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Article

Classroom Management Strategies and Student Engagement in Predominantly Urban Sri Lankan Secondary Schools: A Mixed-Methods Study

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Abstract

Classroom management is generally held to be a major requirement to effective teaching, although little evidence is available in South Asian secondary schools. The relationship considered in this study was between classroom management strategies and student engagement in Sri Lankan secondary schools based on a concurrent mixed-methods design. A questionnaire and open-ended questions were used to gather data on 121 teachers. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression were used to analyze quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative responses respectively. It was observed that the most common classroom management strategies were time management, clear expectations and rules, and positive reinforcement. The level of overall student engagement was moderate. Regression analysis revealed that time management, positive reinforcement, and group work were significant predictors of student engagement, each having 21.7 percent of the variance in student engagement. Qualitative responses also suggested disruptive behavior, large classes, and lack of student motivation were the most prevalent obstacles to engagement and active learning, professional growth, and integration of technology were most frequently recommended. The research shows the significance of purposeful, enabling, and active classroom activities in encouraging student involvement and gives evidence, which is context-sensitive regarding teacher training in Sri Lankan secondary education.

Keywords: classroom management; student engagement; secondary education; mixed-methods research; teacher practices; Sri Lanka

1. Introduction

Classroom management has been considered as one of the prominent requirements leading to successful teaching and learning. However, in modern educational research, it is no longer perceived as the control of misbehavior or order maintenance. Instead, classroom management can be perceived as the collection of activities within which educators create the academic, social and emotional environments that facilitate learning to take place. This wider understanding incorporates the organization of instructional time, routine, communication of expectations, responding to student behavior and the building of supportive teacher-student relationships. This makes such practices consequential due to the fact that they determine the productive use of classroom time and the students experience of the classroom as predictable, orderly, and favorable to participate (Evertson and Weinstein, 2006; Emmer and Sabornie, 2015).

Student interest is also considered one of the indicators of the quality of education. Engagement is normally defined as a multidimensional construct of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive realms, as opposed to involvement that is only visible. Behavioral engagement is participation, effort, and focus on work; emotional engagement is the interest, enjoyment, sense of belonging, and affective responses of the students towards school; and cognitive engagement is strategic effort, self-regulation

and investment in learning of a complex work (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004). Much of the literature has attributed better performance in schools to greater involvement as well as to perseverance and reduced dropout rates, indicating that involvement is not only a result of effective instruction, but also a process through which classroom dynamics affect academic performance (Appleton, Christenson, and Furlong, 2008; Skinner and Belmont, 1993).

The correlation between classroom management and student engagement is therefore theoretically and practically important. A managed classroom saves wasted time in teaching and provides psychological safety that the students require to engage in meaningful participation. Previous literature indicates that students volunteer more when their teachers set clear expectations, reinforcement is applied strategically, lesson pacing is managed effectively, and they also interact well with their peers in a constructive manner. Classroom structure, explicit expectations, opportunities to respond and reinforcement are evidence-based reviews that find repetition in effective classroom environments (Simonsen et al., 2008). Marzano and Marzano (2003) also state further that classroom management is based on the teacher student relationship on the grounds that they have an influence on cooperation, trust and responsiveness to classroom norms.

The literature has also identified several strategy-specific lines of connection between classroom management and engagement. Participation and correct behavior can be promoted through the use of positive reinforcement, where effort, persistence and positive conduct are rewarded and thus, more students will be willing to continue with classroom activities. Clarity and expectations minimize uncertainty, as well as assist students in becoming familiar with the limits of behavioral and instructional expectations. Proper time management keeps the lesson going, minimizes down time and other elements that allow distraction. Participation can also be enhanced through group-based and cooperative learning which involves the students interacting, explaining, negotiating and making contributions to common tasks. There is met study evidence that cooperative format has a stronger correlation with achievement as well as positive peer relationship as compared to competitive or individualistic formats especially in teens (Roseth, Johnson, and Johnson, 2008).

Simultaneously, classroom management might be effective only when implemented within a specific context. Much of the teaching literature on classroom management and student engagement has been on Western or relatively better-endowed systems of education and less literature has been done on South Asian school environments. This is the case since institutional and material conditions such as the class size, classroom infrastructure, availability of professional development, curriculum pressure and the local expectations on teacher authority and student involvement influence the classroom practices. Education in Sri Lanka is still a priority area of the population, and the literacy level and widespread enrollment in schooling are high, but policy-based sources indicate that the system still faces a relatively significant number of concerns regarding the quality, equity, efficiency, and the exam-centered nature of Sri Lankan schools (UNESCO, 2022; National Education Commission, 2023).

