

Classroom Management Strategies and the Reduction of Academic Stress amongst Secondary School Students in the Mifi Division (Bafoussam I), Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This research is titled 'classroom management strategies and the reduction of academic stress amongst students in the Mifi Division (Bafoussam I), Cameroon'. The research problem focuses on how classroom management strategies helps in the reduction of academic stress. The principal objective of the study was to investigate the efficiency classroom management strategies and the reduction of academic stress amongst students. The main research question asked was: 'To what extent does classroom management strategies influences the reduction of academic stress amongst students. Following research objective, the research question was formulated to guide the study. This research question was later transformed into research hypothesis. The main research hypothesis was to whether there is a significant relationship or not between classroom management strategies and the reduction of academic stress amongst students. Theories used were: Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, Skinner's Operant conditioning theory and Lazarus's Cognitive theory. The survey design was used in carrying out the study. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants. Data was collected using the questionnaire and an interview guide. The sample size was made up of 291 students. The instrument used to collect data was the questionnaire. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The inferential method used was the Spearman's correlation test. The results obtained for the hypothesis shows that there is a significant relationship between teachers' use of motivational skills and the reduction of academic stress amongst students with a correlation value of 0.924. From this result, it was concluded that classroom management strategies influences the reduction of school stress amongst students. Consequently, some recommendations have been put forward to address the problem of academic stress amongst students. It was recommended that teachers acquire techniques that will capture the attention and interest of learners.

KEYWORDS: *classroom management strategies; stress reduction; academic stress*

1. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a complex concept. It can be routine stress at home, at school, or at work and could create great strain. Different things cause stress in different people. It is also a part of every student daily life. From the very start till college life, different styles of education and its diverse demands cause stress. A student's life is subjected to different kinds of

stressors, such as the pressure of academics with an obligation of success, uncertain future and difficulties envisaged for integration in to the system. These students face, social, emotional and physical and family problems which may affect their learning ability and academic performance (Fish & Nies, 1996; Chewgrahan, Rogers & Yassin, 2003).

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According to Awino & Agolla (2008), stress prevents students from focusing and enjoying learning from behaving harmoniously, and from unfolding their unique talents. Accumulated stress causes frustration, depression and anxiety, and can lead to attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, substance abuse, antisocial behaviours and even violence. Stress has become an important topic in academic circle as well as in our society. Now almost every student is affected but this can be managed strategies that reduce anxiety since pressure in academic institutions may be positively or negatively influenced if not properly taken care of.

More so, personality variables also affect people's reactions to potential stressors. Some people are simply not bothered by situations that other perceives to be stressful (Glavin et al, 1991). Stress occurs in academic areas due to different reasons. Researchers have identified a number of stressors in academic institution such as many assignments, competition with other students, failures, lack of pocket money (Fairbrother & Warn, 2003), poor relationship with other students or teachers, family or problems at home. Institutional (University) level stressors are overcrowded lecture halls, (Omgori, 2007), semester system, and inadequate resources to perform academic work (Erkutlu & Chafra 2000).

Brophy and Good (2003), state that classroom management is different from the discipline plan teachers implement in their classrooms; it also includes the teachers' beliefs and values as they influence how the teacher views discipline, classroom management also refers to how these beliefs and values intertwine with other underlying aspects of the class' structure. It is probably no exaggeration to say that classroom management has been a primary concern of teachers ever since there have been teachers in classrooms. However, the systematic study of effective classroom management is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Furthermore, students who go through the teaching process have some concerns related to their experience. They have a number of worries and anxieties, resulting in high levels of stress. Various factors may lead students to be anxious about the teaching process such as methods used in teaching, teacher's attitude, knowledge of individual learner characteristics, structuring of learning objectives, and knowledge of classroom assessment. Effective classroom teachers makes use of the classroom environment so that movement can be made easy and closeness with students achieved. So for a training program to have its value, it will need to have accessibility, be well structured with teaching

materials and enough space to enable students do individual and group work as well as work with the teacher. The classroom can be arranged in circles, semicircles, u-shapes and squares and so on. The wall can also be decorated with educative pictures or symbols which makes it suitable for learning with a friendly environment (Caroll, 2003).

When it comes to students, it does not matter where stress is coming because something good can always come from it. Stress is not always the same as distress. Stress can be experienced in positive events as much as the negative. Stress that the students' feel as they start exams that they have prepared for is much different than the stress felt by students who haven't taken their time to study. If balanced correctly, stress can be a positive element in our lives. Stress can be seen as a motivator to a certain level and after that things deteriorate.

