

## **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN**

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### **Abstract**

*This study focuses on classroom management and effective learning environment for primary school children in Enugu State. Survey research design was adopted in conducting the research and a total of 173 primary school teachers made up the sample for the study. Four research questions were generated to guide the study. Questionnaire was used for data collection. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviations. The findings of the study revealed the sources of problems in classroom management: motivation problems, instructional problems, procedural and disruptive problems. Based on the findings, it was recommended that there is need to organise effective classroom management for effective service delivery and enhancement in learning.*

**Keywords:** Learning, Pupils, Learning Environment, Classroom Management.

### **Introduction**

Learning is a necessity. Every one desires to acquire information or body of knowledge by learning one thing or the other. Learning is a natural phenomenon in man. It involves being exposed to subjects and skills intended to be mastered such as mathematics, social studies, football, music, English and Igbo languages, among others. Hill (2002) defines learning as when experience causes a relatively permanent change in an individual's knowledge or behaviour. The change, according to the author, may be deliberate or unintentional, for better or for worse, correct or incorrect and conscious or unconscious. Similarly, Driscoll (2000), Hill and Schunk (2004) define learning as a change in an individual caused by experience. Put succinctly, it is a step-by-by process in which an individual experiences permanent, lasting changes in knowledge.

Learning is significant in the lives of every individual. It enables an individual to acquire the abilities and requisite skills that will help him or her function effectively in society. In recognition of the importance of learning, the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) endorsed education as a means of engendering national development. National development is achieved through pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. This work focuses on primary level of education. In specific terms, pupils investigated in this study are in the primary level of education. According to the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), primary education is education given to children aged 6 to 11 and older. It is this level that the rest of the education system is built on. It is the key to the success

or failure of any education system. Nigeria prescribed that the curriculum of this level of education shall include the following subjects: Languages (language of immediate environment) English, French, Arabic, Mathematics, Science, Football, Music, Physical and Health Education. Christian Religious Knowledge. These subjects provide with pupils the opportunities to learn different subjects and skills in the classroom.

Classrooms are official or public learning environment situated in schools. Classrooms are particular kinds of environments. They have distinctive features that influence their inhabitants no matter how the pupils or the desks are organized or what the teacher believes about education (Dorman & Adams, 2004). Also, Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup (2008) state that classrooms are multi-dimensional. The authors further state that classrooms are crowded with people tasks and time pressure. There, in the classrooms, are many individuals with differing goals, preferences, abilities, most share resources, accomplish various tasks, use and re-use materials without losing them, move in and out of the room, among others. So, the way the teacher handles these unexpected activities matter a lot and is seen and judged by all.

Teachers' role is crucial in conducting learning lessons in the classrooms. In other words, organizing classroom management is significant to maintaining order, peace and tranquility as well as smooth transitions of activities in the classrooms. Woolfolk, Hughes, and Walkup (2008) conceptualise classroom management as techniques used to establish and maintain a positive and a safe learning environment, relatively free of behaviour problems. Classroom management according to Igbokwe and Eze (2009), is the progression of strategies teachers utilize to promote order and student engagement and learning. In the same vein, Slavin (2009) views classroom management as methods used to organize classroom activities, instruction, physical structure, and other features to make effective use of time, to create a happy and productive learning environment, and to minimize behaviour problems and other disruptions. This is essential in the classroom for effective service delivery.

Classrooms management helps to create more time for learning. Woodfolk et al (2008) state that one goal of classroom management is to expand the sheer number of minutes available for learning. This, according to the authors, is sometimes called allocated or available time. It is a time set aside for learning. Creating more time for learning is on one spectrum and another is for the time to be valuable. In other words, the time must be used effectively. Classroom management increases the successful learning time by keeping pupils actively engaged in worthwhile and appropriate activities through interaction about their learning with teachers and fellow pupils. In other words, it is giving all pupils access to learning, making sure everyone (pupil) knows how to participate in class activities (Emmer & Stough in Slavin, 2009).

Classroom management helps pupils to cultivate the culture of self-management. It enables the pupils to be in control of their own behaviours and actions. Woolfolk et al (2008) state that classroom managements help pupils become better and able to manage themselves. However, in a scenario where the teachers focus on pupils' compliance, much of the teaching and learning time would be spent on monitoring and correcting. Pupils appear to see the purpose of school as just

following rules, not constructing deep understanding of academic knowledge. This appears to undermine learning as Kaplan (2002) maintains that the movement from demanding obedience to teaching self-management and self-control is a fundamental shift in the discussion of classroom management. Supporting this position, Woolfolk et al state that without teaching self-control, many low frequency, low level disruptive behaviours continue to take place with a deleterious effect on learning. This is a problem. Practices that contribute to effective classroom management, according to Slavin (2009) & Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan, & Brown (2010) include: planning and preparing a classroom, selecting and establishing useful rules referred to as setting class rules; keeping student records, getting off to a good start, giving effective directions, monitoring the classroom environment, managing classroom interruptions and managing abusive student attitudes and behaviours. All these, when properly planned and executed accordingly lead to effective classroom management.