It is at this contextual gap that the current research study sits. It has a sample of 121 teachers in Sri Lankan secondary schools, 116 of which are urban, and only 5 rural, so the evidence is not much rural at all but is mostly urban in character. The results also indicate that teachers most commonly employed time management, positive reinforcement, and clear expectations and rules and student engagement was used at moderate level and significantly predicted by time management, positive reinforcement and group work. These trends demonstrate that it is the classroom management in the Sri Lankan secondary school which the teachers strive to maintain a state of engagement in spite of curricular and contextual limitation.

In this regard, this paper explores the interaction between classroom management practices and teacher-student engagement in secondary school teachers in Sri Lanka in terms of mixed methods research design. It attempts to determine which classroom management strategies among many are most often employed by the teachers, determine the degree of student engagement, as perceived by teachers, evaluate the statistical relationship between individual strategies with engagement, and understand the thoughts of the teachers on those challenges and areas needing improvement. In this

way, the study adds context-sensitive information into the literature surrounding classroom processes and provides implications to teacher education, school support, and future research in the secondary education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Multidimensional Pedagogical Construct as Classroom Management

Classroom management is conceptualized as a multidimensional pedagogical attribute and not just a disciplinary role that is narrowly seen in the literature. The powerful model by Evertson and Weinstein explains classroom management as the efforts made by teachers to establish a conducive environment that promotes academic, social and emotional learning. This view extends the discipline field to classroom organization, instructional management, relationship building and proactive structuring of participation. Emmer and Sabornie (2015) also propose that the management of classrooms should be interpreted as being inseparably connected with instruction since how different aspects of time, transition, duties, and patterns of interaction are managed influences the degree to which students are able to engage in learning in a meaningful manner.

Such a wider conception is substantiated by syntheses based on evidence. According to Simonsen et al. (2008), there are a collection of cyclic practices that are related to improved behavioral and instructional results: maximizing structure, teaching expectations, active engagement of students, appropriate behavior recognition, and response to misbehavior. Similar to Marzano and Marzano (2003), the authors also highlight that teacher-student relationships are the key to other aspects of classroom management as they influence whether students are receptive to rules, responsive to instructions, and in touch with the classroom community. All these studies combined imply that classroom management can be best thought of as a framework of proactive pedagogical activities that facilitates both order and engagement.

2.2. Student Engagement and Its Applicability in Classroom Processes

Student engagement is one of the most popular constructs applied to explain the relation of students to schooling and their chances of achieving academic success. Fredricks et al. (2004) suggest that engagement can be theorized at behavioral, emotional, and cognitive levels since students might be compliant on the behavioral level, yet become emotionally cold and/or cognitively inactive. Appleton et al. (2008) also emphasize the fact that engagement is not only theoretically complicated but also methodologically significant, as it is associated with achievement, persistence, and school completion. Another implication of Skinner and Belmont (1993) is that engagement is dynamic and relationship: the behavior of the teacher determines the engagement of the student, and the engagement of students in turn determines the behavior of the teacher in the long term.

In the case of classroom management study, it implies that interaction should not be brought down to submissiveness or silence. The fact that the classroom is silent does not mean it is engaged. Instead, the active classrooms are the ones where the students are alert, interested, willing to contribute as well as cognitively interested in the task at hand. This difference is important since the management strategies that ensure disruption is suppressed without increasing participation might have increased order without increasing learning in any meaningful way.

2.3. Classroom Management to Engagement Links That Are Specific to Strategy

One of the main streams of literature deals with the involvement of special classroom management strategies. One of the most common mentioned mechanisms is positive reinforcement. When educators provide the recognition of favorable behavior, efforts, and engagement in a timely and particular way, they are more likely to promote the recurrence of this behavior and contribute to the creation of the classroom atmosphere where students will not feel overlooked or unappreciated (Simonsen et al., 2008). Another significant strategy is having clear expectations and rules. Students know what is required of them academically and behaviorally, making the difference between the

two less unclear, ensuring better transitions and making the teacher responses more acceptable and predictable.

