

## **Classroom Management Practices – Observations in Selected Malaysian Classrooms**

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**Abstract :** *Classroom management has always been an uphill task for most teachers especially the novice ones. In order to face the challenges of the classroom, teachers should always be aptly prepared with knowledge and skills of managing behaviour. This is to ensure learners are always in a safe and meaningfully engaged non-threatening learning environment. Indulging in good practices of classroom management such as maintaining order and creating a conducive classroom environment reflects a competent teacher. Teachers must have principled understanding and knowledge about how they should act in classrooms in terms of strategies to discipline students. This is essential to bring out the best of abilities in learners. The objective of this investigation was for teacher-trainees to critically observe how trained classroom teachers dealt with disruptive behaviours in several primary classrooms in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It also sought to examine the possible reasons and suggest ways of overcoming those disruptive behaviours. This exercise was also undertaken to illuminate the teacher-trainees about good classroom management practices. The observations revealed several disruptive behaviours displayed by pupils. These disruptive behaviours occurred mostly due to the teacher's inadequate classroom management skills. Although the findings of this observation may not be generalized to other classroom context due to its small scale observation, the knowledge and experience from this observation could contribute towards worthy understanding to the teaching fraternity especially to teacher-trainees. Finally, it augurs well for teacher-trainees, to reflect upon their pedagogical strategies in relation to classroom organization and management. Good classroom management practices reflect a competent teacher.*

**Keywords:** *Classroom management, disruptive behaviours, managing misbehaviours*

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### **I. Introduction**

Managing a classroom is a daunting task. Most teachers face challenges to ensure a harmonious atmosphere in the classroom. Without a conducive classroom environment, the process of teaching and learning could be jeopardised (Emmer and Stough 2001).

A classroom is a place where students are supposed to be free from physical, emotional and psychological harm. It is also a place where students are given the opportunity to learn and grow as people (Jones et.al. 2013). In order to get students engaged in a meaningful learning environment, teachers should strive to incorporate effective behaviour management strategies. Indulging in good practices of classroom management such as maintaining order and creating a conducive classroom environment reflects a competent teacher (Donna et.at. 2012).

In order to ensure an orderly classroom atmosphere, teachers must aptly be prepared. Careful consideration and planning for a new class augurs for the success of the class throughout the duration of the lesson. In attempt to do this, teachers have to be very clear and consistent in planning classroom management. Teachers must have principled understanding and knowledge about how they should act in classroom in terms of strategies to discipline students. This is essential to bring out the best of abilities in learners.

### **II. Objective**

The objective of this investigation was for teacher-trainees to scrutinise how a trained classroom teacher dealt with disruptive behaviours in several primary classes in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It also sought to examine the possible reasons and suggest ways of overcoming those disruptive behaviours. This exercise is to shed some light on the teacher-trainees about good classroom management practices.

### **III. Literature Review**

An effective classroom management style constitutes creating an environment and attitude towards the students that is predictable, consistent and task oriented (Wong and Wong, 2005). It is the duty of educators to move away from a one size fit all approach to individualized standards of performance. Teachers these days

have the responsibility of catering to an environment so diverse that they have to be prepared to teach children with different needs and using different ways.

Beginner teachers do not have practical understanding of effective classroom management. As a result, many of them drop out from the profession (Duck, 2007). Additionally, beginner teachers too do not have a grasp of classroom management fundamentals as a basis to hinge their preference in the teaching style (ibid). To overcome problems faced by beginner teachers, they must be equipped with adequate exposure during their course of teaching studies in relation to good classroom management practices. One may be a good teacher but not necessarily a good classroom manager (Palumbo & Sanacore, 2007).

In the past, teachers were more engrossed in disciplining rather than managing classrooms. Megableh et. al. (2007) view classroom management and classroom discipline as two different entities. They exert that classroom management is related to procedures and routines undertaken by the teacher to maintain a quiet and smooth classroom. On the contrary, classroom discipline is related to procedures and strategies used by the teacher to deal with misbehaviours. A good teacher will maximise the efficiency of the teaching process by prescribing routines that allow learners to be ready for learning and not waste valuable time disciplining.

#### **IV. Methodology**

Effective and inclusive instructional planning may not be divorced from an ongoing process of data gathering. The information gathered from the data is fundamental in planning, monitoring and evaluating students' academic and social learning. Apart from that, classroom observations too, serve as tools for assessing the effectiveness of teaching strategies as well as classroom management strategies. For the purpose of this investigation, a case study approach with the anecdotal recording method (Baumann, 2002) was employed. Several classroom teachers were observed and specific information about misbehaviours in the classroom and how the teachers dealt with disruptive behaviours were noted.