To continue, classroom management has been highlighted across numerous research studies as a major variable that affects students' academic performance. The most obvious reason for this assertion is that, effective classroom management sets the stage for teaching and learning. It sets a tone in the classroom that captures students' attention - as a necessity for effective teaching and learning (Marzono, 2008). A classroom which is chaotic and disorganized as a result of poor classroom management is highly unlikely to enhance expansive learning and students' academic performance and might, indeed, inhibit it. Idopise (2004) equally argued that very little academic learning can take place in chaos. According to Walter (2006), classroom management differs from one teacher to another because of the teacher's personality, teaching style, preparedness, and number of students in the classroom.

According to Murphy & Archer (1996), the teaching profession is a challenging one for educators who are always faced with new ideas and concepts daily in their teaching environment. There is no doubt that the pressure experienced by teachers in ensuring that their lessons are well-understood and delivered is crucial to their profession. It must be noted that stress is the main driving force in creating a sense of panic and anxiety for students who may find it hard to grasp and fully comprehend what is taught in the classroom. Not all the students in the classroom will be quick learners; some may struggle to understand the first few times; meanwhile, there are others who may pick the things from the first-time. It honestly varies in the learning abilities of students and how the lesson is delivered and explained to them. The way teaching is

done is very important to the learner since learners vary.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Erkutlu & Chafra (2006), said upon entry into secondary school, it is expected that students will become fearful of the unknown as they venture into a higher level of their academic life. This comes with its own challenges that can make the experience exciting, terrifying and overwhelming, which can result in either success or failure. As access to secondary education increases, so does the number of students who are academically unprepared and lack confidence in their ability to succeed. Several factors mediate in determining whether a student's academic performance is positively or negatively affected. These factors include economic status, family issues, teaching methods, transitions, environmental, course workload and stress. In addition, some students work either day or night while attending school, and managing both can be very stressful which could morph into academic stress.

To continue, Boynton and Boynton (2005), explained how ineffective classroom management skills can waste instructional time, reduce time-on-task, and interrupt learning environments. In addition to interrupting the classroom environment, if proper classroom management is not exercised, disruptive behaviour by a few students can have a negative effect on teacher's instruction, which can lead to other students joining-in and can cause students to question the abilities of their teacher (Braden & Smith, 2006). For these reasons, it is important to study instructional and behavioural classroom management.

Furthermore, the theory of Reinforcement (Skinner, 1953) gained prominence as an approach to classroom management in the later 1980s and the 1990s. In the Skinner model the teachers direct student behaviour to get desired outcomes and effective management (Omomia & Omomia, 2014). Brophy (1996) stated the importance of teachers as effective classroom managers who should focus on creating positive learning environments by preparing and teaching interesting lessons and supervise students.

To continue, from the late 1990s to the present, focus of research on classroom management is more on the area of creating positive environment through teacher-student collaboration in the classroom in solving the problems. Oliver & Reschly (2010) supported the positive learning environment methods which produce and increase constructive interactions resulting in successful classroom environment.

Martin, Yin, and Baldwin (1998) developed the Classroom management Style Inventory which measured teachers' styles to the classroom management in three broad dimensions such as instructional management, people management, and behaviour management. The Choice Theory (Glasser, 1998) has influenced classroom management by teachers creating environments and curricula that cultivate appropriate behaviour through meeting learners' needs for belonging and the feeling of empowerment.

Similarly, Froyen and Iverson (1999) found that classroom management focuses on three major components such as Content Management, Conduct Management and Covenant Management. Hardman & Smith (1999) argued that teachers should create by working towards positive learning environments by identifying conditions in the classroom and implement activities that promote desirable behaviour in the classroom. The actions taken by teachers to create a supportive and positive learning environment will facilitate the academic learning of the students and also, they may adhere to the rules prevalent leading to social-emotional learning (Evertson & Kohn (2004), indicated that students need to be given the chance to discover things on their own and that testing a student is not the best method for the child to achieve everything. He does not support the idea of strict standards to ensure that all students are learning the same thing at the same time because not all students learn at the same pace. Standards and alignment do not take into account the fact that students are different and have different interests. Kohn encourages teachers to help students to pursue their own interests.