One of them is also time management, which is sometimes not given the attention that it deserves in general conceptual discussions. The key elements of time management are to pace lessons, reduce unnecessary transition, sequencing activities and activities, and make sure that instructional time is not wasted in procedural fluster and unnecessary disruption. Emmer and Sabornie (2015) clarify that the issues of instructional organization and classroom management are tightly intertwined: as the lesson proceeds slowly or intermittently, the students become more likely to lose their interest. On the other hand, coherent pacing maintains attention and eliminates chances of off-task.

There are also collaborative and group-based learning strategies presented in literature as an important engagement-oriented approach. There is no certainty that cooperative learning results in engagement, however, when the tasks are designed with a common cause, responsibility, and substantial communication, it can enhance academic and social performance. Roseth et al. (2008) discovered that cooperative goal structures were correlated with great success and better relationship with peers compared to competitive or individualistic goal structures among early adolescents. Gillies (2016) also comes to the same conclusion that collaborative learning has the potential to facilitate learning as well as socialization in educational contexts, whereas Gokhale (1995) attributed better performance in critical thinking to collaborative learning.

2.4. Situation, limitations and the Sri Lankan secondary school environment.

Even though the overall literature indicates that there is a positive correlation between classroom management and engagement, they are contextual relationships. The practices in teacher work are implemented in a system with different degrees of resourcing, classes size, professional development, and policy pressure. The context of Sri Lanka is especially pertinent as it is a country with high educational enrollment but harbors issues regarding quality and equity along with an examination-based school culture. According to the reporting and national policies documents provided by UNESCO, the general education sector in Sri Lanka still faces a challenge in terms of quality enhancement, efficiency of the system, and teacher support, and the national policy framework clearly explains the system as heavily content- and examination-focused (UNESCO, 2022; National Education Commission, 2023).

This is important to this study of the present since context has the power to either enhance or limit the application of strategies that otherwise may be well backed. Big classes, unequal distribution of resources, and underdevelopment of professionalism can decrease the ability of teachers to offer personalized support, closely observe participation or maintain an active learning process. This trend is reflected in the qualitative aspect of the current study as teachers indicated disruptive behavior, large classroom sizes, and low motivation of the student as the barriers and active learning, technology integration, and professional development as the desired response.

2.5. Research Gap

The literature has explicitly defined that classroom management and student engagement are connected, however, there are three gaps. To begin with, a lot of data that is driving the same argument is Western or high-resource, which makes South Asian secondary education relatively under studied. Second, previous research commonly speaks in general terms about classroom management without experimenting over what are the strongest strategies to be related to engagement. Third, a limited number of studies have incorporated quantitative and qualitative research in analyzing how not only may strategies be related to engagement, but also how teachers understand the barriers to its implementation. The current study fills these gaps by investigating strategy-specific relations between classroom management and student engagement in Sri Lankan secondary schools using a mixed-methods design but taking care of generalization outside of the mostly urban sample.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This was a mixed-method concurrent research study. The quantitative section examined the patterns in the strategy of classroom management use and the statistical relationship between the two and student engagement. The qualitative section was in the form of self-reported information of effective practices taught by the teachers, problems that existed at the classroom level, and the suggested tools to solve the problems. The rationale behind this design is that the problem of the research had to be measured and interpreted. The quantitative analysis will show what strategies can be linked with the engagement, and the feedback as regards this may be summarized qualitatively to explain what strategies teachers use in their practice.

3.2. Study Setting, Population and Sample

The survey conducted by the researchers was done at high schools in Sri Lanka. The teachers in the secondary schools were the population of interest and they were selected as the primary respondents because it is them who directly use the strategies of classroom management and they are also the ones who observe the day-to-day trend in terms of student involvement.

Convenience sampling was used to involve one hundred and one teachers in the study on a voluntary basis. The sample also was very urban: 116 teachers (95.9% urban schools, 5 teachers (4.1% rural schools). Most of the respondents have obtained formal training related to classroom management and most of them had more than 11 years of experience in teaching. These teachers were the representatives of a great number of subject areas, although the most represented teachers were English, Science, Geography, History, and Mathematics. The major limitation of the sample is urban bias, which means that the findings can be considered more as the manifestation of largely urban settings.

3.3. Instrument

The study item involved in gathering data using previous literature on classroom management and student involvement was the self-administered questionnaire. The instrument had four partitions.

Part one consisted of demographic information, including the school type, the subject taught, the number of years worked, and the training.

