



The Role of Classroom Management in Enhancing Learners' Academic Performance: Teachers' Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Learners' academic performance is one of the most imperative elements of the classroom and a core responsibility of teachers as well as schools. Thus, it is imperative to manage a classroom in a way that is conducive to teaching and learning that can promote high academic performance. Consequently, the study aimed to examine the role of classroom management in enhancing learners' academic performance. A generic qualitative research method approach was employed in the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a total of 18 teachers from six government secondary schools to study the phenomenon. Therefore, it was found that effective classroom management plays an important role in learners' performance. During the research, it was found that the no availability of physical resources and poor classroom management contribute to learners' performance. Based on the research findings it was identified that teacher effectiveness, teacher preparedness and teacher social and emotional proficiency, teacher-learner relationship, and learners' motivation, behavior, and discipline are the major factors that also have a strong role on learners' performance. The schools selected to conduct research are lacking resources, and teachers are not as effective and skilled as required. Due to the lack of resources and skills, teachers can't manage classrooms which can enhance learners' academic performance. It is thus mandatory to provide resources to schools and skills and training to teachers.



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INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is universally regarded as significant in education – and a crucial factor in effective teaching and learning (Good & Lavigne, 2017). It encompasses a broad range of educational concepts, which include the physical, organizational, emotional, and social management of classrooms. In the mid-1990s, researchers focused on classroom management variables based on learners' outcomes, academic performance, and emotional and social skills development (Madigan et al., 2016). The classroom is vital in the building of academically strong individuals (Irshadullah & Inamullah, 2016). According to Bronfenbrenner's (1999) environmental methods theory this includes the micro-system; an enclosed environmental system in which human beings can grow. It also highlights the significance of the institution and instructors as well as learning and the greater socio-cultural atmosphere in the development process.

Classroom management comprises wide-ranging diversity and educational perceptions, including the surroundings, the emotional environment twisted from side to side, social



contexts, and different teaching mechanisms (Irshadullah & Inamullah, 2016). Although it cannot be pinned down as a specific entity, the main factors of classroom management are the physical environment, instructional management, social conduct, and teacher efficacy (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2023). These factors can play an important role in learners' academic performance if utilized together and implemented effectively.

The classroom has two main environments: the physical and the social environment. The physical environment refers to the settlement, placement, and arrangement of desks, tables, chairs, fixtures and furniture, the paint color, ventilation, lighting, temperature, etc. (Wagner, 2019). The social environment of the classroom means the leadership demonstrated by the teacher, which can be authoritarian, democratic, laissez-faire, or depending on the mode of learner participation, such as collaborative, individualistic, or competitive (Minela, 2020). Both have a strong influence on classroom management and learners' holistic development.

A learner's growth is openly concurrent with their capacity to intermingle with the environment. Environments can attract, influence, and contribute to learner growth. Learner performance can be achieved by creating a classroom environment conducive to learning and through effective management (Singh, 2014). A conducive and social environment in the classroom helps learners feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe in class. It provides an area for learners to mentally and physically relax and interact with others in a way that intensifies academic and social learning (Singh, 2014) and it can promote learners' cognitive outcomes, values, academic growth, personal satisfaction, and social skills development (Wang & Degol, 2016). It also relates to enhanced academic performance and good intellectual and mental health. A preventative approach is useful to improve the social and physical environment of the classroom and lessen disruptive and troublemaking behaviors. It can also help teachers improve learners' satisfaction with school, classroom attendance, and educational performance as a whole (Peterson, 2016).

Although the effective and conducive learning classroom is thoroughly defined, there is no specific definition of a destructive classroom environment. It can thus be considered to be an environment that is not conducive to learning – an environment in which learners feel physically and emotionally uncomfortable, resulting in poorer academic performance (Wang & Degol, 2016). A mismanaged classroom cannot provide an environment for effective teaching and learning. It is thus crucial that the classroom be structured in a way that not only prevents undesired behavior but also meets learners' academic needs and enhances their performance.

Many researchers have highlighted the role of classroom management in the teaching-learning process; however, very limited research has been done on the role of classroom management in enhancing learners' academic performance. This research underpins the factors that play a major role in learners' academic performance. Teacher effectiveness, teacher preparedness, teacher social and emotional proficiency, teacher-learner relationship, and learners' motivation, behavior, and discipline are some of the major factors that have a strong role in learners' performance.

Research Purpose

The research aimed to determine the role of classroom management on learners' academic performance at secondary schools. The classroom has been regarded as fundamental in the teaching-learning process and plays a central role, either to encourage learners towards learning or discourage or hamper their abilities. Therefore, the research intends to examine the current conditions of physical management and social environment of the classroom and their influence on learners' enhancement to develop understanding and comprehension of secondary schools and extend knowledge of classroom management at this level.