Weinstein, 2006). McDonald (2010) worked on the Positive Learning Framework and explained that a teacher by developing a systematic learning environment, students can engage in meaningful activities that support their learning in an orderly manner. Banks (2014) found that teachers who create positive classrooms pay close attention to even little details in the environment which stimulate the behaviour of students in the classroom. Egeberg, Mc Conney and Price (2016) appropriately found that teachers' approach towards students vary according to their theoretical orientation. Therefore, classroom management includes actions by teacher to create, implement and maintain a positive learning environment.

Tchombe (2004), states that teaching, as an interpersonal activity has as main objective to bring about learning and for the teacher to realize this, there is need for appropriate planning, organization and

management. Classroom teaching, therefore, has two major tasks: learning and order. The learning task is the function of instruction, while the other maintaining task (discipline) is the function of management. Learning is related to individual process, and order to group process. Group process relates to interpersonal relations in the nature of teacher-pupil and teacher-class interactions, carried out to ensure attention and group cohesion. Teaching therefore consists of both instructional and managerial components.

Theoretically, Lazarus Psychological Stress Theory (1991), posits that stress is a relational concept and not defined as a specific kind of external stimulation or a specific pattern of psychological, behavioural or subjective reactions. However, like, Lazarus, the researcher is of the view that stress (academic stress) is relational or transactional in nature and is dependent on an individual's appraisal toward the environment (stressor) s/he faces. This psychological stress which hinges on the relationship with the environment (stressors) that a person appraises as significant for his or her wellbeing and in which the demands tax or exceeds his or her coping resources at disposal. However, the researchers conceptualize academic stress as any form of negative stress triggered by all kinds of stressors such as interpersonal, intrapersonal, social, work, institutional and domestic, that impedes the academic output of students as well as the professional performance of faculty in academic institutions.

Furthermore, when classroom management is viewed in a wider and holistic sense, incorporating every element of the classroom from lesson delivery to classroom environment becomes important (Nicholas, 2007). According to Nicholas (2007), this includes creating organized and orderly classroom, establishing expectations, inducing students' cooperation in learning tasks, and dealing with the procedural demands of the classroom. This view of classroom management contrasts to a narrower view of classroom management as it deals with just discipline and control. Weiner & Smith (1992), stated that students who successfully coped with stress consistently have someone in their lives whose actions told them 'you count'. I love you and will care for you. In sum, the long term presence of a basic, trusting relationship with an adult is a big factor in the protective buffering of students from stressors and problems. This simply means that having someone you know you can count on at any time when face with academic challenges is very important to a student because it serves as a reinforcement factor and it also helps the student to

overcome challenges in academic institutions. In short, just knowing you have someone available when in need is so relieving and comfortable and as such academic excellence is assured since the students will be guided by an adult who is more experienced and so keeping the student away from any form of distractions from school work.

Tchombe (2001), stipulates that for the classroom process to achieve its goal, students must be intrinsically motivated to want to learn and sustain the desire to want to learn. They must be extrinsically motivated by the teaching approaches including his on attribution for success. Students must be made to see that they are responsible for their learning. She continues by saying that the students should be made to see the value of learning in their lives outside the classroom. Their active engagement in these processes will develop their interest and this will make them able to address learning challenges.

Again, Ur (1996), explains, some important factors that have an incidence in classroom discipline and are more likely to be within the control of, or influenced by, the teacher. These factors include; methodology, interpersonal relationships and student motivation. For the same author a disciplined classroom is one where learning is taking place, where the teacher and students are cooperating and working together towards the same goal and where the lesson is proceeding according to plan. Discipline is an element of classroom management that needs a proactive rather than a reactive behaviour. Ur suggests planning your lesson carefully, paying attention to directions, which should be clear and effective, and being aware of any change in the dynamics of the class. This can be especially useful for preservice and novice teachers.

According to Skinner's theory of operational conditioning (1948), changes in behaviour are a result of individuals' responses to events, or stimuli, which occur in their environment. When a stimulus-response (S-R) pattern is rewarded, the individual is conditioned to respond similarly in the future. The key to Skinner's theory is reinforcement, or anything that strengthens the desired response. This could include praise, good grades, a reward or even a feeling of accomplishment. Of course, negative reinforcement occurs when a stimulus results in increased response when it is withdrawn. The central tenet of Skinner's work is that positively reinforced behaviour will reoccur. This is why information is presented in small amounts. Responses can be reinforced, and reinforcement will be applied to similar stimuli.

