

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PRACTICES OF LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS IN AN INCLUSIVE SETTING IN NIGERIA



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ABSTRACT

Classrooms in the 21st century have by law, become inclusive, typically comprised of general education and special needs students. Included students are those who present mild to moderate learning and behavioural challenges. This give the teachers additional responsibility in classroom management, requiring teachers to be highly structured, consistent and reinforcing. The loyalty of the teacher to behavioural expectations that have been established for the classroom is essential. Classroom management practices discussed include: teaching techniques, and instructional materials, classroom organization, classroom management skills and general teaching strategies. The paper concludes that teachers should always adopt and use different communication techniques that will enable students to decode any information passed across. Teachers who adopt the use of effective communication in their teaching will ensure students' discipline, as well as motivate and manage their time in classroom management and control.

Keywords: *Positive reinforcement, Differentiated instruction, Time management, Punishment, Inclusion.*

Introduction

A classroom is an environment or enclosure where teaching and learning takes place. It is a place designated for the purpose of teaching and learning. Akubue (1991) describes the classroom as a place in operation of a school which holds students together and offer them the opportunity of achieving the purpose of education. This means that the classroom provides an enabling environment for teaching and learning. Aja (2011) associated a classroom with:

“A place for sharing information and knowledge: a place that provides favourable medium for group discussion and cooperation; a place that houses instructional materials and equipment; a place that enhances student-student and student teacher interaction and a place that encourages students' independent learning and ego-satisfaction” p.3

Classroom management is a term used to describe those activities which are mainly and directly concerned with the smooth running of classroom lessons despite disruptive behavior by students. It could be regarded as those education activities which are directly designed to prevent disruptive behavior in the classroom. It is possibly the most difficult aspect of teaching for many teachers. It is also the process of organizing the activities of the classroom to ensure effective instruction. According to Oboegbulem (2011), classroom management is the arrangement of students and grouping of activities into units to make for effective teaching and learning. It comprises classroom life, utilization of resources in terms of materials in executing tasks such as planning curriculum procedures and resources, arranging the environment, monitoring student's progress, predicting potential problems and finding solutions to them.

In the classroom, the teacher sets out plans and activities to ensure effective and efficient instruction. The management skills the teacher uses to achieve effective teaching and learning process will determine the extent the students achieve success in their learning (Oboegbulem, 2011). The teacher's management task includes control of the education, social and physical environment components. Teachers organize and administer their works in the classroom. Teachers organize and richly equip their classrooms, decorate them attractively and adequately, furnish them with seats and instructional materials that will lead to meaningful teaching and learning. The process of organizing the classroom and arranging the materials in the classroom properly is referred to as classroom management.

From the above, it becomes obvious that classroom management is very crucial in any teaching and learning situation for academic enhancement and high quality productivity. Hence, the paper addresses the topic under the following headings: teaching techniques and instructional materials, classroom organization, classroom management skills and general teaching strategies.

Conceptual Issues

Classroom Management

Classroom management well-informed actions taken by teachers to utilize any available resources in schools to facilitate teaching and learning. Classroom management is the action teachers take to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social emotional learning (Everton and Wienstein, 2006). Male and female teacher's involvement and cooperation in classroom activities help to foster and establish a productive class environment. It is based on this that Oboegbulem (2011) defined classroom management as the arrangement of students and grouping of activities into units to make for effective teaching and learning. Adeyemo (2012) defined classroom management as the teacher's ability to cooperatively manage time, space, resources, student's roles and behaviors to provide a climate that encourage learning. Similarly, Edward (2000) viewed classroom

management as the provisions and procedures necessary to establish and maintain an environment in which instruction and learning can occur. For effective management of the classroom, certain skills are required. These are known as classroom management control. These include discipline, motivation, time management and communication skills.

Classroom Management Controls

Classroom management controls are the most special skills needed by a teacher for effective teaching and classroom organization. It takes a great deal of effort and ability to handle classroom that is full of students. The teacher has to be thorough and knowledgeable in the subject he/she is handling, needs to know how to control a class and maintain discipline and order in the classroom.