Research Questions

1. Does the physical management of the classroom play a role in learners' academic performance?

2. Does the social environment of the classroom play a role in learners' academic performance?

Literature Review

Theoretical framework

Flow theory as cited by Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) emphasizes the perspective of learner engagement in the physical and social environment of the classroom by addressing the role of classroom management on learners' academic performance. To enhance academic performance, it is important to provide learners with a cheering and contented classroom environment that is comfortable, encouraging, and conducive to learning. The fundamental aspect of the flow theory is that the required environment, skills, and resources must fulfill learners' needs to meet a given educational challenge. According to research by Everhart (2022), 50% of learners report that their classroom environment is uncomfortable and boring, and up to one-third have reported that they have spent school days goofing off with their friends.

In setting up the structure of this research, the researcher needed to understand the importance of classroom management, the physical and social environment of the classroom, teaching skills and methodologies applied, the resources required, and the challenges teachers and learners faced in the classroom to enhance learners' performance. These included the teachers' in-classroom actions when dealing with learners and the learners' in-classroom connection with teachers. To achieve academic and developmental goals, learners must experience a classroom environment that fosters enjoyment, interest, and concentration.

Classroom management

Classroom management is the process of organizing, conducting, and maintaining activities in the classroom to maximize academic goals and achievements (Good & Lavigne, 2017). Stough and Montague (2015) stated that for effective teaching and learning and positive behavior in learners, it is essential that the classroom is managed and organized properly. Stough and Montague (2015) further explained that a classroom is effective when the teacher can control and manage misbehaviors and provide learners conducive learning environment that allows them to grow emotionally and intellectually. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) found the notion of classroom management to be broader than the perception of misbehavior, interceptions, control, and discipline. It includes all the things a teacher is required to do to foster learner involvement in academics to achieve educational targets. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) further explained classroom management by linking it to time management, material placement, and space utilization in a way that can enhance learning. Garrett (2014) explained that classroom management is everything that a teacher does in class, which includes seating arrangements, decoration of the room, the placement of physical materials, and putting a timetable in place.

The role of the classroom is fundamental to teaching-learning practice. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a mismanaged classroom. Koran and Koran (2018) suggested that classroom management involves teacher actions and instructional techniques to create a learning environment that facilitates and supports active engagement in academic social and emotional learning. Davis (2017) argued that the management of the classroom is not only linked with maintaining discipline and controlling disruptive behaviors but also demands planning, implementation, execution, monitoring, and evaluation. Davis (2017) further said that it includes providing learners with a comfortable and stimulating environment.

Tomlinson and Imbeau (2023) asserted that classroom management generally is conceived to include all actions taken by the teacher to ensure order and the effective use of time during lessons. Shernoff (2013) stated that classroom management has two unique functions: (a) it seeks to establish an orderly environment so learners can engage in meaningful academic learning, and (b) it aims to enhance learner's social skills and moral growth. Burden (2020)

found that classroom management is creating an environment conducive to learning, which includes arranging the physical environment, establishing rules and procedures, and maintaining learners' attention to lessons and engagement in activities. According to Kounin's (1970) doctrine, classroom management comprises techniques that facilitate teachers to deal with learners' similarities and differences and put them together for social learning. Johnson et al. (2016) stated that effective classroom management creates a positive learning atmosphere through teaching interesting lessons, solving problems, and supervising learners. By reviewing the literature, the researcher concluded that classroom management is a set of planned activities, which includes: lesson planning; teaching methodology; class rules and regulations; and daily, weekly, and monthly assessments and tests to achieve academic goals. It also encompasses teachers' capabilities and skills to use in a classroom in such a way as to develop confidence in learners and enhance their educational outcomes. Brett et al. (2015) stated that classroom management cannot be isolated and defined as one particular entity. The management of the classroom comprises several factors, indeed classroom management is constructed in much the same manner as a quilt – numerous and diverse parts gain distinctiveness through the contribution of each piece to a whole.

Classroom management can be classified into two main aspects: (1) physical management; and (2) social management. When implemented properly, these two aspects can play a significant role in learners' learning and academic enhancement. If one of these two aspects is disregarded or overlooked, this could be detrimental to the learning process (Domitrovich et al., 2017). It is thus essential to implement these aspects collectively to positively affect the teaching-learning process and learner academic outcomes

Physical management of the classroom

From the learners' perspective, an encouraging course of action in the classroom provides them with the opportunity to focus on learning effectively. For learners to learn in a classroom the efficacy of teachers and readiness of learners are not the only imperative components of effective teaching and learning, as the physical management and environment of the classroom are also crucial to allowing teachers to teach and learners to learn. A classroom is thus a place that provides learners with an environment to learn knowledge and skills and teachers to teach effectively.

According to Burden (2020) establishing an environment that is conducive to learning to establish is the initial step of the logical, systematic, and attractive setting of the physical resources in the classroom. Physical management of the classroom is one of the basic components of classroom management and effective teaching and learning. If the physical management of the classroom is not logical, systematic, and attractive it can hurt the teaching-learning process. A logical, systematic, and attractive classroom can positively influence learner performance by improving the interactions between teachers and learners (Hallinger et al., 2014). Ondieki et al. (2020) explained that a logical, systematic, and attractive classroom's physical resources include: designating areas for specific activities, selecting and arranging furniture, arranging seating to facilitate learning, decorating spots for specific purposes, providing the appropriate temperature and teaching-learning aids, and organizing materials and areas for easy access.