The second section was an evaluation of the general use of eight classroom management strategies, and they are the use of group work, positive reinforcement, clear expectations and rules, time management, non-verbal behavior, consistent routine, student participation in the rule-making process, and feedback about behavior. The responses were given based on a level of five points, where 1 (Never) to 5 (Always).

The third section created learner involvement as perceived by the teachers. There were six items, which required the teachers to mention whether or not the students were active, enthusiastic, focused, motivated, and self-disciplined and never distracted. The five-point scale of agreement was used to measure the responses with the negative item being reverse-coded to give a high score suggesting the increased engagement.

The fourth section was open-ended whereby the teachers were asked to further detail additional management strategies, major barriers of engagement, the strategy that they perceived to have the greatest impact, and enhancement recommendations.

3.4. Reliability and Data Collection

The analysis of the internal consistency was done with the aid of Cronbach alpha. The classroom management scale yielded an alpha of 0.73 and the engagement scale yielded an alpha of 0.72 that means that the level of reliability of the scale is good as long as the study is concerned.

The data was collected in the period of three weeks of the month of March 2026. The respondents were engaged on voluntary basis. The objective of the research was informed to the respondents who were assured that the data will be used in academic research only.

3.5. Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using the SPSS version 26.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics, level of use of the strategy and levels of engagement. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated in order to establish the bivariate correlations among classroom management and student engagement. Multiple linear regression was then applied to them and the strategies that were of significant predictive value of engagement were spotted.

Thematic analysis of qualitative responses was done. The answers were read repeatedly, coded as per the current recurring ideas, and grouped into broader themes such as active learning, behavior issues, motivation, group work, and integration of technologies. To be in a position to generalize, the number of times the most frequent responses occurred was counted.

3.6. Ethical Concerns and Methodological Limitations

The study had straightforward ethical principles. The intervention was self-voluntary and informed consent was gathered and no identifying information was reported. Data confidentiality was observed.

Other methodological limitations are also to be reported. The convenience sample is not very representative and the big urban concentration does not allow making claims about schools in the rural locations. The study is a self-report research using teacher self-report, but not direct observation and student report meaning that the findings are dependent on perceived engagements. Finally, it is also cross-sectional, hence, the results describe association, rather than causation.

3.7. Analytic Decisions Rationalization

The purposeful use of the regression and correlation analysis was taken. When analyzed individually, correlation analysis would be useful to show the existence of either positive or negative relationship between a strategy and engagement. Classroom management strategies are not however applied in isolation. The teachers who are time-managing have also a greater likelihood of explicitly communicating expectations or utilizing reinforcement. It was therefore necessary to use multiple regression so as to establish what strategies would have a strong explanatory value when the overlap between strategies was taken into account.

The thematic analysis was used as the qualitative aspect because the answers were quite brief yet informative and were open-ended. A very interpretative method could not have been employed on such a type of survey comments, but a simple method of simply counting without grouping based on a thematic analysis would have reduced the responses to fragments not connected to each other. Thematic analysis provided some remedy such that the study could identify patterns in recurrence but still not ignore the practical issues of the teachers.

3.8. Quality and Level of Evidence

The prevailing design can be termed as exploratory-explanatory compared to definitive. The sample used was sufficient to the regression model used and internal consistency scales satisfactory. At the same time, the article was not created as a national survey. It is constructive in the fact that it can be able to come up with unlikely, yet realistic patterns that can be applied in subsequent working. This type of evidence can be used in educational research, specifically, in the classroom process research, although, such evidence has to be interpreted in good faith and within confines. It is the credible and context-sensitive inference and not the exaggerated generalization of the purpose of this study.

4. Results

4.1. Participant Profile

The respondents were a group of 121 teachers in secondary schools. Urban teachers were taken as 95.9 of the sample, and rural teachers as 4.1. The 11 or more years' experience category was the biggest, which implies that the sample was skewed towards experienced practitioners. The majority of the respondents indicated that they underwent formal training on classroom management, with minor counts having informal and no formal training. Teachers involving a variety of subjects were also included in the sample, in particular, English, Science, Geography, History, and Mathematics.

This profile is an indicator that the results are mostly an indicator of the working teachers in a predominantly urban school. It is also equivalent to the fact that the paper should not consider the data as a nation-wide sample.