Browsers and Tower (2010), submitted that teachers who have problems with classroom discipline are frequently ineffective in the classroom and often report of high levels of stress and symptoms of burnout. According to Donovan and Cross (2002) the inability of teachers to effectively manage classroom behavior often contribute to students' low academic achievement. The rationale behind this assertion is that teachers' inability to effectively manage classroom behaviors makes it impossible for quality to be assured in teacher's classroom management skills. This is because the quality of learning, among others, depends on the skills exhibited by the teachers in the classroom. The application of these skills ensures quality in teaching and learning in schools.

Classroom management and control is the heart of any educational system. No curriculum planning is complete without implementation of which is mainly carried out in the classroom. Teachers are the ultimate decider of the classroom atmosphere as expected by all and sundry. Their role is crucial in influencing the behavior of students. Teachers who plan practically are able to overcome many classroom problems such as disruptions, deviant behavior or misbehavior of students. In this regard the nature of the teacher plays a vital role. For example, different teachers have different ways of instinctively managing the classroom environment and patterns of setting up classrooms that best fit their purpose (Arogundade & Bolarinwa, 2011). Managing a classroom is the ultimate responsibility of the teacher. The way a teacher manages the classroom will change the thinking of the students towards learning.

These classroom management perspectives for effective teaching and learning is concerned with the behavioural management, instructional management and the leadership style employed by the teachers and the school management for effective teaching and learning to take place. Behavioural management is the coordination of all the stakeholders in education to imbibe the expected culture, norms and value set by the educational authorities which encourages effective teaching and learning. Instructional management on the other hand is the teaching aids necessary for each classroom for effective teaching and learning. But it seemly not so in our post primary

schools which are believed with ineffective teaching-learning process and inadequate motivation which breed-up poor classroom management for the special need children.

Special Education Needs

A student/child requires special education if he or she has disability which either prevents or hinders the child from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age in schools within the area of local authority (Jha, 2002). According to Dommak (2013), the concept of educational needs and identification of children with special education needs has always been a thing of negligence as there is still a high proportion of ignorance and lack of legislation to pursue the implementation of inclusion, at least at a pilot level. Meanwhile, people with special educational needs according to Obani (2004) are exceptional people who may be experiencing hearing problems and difficulties or handicap or other forms of special needs. They however, require individually planed and systematically monitored arrangements of physical setting, special equipment and materials, special teaching procedures and other interventions in order to achieve their greatest possible independence, self-sufficiency, academic success and self-fulfillment.

Education for persons with special educational needs Act 2004 of the Federal Republic of Nigeria defines special educational needs as a restriction in the capacity of the person to participate in and benefit from education on account of an enduring, physical, sensory, mental health, or learning disability or any other condition which results in a person learning differently from a person without those conditions. Special educational needs as a term is related to terms like disability, impairment, handicap and special needs (Egunjobi, 2013). Siyanbola and Osibosi (2013) categorized people with special educational needs as follows:

- i. Those enrolled in schools but are experiencing much difficulty, whether temporary or permanent.
- ii. Those living in severe poverty
- iii. Those living in remote places far from any schooling facilities
- iv. Those who are victims of war and armed conflicts.
- v. Street children
- vi. Criminals and ex-convicts
- vii. Prostitute and young single mothers who have dropped out of school.
- viii. Miscreants and misguided youths on the street, touting and hawking wares.
- ix. Children of school age who lead adult disabled beggars around.

All the above mentioned categories of persons with special educational needs require the support of well-trained teachers and there is need for innovative strategies to handle and manage such people at school.

Classroom Organization

The ways in which a teacher establishes and maintains order in a classroom are referred to as classroom organization (Doyle, 1986) as cited in Azanor *et al*, (2015).