In spite of the importance of goals of classroom management, teaching and learning processes appear to be plagued by a number of problems that are connected to organization. In organising the classroom for learning, teachers in a bid to establish a positively productive learning environment appear to employ teacher centred method where pupils would keep quiet, do not talk, obey the order and be passive recipient of information. This inhibits learning. Woolfolk et al (2008) state that it is unethical to use classroom management technique just to keep pupils docile and quiet. In the same line of thought, Igbokwe & Eze (2009) maintain that classroom management is not designed to keep students quiet or to make them passive, but to help maintain an atmosphere or learning environment that is positive and productive.

Teachers spend tremendous amount of time planning instruction; preparing lessons, selecting support materials, creating pupil's activities, designing tests, among others. Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan & Brown (2010) note that these notwithstanding, all too often the anticipated instructional period is drastically reduced by interruptions. Alerby (2003) affirms that pupils complain that they have insufficient time to accomplish school work and the correlations between time spent and pupil learning are usually larger than the correlations between specific teacher behaviours and pupils learning. Also, Orlich et al (2010) note that 21 percent of class time is spent on transitions- ending one activity and beginning another. The author further states that abrupt endings to activities set the stage for numerous behaviour problems.

More so, delay in delegating directions at the appropriate time as at when due is a problem in classroom management. Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan & Brown (2010) maintain that gaps in teacher directions before and after an instructional episode or interruption are a frequent cause of both classroom management problems and lost of instructional opportunities. The authors further state that, frequently, teachers get caught up in the physical requirements of lesson setup or breakdown materials handling, and students' assessment. While the teacher is focusing on these tasks, the class is left idle, which often leads to problems.

Teachers' problem appears to be complex in the classroom situations. Motivating pupils from these diverse backgrounds, cultures, ethnicity, family setup,

age, is a problem. Instructional and procedural techniques and strategies to accommodate pupils from diverse backgrounds are also part of the problems too. This brings about or leads to disruptive problems metamorphosing into excessive talking at the beginning of the class, cheating, stealing, vandalism, attention seeking, among others. All these problems appear to challenge the effectiveness of a classroom manager. These problems informed the need for this study.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to find out the relevance of classroom management as an effective learning environment for children in primary schools. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- 1 Identity the importance of classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children.
- 2 Find out the sources of problems in classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children
- 3 Determine the use of time in classroom management in the learning environment of primary schools children.
- 4 Determine the strategies for enhancing classroom management of the learning environment of primary school children.

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

- 1 What is the importance of classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children?
- 2 What are the sources of problems in classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children?
- 3 Why is the use of time important in classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children?
- 4 What are the strategies for enhancing classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children?

### **Methods**

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. It is a survey that focuses on classroom management and effective learning environment of primary school children in Nsukka town of Enugu State. The sample for this study is made up of 173 teachers. A 51 item researcher structured questionnaire titled Classroom Management and Learning Environment Questionnaire (CMLEQ) was used to gather data from teachers. The item statements were arranged in four clusters in accordance with the research questions. The first cluster sought information on the importance of classroom management as a medium for providing effective learning environment for children in primary schools while the second cluster elicited information on the sources of problems hindering provision of effective learning environment for children in primary schools. The third cluster sought information on the importance of use of time in classroom management in effective learning environment of children in primary schools while the fourth cluster elicited information on strategies for

enhancing classroom management for providing effective learning environment for children in primary schools. The items of the instrument were placed on a four point response scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree with corresponding weighting values of 4, 3, 2 and 1. The instrument was face validated by three experts, one in Childhood Education, one in Arts Education and one in Educational Administration departments of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State. The comments and suggestions made by them were carefully effected in the final draft of the questionnaire. The instrument was trial tested using Cronbach Alpha and the internal coefficient consistency of 0.85, 0.83, 0.77 and 0.91 respectively. A grand mean of 93 was obtained. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations. The decision was based on a mean score of 2.50 and above.

### Results

Research question 1: What is the importance of classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children?

**Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Teachers' Responses on the Importance of Classroom Management in the Learning Environment of Primary School Children.**

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	D
1.	It creates more time for learning	3.52	0.64	*
2.	Increase successful learning time by keeping pupils actively engaged in worthwhile activities.	3.56	0.61	*
3.	It provides access to learning by enabling each child participates successfully in a given activity.	3.42	0.82	*
4.	It helps pupils become better able to manage themselves.	3.28	0.70	*
5.	Expands the sheer number of minutes available for learning.	3.03	1.04	*
6.	It help pupils cultivate self management	3.53	0.67	*
7.	It helps teachers organise classroom activities effectively.	3.46	0.76	*
8.	It helps to create a happy learning environment.	3.47	0.69	*
9.	It helps to minimise behaviour problems.	3.35	0.77	*
10.	It helps establish a productive learning environment in the classroom.	3.39	0.76	*
<b>Key: *Agree A</b>		<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>3.40</b>	<b>0.40</b>

The result on Table 1 revealed that teachers perceived that all the item statements 1-10 are the importance of classroom management for effective learning environment for primary school children. This is because each mean was above the cut-off point of 2.50. The item statements had their standard deviations ranged from 0.61-1.04, which

indicated that the respondents were not far from the mean and from one another in their opinions.

### Research Question 2

What are the sources of problems in classroom management the hinder provision of effective learning environment for primary school children?

**Table 2: Mean Rating and Standard Deviations of Teachers on the Sources of Problems in Classroom Management Hindering Provision of Effective Learning Environment for Primary School Children.**

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	D
<b>A</b>	<b>Motivation Problems</b>			
11.	Insufficient activity for students	3.00	1.06	*
12.	Difficulty getting pupils involved	2.78	1.05	*
13.	Negative pupil attitudes	2.94	1.00	*
14.	Lack of pupil success	2.80	1.13	*
15.	Negative teacher attitudes	2.80	1.04	*
<b>B</b>	<b>Instructional Problems</b>			
16.	Lack of variety in instructional techniques	3.11	0.90	*
17.	Inadequately communicated goals and objectives	3.18	0.86	*
18.	Bad pacing (too fast or too slow)	3.11	0.91	*
19.	Pupils not following directions	2.92	0.97	*
20.	Failure to complete all assignments	2.81	1.13	*
<b>C</b>	<b>Procedural Problems</b>			
21.	Unclear assignments	2.85	1.03	*
22.	Moving the class to a different room	2.90	0.95	*
23.	Failing to reserve a special room or space for an activity	2.87	1.06	*
24.	Not having the necessary materials in the classroom	2.93	1.00	*
25.	Failure to plan discussion groups in advance.	3.07	0.86	*
<b>D</b>	<b>Disruptive Problems</b>			
26.	Excessive talking at beginning of class	2.78	0.98	*
27.	Attention seeking	2.92	0.90	*
28.	Arriving late to class	2.89	0.87	*
29.	Teacher making value judgments about pupils' dress, home life, or parents	2.80	0.90	*
30.	Teacher making unenforceable threats	2.84	0.94	*
31.	Students using obscene language or gestures	2.79	1.00	*
<b>Key: *Agree A</b>		<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>2.91</b>	<b>0.49</b>

Table 2 above captures some of the sources of problems in classroom management as a medium for providing effective learning environment for primary school children. Teachers perceived all the item statement 11-43 as sources of

problems in classroom management that hinder provision of effective learning environment for primary school children. This is because the mean score for each item ranges from 2.78-3.18, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviations generated ranges from 0.86-1.13. This indicates that parents' responses were not far from the mean and not far from one another in opinion.

### Research Question 3

Why is the use of time important in classroom management in the learning environment for primary school children?

**Table 3: Mean Rating and Standard Deviations of Teachers on the Importance of Use of Time in Classroom Management in the Learning Environment for Primary School children.**

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
<b>A</b>	<b>Using Allocated Time for Instruction helps in:</b>			
32.	Preventing lost time	3.01	0.87	*
33.	Preventing late starts	3.13	0.92	*
34.	Preventing interruptions	3.01	0.81	*
35.	Minimising time spent on discipline	3.01	0.96	*
<b>B</b>	<b>Using Engaged Time Effectively</b>			
36.	Teaching engaging lessons	2.89	0.92	*
37.	Maintaining smoothness of instruction	3.06	0.87	*
38.	Managing transitions from one activity to another	3.19	0.71	*
39.	Maintaining group focus during lessons	3.05	0.86	*
<b>Key: *Agree A</b>		<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>3.04</b>	<b>0.49</b>

Results in Table three (3) present the importance of judicious use of time in classroom management in the learning environment of primary school children. It shows that teachers perceived all the items 32-39 as importance of using time in classroom management in learning environment for primary schools children. This is because the mean score for each item ranges from 2.89-3.19, which is above cut-off point of 2.50. The standard deviation range 0.71-0.96, which shows that teachers were not far from the mean but were close to one another's opinion.