4.2. Strategies of Managing the Classroom Utilized by Teachers

The teachers were asked to rate the frequency of their use of eight classroom management strategies. Time management, clear expectations and rules and positive reinforcement were the three most common strategies. These results indicate that the respondents were most dependent on strategies that help in structuring lesson flow, determining classroom norms, and promoting participation with supportive feedback.

Other strategies were employed rather less frequently. The lower-scoring strategies included group work, participation of students in the development of rules, and non-verbal cues. The significance of this pattern is that it demonstrates that the strategies that are most frequently applied are not always identical to those becoming the strongest predictors of engagement in the future. That is, the common use does not necessarily imply the greatest impact.

4.3. Level of Student Engagement Reported

On the one hand, the overall student engagement was moderate to high, with a mean score of 3.60 (SD = 0.66). Motivation and enthusiasm were ranked relatively high by teachers and then came self-discipline and active participation. Attention and concentration were also a little weaker and the reverse coded distractor item indicated that disengagement was still evident in certain schools.

This shows that participation in the sample was neither negative nor full. Educators tended to believe that learners were eager to engage, but discipline and constant attention were weak at least in some aspect of the educational process.

4.4. Reliability of the Scales

The classroom management scale had an acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.73$), as well as the student engagement scale ($\alpha = 0.72$). The values promote the application of the instrument to the current descriptive and inferential analyses.

4.5. Relations Between Engagement and Management Strategies

Correlation analysis using Pearson correlation revealed that, five classroom management strategies were significantly and positively correlated with student engagement such as positive reinforcement, time management, clear expectations and rules, group work, and student participation in establishing rules. The relationship between positive reinforcement and the other variables was the strongest bivariate. Significant positive relationships were also present with time management and clear expectations, with a lesser yet significant relationship between group work and student involvement.

These results suggest that there was greater engagement in classrooms in which the teachers indicated that they used these strategies more often. This is conceptually significant in the sense that

the result indicates that engagement is not only correlating with structure and order, but recognition and participation as well.

There were no significant correlations between engagement and three of the strategies that provide feedback on behavior, consistent routine, and non-verbal cues. This does not imply that they are non-effective. Rather, it indicates that they were not some of the strongest direct correlates of overall engagement in this sample.

4.6. Regression Analysis: What Strategies Were Independent Predictors of Engagement?

The multiple linear regression analysis was carried out to identify which of the eight strategies were found significant in case of considering all strategies collectively. The total model was important, $F(7, 113) = 4.465$, $p < 0.001$ and it explained 21.7% of the student engagement variation ($R^2 = 0.217$).

Three strategies came up as important positive predictors. The most significant predictor was time management ($b = 0.265$, $p = 0.005$). The second strongest predictor was positive reinforcement ($b = 0.249$, $p = 0.005$). The third important predictor was group work ($b = 0.226$, $p = 0.011$). The other strategies were no longer significant when it accounted shared variance between predictors.

Such an outcome explains the correlation results. Other strategies like clear expectations and involvement of students in making rules were positively related to engagement but failed to make a distinct unique contribution in the complete model. Time management, positive reinforcement and group work on the other hand contributed differently. They propose together three key leading lines in which classroom management promotes engagement maintenance of instruction flow, establishment of an affirming classroom climate, and design of active participation.

The model described a significant yet small percentage of variance. This is not surprising, as the engagement depends on numerous factors other than managing the classroom, such as student motivation, interest in the subject, school climate, and broader contextual factors. Despite this, even with the result, classroom management contributes to a significant proportion of differences in engagement among the sample.

4.7. Characteristics of Journee Teachers Working in Rural Schools

Since only five responses were obtained with the rural schools, no statistical comparison between the urban and rural group was conducted. The descriptive profile however implied a slightly lower engagement score and you are likely to find that more resource constraints are mentioned by teachers in the rural population. These findings are far too small to come to any strong conclusions, yet they do suggest that one should examine the contextual inequality in future studies having a more balanced sample.

4.8. Qualitative Findings

The open-ended responses provided four broad sets of results.

The first one was the teachers explaining other classroom management strategies, not included in the eight questions in the questionnaire. Active learning, which came in the form of discussion, teaching by activity and interactive questioning as well as approaches that demanded students to take a direct role were the most prevalent. This implies that teachers do not make such a divide between management and pedagogy as survey categories tend to. To most people, it is best to maintain the interest of students by creating a lesson that will inherently draw them into participation.

