

Original Paper

Managing English Language Classroom for Meaningful Teaching and Learning: A Case Study for Hochland High School in Windhoek

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Abstract

Total management of overcrowded classrooms have across-the-board effects for English as a Second Language teaching and learning environments as in any subject. Greater attainment and achievements in schools depend on the choices made with regard to teacher-learner ratios that consider of classroom management. Recruitment of learners and teachers should ensure that classrooms are enabled to meet the demands of professional teaching challenges, amongst other, individualised teaching and learning. The aim of the research was to explore the challenges and related matters in managing English as a Second Language overcrowded classrooms. A qualitative approach, steered by a case study design, purposively guided the study. It was deemed fit in order to understand the phenomena with deeper understanding of beliefs and situated lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews and nonparticipant observations were used as methods to generate data for analysis. The research exposed that copious problems were experienced by teachers and learners who were subjected to overcrowded classrooms. Amongst many, noise and unruly behaviour, poor time management and teaching approaches result in such classes. Guiding principles regarding sound teacher-learner ratios should be put in place by policymakers and schools in order to support both teachers and learners for the success of teaching and learning.

Keywords

overcrowded classrooms, teaching and learning, time and Space management

1. Background of the Study

Several authors define classroom management as the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep learners systematized orderly, focused, attentive, on task and academically productive during a class (Bolick & Cooper, 2006; Oliver & Reschly, 2011; Korpershoek; Harms; de Boer, van Kuijk, & Doolgaard, 2014). A large amount of a child's time is spent sitting in a classroom where they will learn the innumerable skills believed to be necessary and proper for them to achieve success in the greater world (Lane, Menzies, Bruhn, & Crnabori, 2011; Hannah, 2013). With the classroom being such an important place for the growth of the learner, it is important to understand the traditions in which the environment affects teaching and learning in order to receive maximum effective instruction (Hannah, 2013). The main aim of this paper is therefore to explore the ways in which Grade 10-12 English language classrooms are managed at Hochland High School in Windhoek, Namibia.

Magwa and Ngara (2014) found that learners' behaviours in a classroom can be categorised into two groups of home and school factors. Children that come from broken and disorganised families, with lack of leadership, guidance and control have more disruptive behaviour patterns in schools. Often in such family settings violence is used as a form of discipline. School factors that influence disruptive behaviours in classroom include drugs abuse, crime, and physical abuse that is transferred from societies. Overcrowded classrooms where numbers of learners can exceed 45 for one teacher are part of the factors that overburden management of classrooms.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) corridor has showed some trends of higher learners to a teacher, leading to over crowdedness in classrooms. Though SADC countries such as Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania have showed significant changes in learner-teacher ratios, one can still find ratios of 1:39 to 1:36, some classrooms still register class sizes above 1:50 (UNESCO, 2012). South Africa, for example, shows learner-teacher ratio in primary schools standing at about 1:40 and for secondary schools 1:35 (Motshekga, 2012). John (2013) reports that in some schools in the Eastern Cape, learners are sitting three or four to a desk meant for two, thus upsetting traffic flow in the classroom and demanding extraordinary manoeuvres to move around the classroom. Some schools in the Eastern Cape have more than 130 learners squeezed into one classroom and teachers are obliged to present lessons with their backs pressed up against the blackboard (Guardian Africa Network, 2013). Furthermore, it is noted in Nigeria that learners cannot rely on individual care from teaching (Boyi, 2014, p. 69). A similar trend is noticed by Gideon (2014) in Kenyan schools, where class sizes can reach about 200 per teacher (Bayat, Louw, & Rena, 2014, p. 49). Drame and Kamphoff (2014) reveal that the average class sizes in Senegal are between 50-60 learners per classroom. The prescribed teacher-learner ratio in Namibia is 1:35 for primary school, while for secondary education it is 1:30. But sometimes teachers are forced to teach more than 44 learners per classroom (UNICEF, 2018)

Overcrowded class sizes have negative impacts on the life of teachers and later the learners. Overcrowded classes could overwhelm inexperienced teachers if they lack exposure to teaching such type of classes (Opoku-Asare, Agbenatogbe, & DeGraft-Johnson, 2014, p. 123). The level of experience in

teaching plays a role when it comes to the factors that lead to difficulties in managing an English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom. Andreou and Rapti (2010) teachers need experience to try to gain a child's confidence and trust in order to reduce his or her problem behaviour. Young teachers generally prefer interventions related to the social or emotional wellbeing of students rather than those requiring curricular or environmental adaptations based on the belief that good teachers should be caring, trustworthy, patient and polite.