3. METHODS

The study was a survey and was made up of 291 participants who were secondary school students randomly selected from the Mifi Division, Cameroon. Random sampling was used to select a number that was demographically representative and also sizable enough for the study. The instrument used was the questionnaire which was designed to collect data on academic stress, classroom management strategies and reduction of academic stress. It was self-constructed and referred to as questionnaire for classroom management strategies and reduction of academic stress amongst secondary school students. Since classroom management strategies was the independent variable. It was operationalized as constituting, motivational skills ($X^2=726.713$, $P=0.924$). Quality of motivational skills was measured by items such as teacher's encourages students to attribute their success to their efforts, teacher recognizes and acknowledges student efforts, teacher giving praises whenever something right is being done in class, feeling positive and optimistic about learning etc.

Thematic analysis was done with Open ended questions where concepts or ideas were grouped under similar terms or key words. A pre-designed EpiData Version 3.1 (EpiData Association, Odense Denmark, 2008) database was used for quantitative data with a 111 consistency and validation checks. Consistency was further checked through data range and validation checks performed in SPSS version 21.0 (IBM Inc., 2012) where invalid codes were identify. Data were made essentially of categorical frequencies and Multiple Response Analysis. To assess the internal consistency of responses, reliability test was done using Cronbach Alpha reliability analysis and calculated at 0.795. Here, classroom management strategies indicators were measured at motivational skills (0.532).all statistics were presented at 95% confidence interval with $\text{Alpha}=0.05$.

The spearman rho correlation test was used to compare proportions in order to establish the predictive power of classroom management strategies over the reduction of academic stress amongst secondary school students.

4. FINDINGS

Findings showed that motivational skills ($r=0.924$; $p=0.000$) influenced the reduction of academic stress amongst secondary school students. Descriptively, the

findings revealed that students recognized and acknowledged their own efforts as encouraged by their teacher. They always feel positive and optimistic about learning. it was also found out that praise and encouragement also served as a source of motivation for the students.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. The use of motivational skills and academic stress reduction of students

The findings revealed that the use of motivation skills have a significant effect on the academic stress reduction of students. This is because teachers actively use different motivational skills which include: focusing on how the teacher encourages students to attribute their success to their efforts; always encouraged by their teachers to work on the assigned task; always get feedback from the teacher to improve on their work. Also, they always feel positive and optimistic about learning; they are always irritated and angry and they do not feel like studying; their teachers recognizes and acknowledge their efforts; their teachers are approachable and willing to help them. In addition, their teacher praise them whenever they do something right in class and the use of motivation in classroom reduces their academic stress in schools. This is supported by Skinner (1938) operant conditioning theory which shows that behaviour is modified through the use of positive and negative reinforcement. Through operant conditioning, an individual makes an association between a particular behaviour and a consequence. For example, teachers praising students in class, rewarding a child's excellent grades with candy or some other prize, a schoolteacher awards points to those students who are the most calm and well-behaved. Students eventually realize that when they voluntarily become quieter and better behaved, that they earn more points.

The issue of motivational skills correlating with the reduction of student's academic stress is often a main focus of research. Findings from the studies in this review show that motivational skills as reported by the students consistently had positive effects on students across all developmental levels of education. Note that research conducted from a variety of perspectives all show a positive correlation between motivation and reduction of academic stress.