Classroom organization includes a number of factors such as the following:

- Physical organization, such as the use of wall and floor, space and lighting.
- Classroom routines for academic and non-academic activities.
- Classroom climate or attitude towards individuals differences.
- Behavioral management, such as classroom rules and monitoring.
- The use of time for instructional and non-instructional activities.

Classroom organization strategy can have real benefits for students with special needs such as;

- i. Movement will be easy for those on wheelchairs, on crutches or other appliances within and around the classroom.
- ii. Children with hearing impairment, low vision and partial sight sitting in the front rows, will enable the hearing impaired to hear as much of the spoken instruction as possible and to lip – read the teacher. Those with low vision or partial sight, sitting in the front row increases their chances of seeing better what is written on the chalkboard.
- iii. Children with physical disabilities will not have extra trouble in maneuvering to the middle or the back seats in the classroom.
- iv. Teachers will be able to monitor the behaviour of the children and identify the ones with problem behaviour.

Classroom Management Skills

Skills connote knowledge which one has acquired which he can use to help himself and his society throughout his life time. Classroom management skills refer to knowledge acquired by the teacher which enables him carry out activities that engender conducive classroom environment. Such actions, according to Akubue (1991) include:

- i. Actions that precede teacher-pupil class interaction such as class grouping, designing curricula, preparing time table, formulating school rule and regulations, among others.
- ii. Actions which are intended to create favourable conditions that will facilitate effective instructional delivery such as giving clear and understandable directions, among others;
- iii. Actions which aim at regulating the behavior of learners like directing questions at an un-attentive learner, using positive reinforcement, or applying punishment, among others;
- iv. And actions that should assert the authority of the teachers such as taking decision on what learners should do. Classroom management skills are therefore those skills required by the teacher to enable him carry out

judicious use of the human and materials resources as well as other educational programmes with the classroom management and control for the successful accomplishment of educational objectives (Edwards, 2000).

In managing children with behaviour problems, which can constitute a problem to the teacher, the following should be done;

- i. Decide much behaviours you are going to ignore, target only a few important behaviours rather than trying to fix everything.
- ii. Make the children part of any plan to change behaviour. If you don't, you will become their enemy.
- iii. Provide consistency, structure and clear consequences for the children behaviour.
- iv. Establish a rapport with the problem behaviour children. If the children passive you as reasonable and fair, you will be able to work more effectively with them.
- v. Give the problem children some classroom responsibilities.
- vi. Select materials that encourage children interaction; children with behaviour problem need to learn to talk to their peers and to adult in an appropriate manner. All cooperative learning activities must be carefully structured.
- vii. Systematically teach social skills, including hanger management, conflict resolution and how to be assertive in an appropriate manner.

Teaching Techniques in Regular Class

Obi (2006) enumerated three key approaches to be considered in teaching special needs education. These are:

- i. **Systematic instruction:** Systematic instruction approaches have two elements. These are sequential arrangement and presentation consistency (Wood, 1993) cited in Obi, (2006). Sequential arrangement consists of five phases-lecture/demonstration, imitation, production, practice and application. The lecture phase consists of explanation. The imitation phase allows children the opportunity to imitate the responses or tasks that were presented or to repeat what was said to them. In the production phase the children are allowed to perform the response or task under the supervision of the teacher and get immediate feedback. The practice phase gives children the opportunity to practice the response or task taught to them independently. Feedback from the teacher can be delayed until the task has been completed while the application phase takes place when the children have adequately learnt to practice and are made to perform responses to task similar to the originally learnt task. Unsuccessful completion of task at any phase would warrant a repeat or return to the phase preceding it by the students. Instructions at

the phase should be repeated by the teacher and the child made to perform the task again.

- ii. **Differentiated instruction:** The idea behind differentiated instruction is that variety of teaching and learning strategies are necessary to meet the range of needs evident in any given classroom.

According to Tomlison (2000) cited in Azanor *et al*, (2015), students' diverse needs can be met by providing materials and tasks at varied levels of difficulty, with varying degrees of support, through the use of multiple grouping arrangements and with time variations.