Classroom management and learners' academic performance

In numerous studies, classroom management has been identified as a key component in teaching-learning that influences learner academic performance. One of the most evident reasons for this is that effective classroom management sets the scene for teachers to teach and learners to learn (Bizimana & Orodho, 2014). It provides an environment in which learners and teachers can concentrate on learning and teaching respectively. Very limited learning can take place in a classroom that is disorganized and poorly managed. It is evident that for effective teaching-learning and learner academic achievement the classroom must provide an

environment that is attractive and comfortable for learning hassle-free and encouraging for teaching (Haron et al., 2021). Furthermore, learner performance and development directly relate to learners' ability to interact with the environment. By interacting with events, materials, and situations, learners can develop understanding and bring change in themselves consequently. The motivation to interact with an environment exists in all learners as an intrinsic property of life, but the quality of the interactions depends on the possibilities for engagement that an environment provides (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). It is important to provide a classroom environment that contributes positively to learner performance.

The social environment of the classroom

In an educational setting, the social environment of the classroom is as vital as the physical management of the classroom and has been regarded as a key variable that affects learners' academic performance and educational outcomes across several research studies (Barrett et al., 2015). The most important evidence for this statement is that an effective classroom environment lays the groundwork for efficient and productive teaching and learning. It provides a classroom environment that captures learners' attention which is essential for effective learning outcomes. The social environment of the classroom is linked with the resources available in the classroom and teachers' skills, emotional proficiency, and efficacy.

Teachers' social and emotional proficiency

A teacher with social and emotional proficiency sets the pitch of the classroom by developing encouraging and comforting relationships with learners and by planning lessons to develop learners' strengths, abilities, and skills. This is done by establishing and implementing social conduct in a way that can promote internal motivation; preparing learners to deal with conflict; creating cooperation and collaboration among learners; operating and performing as a role model for well-mannered and appropriate communication, and demonstrating social and civic conduct (Frey et al., 2019).

Teacher conduct links to an advantageous social and emotional classroom environment and learner performance. An advantageous classroom environment is shaped by keeping conflict and disordered behavior to a minimum (Kutsyuruba et al., 2015). It requires quick transitions from one activity to another, positive emotional expression, meaningful communication, and respectful behavior regarding individual differences, the teacher's relationship with learners, and learner needs.

Teacher-learner relationship

Effective classroom management is the collection and coordination of the relationships between the teacher and learners and between physical resources and their usage. The effectiveness of the teacher in classroom management depends on the establishment of high-quality, trustworthy relationships with learners (Gregory et al., 2016). High-quality relationships increase trust and minimize challenges in the class as they arise. In contrast, the regular or interrupted engagement of teachers in conflict, misconduct, and behavior-related issues negatively affects the teacher's aptitude, with the result that the teacher does not react effectively to classroom disruptions.

Healthy, high-quality teacher-learner relationships play a vital role in productive classroom management, learners' relationship with the classroom, and the most wanted outcomes – educational and social. Moreover, they are the cornerstone of effective classroom management. According to Gregory et al. (2016), a meta-analysis of over 100 studies found that teachers who built healthy, high-quality relationships with their learners had 31% fewer behavior problems over a school year than teachers who did not. Jussim and Harber (2005) learners who experience teacher support are more interested and motivated. Thus, the way teachers behave with their learners affects educational outcomes and objectives.

Healthy teacher-learner relationships are characterized by affectionate and responsive actions from the learners' side and by evident limitations and boundaries as well as steady and reliable associations on the teacher's side. Striking the right balance between affectionate and responsive actions and steady and reliable associations is generally a challenge for both teachers and learners (Tawana, 2020). A balanced relationship between teacher and learners offers the best grounds for productive classroom management and skills development. This is especially applicable when unforeseen and unanticipated learner issues crop up that require an "on-the-fly" response from the teacher to inculcate social and civic skills in learners (Tawana, 2020). As noted by Teng (2017) classroom management plays a major role in learner's academic performance and skills development. Unfortunately, many of the educational reforms have failed to mention or address the relationship between learners' academic performance and learners' discipline in the classroom and their behaviors.

Learners' behavior and discipline

For many years, discipline has been cited as a chief concern of teachers. According to Wolf and Kupchik (2017), improper treatment of discipline and behavioral problems negatively affect learners' performance. Ill-discipline and bad behavior are challenging concerns for all government schools in South Africa. Wolf and Kupchik (2017) further explained that despite long-standing attention to the problem, there is a growing perception that not all public schools are out-performing and disciplined. Some learners are spending time outside of the classroom, in places like in-school suspension or out-of-school suspension, instead of in classroom settings, which ultimately affects their academic achievement.