Second, the three significant barriers to engagement that were identified by the teachers included behavior problems, large classes, and lack of student motivation. Other mentioned responses were low resources, distraction, ability mix, and examination pressure. These themes reveal that the skill of the teacher is not the only limitation to classroom management but also structural and contextual conditions.

Third, group work and positive reinforcement were mentioned the most frequently when teachers were requested to specify which strategy affected engagement the most. Teachers indicated that group work improves the engagement and confidence and positive reinforcement motivates effort and makes the classroom more conducive. This qualitative trend is a great supporter of the quantitative findings.

Fourth, the improvement recommendations provided by teachers focused on increased application of active learning, offer more professional development, and enhanced technology integration. These reactions show that teachers view engagement as a factor that relies on instructional design, institutional support and not necessarily on the tighter discipline.

4.9. Summary of the Results

The findings indicate that there is a coherent general pattern. Most commonly used methods were time management, clear expectations and positive reinforcement as reported by teachers. The overall student engagement was moderate and high. Positive relationships between engagement and 5 management strategies were found, though only three strategies appeared to be independent predictors in the regression model because of time management, positive reinforcement and working in groups. These results were supported by qualitative responses that also focused on active learning and encouragement, and collaboration as well as barriers like large classes, low motivation, and behavior difficulties.

The other interesting aspect about the descriptive pattern is that the most common strategies also had the highest compatibility with the teacher-led instructional control. It is possible to implement time management, clear expectations, positive reinforcement, but there is no need to alter the very formation of the lesson. In comparison, group work and student participation in writing the rules demand certain redistribution of classroom work. This is perhaps one of the reasons why they were not used more often even though group work at a later stage exhibited great predictive value.

The engagement profile also indicates that the teachers found motivation and interest slightly higher than sustained concentration. This distinction matters. Students can demonstrate willingness, enthusiasm but still be unable to stay focused throughout a lesson. Practically, this implies that engagement cannot be considered a flat unit. The emotionality of a classroom may be positive and yet there may be issues of sustained attention, and it may be precisely in this area that the management technique of pacing may be important indeed.

The results of the regression also indicate that statistical significance is not immediately the result of frequency of use. The group work, e.g., was not among the best strategies in the routine usage, but it still had independent predictive values in the entire model. This implies that there are strategies that can be underused as compared to their contribution on engagement. This is a significant finding to teacher education since it identifies not only what is already done by teachers, but what could be given more attention in practice.

The qualitative findings also enhanced the internal consistency of the research. The suggestions by teachers on the active learning and professional development did not stand alone of the quantitative data rather those were the same bigger trend. The teachers seemed to have realized that in the contexts of classroom management being associated with participatory teaching and teachers being empowered with approaches beyond strict control engagement is enhanced. Such uniformity of methods adds credibility to the interpretation of the results in general.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to establish which classroom management strategies were most closely linked with engagement in Sri Lankan secondary school classrooms and to make sense of those findings from the teachers' perspectives. It shows that classroom management is likely important for engagement, but not all strategies are equally important. Perhaps the most consistent finding in this study is that engagement is strongly associated with strategies for time management, affirmation and encouragement to participate.

5.1. *The Importance of Time Management*

Most significantly, time management is strongest predictor of engagement. This is important because time management is often discussed as a technical rather than as a substantive variable in education. The current findings indicate that it's not. In the classroom bad timing results in wasted time, confusion and stasis. Confusion and boredom are more likely to occur when lesson planning or transitions are poor, and when the flow of teaching is interrupted. Effective pacing, on the other hand, keeps students engaged and focused.

In secondary education this may be particularly important because teachers encounter "time to teach" constraints and need to keep students engaged. Lessons that are "well-paced" are not necessarily fast-paced but they are certainly efficient. It avoids time wasters, arranges tasks in a logical order, and provides clear goals. In this view, time management facilitates engagement by limiting the conditions and opportunities for disengagement. The result also makes sense from classroom ecology, which includes (among other things) considerations of flow, momentum and activity systems.

The implication for practice is clear: teacher training sessions should include discussion of pacing, transitions and time management in the classroom. They are not small things. They are part of the process of building engagement.

5.2. *Social Engagement and Positive Reinforcement*

Positive reinforcement was the second most important predictor and the strongest bivariate predictor of engagement. And this shows that positive reinforcement is still important to support the secondary classroom. Relationships with students improve when students are recognized for their effort, participation, and improvement. Reinforcement seems to work not only via increased desirable behavior, but also via the psychological environment of the classroom. And when students perceive they are being acknowledged, they may be more willing to attempt to participate.