The strategies for accommodating students with special needs in general education classroom follow seven steps:

1. Identify environmental, curricular and instructional classroom demands
2. Note students learning strengths and needs
3. Check for potential areas of students' success.
4. Look for potential problem areas
5. Use information gathered to brainstorm instructional adaptations
6. Decide which adaptation to implement.
7. Evaluate student's progress.

These steps are to apply to broad range of special needs and classroom environment.

- iii. **Positive Reinforcement:** Positive reinforcement according to Skinner, (1969) cited in Obi, (2006) is a consequence that increase the frequency of a behavior being emitted usually due to the accompanying rewards. Although children generally perform with positive reinforcement, those with disabilities exhibit more desirable responses and behaviours following positive reinforcement. Different types of positive reinforcement should be used to enhance students' performance. These could include: praises, rewards, special privileges, teachers' attention etc. Positive reinforcement should be given almost immediately following the desired response or behaviour. In teaching children with special needs, the teacher should also consider the general method of teaching and how to introduce his teaching method to the children.

General Teaching Strategies

Schulz and Turnbull (1984) cited in Obi (2006) suggested that instructions for children with learning disabilities could be divided into smaller units or reduced in length especially for those with short attention span and the hyperactive. The teacher could also shorten the work periods, make frequent changes from one activity to another to sustain their interest and give preferred and less preferred activities to the children alternatively. For those with memory problems the teacher could prompt correct responses, include repetition in skills and letting the student get practically involved in solving problems or demonstrating acquired skills. Feedback should be an integral aspect of teaching at each stage.

Morsink, (1984) who wrote about strategies of teaching children with special needs in regular classes suggested the following:

- Measure the effectiveness of your instructions so that procedures that are not working can be identified and changed.
- Instructions should be based on the designated plan of instructions for the child.
- Be specific in giving instructions to the child.
- As much as possible use concrete materials
- Simplify instructions given to the child.
- Teach them how to sort objects or label them based on association of their basic attributes or similarities.
- Learning materials should be broken down into smaller tasks and taught sequentially to aid memory.
- Reinforce the child's efforts to motivate him.
- Use different methods of teaching to aid remembering.
- Constructive feedback should be given almost immediately a desired response or behavior has been emitted.
- Encourage the use of mnemonics to aid recall.
- Encourage the use of peer tutors to assist slow learners in specific subjects.
- Vary your techniques based on the child's need and problem.
- Learners with inefficient learning strategies can be taught using problem solving software and personal productivity tools.
- Learners who lack background knowledge can be taught using content area software, videodisc micro-context and hypermedia
- Learners with motivational deficits can be taught using all technology based application.

Assessing

Obi (2006) asserted that in assessing children with disabilities in an inclusive setting, the teacher should avoid the use of norm-referenced test. He should rather use criterion-referenced test. Criterion referenced test should be based on the enabling objective stated in the lesson plan which is related to a specific academic skills. Enabling objective should be stated in the lesson plan which is related to a specific academic skill. Enabling objectives should be used since they state the expected response the child is required to make or the child's level of mastery of a subject area. Curriculum based assessment could also used with the child with a disability. This assessment focuses on the child's on going performance within the existing curriculum. It involves the use of many informal procedures to examine the child's performance. The frequency of assessment should be based on the need of the child. Curriculum based assessment, could involve a continuous and periodic collection of data on the child's progress. Some children especially those with severe cases could need daily assessment to reassure them of their progress. The teacher should as much

as possible assign grades to children with disabilities and their parents informed regardless of the procedure of assessment used and frequency.

Conclusion

The strategies that have been presented in this article provide an approach to classroom management that is relatively easy to implement. The teacher's ability to handle unpleasant behavior in the classroom sets an example for students to see the necessity to behave themselves. Hence, group participation by students encourages and maintains academic and social relations. Teachers should always adopt and use different communication techniques that will enable students to decode any information passed across. Teachers who adopt the use of effective communication in their teaching will ensure students discipline, as well as motivate and manage their time in classroom management and control.

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