

Teachers' Perspective on Classroom Management in Primary Education - A Case Study

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Abstract

The current article tries to give teachers' perspective on classroom management by the research method of content analysis. This method combines both qualitative and quantitative features, such as tables, which are presented below. Teachers through study seem to be aware of the factors that are connected to classroom management, and also seem to come very close to how classroom management is defined in the contemporary literature a fact that is very encouraging. Nevertheless, what is important to be mentioned, is that teachers do strongly express their need to be further trained on how to succeed effective classroom management.

Key words: classroom management, content analysis, physical environment, psychosocial environment, teaching environment, management of discipline issues.

1. Introduction

Classroom management is considered to be a wide term that has many extensions (Vairamidou & Stravakou, 2019). The most important challenge and the upper goal of teachers is to succeed an effective classroom management. The basic step towards this direction, is to create a secure and supportive educational environment, where teaching process is facilitated, unwanted behaviors are prevented (Saban, 2009), and where the learning opportunities are maximized for all the children (Evertson & Emmer, 2009). Such an environment can promote the full - sentimental, social and cognitive development of children (Evertson & Weinstein, 2011). Classroom management, as it is supported, has a direct influence on student's performances and includes the following: space and material management, social relationships and management of students' behavior (Djigic & Stojiljkovic, 2011).

As far as students' behavior is concerned, responsible for the good behavior of children are both children and teacher (Levin & Nolan, 2004). Unwanted behavior appear when students do not follow the rules of the class and they cause disruption to the teaching and learning process (Sun & Shek, 2012).

So, the prevention of unwanted behavior is the most secure and effective way of not letting them emerge (Andreadou & Andreadou, 2017). In a class where rules do exist and students are strongly encouraged to follow them, managing behavioral issues succeeds (Kyrides, 1999; Stampouli, 2017)

According to Chaplain (2016) teachers should apply a plan of classroom management which is based on the following: on the design and organization of classroom environment - physical environment, on the acquisition of social skills that are required for the development of meaningful relationships in a classroom - psychosocial environment, and on the teaching skills teachers should develop - teaching environment. Physical environment doesn't only refer to the material environment, but also to the environment that a child can express itself and can interact with others (Germanos, 1998).

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As far as psychosocial environment is concerned, it is strongly related to student's attitudes and feelings. In this environment, social relationships derive during teaching and learning process (Frenzel, Pekrun & Goetz, 2007). In order for children to succeed academically, and to reach their full potential as well, they should firstly satisfy their sentimental and social needs (Babalís, 2017). Finally, teaching environment is a term that is mostly referred to teachers, students and educational activities (Kyriacou, 2009). In this environment, teaching is in the center of teacher's role (Polyzoakis, 2008) and it includes three dimensions: programming, implementation and assessment (Jacobsen et al., 2002). Nevertheless, teaching should motivate students to be effective learners and agents of their learning process (Borich, 2014).

It is important to be mentioned that on the focal point of the educational process is always the teacher (Papaikonou, 2014). There is the conviction that for the effectiveness of school in general, teachers play the most important role, as they have a decisive influence on the progress of their pupils (Reppas, 1996). By this, teachers should not be considered as used to, the exclusive administrators or the experts of the whole educational process as was referred by Brown and Phelps (1961), but on the contrary, they should be considered as the ones that create the appropriate conditions for the accomplishment of learning outcomes (Karantzis, 2011) and to be referred even more widely, for the achievement of student's goals (Saban, 2009). So, some of the most important characteristics a teacher should have in order to succeed an effective classroom management are: impartiality, sense of humor, fairness (Katsamagou, 2004), patience (Demir, 2009). Moreover, they should be well prepared, they should co-create with their students and should be templates for their students (Demir, 2009). Finally, teachers should also love their profession, understand children's needs (Pekridou, 2007) and train their students gradually, to acquire self esteem and self control (Jones & Jones, 2004).