This can be important in classrooms where students anxiously fear failure, ridicule, and personal attack. In these environments, reinforcement can reduce anxiety of classroom participation and facilitate a positive classroom culture. This interpretation is supported by the qualitative data, as teachers often reported that their encouragements led to higher challenges and effort.

But this finding is not straightforward. Our results are related to reports of frequency, not content. Reinforcement is likely to work most effectively when it is specific, authentic and focused on effortful engagement. This is where we need to consider self-determination theory: effective feedback for engagement is likely to support competency, but not control.

5.3. *Group Work Is Underused but Powerful*

The use of group work reveals an interesting paradox. It did not rank top in terms of frequency of use, but was identified as a key predictor of engagement and often as the best teaching method by teachers. That implies that group work may be an activity that should be used more than it currently is.

This appears for good reason. Working in groups is more complex than direct instruction. Instructions and tasks need to be well defined; group members need to be allocated tasks and roles, time needs to be constrained, and groups need to be monitored. It can seem fraught when teachers have large or mixed-motivation classes. But done well, group work can make a profound difference to engagement by getting students actively engaged rather than passively consuming. It also promotes relatedness and social learning, which are important for engagement.

Our quantitative data is telling. This is not simply because teachers describe group work as a strategy for "occupying" students. Rather, they saw it as a strategy that motivates, encourages discussion and engagement. This is consistent with cooperative learning research and implies that where policies meet practice cannot necessarily be clearly delineated. As a management strategy, group work works because it's an effective participatory strategy.

5.4. Clear Expectations and Student Involvement

Expectations and rules were the most common strategies and were positively associated with engagement, but were not part of the final model. This suggests they are either foundational, or not particularly powerful factors. Expectations can provide a foundation for structure and coherence but they don't necessarily lead to engagement. There can be a lot of structure in a classroom that is not necessarily high in engagement. In this way, having expectations may be necessary but not sufficient.

Student-created rules were less strongly, but significantly, related to engagement in a bivariate analysis, and then became insignificant in the regression model. This suggests autonomy-supportive strategies may still be relevant, but there are likely indirect pathways for these effects. Student voice may play a role in perceptions of fairness, control, classroom culture, but the influence may be more indirect or hidden than the effects of pacing, feedback and group work.

These results suggest it is wrongheaded to think of black-and-white options. Management-oriented practice and participation-oriented practice are not at odds. Expectations define the frame; reinforcement and group work define the content of that frame.

5.5. The Role of Other Non-Significant Strategies

Behaviour feedback, routine and non-verbal cues were not significant in this study. The likely reason is not that these strategies are ineffective but that they are more like a part of the oil pump than part of the engine. They could help the classroom function, without necessarily enhancing the enthusiasm, concentration and involvement measured by the scale. The other reason is measurement. A frequency scale can't pick up differences in quality of use. Correctly implemented and poorly implemented routines may be rated the same but have different effects.

This is a word to the wise about reading too much into "not-significant". Intervention strategies can be context dependent and quality dependent. The data here pick out the best tactics in this particular sample; they do not establish a hierarchy of value.

5.6. The Qualitative Insights

The qualitative findings enrich the analysis of the quantitative findings in two ways. First, they reveal teachers think of classroom management in a wider way than indicated by the survey results. Engagement-based learning, activities, context and relationship-building are all themes. This suggests to us that teachers do not think of management and pedagogy in isolation. When students are engaged in a lesson, it is also manageable.

Second, the open-ended responses made factors apparent. Class size was a recurring theme, as was a lack of interest and misbehavior. These explain why successful approaches can be difficult to maintain. For instance, group work can be engaging, but may be difficult to facilitate in large classrooms. Communications technology may stimulate interest, but in technologically high-resource classrooms. In other words, we should not consider classroom management as merely an individual teacher decision, separate from institutional constraints.

5.7. Theoretical Implications

Three theories help explain the findings. Classroom ecology explains the role of time management in that engagement is a function of the time and activity structure of lessons. Behaviorist theory explains why positive reinforcement may matter, particularly in relation to repeated engagement. Self-determination theory helps explain why these things might matter beyond behavior: they facilitate competence and relatedness, two psychological needs related to engagement.

Combing these insights suggests that classroom environments increase engagement when structure, reward and participation are combined. It's a stronger claim than teaching is about classroom management or discipline. It describes classroom management as the creation of participation opportunities.

