaviors before (pre-intervention) and while treatment (post-intervention). Finally, the pre-and post-intervention data were compared based on the first two objectives of the present study.

**Results**

Figure 3 illustrates the number of students in the percentage who exhibited disruptive behaviors in the English language classroom. The pre-observation data which was carried out to investigate the common types of disruptive behaviors that the participant exhibits in the language classroom revealed six common types of disruptive behavior namely, looking outside the window (25%), coming late to the classroom (28.1%), talking with their friends (37.5%), laughing/shouting out loud in the classroom (43.8%), drawing unrelated pictures (25%), and shifting from one chair to another in the classroom (28.1%).
Figure 4: Comparison between pre-and post-intervention data on disruptive behaviors exhibited by the participants

Figure 4 demonstrates the comparison of disruptive behaviors that the participants exhibited before (pre-intervention) and while in the treatment (post-intervention). The pre-and post-intervention data were compared to examine whether or not the frequent change of seating arrangements had any influence in reducing students’ disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The result revealed that the number of disruptive behaviors that the participants exhibited before the intervention is comparatively higher than that of while in the treatment. For instance, looking out of window was reduced from 25% of students to 15.6% after the intervention. Similarly, the number of students coming late to the classroom got reduced by 9.3%, talking in the classroom got reduced by 12.5%, laughing and shouting in the classroom declined by 15.7%, drawing unrelated pictures by students got reduced by 6.2%, and finally the movement of students in the classroom were reduced by 12.5%. On the whole, the result indicated a positive influence of the frequent change of seating arrangements in reducing students’ disruptive behaviors in the language classroom.

Interviews

The semi-structured interviews which aimed at exploring students’ perceptions about disruptive behavior in the classroom gave the researchers a few themes that would be useful in mainstream education. The following themes/categories were revealed in participants’ responses to the interviews, in particular, included disruptive behavior in the classroom impedes learning as students get distracted and disturbed; both teachers and students are responsible for disruptive behaviors in the classroom, teachers’ role in reducing students’ disruptive behavior. Pseudonyms such as S1, S2… S10 were used to represent participants and some excerpts related to the themes/categories were given under each theme.

Theme 1: Disruptive behavior in the classroom impedes learning as students get distracted and disturbed.

Three students (S1, S6, S8) reported that disruptive behavior in the classroom impeded their learning. They pointed out that when their friends behaved disruptively in the classroom, they lost the track of the lesson, diverted their attention away from the teacher, and sometimes could not hear the teachers properly. One student (S7) even expressed the frustration of not being able to understand teachers’ instructions and lectures because of the presence of disruptive behavior in the classroom.

When my friends show disruptive behavior it diverts my attention which affects my learning. (S1)

I get disturbed and I lose the lesson track when my friends misbehave in the middle of the lesson. (S6)

I get distracted from my study. I feel angry as I cannot hear the teacher properly. (S7)

Two participants (S3, S5) commented that they get distracted and disturbed when their friends exhibit disruptive behavior in the classroom. S9 pointed out that discipline issues in the classroom not only disrupt individuals but the whole class. Likewise, S10 asserted that she does not like when her friends behave disruptively in the classroom because she cannot concentrate on her learning. She pointed out that she loses interest in the lesson.

I often get distracted when a friend shows disruptive behavior. Sometimes, I even cannot focus on my studies. (S3)

Whenever I try to give my full concentration in class, I get distracted when they show disruptive behavior. (S5)

I don’t like to be in the classroom where students exhibit disruptive behavior because I cannot concentrate on what the teacher teaches us and after that, I lose interest in studying. (S10)
Theme 2: Both teachers and students are responsible for disruptive behaviors in the classroom

Two participants (S6, S8) pointed out that teachers were responsible for students’ disruptive behavior in the classroom. They stated that teachers should guide students concerning discipline issues and come up with different methods, such as group discussion where students remain engaged:

I think teachers are responsible for their behavior and some students are responsible as well. Teachers can guide them and use a different method to engage them in studying by group discussion and assigning group work. (S6)

It is teachers’ responsibility to correct their behavior. It is difficult for them to change. (S8)

On the other hand, some of the students (S2, S3, S4, S10) admitted that students were responsible for disruptive behavior in class. They said that students should seek help from teachers and parents and help themselves to improve their discipline in the classroom.

Yes, we are responsible for our behavior. We can improve it by taking the advice of our teachers and parents. We can also look upon our friends who possess good behavior. (S2)

Yes, they are responsible for their behavior. They should seek help to improve it. (S3)

Yes, they can improve their behavior if they follow the instruction given by a teacher or if they do something valuable, they may change the way they behave in class. (S4)

Yes, our behavior must be controlled by ourselves. Maybe a teacher can play an important role to get the students on right track by advising the students frequently. (S10)

Theme 3: Teachers role in reducing students’ disruptive behavior

All students who participated in this study believed that the teacher had full control over disruptive behavior in the classroom. Some students (S1, S4, S8) suggested that disruptive behavior of students could be reduced to a certain extent if teachers set rules at the beginning of the class with clear consequences agreed upon if the rules are breached. Additionally, S2 and S9 commented that the teaching methods should be student-centered and be more engaging.