Moreover, many of the teachers are unsuccessful in maintaining discipline in class. In some situations, maintaining discipline in the class appears to be about control with excessive emphasis on strict rules and regulations, which can lead teachers to be inflexible and unresponsive to learners' academic needs. This condition restricts learners from building their social skills and developing academic learning. It also characterizes an irrational expectation of learners' correct behavior.

According to Njoroge and Nyabuto (2014) in a classroom that is not properly managed, and where teaching methodologies are not exercised, disruptive behaviors by a few or some learners in a classroom can negatively impact teaching instruction. This can cause poor teaching and can lead to lower academic outcomes and skills development in learners. Discipline in schools and classrooms is a major challenge today and it is increasing day by day, which negatively impacts learners' academic performance and skills development.

The management of classrooms is the foremost and leading concern of all schools today. Kim et al. (2019) explained that management of the classroom necessitates an umbrella of definitions that include learning interactions, learning, and the behavior of learners. Franklin and Harrington (2019) stated that the best teachers don't simply teach content, but they teach people. For effective teaching and learning, teachers must use effective behavior management skills and strategies, effective and appropriate teaching methods, and a curriculum that is well-constructed and relevant to the learners' needs. Franklin and Harrington (2019) further explained that in addition to effective and appropriate teaching methods in the classroom, a teacher's most considerable challenge is the behavior management of learners because it can directly affect teaching, learning, and academic achievements. Behavior management in a classroom appears to be a major and complicated task for both newly qualified and experienced teachers.

RESEARCH METHOD

In the accomplishment of the aims and objectives of the research, the qualitative research method was utilized to collect, analyze, and present the results of the research. According to Neuman (2014) to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of the educational process a researcher must exercise the basic qualitative research design in research. To start

with, a constructivist paradigm approach whose mother is the interpretive paradigm Bhattacharya (2017) was applied to guarantee that the findings of the investigation were the views and voices of the respondents, not the researcher's thoughts and feelings. The qualitative research approach was the most suitable for the phenomenon to investigate, explore, and draw meanings to answer the research question and address the topic. Subsequently, a generic qualitative method (Silverman, 2016) elucidated the importance of the application of the design to this research. Consequently, the interpretive research design explains the qualitative data used in this research to provide the findings, as interpretive design relies on qualitative data and is helpful in theory construction in areas with no or insufficient prior theories (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

A total of eighteen teachers from six government secondary schools were selected by using a purposive sampling technique to research the phenomenon of the role of classroom management on the academic performance of learners. These schools were selected for the research as they were one of the secondary schools in the city of Johannesburg where the literacy rate is 98.7% (Khumalo & Alhassan, 2021). Johannesburg is regarded as one of the largest cities in the African continent.

Data analysis is a type of methodology that helps researchers to illustrate, build theory, and construct and draw meaning from collected data. By reviewing the literature and interviewing the 18 teachers, the researcher compiled voice recordings, field notes, and comments from the interviewees (Creswell, 2009). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of data analysis framework were followed to carry out the research. This is the most significant approach in social sciences investigation because it provides an unambiguous and practical framework to accomplish the process of data analysis and theme generation. By accomplishing the findings of the research the following six steps were exercised. Step 1: Familiarization with data, step 2: Data reduction and generation of preliminary codes, step 3: Theme exploration, step 4: Evaluation of themes, step 5: Define themes, and step 6: Write-up of descriptive analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Does the Physical Management of the Classroom Play a Role in Learners' Academic Performance?

We analyzed respondent's responses by using an interpretive research method to identify emerging themes. As a form of an ice-breaking question, the research respondents were asked questions on their experience with the role of classroom management on learners' academic performance. It was discovered that researchers have sufficient knowledge about classroom management.

Theme: Classroom management, teacher effectiveness and preparedness, and physical resources and arrangements.

Respondents expressed their experiences with classroom management and its role in learners' performance:

Classroom management and teacher preparedness and effectiveness are interlinked. Where there is no preparedness and effectiveness, there is no discipline, if there is no discipline, there is no classroom management, and if there is no classroom management, there is no teaching and learning and learners' enhancement. Classroom management and teacher preparedness are keys to effective teaching learning and academic performance. A good class is one where the teacher behaves well learners should also behave well and the classroom is managed in a way that is conducive to learning. If a teacher is not behaving and not prepared for teaching it is hard to manage discipline in the classroom which ultimately affects learner performance negatively. (Respondent 3)

In addition to the above, respondent 3 also agrees that learners can only perform well if the classroom is managed and the teacher is effective and prepared for teaching. She added that:

Learners' performance is linked with classroom management and teacher preparation. The teacher must enter a classroom with prepared lessons to teach learners. If a teacher is not prepared the learners can pick up quickly and start creating a problem for the teacher in that specific class. Sometimes it does work if the teacher is not prepared and learners cannot pick it up, but most of the time it does not work and it ends up with behavioral and other social issues in the classroom. Lessons should always be prepared and organized for effective teaching and classroom management. Lesson planning and class control are essential in teaching-learning; if you as a teacher are not prepared it means you are creating chaos in class. If learners are bored and have nothing to do in class, they create problems and do other things which leads to mismanagement of class and lower learners' performance.