5.8. *What Teachers and Policymakers Should do*

For teachers, the results suggest three things: pace lessons better, deliver more specific directed and non-directive feedback, and include smaller group practice. For teacher training, the findings indicate that students should not only learn about management rules, but should be given opportunities to practice transitioning, dividing students into groups, and provide specific feedback. Finally, the research suggests that attendance is partially dependent on the environment. Teacher training, small class sizes and access to classroom resources are not peripheral, they are part of classroom management.

Future studies should consider the limitations we reported: more rural samples that are balanced across jurisdictions, incorporating student views, classroom observations or longitudinal methods. We also need to investigate quality of use, rather than just frequency, because classroom management strategies such as praise and group work differ widely in quality.

5.9. *Overall Interpretation*

So, the discussion above leads to a conclusion: the classroom management strategies most strongly associated with engagement in this sample were those that flow, make students feel included, and are active rather than passive. Therefore, classroom management is not about simply preventing classroom disruption. It is about ensuring a well-managed classroom in which students can engage.

5.10. *Contribution to Sri Lanka*

Another strength of the study is that it provides an applied contribution to the debate on education in Sri Lanka where classroom management is usually seen as a teaching and learning issue, and more generally as a policy problem, but less often as an examinable aspect of classroom participation. The study finds that the issue is not so much children's misbehavior. A more important concern is the conditions of engagement enabled and disrupted in the classroom. Thus, classroom management provides a measure of day-to-day educational quality, not just control. It is also important to debunk the popular illusion that control equals engagement. The findings instead suggest a more nuanced model, where classrooms must be well structured but also supportive and engaging. A highly structured, but badly paced and unsupportive classroom may lack high engagement. Nor is a supportive but uncontrolled classroom assured of success. It seems that a combination of structure, support and encouragement is likely the best fit.

5.11. *What Can and Cannot Be Claimed*

Don't claim too much We can justify saying that several classroom strategies were found to predict greater perceived student engagement in this sample and that three strategies were the only ones remaining significant when all were included. They do not justify the more causal claim that using these strategies will raise engagement in all classrooms. They do not justify a claim about all Sri Lankan schools, especially since the sample was unbalanced.

On the other hand, being unhealthily conservative would also be an achievement. The consistency across descriptive, correlation and regression results and the outcomes of qualitative questions means the pattern is hard to explain away as a coincidence. While the design is not causal, it does offer reliable evidence that some approaches should be emphasized over others in teacher and school practice. The correct interpretation of the results is something that falls between overstatement and understatement: it is weak but it is also strong.

5.12. *Final Discussion Point*

The bottom line, then, is that the study has produced an understanding of engagement as the outcome of classroom design. Students are not engaged simply because they are highly motivated. They are more engaged when lessons move along at a manageable pace and when they are rewarded

for participating and when learning is structured in a social rather than passive way. That's why indicators are so revealing. They indicate that classroom management, while neither an exercise in control, nor the Holy Grail for engagement.

6. Conclusion

We investigated the association between classroom management strategies and student engagement in largely urban secondary schools in Sri Lanka. Classroom management is important for engagement, but not all strategies are created equal. The key predictors of engagement in the regression model were time management strategies, positive reinforcement and group work, with clear expectations and student input in rule making also positively bivariate related to engagement. Teachers' written comments reinforced these positive relationships in that they underscored the benefits of active learning, feedback and group work, and the problems posed by large classes, behavioral problems and low motivation.

This research therefore offers a more accurate view of classroom management. The most effective strategies of our sample were not just control strategies. They involved organized teaching flow, positive teacher-student interactions, and engagement. So, teacher-student engagement can be promoted by preventing disturbances but also by making classroom activity or work structured, supportive, and meaningful. The implications are practical. Teachers should attend more carefully to pacing instruction, providing targeted positive feedback and carefully structured group activities. Preservice teacher programs should consider such practices essential classroom management skills, rather than optional fringe activities. And school leaders and policymakers should better understand that classroom management is partly a function of institutional factors, including teacher training, class size, and school resources.

The research should be taken in context. Our sample was disproportionately urban and involved teacher self-report, so the results do not offer an equitable comparison across the nation, nor causality. Nonetheless, the findings make sense and are relevant to teaching. It shows that student engagement is likely to be highest when classrooms are structured and supportive, and where students are invited to take part.

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