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Interpersonal and communication skills used by teachers to achieve quality classroom management in secondary schools in Imo State

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Abstract

One of the ways through which secondary education goals can be achieved is by quality management of classrooms by teachers. This can only be possible when teachers are equipped with necessary classroom management skills. This study analysed interpersonal and communication skills used by teachers for quality classroom management in public secondary schools in Imo State. Two research questions were answered in the study. The descriptive survey design was adopted with a population of 5,363 teachers. A sample of 748 teachers was drawn using multi stage sampling technique. A questionnaire titled "Interpersonal and Communication Skills Questionnaire" (ICSQ) which was validated by three experts was used for data collection. Internal consistency coefficients of 0.87, 0.77 were obtained for the two sections of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha method. An overall reliability co-efficient of 0.82 was obtained for the entire questionnaire. Data were analyzed using mean and standard

deviation. The result among others revealed that teachers: make use of interpersonal skills such as listening to students with academic problems and help in finding solutions to their problems, make use of humor to strengthen their relationship with the students in the classroom and create a democratic atmosphere where the interest and needs of the students are adequately catered for. Teachers also make use of communication skills such as giving frequent and consistent feedback regarding students' behaviour and performance, providing clear directions for classroom activities so that the students know what to do at any given time and use command tone that does not terrify students during teaching and learning. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that teachers should continually utilize relevant interpersonal and positive communication skills in order to achieve quality classroom management.

Keywords: interpersonal skills, communication skills, classroom, classroom management

Introduction

Secondary education in Nigeria plays a great role in imparting and equipping individuals with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes. The acquisition of these knowledge and skills take place mainly in the classroom. The classroom is very important in overall operation of any school because it holds the students together and affords them the opportunity to interact with one another and through this interaction, grow physically, intellectually and emotionally (Ogbonnaya, 2013)^[43]. According to Okorji (2013)^[21], classroom as an important place in the operation of a school which holds learners together and offers them opportunity of achieving the purpose of education. In other words, a classroom is a uniting point where the teachers and learners meet to achieve the teaching-learning objectives. Most often the classroom is made up of learners with different values, opinions, family background, individual differences and temperamental dispositions, yet are meant to achieve a common educational goal. In order to effectively hold the learners together, the teacher requires skills in effective classroom management.

Classroom management according to Arikewuyo (2004)^[6] is the process of efficiently and effectively organizing the classroom so that learning objectives can be achieved. It involves a positive classroom environment, appropriate standards of behaviours for students, effective management of daily routines and instructions, and engaging the students in classroom activities throughout the lessons. Okonkwo (2009)^[18] defined classroom management as an effective organization of classroom life, which includes planning curricular, organizing procedures and resources, setting the tone of the class environment to maximize learning, monitoring students' progress and anticipating potential problems. Amesi, Akpomi and Amadi (2014)^[5] describe classroom management as the process of ensuring that classroom lessons run smoothly despite disruptive behaviours by students. It is possibly the most difficult aspect of teaching for many teachers. This is because once a teacher loses control of the classroom, it becomes increasingly difficult to regain that control.

In order to effectively manage the classroom, the teacher must possess variety of classroom management skills which are necessary for attaining classroom objectives. Osakwe (2014) ^[47] refers to classroom management skills as the tactics or methods adopted by teachers to ensure decorum in the classroom and thus create a healthy and conducive atmosphere for learning. He added that teachers in secondary schools in Nigerian can apply several skills for quality classroom management. Some of which are: class control skills, motivation skills, interpersonal and communication skills. This study focused on interpersonal and communication skills.

Interpersonal skill deals with the techniques used by teachers to interact with the students appropriately. It has to do with teachers' ability to get along with the students while doing their job in the classroom. Teachers need interpersonal skills to be able to deal with students and to create an atmosphere of love and trust between them and the students. This will help in the achievement of classroom objectives.