Another respondent noted the following:

The main element in classroom management is the preparedness of a teacher. The teacher being prepared is exceptionally essential. Teachers should always come to school and class with prepared lessons and tasks. Secondly, the teacher should be on time in the classroom. Thirdly he or she should be motivated by teaching. All these are the basic factors of a teacher's preparedness and classroom management. (Respondent 15)

Furthermore, all respondents stated that teacher preparedness, discipline, and motivation are the core elements of learning effectiveness, however, this respondent replied by adding:

Classrooms in school are not fully equipped with the required educational resources. If there are no resources a well-trained, equipped, and skilled teacher even cannot deliver and produce what is required from him/her. It is essential to provide resources to schools. Our school does not have enough educational resources in the classroom. (Respondent 6)

In the view of respondent 4, teachers play an important role in teaching but physical resources are the basics of classroom management and effective teaching-learning: Besides teachers' effectiveness, physical resources, like soft boards, projectors, charts, etc. are not available in schools. Without resources and AV aids, teaching-learning is not possible. Resources are the basics of any classroom. We are facing challenges and cannot deliver whatever is expected from us.

Does the Social Environment of the Classroom Play a Role in Learners' Academic Performance?

Theme: Teachers' social and emotional proficiency, teacher-learner relationship, and learners' behavior and discipline.

The question was posed to research respondents; does the social environment of the classroom play a role in learners' academic performance? In response to this question, it was revealed that the social environment of the classroom depends on teachers' social and emotional proficiency, teacher-learner relationships, and learners' behavior and discipline. If the social environment of the classroom is conducive to learning, evidently this classroom can enhance learners' academic performance and achieve educational goals.

Teachers' social and emotional proficiency

Respondent 6 asserted that a teacher who is prepared socially and emotionally to deal with learners', can provide a conducive learning environment in the classroom.

It is one of the fundamental duties of a teacher to enhance learners' academic learning in the classroom. Academic enhancement in learners' is very important and one of the

fundamentals of the classroom. We can say that the teacher's main duty in the classroom and educational setting is to focus on academics only. In my view, if a learner is excellent in civic and social skills but not good in academics, he or she can not be as productive for society as required. The educational outcome only be achieved if teachers are effective, professionally equipped, and emotionally prepared to deal with learners in the classroom.

Respondent 9 was in the view that:

We are grooming future leadership in schools. Today's learners are future leaders, so it is the major responsibility of the school institution and teacher to develop them holistically and enhance their academic learning. In an entire educational process, a teacher has the chief role in learners' development and the provision of an encouraging classroom environment.

Respondent 7 highlighted the role and responsibility of a teacher in learners' academic and skills development. According to her, teachers' main duty is not only to focus on how to discipline and control class but to promote a friendly and democratic environment for academic achievement.

The purpose of school is to put learners of the same age from different cultural backgrounds together in a classroom for them to interact and share their expertise and can develop them holistically so that when they are posted out from school to society they can play a positive role in different places and characters. I believe schools are the places where we are preparing these characters for society. There should be a permanent change in learners' behavior, and they must have a strong academic background to enable them to play a productive role in society. I must say to achieve all this; teachers need to prepare themselves socially and emotionally to deal with learners in adverse situations, and order for them to be effective for society.

Teacher-learner relationship

From the generated responses during the interview session, the respondents indicated that along with discipline and implementation of rules and regulations, a good and healthy teacher-learner relationship for effective learning is crucial for the social environment of the classroom. Research respondents replied by saying:

The development of effective relationships between teachers and learners and the implementation of rules and discipline is the key to a successful educational process. It is very important for learners to follow discipline and class rules and for teachers to interact positively with learners and keep a professional but close relationship with them for better teaching and learning. (Respondent 2)

Another respondent replied to the same question:

The teacher needs to establish a positive relationship with learners. You as a teacher should have an understanding of the environment of the school and know about the learner's background. Positive relationships with learners and knowing about learners' backgrounds (socioeconomic) are a part of effective teaching-learning and effective classroom management. (Respondent 5)

Respondent 13 added to this question by replying:

The relationship between classroom management and learners' performance is interlinked. As a teacher, you should make sure that no learner is inclusive, and no one is left behind. The teacher needs to show his or herself as a facilitator in front of learners, and they should not be shy to ask any question a teacher. I would say a classroom is managed if you have a friendly environment in your class and that class is productive.