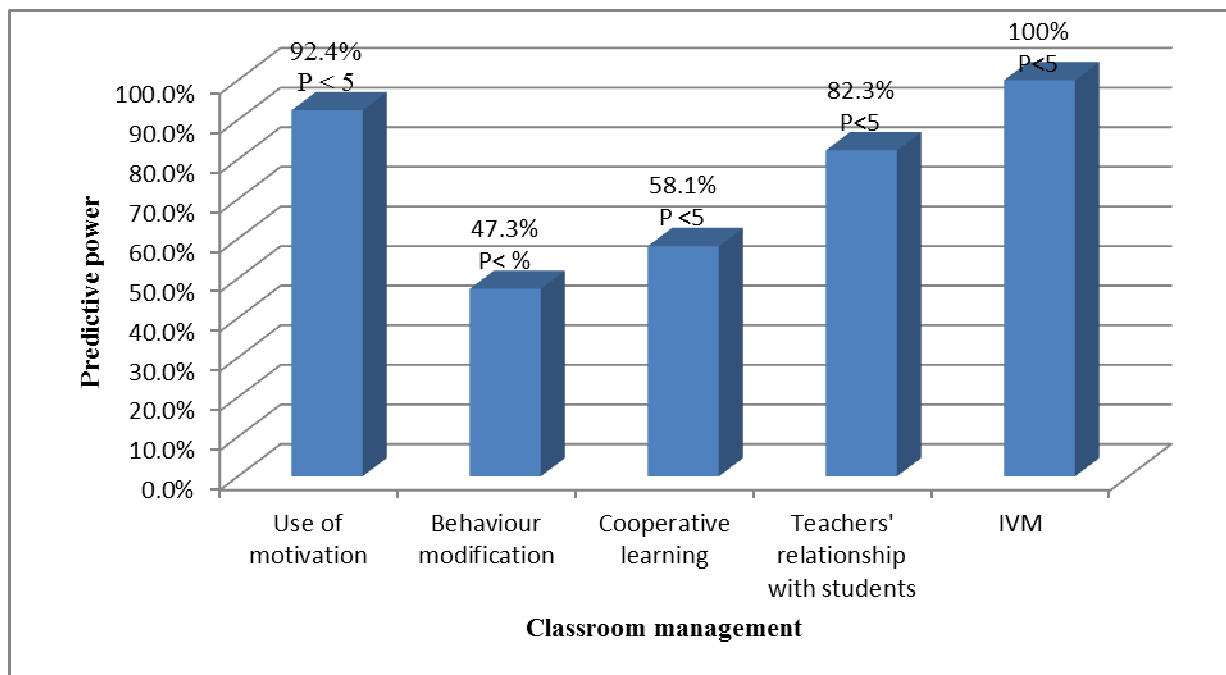


Fig.1. predictive effects of classroom management on academic stress reduction of secondary school students

Table 1 Summary of findings

Research hypothesis	Statistical test used	Comments
Ho ₁ : There is no significant relationship between the use of motivation and the reduction of academic stress amongst students	Binary Logistic Regression Model: - Model validation test (Ominbus Tests of Model Coefficient P<0.05 - Overall Predictive or Explanatory Power (Nagelkerke R square)	The variability explained by this model was significant (Omnibus Tests of Model Coefficient: $\chi^2=726.713$ P=0.000 The Explanatory Power (EP) / Predictive Power was moderate with a value of 92.4% (Nagelkerke R square =0.924). The findings therefore show that the use of motivation significantly influences the reduction of academic stress of students.

The study further revealed that all the aforementioned motivation skills used by teachers consisted of typical motivation strategies which consists of used by teachers to help students learn and manage the teaching and learning transaction. Equally these are typical motivation techniques which people mostly use in overcoming challenges they encounter on their daily basis. The techniques employed are equally used by people to overcome and cope with difficulties that they face. This shows that teachers use different motivation skills to help reduce learner’s academic stress.

Moreover, motivation has emerged as important phenomena for educators - a natural wellspring of learning and achievement that can be systematically catalyzed or undermined by parent and teacher practices (Ryan & Stiller, 1991). Because intrinsic motivation results in high quality learning and creativity, Montessori (1972) also added that the child needs an adult who is to give him/her guidance with his/her work and who will take into account the child’s needs. She further stated that in such an

environment the child works very hard, is observant and is not destructive.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Findings from the study showed that the efficiency of classroom management strategies has a significant influence on the reduction of academic stress amongst students. The study looked at how motivational skills, behaviour modification skills, cooperative learning skills and teacher-student relationship skills helps in reducing academic stress. Therefore motivational skills help reduce school stress. That notwithstanding, there were some students who lacked some of these school skills but did better in school. Some children are born with a high intelligent quotient (IQ). However, those who are provided with motivational skills when needed perform better in school. All these show that classroom management strategies being given during the learning process is very important and as such should be encouraged to improve on students learning outcome.

From the research, it could be concluded that classroom management strategies from motivational

skills plays an important role in dealing with academic stress because classroom management strategies in the form of motivational skills could lower down the level of academic stress of students. This means that the higher the motivational skills, the lower the stress from an academic milieu. Otherwise the lower the motivational skills, the higher the academic stress. The study provides empirical evidence with regards to positive effects of classroom management strategies in managing academic stress amongst students. Specifically the findings suggested that an increase motivational skills may lead to decrease in academic stress amongst students. Thus the findings from the field already presented above and as supported by literature that there is a significant relationship between classroom management strategies and the reduction of academic stress amongst secondary school students. As such, the investigator concludes that classroom management strategies is a correlate in the reduction of academic stress amongst secondary school students in the Mifi Division, Cameroon.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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