Mustafa, Mahmoud, Assaf, Al-Hamadi and Abdulhamid (2014, p. 178) point out that overcrowding learners in one classroom could promote indiscipline in classrooms. Overcrowded classes are noisier and more prone to pushing and shouting to the extent that the classroom is negatively disciplined. Valuable lesson time is spent by teachers most of the lesson time trying to control rowdy learners. Little time is left for real teaching (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 251; Davis, 2013). Teachers cannot practise a multiplicity of methods, such as higher-order questioning and active learning approaches as they are just restrained to the 'chalk and talk' instructional method (Opoku-Asare *et al.*, 2014, p. 128). Teachers who teach in overcrowded classrooms devote less time to instruction and integrated reading and writing tasks, because instruction time is often wasted by administrative tasks, such as checking attendance lists, and managing behaviour, thus leaving less time for actual instruction (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 251) and Mustafa, *et al.* (2014, p. 178). Cortes, Moussa and Weinstein (2012, p. 25) highlighted that class size affects student performance. Overcrowded classrooms hinder teachers to pay attention to all the learners (Imtiaz, 2014, p. 251; Kiggundu and Nayimuli (2009, p. 350) and Sosibo and Nomlomo (2014, p. 89), as teachers cannot inspire or take all learners to task to participate at the expense of the passive.

Teachers do not easily get to teach students and find out their needs and weaknesses" (Ellis, Limjoco, & Johnson, 2011). Learners cannot pay attention or participate at the required level of intensity because classmates are noisy and restive (Benbow, Mizrahi, Oliver, & Said-Moshiro, 2007; Mustafa, *et al.*, 2014, p. 78; Qasim & Arif, 2014, p. 145), with the result that academic achievement is negatively affected (Bayat, Louw, & Rena, 2014, p. 49).

Imtiaz (2014, p. 251) as well as Khumalo and Mji (2014) agree that overcrowded classrooms are unsupportive learning environments, and may even affect the learners' physical health and hygiene, especially where infectious diseases are observed. Eventually, teachers in Zimbabwe (Mapfumo, Mukwidzwa, & Chireshe, 2014, p. 191) and in Ghana (Opoku-Asare *et al.*, 2014, p. 123) found unruly classes as a source of stress and burnout. They have never showed signs of enjoying their teaching and learning life chosen profession. Both the teacher and the learners suffer in a poorly managed classrooms (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003) Klammer-Hoogma (2012). It is for this reason that for learning and teaching to take place in the learning environment, the English classroom should be well-managed and welcoming.

Kayikci (2009) conducted a survey of 450 teachers in the city of Antalya with the aim to examine the important of relation between the dimensions regarding classroom management skills of teachers and disciplinary behaviors of students. Kayikci concluded that the beneficial outcomes of a well-managed

physical environment enables the comfort of the learning and teaching process, fostering classroom participations. Therefore, good classroom management is beneficial to both learners and teachers and mismanaged classrooms negatively affect learner's performances and outcomes as well as teachers attitude toward teaching.

Strategies that ESL teachers can use in order to manage their large classes include interactive activities with learners as well as to give penalty but they ensured that seating arrangements, effective instructions, sequencing of activities, choice and access to preferred activities increases engagement and reduced problem behaviour therefore, using children's own special interests as the basis for activities can significantly increase engagement (Pungki & Suwartono, 2018) suggested that teachers be This study focused on the factors, effects and strategies of managing overcrowded English Second Language teaching and learning in a classroom at Hochland High School.