Another respondent noted a crucial requirement for teachers:

Know your learners, you need to form a relationship with learners, correct relationship, you know that you are a teacher and they are learners, you need to build up trust with learners so that they can share whatever is important and necessary with the teacher. They need to trust that whatever you are teaching them is correct. There should not be any type of humiliation in the classroom with the learner. (Respondent 2)

This respondent added that the learners are not from the same family and socio-economic background; they are from diverse surroundings, hence it is important for the teachers to have close and friendly relationships with learners so that they can be dealt with in different situations accordingly:

Learners are from diverse backgrounds, from strong families, from broken families, from no family at all and different cultural backgrounds, different languages, etc. You need to know where to pitch your lesson. If you are in a class and want to manage class and you don't know about your learners, you are not going to make a difference in their academic and skills development. I come from a school where we don't have many resources, that was a fee-paying school but all parents are not paying, so we are lacking resources day by day. You need to know who your learners are you need to know how to utilize your skills to achieve educational goals. You need to set your example, and set a president; they pick up very quickly because they are smart and clever. A professional and close relationship with learners is the key to effective teaching and learning. (Respondent 14)

Learners' behavior and discipline

In the view of research respondents discipline is a serious concern for schools and it affects the teaching-learning process. According to research respondents behavior and discipline are vital for the social environment of the classroom. One of the research participants replied:

We have serious discipline issues in our schools. I always put discipline on top in my classroom. We have one teacher and 40 learner ratio average in classrooms. If I can't maintain discipline in class I can't teach learners. The minute you start teaching in class, a disruptive learner comes in and the teacher spends most of the class time talking with that individual learner. So it is very important to maintain discipline in class. My discipline is "to lead by example" If I am late in class, I can't tell a learner to be on time for class. We are having serious discipline issues in schools. (Respondent 3)

Respondent 1 was in the observation:

Classroom discipline is very important for a teacher to maintain. I have a very big issue with discipline; there is no re-precaution for taking action against the learner because you as a teacher are not allowed to punish the learner. I think learners have more rights in school than teachers. Our hands are tight; we cannot take serious action against ill-disciplined action.

This respondent added her personal experience with a learner:

I have received insulting words from a learner many times in school. In my second month of teaching in this school, a girl learner in grade 9 threw a piece of paper at me in class. I placed a complaint in the principal office but unfortunately, no action could be taken against this learner by the disciplinary committee. I think the learner was colored by race, and this is the colored dominant area. In disciplinary hearing meetings, the committee members and learner were speaking in the Afrikaans language which I could not understand. I feel it is a racial matter. This is a colored community and my feelings are that learners respect more colored teachers than black ones. Learners usually do not even positively reply to black teachers because of racial issues. I do not feel safe in this school. Parents usually come to the class directly rather than go to the office; which I think is not

appropriate. According to the constitution, you as a teacher cannot punish learners in any way and learners are taking it as an advantage. (Respondent 4)

According to this respondent, no serious action can be taken against misbehaving learners: We are sitting with learners who are not interested in schooling. I can't say who is faulty if the child is not interested in schooling. Those, who are not interested in schooling usually, create problems and misbehave with fellow learners and teachers in school, and we cannot take serious action against them because the constitution says we cannot expel or punish a misbehaved learner from school. We need to draw a thin line and rules and regulations to keep boundaries and discipline in the classroom and school. (Respondent 9)

According to respondent 15, besides many other reasons I mentioned, poverty is one of the main reasons for misbehaviors and ill-discipline.

Learners sometimes don't follow the rules, there is bunking in schools. In the past, we used to follow all rules and school discipline but now things have changed. Children want to do what they want or like to. There could be political reasons behind all these problems. District management has set the tone, and now I think problems might be from that side, we hardly receive any support from the district if we face a discipline issue. Things are getting worse. And teachers are tired of dealing with these problems. Kids are not on track, they always just don't follow, and do not complete tasks and assignments, and we are not allowed to give them ZERO marks in their examinations. Bunking is more common in boys than girls but girls also bunk. Poverty is one of the major reasons for all these issues. I have seen a good discipline in model C (fee-paying) schools where learners have to pay the full fee. These learners belong to established families; they are disciplined and well-behaved.

A response added by saying, that casual days (pajama days) are one of the reasons for the discipline setback:

I think casual days (children are allowed to wear any type of clothing by paying a certain amount to school) in school are also a problem. Casual days are for fundraising for the school. Learners are allowed to wear any type of dress by paying a certain fixed amount to the school. I am not in favor of casual day pajama days etc. It also creates discipline problems in school. Because in casual days kids wear different types of dresses, especially girls are wearing very inappropriate and exposed dresses which attract male learners and learners and then start doing bullying with female learners which results in ill-discipline. Another thing; boys focus more on girls than learning on that specific day. Being a teacher you need to know that the future is in your hand. Learners are growing every day, they are not stagnant and we need to implant good discipline in them. (Respondent 8)