Communication skill has to do with teachers' ability to convey necessary information, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values to the students in a way that the students will be able to understand. According to Akudolu and Olibie (2002) ^[4], communication skill is the propensity and dispositions, which people manifest in the process of transmitting attitudes, feelings, insights and facts to others. Vale (2005) ^[51] argued that communication skills is better understood in terms of the strategies, attitudes, manner and dispositions which a person employs while transmitting ideas to another with a view to influencing the other. Teachers must communicate with students in the teaching and learning process by making use of different communication skills to instruct, direct, command, persuade, present, inform and establish relationships as well as develop understanding in the classroom to achieve classroom objectives. These skills are a crucial part of teacher's success in providing quality classroom management.

Quality classroom management is the process of ensuring that good standard is upheld in the classroom. It can also be seen as the establishment of standards in various activities that lead to the attainment of classroom objectives. It is an organized way of encouraging the achievement of good and high standard in the classroom. Researchers such as Mobegi, Ondigi and Oburu (2010) ^[38], Digolo (2003) ^[17] and Eshiwani (1993) ^[23] suggested that a number of factors contribute to the establishment of quality in the classroom. They observed that factors such as instructional materials, equipment, classroom management, supervision, teacher training and good teacher classroom management skills are some of the indicators.

However, despite all efforts to maintain quality classrooms in secondary school in Nigeria, Imo State inclusive, there are still obvious challenges. One of such challenges is poor classroom management. Some teachers in secondary schools in Imo State appear not to possess relevant classroom management skills that are needed to enhance students learning in the classroom. Observable situation by the researchers shows the existence of overcrowded classrooms as well as different kinds of indiscipline being exhibited by students in the classroom. Teachers' whose major responsibility is to manage students' discipline in the classroom are sometimes found wanting. These problems combine to suggest that secondary school system in Imo State seems to be at a crossroad. This being the case, one may begin to wonder whether the expectation and objectives of

secondary education in the state are guided by unskilled teachers and mismanaged classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

This study examined the interpersonal and communication skills used by teachers to achieve quality classroom management in secondary schools in Imo State. Specifically, the study examined:

1. The interpersonal skills used by teachers to achieve quality classroom management?
2. The communication skills used by teachers to achieve quality classroom management?

Research Questions

The present study was guided by the following research questions.

1. What are the interpersonal skills used by teachers to achieve quality classroom management?
2. What are the communication skills used by teachers to achieve quality classroom management?

Literature Review

Teachers' Use of Interpersonal Skills to Achieve Quality Classroom Management

Quality classroom requires proactive and reactive teachers in order to define and communicate their social and academic expectations to their students. Such teachers can motivate the students to obey and accept school rules and regulations. Classroom management is a crucial part of teacher's success in creating a safe and effective learning environment for the students. Therefore, teachers should know how to use and apply skills that will allow and also help students to learn (Zuckerman, 2007) ^[53]. Promoting quality classroom through effective skills means creating an environment in which all students feel safe, respected and empowered with academic activities. Students will feel safe when they have the confidence that their ideas and opinions are valued, whether or not they are correct. The teacher must promote polite and respectful student interactions and address inappropriate student behaviour in a positive manner.

Human relations are considered as the most important factor for a better social order. In the same way, teacher-student relations are considered as most important factor for a better school order. Mishra (2008) ^[37] defines teacher-student relationship as the relationship that exists when there is understanding, love and care between the teacher and the students in the class. He further stated that when the relationship between the teacher and the students is tensed, there is every tendency that the students will be affected physically and psychologically, hence disruptive behaviour and poor class performance.