2. Methodology

The study was carried out using a purposefully sampled qualitative research approach. Qualitative methods are concerned with how humans' behaviour can be explained within the social structures in which the behaviour takes place (Austin & Sutton, 2014). The researchers used the case study approach as it increased credibility and trustworthiness of the study. A sample size of 6 participants were interviewed. All 3 Grade 10-12 English as Second Language teachers at Hochland High School were semi structurally interviewed, as they were holders of knowledge in the area the research intended to investigate. The non-participant observation supported the interviews in collecting data.

Content analysis was done by organising, analysing and interpreting the data in four stages: (1) identifying keywords such as 'challenges', 'problems' 'noise', 'disruption' and 'tests'; (2) categorising responses according to keywords, such as 'poor discipline' and 'academic achievement'; (3) consolidating categories into subthemes such as 'Learners' lack of motivation'; and (4) organising subthemes under a main theme, such as 'the influence of overcrowded classrooms on academic achievement'. The analysed data is presented, and then discussed and interpreted with reference to the literature review.

3. Results of the Study

Teachers and learners had opportunities to share their views and experiences on how English as a Second Language classrooms are managed in Namibia.

3.1 Absenteeism

Teacher B stated that "*Learners stay out of school for simple reasons such as the inadequacy of proper sitting spaces in the classroom*". **Teacher C** also mentioned that "*sometimes you are not even aware of the fact that the learner is absent from school, you only get to notice when his/her question paper is missing and when the mark is not recorded*" (**Teacher Transcript 1**). **Learner C** noted "*my class has a lot of late comers and absentees that is why it is difficult for anyone to quickly notice that someone is*

missing” (Learner Transcript 2). “It is very difficult to manage a class that has learners who stay out of school at any time they want. When they come back the organisation of the class and the interest of those that always go absent disrupts the atmosphere of the classroom”, Teacher A said “Learners deliberately stays out of school, even during important test and examinations. At times it is impossible for teachers to notice that learners are absent from school until when they notice that the learners’ mark for the test and examination is missing”.

Learners stay away from school without providing a genuine reason for not attending classes. This is one of the many factors that affect classroom management; it also negatively affects the performance among learners. This can also mean that learners choose to stay away from school because of the lack of interest in the study, which can be a result of difficult subject content that learners find difficult to comprehend. Absenteeism can lead to drug abuse, early pregnancies and unruly behaviour. Learners who are absent lag behind with school work, on test scores and other measures, not only this but the good attenders can suffer academically when their classmates stay out of school as teachers might slow down instruction to make sure that the absent learners catch up.

3.1.1 Noise

Noise also appeared as a factor that disrupts teaching and learning. **Teacher C** said, “*learners’ behaviour if not controlled can lead to noise and a mismanaged classroom.*” (**Transcript 1, Teachers**). **Learner B** mentioned that, “*we basically contribute toward the noise pollution in the classroom as we do not listen; we are too many*”. **Learner C** also noted that, “*we make a lot of noise and contribute to chaos in the classroom and because of that the classroom becomes completely disorderly.*” (**Transcript 2, Learners**). This is supported by **Simic (2018)**, who opined that a mismanaged classroom is frequently accompanied by a lot of noise which leads to non-conducive learning environment and poor learner-teacher relationship. The factor that flowed from the finding showed that learners at Hochland High School believe that noise is a popular factor that leads to difficulties in managing an English Second Language for teaching and learning. **Observer A** observed that “*some learners shout answers out loud, few learners’ talk while teacher was teaching as well as the dragging of chairs and tables. From the observation it is indicated that few learners had mini-conversations in between the lesson*”. (**Transcript 3, Observation**).

Noise hinders classroom management practices as well as effective teaching and learning in a classroom. The teacher should therefore be ready to implement effective strategies that will lessen the influence of negative behaviour and noise pollution in the classroom. Teachers should be ready to instil discipline among learners in the classroom, motivate learners, exercise control over learners in order to teach effectively and in return learners should be prepared to follow the rules. Teachers should alert the learner’s on the *do’s* and the *don’ts* of the classroom, if they understand and know what is expected of them it will lead to less chaotic lessons, more learner discipline, friendly communication between the teachers and their learners as well as excellent classroom rapport.