#### **IV. Findings**

A number of urban Year 5 classrooms (eleven years old primary pupils) were observed. The observations revealed numerous patterns of disruptive behaviours among the pupils. The disruptive behaviours are as follows:

##### **i. Disruptive behaviours**

According to Levin & Nolan (1991), a disruptive behaviour is defined as behaviour that interferes with the act of teaching and other pupils from learning in a harmonious environment. Additionally, it can cause harm to others whether physically or psychologically. As teachers, we need to curb disruptive behaviours from occurring in our classroom so that the pupils can learn pleasantly.

The observations in the Year 5 classes revealed several patterns of disruptive behaviours by the pupils. Firstly, they were **distracting their peers**. They were walking around the classroom and disturbing others especially when the teacher was not paying attention to them. They patted on their friends who tried to carry out the task given by the teacher. As a result, pupils who wanted to carry out their tasks could not focus during the lesson. This disruptive behaviour occurred for quite a while until the teacher noticed the misbehaviour. The teacher tried to handle this matter by asking them to sit at their places and concentrate on the task given to them. At first the pupils followed the teacher's instructions, but after a while, they started to wander around the classroom and disrupt other pupils again. In the end, the teacher ignored them and focused on other pupils.

Another disruptive behaviour showed by the pupils was **not paying attention** to the teacher. They were talking to each other even though the lesson had already begun. From the observation, there were pupils who sat together and chattered during the teaching and learning session. They behaved as though the teacher was not in the classroom. Ironically, the teacher did not even notice the pupils chattering and not attending to the task given to them. Apart from that, there were pupils who **did not keep time**. Apart from coming in late into the classroom after recess, they were donning a noticeably untidy uniform. When they entered the class, they did not seek the teacher's permission and neither did they apologise for coming in late. This is a **rude behaviour**. Not only that, they were **arguing in the classroom**. There were a few teachers who reprimanded such behaviour but some did not respond to them at all. The pupils continued talking during the lesson and in the end they started arguing and almost got involved in a fight. Only then, they were ordered to sit in front near the teacher's desk. The pupils followed the teacher's orders but only for a while. After several minutes, the pupils went back to their seat and started talking with their friends again.

## **ii. Reasons for disruptive behaviours**

There are several possible reasons why these disruptive behaviours were displayed by the pupils. Firstly, probably, **the task given by the teacher was not cognitively challenging** and it did not require a lot of time to be completed. They were done in no time. Upon completing the task, they had nothing to do at all. Consequently, they felt bored and decided to disrupt others who were still struggling to finish their task. As for the pupils who were almost involved in a fight, they seemed not concerned at all about what happened in the classroom at that time. For some reason they must have felt **bored** and did something else. Another possible reason why the pupils displayed disruptive behaviour in the classroom was because the **teacher did not impose any rules during or prior to the lesson**. Rules are very important in a classroom. Martella, R.C., Nelson, J.R. & Marchand-Martella, N. (2003) assert that rules and regulations help the teacher to control the classroom efficiently and they can reduce the occurrence of disruptive behaviours. Since the teacher in the classroom did not impose any rules and regulations, the pupils assumed that they can do anything that they liked in the classroom.

Another reason for the occurrence of the misbehaviour above is because the **teacher did not give attention to the pupils and was not aware of what happened in the classroom**. We could attribute this to teacher presence. Teacher presence is the ability of the teacher to use his or her personality and body language to command attention. Perhaps the pupils did not feel the presence of the teacher. It was noticed that pupils only displayed disruptive behaviours when the teacher did not give attention to them. In other words, these pupils are **attention-seekers**. When they did not get the attention that they wanted especially from the teacher, they decided to misbehave. Another possible reason for these disruptive behaviours is that the teacher did not implement his **authority** in the classroom. The teacher seemed to ignore those pupils and continue teaching and focussing more on the pupils who listened to him or her. In terms of teacher-pupil interaction, some of the teachers did interact with the pupils and tried to give more attention to them and some did not. Some of them lacked authority and could not manage the disruptive behaviour effectively. For example, when some of the pupils were walking around and disrupting others, there was one teacher who just watched and gave a mean look at the pupils. Some of the pupils understood the non-verbal communication displayed by the teacher who used his eyes and facial expression, but others could not comprehend it. In the end, they continuously disturbed others until the teacher communicated verbally to them. Perhaps the teacher should have used both verbal and non-verbal communication so that the pupils will get the message intended. Additionally, the teacher should have advised the pupils and tried to get their attention in the classroom by conducting interesting activities.