### Research Question 4

What are the strategies for enhancing classroom management in the learning environment for primary school children?

**Table 4: Mean Responses of Teachers on the strategies for enhancing Classroom Management in the Learning Environment for Primary School children.**

S/N	Item statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
40.	Planning and preparing a classroom	3.32	0.80	*
41.	Selecting and establishing useful class rules	3.28	0.71	*
42.	Keeping pupils' records	3.26	0.76	*
43.	Getting off to a good start	3.24	0.79	*
44.	Giving effective directions	3.37	0.66	*
45.	Monitoring the classroom environment	3.16	0.77	*
46.	Managing classroom interruptions	3.21	0.69	*
47.	Managing abusive pupil attitudes and behaviours	3.20	0.77	*
48.	Organising classroom activities	3.33	0.74	*
49.	Organising instruction	3.39	0.62	*
50.	Organising the physical classroom to provide for effective use of time	3.42	0.62	*
51.	Create a happy productive learning environment	3.39	0.63	*
<b>Key: *Agree A</b>		<b>Cluster Mean</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>0.50</b>

Table 4 above captures some strategies for enhancing classroom management for effective learning environment for primary school children. Teachers perceived all the item statements 40-51 as effective strategies for enhancing classroom management for effective learning environment for primary school children. This is because the mean score for each item ranges from 3.16–3.42, which is above the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviations generated ranges from 0.62-0.80. This indicates that teachers were not far from the mean and not far from one another in opinion.

### Discussion

The finding of research question one shows that teachers perceive that all the item statements 1-10 are the importance of classroom management for effective learning environment of primary schools. These include: it provides more time for learning, increase successful learning time by keeping pupils actively engaged in worthwhile activities, it provides access to learning by enabling each child participate successfully in a given activity, among others. This finding is in consonance with Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup's (2008) submission that importance of classroom management is that it expands sheer number of minutes available for learning; increases successful learning time by keeping pupils actively involved in worthwhile appropriate activities. This finding also corroborates Slavin (2009) views that classroom management equips one with strategies for providing effective learning environment, using class time well, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to

interest and inquiry, and permitting activities that engage students' mind and imagination.

An overview of the findings in research question two enumerates the sources of problems in classroom management for effective learning environment of primary school children. These are motivation problems: insufficient activity for children, difficulty getting children involved in activities, instructional problems, lack of variety in instructional techniques, inadequately communicated goals and objectives; procedural problems: unclear assignments, moving the class to a different room; disruptive problems: excessive talking at beginning of class, note passing, arriving late for class, among others. This finding corroborates Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan & Brown (2010) views that gaps in teacher directions before and after an instructional episode or interruption are a frequent cause of both classroom management problems and lost opportunities. The authors further state that frequently teachers get caught up in the physical requirements of lesson setup or breakdown, materials handling, and pupil assessment. While the teacher is focusing on these tasks, the class is left idle, which often leads to problems.

Based on the items enumerated in research question three (3) as the importance of using time in classroom management for effective learning environment of primary school children, such as preventing lost time, preventing late starts and early finishes, preventing interruptions, minimising time spent on discipline, among others. This position corroborates the views of Woolfolk, Hughes and Walkup (2008) that managing time helps create more time for learning. Similarly, Slavin (2009) states that it helps in allocating time for instruction and use of engaged time effectively.

Result from research question four (4) indicate that the teachers perceive all the strategies suggested as effective for enhancing classroom management for effective learning environment of primary school children.. This is in consonance with the views of Woolfolk et al (2008), Slavin (2009) and Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan & Brown (2010) that teachers should be educated in the ways enumerated above for enhancing classroom management for effective learning environment of primary school children .

### **Recommendation**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Teachers should be properly educated in planning and preparing classroom activities.
- Teachers should select and set useful class rules for the pupils.
- Teachers should organise the physical classroom to provide for effective use of time.
- Teachers should effectively monitor the classroom environment to avert disruptions.
- Teachers should create an interesting and a happy productive learning environment that is more of a learner-centred environment.

## Conclusion

Classroom management entails employing different strategies to create a positive, productive learning environment that uses class time well, creating an atmosphere that is conducive to stimulate the interest of pupils. The greater responsibility rests on the teacher's shoulders. Setting up an effective learning environment is a matter of the teacher knowing a set of techniques and applying them accordingly, especially carrying every child along. In other words, learner-centred classroom is preferred where the pupils are actively involved.

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