3.1.2 Learners Behaviours

Teacher C mentioned that, *“most of the challenges are that some learners do not want to do the work, come late to class, and disturb others,”* (**Transcript 1, Teachers**). **Learner A** also noted *“we do not respect due dates, which causes us to be in trouble with the teacher when the project or homework is incomplete. To avoid detention, we just copy from our friends the following day”*. *“No one easily see who is making noise. We cover each other because we are too many to be noticed”*, **Learner C**. Some learners show that they lack of motivation and have no drive to learn. They bully others in the classroom. Learners disrupt learning and they are not accommodative. There is chaos and that leads to uncondusive learning environment. Classroom time is wasted and misused because teachers spend more time dealing with discipline rather than teaching (**Simic, 2018**).

3.1.3 Overcrowded Classroom

Our findings also indicate that the class size at Hochland High School is a contributing factor that affects classroom management. The size of learners per classroom can range from 35 to 50 in a class, resulting in negative effects on the management of teaching and learning processes and the conduciveness of classroom environment. Comments obtained from the findings clearly demonstrate this: **Teacher B** stated that *“one of the big factors that lead to mismanagement and other several forms of behaviour is (sic) the overcrowding of learners in the classrooms. A teacher may not have individual attention to learners. ...”* (**Transcript 1, Teachers**). **Learner B** stated that *“sometimes I feel like the number of learners in our classroom are too many, making it impossible for individual assistance from the teacher, also the more the learners’ in the classroom are, the more chaotic it gets if it is not governed by classroom rules”* (**Transcript 2, Learners**). *“There is no individualised attention given to learners”*, **Teacher A**.

“Teaching a language requires a lot of giving attention to individual learners. Aspects of speaking, writing and reading requires the highest attention given to individual learners. A teacher should not just assume that all learners can speak, write and read well when their language at home and in the larger community is different from the medium of instruction (English) at school and that English as a subject is a second or foreign language. There are several errors that need one on one situations with learners. An overcrowded class is just a trap for failure”, **Teacher C**.

Classroom observations also indicated that a great number of classes are heavily crowded. *“There is little or no space for movement. The teacher’s movement is limited and learners are tightly packed together”* (**Transcript 3, Observations**).

It is highly difficult to manage or control a fully packed language classroom. Language classrooms demand higher interactions between learner and learner and learner and teacher. The absence of interaction builds mismanagement and less productive learning. Learners are unique, different and they all learn differently. A big classroom limits and worsens the ability for the teacher to differentially manage the classroom as individual differences and uniqueness are not accommodated. The teaching process will be substituted with the teacher’s effort to establish a conducive learning and teaching zone

where teaching can take place without disturbances. For Example, teaching English as a Second Language focusing on writing skills involves developing linguistic and communicative competence of the learner which is quite a challenging task (Hafiz, Tariq, Din, Latif, & Anjum, 2013).

3.2 Effective Strategies to Classroom Management

3.2.1 Seating Arrangement

Irrespective of the hardships that teachers go through at Hochland High School, English teachers have tackled classroom management issues by implementing arrangement of tables in classrooms for control. As said by **Teacher B** *“to maintain focus and full class participation. We arrange our tables in such a way that the teacher will be able to move around the classroom for control. It also enhances group work.”* (**Transcript 1, Teachers**), (**Transcript 3, Observation**).

The findings insist that seating arrangements, effective instructions, sequencing of activities, choice and access to preferred activities increases engagement and reduced problem behaviour therefore, using children’s own special interests as the basis for activities can significantly increase engagement.