Human interpersonal relationships cannot be divorced from classroom management. It therefore, becomes incumbent on the teacher to ensure good positive relationship among the students and the teacher himself. The teacher must ensure that there is no rancor among the students and that they relate with one another. Bolarm (2000) further stated that the teachers must also related well with the students, get to know them, individually and collectively and establish a cordial relationship that is more on the informal than on the formal side. This kind of relationship is very much likely to facilitate the teaching-learning process. Bolarin (2000) ^[12] in agreement, opines that successful teaching is more than anything else, an exercise in personal relationships. It barriers

of hostility and lack of understanding exist between a teacher and his students; this will seriously hamper their ability to learn from him. Thus, one of the responsibilities of the teacher is to get to know his students as individuals and as a group and learn to understand their attitudes and behavior, try to convey to them that he is a friendly person and sincerely caring about their learning/welfare. In the same line of thought, Cohen (1983) ^[15] put it that “good relationships between teacher and his students are vitally important in the give and take of classroom life: where they exist, there is less likelihood of difficulties arising”. Thus, such relationships minimize disruptive and disturbing behaviours in the classroom in line with facilitating the teaching/process.

Research has shown that the quality of teacher/students relationship is the keystone for all other aspects of classroom management (Marzano, 2003) ^[33]. The researchers further stated that teachers who had high quality relationships with their students had fewer disruptive problems and rule than those who did not have high quality relationships. The authors also are of the view that the most effective teacher/students relationships are characterized by three specific teacher behaviours.

- a. Exhibit appropriate level of dominance
- b. Exhibiting appropriate levels of cooperation
- c. Being aware of high need students

Good teacher/students relationships promote the following

- a. Favourable classrooms
- b. Good behaviour among students
- c. Teacher students body language
- d. Warmth and care
- e. Encouragement
- f. Politeness
- g. Active listening
- h. Fairness

According to Danielson (2011) ^[11] good teacher relationship is one of the most important aspect of classroom management because it helps the teacher to know and understand his students in his class, be exposed to their academic and personnel needs and at the same time, helps the students to build up trust in the teacher as to discuss their needs. Danielson also agrees that when the needs of the students in the class are met, there is always the room that their behavior will be more in control and that will boost their learning capabilities. Teachers should establish relationships with the learners considering their intellectual levels and work with them cooperatively so as to contribute effectively to the success of learning. A democratic atmosphere should also be created, where possible such that need and interests of the learner, as well as their likes and dislike are adequately catered for. Based on these discussions, it is imperative that the classroom teacher maintains a good interpersonal relationship with the students in order to achieve quality classroom management.

Teachers’ Use of Communication Skills to Achieve Quality Classroom Management

Communication is derived from the Latin word “communis”, which means to share, participate and to share data. According to Canary (2011) ^[14] communication may be defined as the transfer of a message of information from one person to another. Many communication activities go on the

classroom either in the form of teaching, students’ discussion and conversation, and the person that initiates it is the teacher (Okorji, 2014) ^[45]. Communication abilities of the teachers are indispensable in the management of classrooms. The teacher should know what to communicate, how to communicate, when to communicate and the medium for community process (Mgbodile, 2004) ^[36]. The author further stated that effective communication maintained in the classroom enhances awareness, enlightenment, involvement, feeling of belongingness and performance effectiveness as well as improves the relationship between the teacher and the students in the classroom.

Communication in the classroom is the process of sending and receiving messages that enables teachers and students to share knowledge, attitude and skills (Ahmad, 2011) ^[2]. It is a very important component of classroom management. UBEC (2012) posited that the way the teacher communicates during the teaching and learning situation influences how he/she and the learners will perform in the teaching and learning process. Teachers have complete power in the classroom through communication to influence classroom situations. Teachers can achieve much if they use the following strategies:

- i. Encourage communication process with the students and create a meaningful bonds with the students based on genuine social inter actions.
- j. Create opportunities for socialization as part of instructional activities and designed learning experiences that promote socialization and discussion.
- k. Hold and communicate high behavioural expectations
- l. Systematically teach classroom routines
- m. Use more positive than negative teacher students interactions
- n. Give students the opportunity to express their opinion and contribute ideas.
- o. Involve students in creating rules, consequences and routines

According to Emmer and Evertson (2003) ^[22], good classroom managers need to communicate expectation related to engaging in and completing work assignments. They should communicate information, directions and objectives for easy understanding by the students. The authors further stated that effective communication in the classroom helps the students to understand the subject matter better and gives clearer information on the expectations of the classroom. This they believe affects learning. Communicating effectively to the students in the classroom among other strategies is a very important approach towards quality classroom management (Bala 2013) ^[9]. The author further stated that when a teacher possesses good communicating skills, it will enhance effective instructions in classes. In agreement, Browne (2013) ^[13] emphasized that with positive communication skills, teachers may prevent challenging behavior from occurring and promote academic performance of the students. The teacher should be able to constantly remind the students of expected classroom behaviours in order to maintain a positive learning environment. Ihebereme (2013) ^[28] opined that effective communication in the classroom is a two way process, teacher and students. The researcher encourages classroom interaction as a means of engaging the students. When the students are involved in the class discussions, they are more attentive and this reduces misbehavior and promotes learning.

Federal Ministry of Education (2010) in support of the above stated that the teacher should also use non-verbal behaviour to communicate. Non-verbal feedback (smiles, frowns, nod move closer to students, (etc) for acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Eye contact and/or facial expressions communicate pleasure, concern, interest, mood etc. The teacher should make sure that his verbal communication is consistent with his non-verbal behaviour. Communication, be it verbal, non-verbal, is a very important tool in classroom management but should be well handled to avoid misunderstanding or sending the wrong signal. Teachers who communicate with their students effectively strengthens the students' trust in promotes student-teacher relationship. The students understand what they are expected to do at any given time and what they should not do, when to talk in class, when to leave the class when to stand and how to answer questions in the class. This therefore promotes academic performance and deters disruptive classroom behaviour.

Empirical Studies

Wigwe (2003) ^[52] conducted a study on classroom management practices in senior secondary schools in Rivers state. Four research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study employed a descriptive survey design. A sample of 240 secondary school teachers (120 males and 120 females) was used for the study in six education zones drawn from the fifteen education zones of River State. A structured questionnaire on classroom management practices technique assessment scale (CMPTAS) was used to collect data for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the four research questions, while t-test statistics was adopted to test the two null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the study, among others, revealed that secondary school teachers in Rivers state employ a lot of preventive and maintenance oriented approaches in the management of students' classroom behaviours. This study revealed that, secondary school teachers in Rivers state indulge much in physical restraints and close monitoring of students as for remedial measures, while they neglect other non-punitive measures. The study recommended that teachers should be given in-service training on the various aspects of classroom management skills and on how to apply preventive, operational, maintenance and remedial classroom management measures. The study by Wigwe is related to the current study in design, instrument for data collection and method of data analysis. Both studies adopted a descriptive research design using a questionnaire as instrument for data collection. Both studies also used mean for data analysis. The reviewed study and the present study differed in area of the study, population of the study, sample and sampling technique.

Onyali and Modebelu (2010) ^[46] carried out a study on effective classroom management skills: enhancement strategy for standard in secondary education in Nigeria. Two research questions and a null hypothesis guided the study. The study employed a descriptive survey design. 261 duty principals and 1160 teachers drawn from the six education zones constituted the sample for the study. A 27-item questionnaire designed by the researchers was the major instrument used. Mean scores were used to answer the research questions and the t-test was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance for the data analysis. The results of the study, among others, revealed that the itemized seven classroom management skills such as

chalkboard arrangement, classroom arrangement, class control, sustaining learners' interest, time management, classroom communication and time tabling were confirmed as enhancement strategies for standard in secondary education. It also showed that only two, class control and time tabling, out of the seven identified classroom managements skills are in frequent use by the teachers. The study among others recommended that practical classroom demonstration and experimentation by master trainers and trained teachers should be encouraged. Teachers also should be educated through workshops on the usage and application of the skills. The reviewed study is related to the present study in design, instrument for data collection and method of data analysis. Both studies adopted a descriptive survey research design using a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. Both studies also adopted mean and standard deviation for data analysis. Both studies however differed in sample and sampling technique, category of respondents and the variables under study.

Asiyai (2011) ^[7] carried out a study on the effective classroom management techniques for secondary schools in North senatorial district of Delta state. The study involved a population of 135 Principals, 270 Vice Principals and 2758 teachers of public secondary schools in Delta State. The sample of the study consisted 50 principals, 70 vice principals and 180 teachers selected through random sampling technique from 50 public secondary schools in the senatorial district. The study was a descriptive survey research and was guided by two research questions and tested two hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed the effective classroom techniques as effective communication, use of reinforcement and reward, use of innovative instructional strategies by teachers during lesson, teachers serving as role models, regular use of questions etc. It also found out that the effects of teachers classroom management effectiveness on students learning are: it makes students positively disposed to learning, they are willing to do class assignments, help to arouse students interest etc. the implication of the findings of this study is that teacher classroom management effectiveness is a predictor of students learning and academic performance. The reviewed study is related to the current study in research design. Both studies differed in area of the study, categories of respondents and sampling techniques.

Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study which was carried out in public secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. From a population of 5,363 teachers, a sample of 748 was drawn using a multistage sampling procedure. A researchers' developed instrument titled "Interpersonal and Communication Skills Questionnaire" (ICSQ) which was validated by three experts was used for data collection. The questionnaire was structured on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A) Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) weighted 4, 3, 2 and 1. The internal consistency of the instrument was ascertained using Cronbach's Alpha and this yielded reliability coefficients of 0.87, 0.77 for the two sections of the instrument and 0.82 for the entire instrument. The instrument was considered reliable in line with Nworgu (2015) ^[40], who stated that if the co-efficient obtained for an instrument is up to 0.70 and above, the instrument should be considered good enough to be used for a study. The direct administration and retrieval method was used for data

collection. A total of 748 copies of the questionnaire were administered while 721 were retrieved and was used for data analysis. Mean was used to answer the two research

questions. A mean rating of 2.50 and above was interpreted as agree while mean rating of less than 2.50 was interpreted as disagree.

Results

Table 1: Mean Ratings of the Interpersonal Skills Used By Teachers to Achieve Quality Classroom Management N=721

Interpersonal skills adopted by teachers	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Listen to students with academic problems and help in finding solutions to their problems.	3.74	.44	Agree
2. Make myself available when the students' needs me	3.34	.68	Agree
3. Relate with the parents of my students on their progress	3.46	.50	Agree
4. Make use of humor to strengthen my relationship with the students in the classroom	2.89	.87	Agree
5. Create an environment of respect and rapport in the classroom by ways of good interaction	3.40	.49	Agree
6. Know my students and address them by their names	3.41	.49	Agree
7. Create a democratic atmosphere where the interest and needs of my students are adequately catered for.	3.16	.79	Agree
8. Establish room for the students to trust me as their teacher.	3.51	.88	Agree
9. Maintain an atmosphere of love between I and my students in and out of the classroom.	3.14	.62	Agree

As depicted on Table 1, the respondents agree on the 10 items as the interpersonal skills used by teachers for quality classroom management. Their mean ratings which ranged from 2.89 to 3.74 were all above the cut of mean of 2.50. The respondents' standard deviation which fell between .44 and

.89 shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their mean ratings of the interpersonal skills used by teachers to establish positive student-teacher relationship for quality classroom management.

Table 2: Mean Ratings of the Communication Skills Used By the Teachers to Achieve Quality Classroom N=721

Communication skills adopted by teachers	Mean	SD	Remark
1. Display the major classroom rules and procedures in an appropriate section of the classroom	3.16	.84	Agree
2. Use non-verbal signals such as gestures, movement, facial expressions to indicate approval or disapproval	2.96	.95	Agree
3. Give frequent and consistent feedback regarding students' behaviour and performance	3.31	.55	Agree
4. Involve students in constant interactions	3.25	.93	Agree
5. Use questions and answers to promote teaching and learning in the classroom	3.59	.49	Agree
6. Provide clear directions for classroom activities so that the students know what to do at any given time.	3.32	.69	Agree
7. Use command tone that does not terrify students during teaching and learning	3.05	.91	Agree
8. Systematically teach and re-teach classroom routines within the context of the classroom (eg turning in home work, requesting assistance, talking in turn.)	3.32	.79	Agree
9. Make clear to students the consequences of their behaviour in the classroom	3.41	.82	Agree
10. Call students by their names to keep them involved and focused	3.65	.56	Agree
11. Provide each student with multiple opportunities to participate during instruction.	3.41	.49	Agree
12. Present lessons with clarity for better understanding of the topics	3.59	.49	Agree

Table 2 shows that the respondents agree to the 12 listed items as the communication skills used by teachers in the classroom for quality assurance. Their mean ratings for the 12 items ranged from 2.96 to 3.65. The range of the standard deviation which fell within .49 and .95 indicates that the respondents were homogeneous in their mean ratings of the communication skills used by teachers in the classroom for quality assurance.

Discussion of Findings

The result in table 1 revealed that teachers agree to the ten listed interpersonal skills as being used to establish positive student-teacher relationship for the achievement of quality classroom management. These skills include: listening to students with academic problems; making themselves available when the students' need them; relating with the parents of the students on their progress; making use of humor to strengthen the relationship with the students in the classroom. Other skills are creating an environment of respect and rapport in the classroom by ways of good interaction; knowing the students individually and collectively; creating a democratic atmosphere where the interest and needs of learners are adequately catered for; establishing room for the students to trust their teachers and by maintaining an

atmosphere of love between teachers and students in and out of the classroom.

This finding is in line with Hamre and Pianta (2005) [26] who emphasized that teachers can learn specific strategies and techniques that will help them form more supportive relationships with all students in the classroom. A few of such strategies are engaging in frequent social conversation with students, being available to students who are having a hard time, displaying regard for students' perspectives and ideas and using behaviour management strategies that clearly communicate expectations and caring. A sizable literature provides evidence that strong and supportive relationships between teachers and students are fundamental to the healthy development of all students in schools (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Pianta, 1999) [11, 27]. According to Asiyai (2011) [7], maintaining good teacher - student relationship is an effective way of managing the classroom to promote teaching and learning in secondary schools. Teachers therefore should always adopt positive skills in establishing student-teacher relationship for quality classroom management.

The finding of this study in table 2 indicated that teachers agree to the 12 listed communication skills as the skills they use in the classroom for quality classroom management.

Some of the skills include: displaying the major classroom rules and procedures in an appropriate section of the classroom; using non-verbal signals such as gestures, movement, facial expressions to indicate approval or disapproval; giving frequent and consistent feedback regarding students' behaviour and performance; Involving students in constant interactions; using questions and answers to promote teaching and learning in the classroom; providing clear directions for classroom activities so that the students know what to do at any given time, among others. Studies have shown that effective communication abilities of the teachers are indispensable in the management of classrooms. This agrees with Ahmad (2011) ^[3] and Asiyai (2011) ^[7] who found out that effective communication enables the teacher to maintain conducive classroom environment for teaching and learning. This is because the teacher communicates the rules and expectations of the class and the students know the consequences of their actions. The teacher should know what to communicate, how to communicate, when to communicate and the medium for communication process (Mgbodile, 2004) ^[35]. The author stated further that effective communication maintained in the classroom enhances awareness, enlightenment involvement, feelings of belongingness and performance effectiveness as well as establish the relationship between the teacher and the students in the classroom. In the light of this, teachers should endeavour to adopt clear communication skills in order to achieve quality classroom management.

Conclusion

The study concludes that teachers in public secondary schools in Imo State make use of all the interpersonal and communication skills listed in the study to achieve quality classroom management.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers recommend that teachers should continually utilize relevant interpersonal and positive communication skills in order to achieve quality classroom management.

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