Discussion

The research attempted to establish the role of classroom management in enhancing learners' academic performance. Most respondents reported that classroom management and the social environment of the classroom are essential parts of teaching and learning. Effective classroom management enhances academic learning; however ineffective classroom management hinders learning. Classroom management is linked with teachers' effectiveness and preparedness, availability of physical resources in the classroom and arrangements, motivation, and discipline. The findings confirm existing studies that the role of classroom management is crucial for an effective teaching-learning process. Phiri (2016) suggested that effective classroom management can engage teachers' expertise, skills, and techniques to provide a conducive environment for learners to enhance academic performance. Phiri (2016) further stated that classroom management is not only to control learners' behavior and maintain discipline but it reflects on learners' achievements and satisfaction. In an attempt to understand the role of

classroom management on learners' performance, it was found that learners' performance is linked with classroom management and teacher preparation so the teacher must enter a classroom with prepared lessons to teach learners. Research respondents stated that learners have seen more motivation in resourced classrooms and skilled and prepared teachers' lectures than in those less resourced classrooms and less skilled teachers' lectures. The thought is supported by Glasser's (1999) choice theory that teaching and learning can only be accomplished if the classroom is managed, the teacher is prepared and the lesson is planned to fulfill the learner's educational needs. Glasser's (1999) choice theory further stated that if the schools, classrooms, and teaching-learning are to carry on, they must be revamped and restructured to emphasize the worth of teaching-learning throughout. Furthermore, some respondents indicated that besides teachers' effectiveness and preparedness, physical resources are crucial for teachers to teach effectively and manage classrooms for smooth teaching-learning activities.

The findings collaborated with Burden (2020) that physical management of the classroom is thus one of the basic components of classroom management and effective teaching and learning. If the physical management of the classroom is not orderly and attractive it can negatively impact the teaching and learning process. Orderly and attractive classroom management can positively influence learner performance by improving interactions between teachers and learners and between learners and learners. Burden (2020) further supported the research findings that a well-arranged and managed classroom stimulates learners, improves learning, and aids learners in recalling what has been learned. An effective seating arrangement must, however, facilitate learners according to the teaching-learning methodology in use, such as collaborative learning, lecture style, group work, etc. The technologically advanced, modern classroom of today demands that the physical arrangements of the classroom align with teaching-learning tools and equipment.

An effective classroom must thus support the subject and teaching method, ease teaching-learning, connect the teacher and learner, allow circulation in the classroom, and provide learners with the opportunity to actively participate in learning activities. During research interviews, researchers observed that classrooms lacked physical resources and research respondents stated that due to the lack of physical resources, it does not potential to deliver what is required in an educational setting. Additionally, research findings showed that discipline in the classroom is a key to success. *If there is no discipline, there is no classroom management, if there is no classroom management; there is no effective teaching-learning. A good classroom is one in which, both, teacher and learners behave well and maintain discipline.* Based on the theory adapted in the research Glasser (1999) also believes that the ideal classroom is the one in which a teacher and learner both can maintain discipline and follow class rules for effective teaching-learning and academic enhancement.

To understand the role of the social environment of the classroom in learners' academic enhancement, the responses indicated that the social environment of the classroom has the central role in teaching- learning; however, it depends on teachers' leadership style, teachers' social and emotional proficiency, teacher-learner relationship and learners' behavior and discipline. In related research Suleman and Hussain (2014) stated that the classroom has two main environments: the physical and the social environment. The physical environment refers to the arrangement of chairs, tables, fixtures and pieces of furniture, painting, lighting and ventilation, etc. Conversely, the social environment of the classroom is demonstrated by the teachers' leadership style, which can be democratic, authoritarian, or laissez-faire, and the mode of learners' participation, such as collaborative, individualistic, or competitive.

Schools and classrooms are for grooming future leaders, so to provide an environment that can allow learners to prepare themselves for the future and enhance academic skills and learning. In a classroom, a teacher is a leader, and learners learn from teachers, teaching styles, and methodologies. Glasser's (1999) choice theory adopted in the research stated that, traditionally, teachers focus on lecturing styles in classrooms and expect learners to write in

notebooks whatever is taught. He says this is boring for learners and limits academic learning. According to him, a teacher should function as a leader in the classroom to provide quality teaching and continuous support and encouragement to learners for them to be fruitful for society. By doing so and meeting learners' academic needs, better and quality work can be achieved.

Currently, secondary schools are not performing well because of the traditional classroom environment, teaching practices, methodologies, and techniques. Teachers in secondary schools need training and required physical resources in classrooms, both, together can enhance the social environment of classroom and teaching-learning. Glasser (1999) further provides a solution to this problem by offering instruction in different ways to learners to achieve quality education. He says this entails a change in curricula, materials, and physical facilities in the classrooms but a significant change in teachers' behavior, teaching practices, and interaction. However, Chandra (2015) stated that teaching is a working methodology of a teacher with the learners to discover, nurture, develop, and accomplish set goals and targets. A learner's academic performance is linked to the teacher's guidance and teachers' leadership styles.