3.2.2 Punishment and Detention

Some Teachers mentioned the use of punishment as a way of keeping order or to remedy disturbing situations when they occur in the classroom. According to the literature reviewed **Andreou and Rapti (2010)** said that it seems that teachers who do not feel competent to handle behaviour problems in the classroom are more likely to respond punitively or neutrally to the students perceived. The findings from learners’ that were interviewed showed that detention is another strategy frequently use by English teachers to remedy learner’s behaviour in the classroom. This is illustrated by **Teacher C** said *“because the policy does not allow us to chase the child out, I ask them to stand up and face the wall and at the same time they can still hear what is going in the class. But if it still continues let the child sit in for detention or take him or her to the office or call the parents”.* (**Transcript 1, Teachers**). **Learner A** mentioned, *“Sometimes we get detention or forced to cut glass around school premises.”* **Learner B** noted that *“the teacher does punish us through detention and she only let us go on condition that the work is completed.”* (**Transcript 2, Learners**). As indicated by the observation: two Grade 10 boys and 1 girl got detained because they failed to complete homework. (**Transcript3, Observation**).

Detention is important in putting an end to negative behaviour within a classroom. It would not be effective to chase out a learner out of class because some learners enjoy being outside of the classroom than being inside.

3.2.3 Calling Parents

Parents and teachers should work together into bringing up a learner for better results, punishments should be more content related, such as doubling homework, giving learners fun and creative activities to keep them busy also could work. This is showcased by the comments that are made from the interviews. **Teacher C** said *“take him or her to the office or call the parent”* (**Transcript 1, Teacher**). **Learner A** also mentioned that, *“what the teacher does is take us to the principal or call in our parent*

which is scary and so we are forced to behave.” Learner B stated that, *“our parents are called in for meetings and informed on our bad behaviour” (Transcript 2, Learners).*

3.2.4 Rules

Learners and teachers at Hochland High School showed the importance of having classroom rules as well as the consequences of breaking the rules of the classroom. These are the following comments that reflect the importance of having classroom rules as mentioned by **Teacher A** *“you should stipulate class rules, talk to them about general behaviour, indicate punishment and practice it, be fair, give activities and brings in creativity” (Transcript 1 Teachers).* **Learner A** noted, *“rules help keep the class in order and we actually help our teacher set them”* **Learner B** stated that, *“there are rules put in place to help keep the class in order”,* **Learner C** also noted that, *“there are rules in our classroom that we are expected to follow.” (Transcript 2, Learners).*

The finding shows that rules are important in keeping a classroom in order, and it is important for teachers to lay down rules in every classroom. It is helpful for teachers and it is important for learners to be aware of what they are expected to do and what they should not be doing in the classroom, this means that no rules in the classroom are associated with chaos. **Marzano, Marzano and Pickering** mentioned that, effective leaning and teaching cannot take place in a poorly managed classroom, such as if learners are disorderly and disrespectful and no apparent rules. This means that classrooms are the steering wheel of a properly functioning classroom, just like we have rules governing households, a classroom needs the same rules to be able to at least function on a daily basis.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

Overcrowded classes have serious impacts on the management of teaching and learning environments. The aim of teaching and learning is to achieve learning. The presence and evidence of management helps teaching and learning achieve its desired goals. Individualized learning also helps community development. Values and morality are shared when individual teaching and learning takes place in friendly and accommodative environments. The naturally delinquent individuals learn from their teachers and fellow learners and fill up where the larger communities have failed.

The study found that there also consequences that come with the mismanagement of English Language classroom. Mismanaged classrooms tend to be unconducive and unsupportive for learning and teaching. Learners will not be able to reach their full potential or academic capabilities in the classroom as a result of others’ behaviours. teachers are unable to finish requirements in time for examinations as most of the time is spent on dealing with disciplinary as well as misbehaviour issues other than spending that time teaching and assisting learners individually as they should have.

4.2 Recommendations

Classroom sizes (teacher-learner ratios) should be pronounced in all levels of schools to help teachers and learners focus on the matters of teaching and learning. Modules on classroom management should be

implemented at Universities, colleges and many other institutions of higher education that offer the Educational Degrees in Namibia. This will get the teachers equipped with the necessary knowledge and horn skills that are needed in the field. The aim for these modules will be to equip teachers with various approaches and strategies for classroom management.

Teachers should demonstrate positive behavioural patterns to learners that could be emulated for smooth management of large classes. School rules should be negotiated with learners so that they have an input in the management of a classroom. They should also incorporate creativity in their lesson at learners tend to get bored.

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