Finally, external classroom factors are considered to influence classroom management. Here, in this category are parents, colleagues and the principal of the school. The effective collaboration with parents depends mostly on the school, and on the teachers (Milonakou-Keke, 2017). The interaction among family and school leads to the promotion of children's psychosocial development (Babalís, 2017). It is also important for the teacher to maintain a good relationship with his/her colleagues, and with the principal as well (Brown, Earlam & Race, 2001). Principals contribute to the positive climate of the school, and to a certain extent, to the positive teaching conditions (Baytekin, 2009).

2. Methodology

Classroom management is a burning issue that is of concern to a great percentage of teachers. The goal of this study is to submit the views of primary school teachers in order to approach the following: *how classroom management is defined, which are the parameters that are connected with this term and how classroom management can become more effective in order to keep up with the modern educational reality.*

The scientific method for data analysis that was used in this case study, is the content analysis. Towards this direction, the written forms were chosen as the research tool for gathering the research material, while the word, the phrase, the sentence, and the paragraph were used as a unit of analysis.

Content analysis is both a qualitative and a quantitative systematic method of analysis, which is subject to specific techniques and procedures (Palla, 1992). In this study, content analysis is considered to be the most appropriate method that fits to the present venture. This is because, content analysis is the most suitable method for the analysis of written forms, as it deepens in a text and reduces the amount of data, while the text is coded into manageable categories (Schreier, 2012).

The contents of the texts have to be coded into categories and subcategories when it is needed, in order to investigate in depth the views of the participants. The main categories that emerge are mostly concept-based, while some others and some subcategories are usually added in a data-driven way. The content analysis method is considered to be very flexible, as it has cyclic elements. This means that though the coding frame was built and the data-driven categories were emerged, they should both be revised again and again (Schreier, 2012). The interpretation of a text is considered to be a demanding endeavor as every researcher built the meanings from his/her point of view. Moreover, in cases that some of the terms are implicit into the text, the investigator has to deal with a much more complicated work (Schreier, 2012).

In those cases, the researcher has to summon his/her insight (Berelson, 1952) and the deep understanding of the text in order to be led to effective and substantial conclusions (Holsti, 1969). The stages of content analysis include: indexation of texts, formation of category systems, quantitative and qualitative punditry of the findings (Masali, 2004; Taratori & Masali, 2005).

Twenty active primary school teachers participated in this study. The sampling method that was used is called quota sampling. The participants were chosen because of some specific characteristics: All teachers work either in state or private schools in a rate one to five, and the rate of men and women is one to three. In content analysis the sample representativeness is not the requested, as the findings are not for generalization. For this reason, the size of the sample is considered adequate. Nevertheless, what is considered to be very important is the in-depth analysis of particular views over a specific issue (Iosifidis, 2008).

3. Findings

3.1 Quantitative analysis

In this unit the specific concepts that derived from data analysis, are mentioned and placed into categories. The thematic units are six, and they are reported in a descending order. So, managing discipline issues is considered to be the thematic unit one, with the biggest amount of references. The characteristics of teacher is the thematic unit two, following the psychosocial environment, continuing with the external factors that influence classroom management, and last comes the physical environment with a pure number of references.

Table 1. Allocation of data by thematic units

Consolidated table that shows the quantitative distribution of the study findings.

| Order number | Thematic units | Number of references | Average % |
|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Managing discipline issues | 88 | 26,83% |
| 2. | The characteristics of teacher | 79 | 24,08% |
| 3. | Psychosocial environment | 72 | 21,95% |
| 4. | Teaching environment | 39 | 11,89% |
| 5. | External factors | 37 | 11,28% |
| 6. | Physical environment | 13 | 3,96% |
| | Total number of references | 328 | 100% |

The texts of the subjects of the study show some interesting elements about what teachers consider of great importance in classroom management. It is important to be mentioned that managing discipline issues (26,83%), the characteristics of teachers (24,08%) and the psychosocial environment (21,95%) have pretty much the same number of references, in comparison to teaching environment (11,89%), external factors (11,28%) and physical environment (3,96%), which follow with less references.

Table 2. Managing discipline issues

| