

SELF – ASSESSMENT OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS: CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT AND DISCIPLINE REFERRALS

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ABSTRACT

Classroom management takes account of students and their environment and is intended to increase student achievement by the process of planning, assessment, and evaluation. Reports have indicated that student disruptions may consume much of the instructional time on daily basis. The purpose of this quantitative study was to focus on classroom management self-assessment of middle school teachers and number of discipline referrals written in one academic school year in western part of the U.S. The participants of this study included 237 teachers including 79 teachers at grade 6, 79 teachers at grade 7, and 79 teachers at grade 8 levels. As data collection tool, a questionnaire called *Self-Assessment - Classroom Management (SACM)* was used and discipline referrals written in one academic school year were collected. The findings the study indicated that teachers, who are inadequate in classroom management, tend to have more disciplinary problems in their classrooms, thus writing more discipline referrals than those who are effective in classroom management.

Key Words: Classroom management, discipline referrals, middle school teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers begin the school year by taking control and lay out their expectations for student behavior along with the consequences for those who continue to disrupt. Most students experience failure or frustration in school (Bluestein, 2000). Educators must employ effective classroom management strategies to minimize failures and frustration in their classrooms (Shawer, 2010). Research suggests that student achievement and the development of self-control are promoted by effective classroom management skills (Heit, Meeks, & Page, 2003). Walker, Colvin, and Ramsey (2004) indicated that effective classroom management is a fundamental component of the teaching-learning process, which promotes good behavior in students. When dealing with classroom management, educators have to be one step ahead of the situation (Wong & Wong, 2005).

Teachers, who fail to take some responsibility of thinking ahead, may fail to provide effective learning and control students' behavioral attitudes (Wong & Wong, 2005). According to research, classroom management is directly linked with academic achievement, teacher efficacy, and teacher, and student behavior (Froyen & Iverson, 1999). Teachers, who have confidence with their self-efficacy, may be effective in controlling negative student behaviors (Jolivet & Steed, 2010). Teachers, who feel inadequate in classroom management, may be ineffective in providing a disciplined classroom (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010).

Many higher institutions do not train prospective teachers on classroom management skills and strategies (Gelpi, 2008). When pre-service teachers do not receive enough training on classroom management strategies, teaching could become quite challenging, thus learning in such environment, in which students exhibit negative behaviors (Gordon, 2001). Due to the needs of society and the changing dynamics of the student population, teachers are coming out of school unprepared to take on the everyday challenges of our students (Samson, 2007; Sprick & Daniels, 2010). Although many higher institutions may not train pre-service teachers on classroom management, all teachers have an opportunity to self-assess themselves and reorganize their classroom management strategies for a more effective learning environment.

According to Amstutz (2005) "Discipline usually has several goals. Short term, discipline tends to stop a child's inappropriate behavior while explaining what is appropriate. Long term, discipline aims to help them take responsibility for their own behavior". As teachers continue working with their students in order to preserve the classroom environment, they are expected to overcome disruptions and not to allow such disruptions to take over the instructional time (Evertson, 1994). Many teachers needing improvement utilizing discipline within their classrooms must effectively self-assess their classroom management skills and take precautions accordingly in order to eliminate disruptions (Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-Davis, & Hunt, 2010).

Classroom management refers to anything that would create effective student learning in the classroom (Wong & Wong, 2005). It takes account of students and their environment and is intended to increase student achievement by the process of planning, student engagement, assessment, and evaluation (Tal, 2010). Classroom management also has been seen as an example of positive behavioral support for students with discipline issues. Some schools take certain precautions to diminish discipline problems within their settings. They establish high expectations for both students and teachers. Some middle schools even provide formal trainings for teachers in behavior management. Such supports help teachers be prepared in every classroom and help guarantee student achievement (Wong & Wong, 2005). School communities need teachers with a better understanding of classroom management approaches so that they can have a positive effect on student achievement and minimize negative student behaviors (Justiz, 1984; Mahon, Bryant, Brown, & Kim, 2010; McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003). In addition, students could learn how to demonstrate positive attitudes by observing the positive behaviors and outcomes of the others around them (Todd, Campbell, Meyer, & Horner, 2008).

Classroom management is related to all of the things that teachers do to organize students, time, and materials so that student learning can be meaningful (Wong & Wong, 2005). Classroom management is an effective teaching strategy and a key concern of many teachers while providing important teaching approaches for students (Cothran, Kulinna, & Garrahy, 2009).

Researchers believe that teachers mainly face two critical issues in their teaching careers: classroom management and discipline (Bandura, 1997; Canter & Canter, 2001; Dreikurs & Cassel, 1991; Glasser, 1998; Ginott, 1972); Kounin, 1970; and Skinner, 1974). They created important models to help educators deal with disciplinary issues in proactive and systematic ways. Researchers realized that student disruptions may consume much of the instructional time on daily basis (Bluestein, 2000; Demirdag, 2015). A study showed that there is a difference in students' achievement gains across teachers' classrooms based on their effectiveness in classroom management (Kane, Taylor, Tyler, & Wooten, 2011). Another research indicated that classroom management is a critical competency area for all teachers as it is directly related to student achievement (Yilmaz, 2009).

Inexperienced teachers with inadequate classroom management skills may not be able to accomplish much in the classroom (Wong & Wong, 2005). Research suggests that classroom management should focus on the topics of caring and classroom diversity (Marks, 2010). There are certain characteristics that create a well-managed classroom. These characteristics include students who are deeply involved with their learning activities, especially with academic and teacher-led instructions and students who know what is expected of them. Effective classroom management enforces little wasted time, confusion, or disruption, and creates a classroom environment, which is work-oriented but relaxed and pleasant. Teachers must implement predictable and consistent classroom procedures and practices. These procedures have two ends: (a) fostering student engagement and cooperation in all classroom activities, and (b) creating a productive working environment.

Discipline referral is a written document utilized to report infractions that break school rules, and is a way to keep track of the discipline throughout the school. Teachers should complete the discipline referrals when the incident occurred, they should not wait too long after because then it would leave room for bias (Wright & Duesk, 1998). The information from discipline referrals can be compiled to allow educators to have an idea of all of the disruptive behaviors.

Teachers, who lack in classroom management skills, could have a questionable impact on student learning (Floden & Buchmann, 1993). They may have frequent problems with classroom control, and write a large number of disciplinary referrals (Bennett, 2009). Those problems may be associated with students' noise and their disrespectful attitudes towards their friends and teachers (Kohn, 1998). Lack of skills in classroom management is one of the biggest challenges for teachers especially those who are new in teaching because organizing students' behaviors is an important factor in the teacher's classroom effectiveness and job satisfaction (Heit et al., 2003). In some cases, one-half of classroom time is taken up with controlling negative student attitudes other than instruction. The discipline problems are responsible for a significant portion of this lost instructional time (Cotton, 1990).

Recent incidents show that the desire for increased effectiveness in classroom management is the general societal concern that some students are becoming more aggressive and violent as evidenced by recent shootings on public school grounds (Greenberg, 2007). As a result, controlling maladaptive and counterproductive student attitudes becomes a critical aspect of the teaching endeavor (Inman & Marlow, 2004; Jolivette & Steed, 2010). Improving teacher effectiveness may help the student possibly achieve at a higher achievement level because less time would be spent on refocusing students due to classroom disruptions and time spent on writing more referrals.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Marzano's (2003) examination of teachers as classroom managers. In this framework, teachers use a questionnaire to self-assess their effectiveness for various indicators on a 0-3 rating Likert scale. The questionnaire has a 10-item construct including 34 questions. After self-assessing their effectiveness using these indicators, teachers will have an opportunity to reflect on their classroom management. In addition, they will have opportunity to generate new ideas in order to improve their teaching and classroom management skills. The teachers will be able to see how student's achievement is impacted by the classroom management strategy utilized. If administered effectively, the appropriate classroom management strategy would help eliminate or decrease student disruptions within the classroom (Heit et al., 2003; Smart & Igo, 2010; Walker et al., 2004). As a result, this framework provides teachers with a comprehensive system for assessing, discussing, and refining their classroom practice.

Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of classroom management strategies and their impact on number of discipline referrals occurred in one academic school year. In line with this aim, the following research questions were studied:

1. What are the perceptions of middle school teachers about their own classroom management?
2. What is the relationship between middle school teachers' classroom management self-assessment and number of written discipline referrals?

METHOD

The study included non-random selection of participants. This quantitative methodology was used because the study measured facts and objectives (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), such as classroom management self-assessment of teachers teaching different grade levels. This methodology offered many opportunities for the researcher to collect information through a questionnaire and document analyses that included discipline referral records for all grade levels in a middle school. The study employed statistical methods and included correlational or quasi-experimental designs to reduce the bias (Cronbach, 1975) and presented the outcomes objectively (Powdermaker, 1966).

This study, which evaluates the various perspectives on classroom management self-assessment of middle school teachers, took place in several middle schools in western part of the U.S.

Table 1: Percentages of Genders Participating in the Study

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	122	51,5	51,5
Male	115	48,5	100,0
Total	237	100,0	

Setting

The quantitative study focused on classroom management self-assessment of teachers in 10 middle schools in western part of the U.S. The schools had a total enrollment of 10,145 students in grades 6th – 8th. The schools had a diverse student population including Hispanic students at 70%, African - American students at 15%, Caucasian students 10%, and the other students at 5%. About 80% of these students were economically disadvantaged and received free or reduced lunch.

Sample

Research sample included non-random selection of participants. The participants of the study included 79 teachers from grade 6, 79 teachers from grade 7, and 79 teachers from grade 8 level with a total of 237 teachers. Female participants were %51.5 and the male participants were %48.5 in the study (see Table 1). The instrument used in the study had 10 main items and each item included three to four questions. As a result, the instrument included a total of 34 questions. The questions included a 4-point Likert scale, with 0 indicating "not yet completed", 1 indicating "some attempt to implement", 2 indicating "implement but struggle with follow-through", and 3 indicating "implement, follow-through, monitor, and improve".

Instrument

This study included a questionnaire called *Self-Assessment - Classroom Management (SACM)*. It was used to measure the classroom management self – assessment of middle school teachers. Quantitative data were collected and analyzed through the use of the questionnaire. The instrument was developed by Sugai (2008). The questionnaire was modified and pilot-tested with 18 middle school teachers to determine the readability and suitability for middle school students. The researcher calculated the coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) to assess the reliability of the instrument with his sample. After the pilot testing, the researcher found that the survey was reliable, as the coefficient alpha was 0.76. In addition, the validity for the instrument was established through the normal occurrences of the studies conducted previously utilizing this particular instrument and reported by the authors of the instrument. Strategies such as member checking were used to ensure the validity of the study. The instrument included questions such as "maximize structure and predictability in the classroom", "use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge expected behavior", and "teach about responsibility and provide opportunities for students to contribute to the functioning of the classroom".

Data Analysis

For the data collection, discipline referrals written by teachers and a questionnaire were used for all participants during the 2013-2014 academic school years. The researcher allowed participants about 45 minutes to answer all questions on the questionnaire. SPSS was used for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Upon the completion of data collection, the data set was imported into the SPSS software for further analysis. The data were analyzed on the basis of the arithmetic mean, standard deviation, one-way Anova, and Post Hoc tests.

Table 2: Graphical Representation from SPSS of the Classroom Discipline Referrals Written by Middle Schools Teachers

Participants	Number of Referrals	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Grade 6 Teachers	616	45,3	45,3
Grade 7 Teachers	341	25.1	70.4
Grade 8 Teachers	402	29,6	100
Total	1359	100	

Teachers write discipline referrals when students exhibit non-compliant behaviors during the instructional time. In this research, number of discipline referrals written by teachers in different grade levels for one school year were collected. After the data were analyzed, the findings showed that grade 6 teachers (616 referrals) wrote more referrals compared to the teachers from grade 7 and grade 8 levels (see Table 2).

Table 3: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Variances	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
1-Maximize structure and predictability in the classroom	.93	2	234	.39
2-Establish, teach, and positively stated classroom expectations	.92	2	234	.39
3-Manage behavior through effective instructional delivery	2.44	2	234	.08
4-Actively engage students through use of varied instructional strategies	.40	2	234	.66
5-Evaluate Instruction	.58	2	234	.55
6-Maximize positive interactions	2.86	2	234	.05
7-Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge expected behavior	.35	2	234	.70
8-Use a continuum of strategies to respond to rule violations	.65	2	234	.52
9-Develop caring and supportive relationships	2.42	2	234	.09
10-Teach about responsibility and provide opportunities for students to contribute to the functioning of the classroom	2.08	2	234	.12

The Levene's test for homogeneity was conducted to measure the differences in variances. This test was conducted to indicate whether the variables in the study were normally distributed and that the variances in the population were equal. In this test, if the significant value was greater than .05, then the researcher would assume that the variances in one condition did not vary too much more than the variances in the second condition and that the researcher had confidence in the validity of the results. Otherwise, the researcher would have to proceed with caution to analyze further data. In this case, all significant values were greater than .05 (see Table 3) and this situation indicated that the data were valid for the further analysis.

RESULTS

The findings of this quantitative study are presented according to the classroom management self-assessment of middle school teachers. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. First, ranges, standard deviations, and mean scores between groups were analyzed. Second, one-way Anova test was conducted to indicate significant differences between groups. Lastly, multiple comparisons were conducted by Post Hoc tests to determine significant differences between two groups.

Table 4: Comparison in Mean Scores among all Teachers on SACM

Variances	6th Grade Teachers			7th Grade Teachers			8th Grade Teachers		
	Min-Max	M	SD	Min-Max	M	SD	Min-Max	M	SD
1-Maximize structure and predictability in the classroom	0-3	1.68	0.74	0-3	1.62	0.86	0-3	1.56	0.75
2-Establish, teach, and positively stated classroom expectations	.25-3	1.57	0.6	.25-3	1.71	0.65	0-3	1.74	0.7
3-Manage behavior through effective instructional delivery	.25-3	1.73	0.58	.25-3	1.76	0.66	0-3	1.63	0.71
4-Actively engage students through use of varied instructional strategies	.33-3	1.71	0.79	0-3	2.03	0.78	0-3	1.69	0.85
5-Evaluate Instruction	.33-3	1.9	0.72	0-3	1.85	0.79	0-3	1.84	0.81
6-Maximize positive interactions	.33-3	1.8	0.86	0-3	1.71	0.72	0-3	1.74	0.73
7-Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge expected behavior	.33-3	1.97	0.74	.33-3	1.68	0.77	0-3	1.72	0.81
8-Use a continuum of strategies to respond to rule violations	0-3	1.96	0.75	0-3	1.74	0.77	.33-3	1.91	0.68
9-Develop caring and supportive relationships	.25-3	1.54	0.61	0-3	1.83	0.74	0-3	1.84	0.75
10-Teach about responsibility and provide opportunities for students to contribute to the functioning of the classroom	0-3	1.79	0.71	.25-3	1.84	0.67	.25-3	1.84	0.77

Note. SACM = Self – Assessment Classroom Management.

When 10 items of SACM survey were analyzed, middle school teachers scored different mean scores on each item (see Table 4). After the comparison between mean scores on item 1, grade 6 teachers scored higher ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .74$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.62$, $SD = .86$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.56$, $SD = .75$) teachers. On item 2, grade 6 teachers scored lower ($M = 1.57$, $SD = .6$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.71$, $SD = .65$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.74$, $SD = .7$) teachers. On item 3, grade 6 teachers scored lower ($M = 1.73$, $SD = .58$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.76$, $SD = .66$) and higher than grade 8 ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .71$) teachers. Grade 6 teachers scored lower ($M = 1.71$, $SD = .79$) than grade 7 ($M = 2.03$, $SD = .78$) and higher grade 8 ($M = 1.69$, $SD = .85$) teachers on item 4. Grade 6 teachers scored higher ($M = 1.9$, $SD = .72$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.85$, $SD = .79$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .81$) teachers on item 5. Similarly, grade 6 teachers scored higher ($M = 1.8$, $SD = .86$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.71$, $SD = .72$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.74$, $SD = .73$) teachers on item 6. On item 7, grade 6 teachers scored higher ($M = 1.97$, $SD = .74$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .77$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .81$) teachers. Grade 6 teachers scored higher ($M = 1.96$, $SD = .75$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.74$, $SD = .77$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.91$, $SD = .68$) teachers 8. On item 9, grade 6 teachers scored lower ($M = 1.54$, $SD = .61$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.83$, $SD = .74$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .75$) teachers. Lastly, grade 6 teachers scored lower ($M = 1.79$, $SD = .71$) than grade 7 ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .67$) and grade 8 ($M = 1.84$, $SD = .77$) teachers on item 10.

Table 5: One-way Anova Test Results between Groups

Dependent Variable	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1-Maximize structure and predictability in the classroom	.29	.48	.61
2-Establish, teach, and positively stated classroom expectations	.66	1.55	.21
3-Manage behavior through effective instructional delivery	.38	.91	.40
4-Actively engage students through use of varied instructional strategies	2.89	4.38	.01
5-Evaluate Instruction	.08	.14	.86
6-Maximize positive interactions	.16	.27	.76
7-Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge expected behavior	2.06	3.44	.03
8-Use a continuum of strategies to respond to rule violations	1.13	2.07	.12
9-Develop caring and supportive relationships	2.38	4.83	.01
10-Teach about responsibility and provide opportunities for students to contribute to the functioning of the classroom	.05	.11	.89

Data analysis from Anova tests showed that there were significant differences on mean scores between middle school teachers on item 4 with conditions $F(2, 234) = 4.38, p = .01, \eta^2 = 2.89$, item 7 with conditions $F(2, 234) = 3.44, p = .03, \eta^2 = 2.06$, and item 9 with conditions $F(2, 234) = 4.83, p = .01, \eta^2 = 2.38$. On the other hand, the data results showed non-significant differences on mean scores between groups on item 1 with conditions $F(2, 234) = .48, p = .61, \eta^2 = .29$, item 2 with conditions $F(2, 234) = 1.55, p = .21, \eta^2 = .66$, item 3 with conditions $F(2, 234) = .91, p = .4, \eta^2 = .38$, item 5 with conditions $F(2, 234) = .14, p = .86, \eta^2 = .08$, item 6 with conditions $F(2, 234) = .27, p = .76, \eta^2 = .16$, item 8 with conditions $F(2, 234) = 2.07, p = .12, \eta^2 = 1.13$, and item 10 with conditions $F(2, 234) = .11, p = .89, \eta^2 = .05$.

Table 6: Multiple Comparisons from Post Hoc Test Results.

Dependent Variable	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.	
4-Actively engage students through use of varied instructional strategies	7th Grade Teacher vs 6th Grade Teacher	.32*	.12	.03
	7th Grade Teacher vs 8th Grade Teacher	.33*	.12	.02
7-Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge expected behavior	6th Grade Teacher vs 7th Grade Teacher	.29*	.12	.04
9-Develop caring and supportive relationships	7th Grade Teacher vs 6th Grade Teacher	.29*	.11	.02
	8th Grade Teacher vs 6th Grade Teacher	.31*	.11	.01