## **iii. Ways to overcome the disruptive behaviours.**

Classroom teachers employ numerous strategies stemmed from rooted theories and approaches to overcome misbehaviours. One example of an alternative way to overcome the disruptive behaviour is by setting up rules and regulations in the classroom. Rules and regulation are very crucial in preventing disruptive behaviours. When setting up rules, the teacher must make sure to mete out reinforcement so that the pupils will follow the rules. The reinforcement can either be positive or negative. According to Canter (n.d), when teacher uses positive reinforcement coupled with consistent disciplinary consequences, the pupils' behaviour improves. Furthermore, the pupils will know what are being expected from them. According to Canter's assertive theory, the pupils must know beforehand what will happen when they comply with the rules and vice versa. This will enable the pupils to learn that their actions have different consequences and they themselves are the ones who control them. Another thing that needs consideration is that the teacher should explain to the pupils why their behaviours are considered disruptive. Charles (2005) postulates that the teacher should explain the reasons for the rules so that the pupils can understand why they need to behave in the classroom and they will comply with the rules set up by the teacher.

Apart from the above, classroom seating arrangements play a great role in curbing indiscipline. In order to prevent disruptive behaviours, teachers need to manage pupils' seating arrangements. As far as possible, do not let pupils sit in groups belonging only to one gender or the same ethnic. The classroom observation revealed that pupils sat in groups according to their ethnicity. It was like birds of feather, flocking together! The Indian pupils sat among the Indians while the Malay pupils sat among the Malays. The Chinese sat among the Chinese. This kind of seating arrangement is not encouraged as it does not promote social interaction. The teacher should change the pupils' seating arrangement to reflect a group that has a mixed composition. In addition, by changing the seating arrangement, the pupils will be able to work with others and learn to adapt with differences.

Apart from the above, teachers must have good verbal and non-verbal communication skills. This notion is reinforced by Nesamalar (2005). She mentions that communication is very important in the teaching and learning process. Teachers must be able to use body gestures, intonations and facial expressions at the appropriate time and situation. Teachers too, must have the skill to give instructions in simple, precise and clear manner. When the teacher has effective communication skills, he or she will be better skilled in handling pupils, especially those who display disruptive behaviours.

## **VI. Some Recommendations for Managing Classrooms**

Teachers must have the skill to swiftly and promptly curb misbehaviours. In the classroom, learners must be made aware that the person in charge is the teacher. Thus, poor or inappropriate behaviours are not tolerated. Steps to correct or punish misbehaviours are essential to eradicate misbehaviours and to restore order in the classroom. This is pertinent for a healthy classroom environment. Teachers are duty bound to correctly mete out punishments in order not to be seen as unfair. Teachers should always strive to strike a balance between punishing, rewarding, and motivating because any of these acts if done inappropriately, will make misbehaviours ingrained. Some of the ways teachers could manage classroom behaviours are as follows:

- Give a disapproving look
- Ask students to be silent when the teacher raises his or her hand
- Teacher counts down from five and punishes students with an agreed punishment at the count of one if they continue misbehaving
- Call the name of the student who is misbehaving
- Get the misbehaving student to sit elsewhere
- Disallow misbehaving students from taking part in games or fun activities temporarily
- Remove the student from the classroom to the office or councillor but ensure adequate warning is given first
- Punish by getting students who misbehave to do some writing tasks while others indulge in games
- If the whole class is misbehaving, discontinue the game and have them do a written task instead
- Have a talking session with misbehaving students at a later time
- Inform the head teacher
- Call the parents and inform them of the misbehaviour

## **VII. Conclusion**

This classroom observation exercise revealed several disruptive behaviours displayed by pupils. These disruptive behaviours occurred mostly due to the teacher's inadequate classroom management skills. If the teacher paid more attention to the pupil's in the class and displayed a firm attitude towards them, the disruptive behaviours would not have occurred. To curb indiscipline in the classroom, a teacher must have skills to implement rules and regulations. Additionally, a teacher has to be equipped with verbal and non-verbal communication skills. Apart from that, pupils' seating must be managed well too. Improper seating arrangement will result in disruptions. A teacher must also be able to know what actions should be taken in the classroom in order to prevent misbehaviours. Misbehaviours which are not dealt with accordingly will bring about a chaotic classroom. A chaotic classroom is a reflection of poor classroom management. Thus, teachers should strive to have excellent classroom management skills so that the ultimate aim of teaching i.e. to bring about behavioural change could be achieved.

The findings of this observation may not be generalized to other classroom context. However, partial generalizations may be possible to be drawn to similar situations (Adelman, Jenkins, and Kemmis, 1980). Augmenting this notion, Margaret (2000) and Creswell (2013) too, advocate that knowledge produced by qualitative research is noteworthy in its own right. Bearing this in mind, the findings of this observation allow for the culmination of a more vivid personal understanding of the experience and the prospective outcome can contribute worthy knowledge to the teaching fraternity especially to teacher-trainees. Finally, it bodes well for teacher-trainees especially, to reflect upon their pedagogical strategies in relation to classroom organization and management. Emphasis must be given on preparing lessons and managing classroom routines. For novice teachers, it is recommended that they obtain feedback from more experienced peers so that improvement could be made on classroom practices.

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