If a teacher sets certain rules that no one should show disruptive behavior, if they happen to break rules then they will get punished. This might help to improve the discipline in the class of the students in the classroom. (S1)

Keep note of students with disruptive behavior. Develop different means of approaching them. Make them engage by using different teaching methods. Give feedback and guidance. (S2)

Discussion

This study investigated the common types of disruptive behavior that EFL students exhibit in the English language classroom. It examined whether the intervention strategy used in this study help reduce students’ disruptive behavior in the classroom, and explored students’ perceptions of disruptive behavior in the classroom.

This research project revealed six common types of disruptive behaviors that students exhibit while in the English language classroom. We observed that students misbehave especially when they were disinterested and did not understand the subject matter well. This finding was in line with Jati et al. (2019) which claimed that students show disruptive behaviors when they are less interested to learn and face difficulties understanding the subject being taught. The findings also revealed that students’ disruptive behavior can be reduced to a certain extent by implementing different types of seating arrangements in the classroom (Rafi et al., 2020). More so, we also noticed that frequent changes of seating arrangements excite students and make them curious about their seats, seat partners, group members, etc. This improves their motivation to come to class. Of many seating arrangements implemented in this study, the most effective way to reduce disruptive behavior was making students sit in pairs or groups of three or four. This should be however followed by group activities to keep students engaged. Another benefit of seating in pairs or groups is that it helps students facilitate and complement each other in completing assigned tasks in the classroom and gives students more space to communicate with their peers (Alfares, 2017). This also promotes social relationships among the students. Furthermore, we observe that pairing or grouping students increase students’ participation in the classroom (Egounlété et al., 2018). They tend to participate more actively to help their group complete the assigned task. That said, teachers are suggested to be careful when switching group members to avoid only dominant or only passive patterns of the group (Storch, 2002).
As for perception, our findings resonate with earlier studies (e.g., Duesund & Ødegård, 2018; Gómez Mármol et al., 2018; Närhi et al., 2017; Nash et al., 2016) which claimed that disruptive behavior in the classroom is one of the biggest issues in educational settings. We noticed that when students behaved disruptively in the classroom, it negatively impacted the classroom environment, students learning, and teachers' instruction. In addition, in the interviews, many students commented that when their classmates' misbehaved in the classroom, they got distracted, lost interest in learning, lost attention, and also lost track of the lesson. All together, disruptive behavior of students in the classroom was found disturbing not only by teachers but also by students themselves in this context.

Our findings also revealed that the cause of disruptive behavior in the classroom was attributed to both teachers' classroom management skills and students' behavior. In the interviews, participants reported that teachers had full control over students' behavior in the classroom and they should know how to manage the classroom. The participants suggested that teachers should give proper guidance, advice, and come up with better teaching methods or set strong classroom rules at the beginning of the class with clear consequences to keep students in control. That being said, many students also agreed that students were the major contributor to indisciplined action in the classroom. They pointed out that students should seek advice from teachers and parents and look up to those classmates with good/model behavior and improve their behavior.

Conclusion

The present study may have a direct contribution to theoretical and practical implications concerning second or foreign language classroom management. This study showed that students' disruptive behavior can be reduced to a certain extent by implementing seating arrangements as an intervention strategy in the classroom. More interestingly, this study revealed that both teachers and students could be the cause of disruptive behavior in the classroom, which adversely impacts teachers' instruction, students' learning, and the classroom environment as a whole. The present findings are in line with the suggestion that students' disruptive behavior is one of the major problems in education. Also, it came to our attention that not only teachers but also students feel burden when their mates behave improperly in the classroom.

Implication and recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several implications and recommendations were discussed. First, students' disruptive behavior in the classroom is likely to be an issue of classroom management in the context. However, there is a need for further study to confirm these findings. Second, not only teachers, even students may feel overwhelmed when classmates in the classroom exhibit disruptive behavior. Third, in addition to what previous studies have pointed out regarding seating arrangements as a crucial strategy to enhance students' participation, students learning ability, and student's academic performance (e.g., Egounléti et al., 2018; Pichierri & Guido, 2016; Tobia et al., 2020), this study proposed the seating arrangement as a strategy to reduce students' disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Finally, although the present study suggested that seating arrangements are an effective measure to reduce students' disruptive behavior in the classroom, it should be noted that disruptive behavior that students exhibit in the classroom is likely to be context-dependent. Therefore, the disruptive behavior presented in this study may not be consistent with other educational settings and contexts. For instance, since participants in this study were young and did not use mobile phones in the classroom, there was no technological disruption in the classroom. The case may be different in another context where students are allowed to use mobile phones and other technological gadgets in the classroom. Moreover, this study had some limitations, the sample size was relatively small and the study tested only one type of intervention strategy—seating arrangements in the classroom. Therefore, it would be of interest to future researchers to conduct a similar kind of study with a larger sample size to confirm the present findings. Further, future studies may consider comparing different types of seating arrangements and their influence on students' disruptive behaviors. This may help corroborate the present findings.

References


Appendix

Observation sheet to check the number of students that exhibit disruptive behavior in each week. (Week 5 to 16)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Week</th>
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<th>9</th>
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<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of disruptive behavior</td>
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<td>Looking outside the window</td>
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<td>Late comers</td>
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<td>Talking in the class</td>
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<td>Laughing/ shouting</td>
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<td>Drawing pictures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shifting form one chair to another</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Mark (*) for each time the student exhibits the given list of disruptive behavior in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL no.</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Monday and Wednesday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disruptive behavior</td>
<td>Looking outside the window</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Karma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dawa</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jurmey</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sangay</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Sonam</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Mindu</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Tashi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>