Teacher-learner relationship is one of the techniques of leadership and teaching style. It provides teachers an opportunity to know about learners and their backgrounds to deal with them in the classroom and to apply rules and knob discipline. So it is evident for teachers to recognize learners for effective classroom and healthy teaching-learning. Singh (2014) supported the view that a learner's growth is openly concurrent with their capacity to intermingle with the environment in which he or she is living and growing up. Environments can attract, influence, and contribute to learner discipline and educational growth. However, Tawana (2020) elaborated that healthy teacher-learner relationships are characterized by affectionate and responsive actions from the learners' side and by evident limitations and boundaries as well as steady and reliable associations on the teacher's side. Striking the right balance between affectionate and responsive actions and steady and reliable associations is generally a challenge for both teachers and learners. A balanced relationship between teacher and learners offers the best grounds for productive classroom management and academic development. This relationship is applicable when unforeseen learner issues crop up that require an 'on-the-fly' response from the teacher to control discipline and enhance academic learning. Teng (2017) noted that in classroom management teacher-learner relationship plays a major role in the learner's academic performance. Unfortunately, many of the educational reforms have failed to mention or address the importance of relationships and their role in learner's performance.

Furthermore, discipline is also a challenge for teachers in classroom management. According to research respondents, it is difficult to manage discipline in schools in the presence of section 12, Act 108 of 1996 of the South African Constitution which states that "everyone has the right not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way". In line with the Constitution, the National Education Policy Act of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a: A-47) states that no person shall administer corporal punishment or subject a student to psychological or physical abuse at any educational institution (Heekes et al., 2022).

Keeping in view the constitution and Education Act, to deal with ill-discipline, schools are required to find alternative functional measures of discipline. In trying to follow the Constitution and Education Policy Act of 1996, schools are respecting learner's rights on the one hand, and on the other, they have to find alternative, meaningful, and adequate measures to deal with learners' ill-discipline issues without infringing on learner's rights, this requires serious attention as it hinders teaching as well as learning. Therefore, a balanced approach is necessitated for teachers' effectiveness, teachers' proficiency, leadership styles, and skills development to attain educational aims.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to investigate the role of classroom management in enhancing learners' academic performance. The results of the research indicated that physical management and the social environment of the classroom have the core function in an educational setting. Research shows that physical management of the classroom, and required resources for effective teaching and learning are important, but educational outcomes and academic enhancement cannot be achieved without a social environment of the classroom. The social environment of the classroom is linked with teachers' effectiveness, teacher's preparedness, and teachers' social and emotional proficiency in teaching styles, teacher-learner relationships, and learners' motivation, behavior, and discipline in the classroom. However, the physical management of the classroom is linked with the resources available in the classroom to foster effective and smooth teaching-learning.

Learners' academic enhancement is linked with classroom management. A professional, efficient, and effective teacher can only produce results and enhance academic learning if the classroom is equipped with the required physical resources. An effective and professional teacher can teach with few physical resources available in a classroom but this is not applicable in every setting. Technology and resources are the forces that aid teachers to teach effectively and boost learners' skills and knowledge. Schools are lacking basic physical resources and essential technology which in-result hinders required academic learning. A classroom can only be managed if required resources are available and utilized properly. A managed classroom must thus support the subject and teaching method, ease teaching-learning, connect the teacher and learner, and provide learners with the opportunity to actively participate in learning activities. The schools selected to conduct research are lacking physical resources (like furniture, projectors, AV aids, etc.). Due to the lack of physical resources, teachers can't deliver what is required in an educational setting.

Moreover, the social environment of the classroom depends on teachers' social and emotional proficiency, teacher-learner relationships, and learners' behavior and discipline. If the social environment of the classroom is conducive to learning, evidently this classroom can enhance learners' academic performance and achieve educational goals. It was revealed that teachers are not professionally skilled and emotionally proficient and trained as required to manage the social environment of the classroom in a way that can lead the educational process successfully and enhance learners' learning. A classroom can be directed to a conducive teaching-learning environment if the physical resources are available and teachers are professionally skilled and proficient.

Teacher-learner relationship is also one of the crucial factors that play a vital role in learners' academic performance. Teachers lack professional skills which hinder them from forming teacher-learner relationships to maintain discipline in the classroom and motivate learners for effective teaching-learning and academic outcomes. Research respondents also agree that learners can only perform well if the classroom is managed and the teacher is effective and prepared for teaching. The research concluded that classrooms are lacking resources and teachers are lacking training and skills. To improve classroom management and learners' academic outcomes, it is crucial to provide the necessary resources to each school and training and skills to each teacher in South Africa. Furthermore, schools should engage governing bodies, parents, businesses, and non-profit organizations to acquire resources for classrooms. Moreover, private training institutes and bodies can be contacted for teachers' training and skill development. Effective teachers in resourced classrooms can manage classrooms which can as a result enhance learners' academic.

The results of this research cannot, however, be taken as conclusive as this research was constrained by some limitations. The research was conducted in six schools with eighteen participants thus; these results cannot be generalized to all secondary schools. The research focused on physical management and the social environment of the classroom; other factors that may play a role in learners' academic enhancement have not been included in the research.

A qualitative method was utilized in research which always has gaps to fill and questions to answer. Additional research may be required to fill the gaps and provide more detailed results on the role of classroom management in enhancing learners' academic performance.

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