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

After data were analyzed from Anova tests, it was crucial to determine the meaningful differences between each grade level. The significant mean scores between groups resulted on item 4: Actively engage students through use of varied instructional strategies, item 7: Use a continuum of strategies to acknowledge expected behavior, and item 9: Develop caring and supportive relationships. Therefore, Post Hoc tests were conducted and revealed how each grade level teachers differed from one another on mean scores (see Table 6). Grade 7 teachers scored significantly higher than grade 6 teachers ($p = .03$) and grade 8 teachers ($p = .02$) on item 4. On

item 7, grade 6 teachers scored significantly higher than grade 7 teachers ($p = .04$). Finally, both grade 7 teachers ($p = .02$) and grade 8 teachers ($p = .01$) scored significantly higher than grade 6 teachers on item 9.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of teachers on their classroom management skills and how such strategies impact student attitudes. Middle school teachers from grade 6, grade 7, and grade 8 answered 34 questions on a questionnaire. In addition, discipline referrals written by these teachers were analyzed. SPSS analysis indicated significantly different indicators on several items. Based on research results, teachers who lack classroom management skills had more discipline referrals than teachers with less deficiency in classroom management skills (Bandura, 1997; Canter & Canter, 2001; Floden & Buchmann, 1993).

Classroom management skills require teachers to take effective measures in eliminating negative student behaviors and provide active learning. Teachers with strong classroom management skills can successfully establish expectations for students' attitudes in order to lower number of discipline referrals (Wong & Wong, 2005). They would be able to promote student learning and develop self-control among all students to minimize students' negative behaviors (Heit et al., 2003). Students engaging in learning activities would not exhibit any behavioral problems towards their peers or teachers (Canter & Canter, 2001).

Some findings in this study indicated consistency with those of research aimed at testing teachers' classroom management self-assessment and number of discipline referrals. Effective classroom management skills not only utilize effective learning environment, it promotes positive student behavior and lower number of discipline referrals (Walker et al., 2004). In parallel research findings, Froyen and Iverson (1999) found that classroom management is directly linked to classroom environments in which students' behavioral problems are controlled and higher learning expectations are established. Moreover, in their research, Reupert and Woodcock (2010) suggested that teachers, who are ineffective in classroom management, would have to spend most of the instructional time on controlling students' behaviors and write more discipline referrals. However, in this study, data analysis from some middle school teachers indicated conflicting results compared to those previously found ones. For example, although grade 6 teachers scored significantly higher mean scores on item 7 compared to other grade level teachers, they experienced the most number of non-complaint student behaviors resulting in higher volumes of discipline referrals. Therefore, it is passable to suggest that middle school teachers have different perceptions about their own classroom management assessment whereas it is difficult to suggest whether there is a relationship between middle school teachers' classroom management self-assessment and number of written discipline referrals.

This study has important limitations that must be considered if the findings are to be adequately interpreted. First, the data were obtained from a convenience sample; such non-random selection of participants is a frequent limitation in school-based studies (Hedges & Hedberg, 2007). Second, the small sample size may not be generalized to the entire population of teachers and students in the state or the nation. Finally, possible researcher bias, due to the researcher being the sole person responsible for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). To minimize researcher biases and to strengthen the case study design, strategies were used to enhance the reliability and validity of this study, as well as adherence to protocols of data collection and analysis.

CONCLUSION

When dealing with classroom management, educators will need to be one step ahead of the situation. Classroom management is related to all of the things that teachers do to organize students, settings, time, and materials so that student learning can be effective and meaningful. School communities need teachers with a better understanding of classroom management approaches. Schools should provide training and professional development on classroom management strategies for all teachers so that they can be efficient utilizing classroom management approaches and be able to control students' discipline problems. Otherwise, teachers, who are inadequate in classroom management, may be least effective in teaching and end up using most of the

crucial instructional time on discipline problems. Finally, implications for positive social change are that schools could institute staff development concerning types of effective classroom management strategies, which could be utilized to reduce students' noncompliant behaviors that may prevent a successful learning environment.

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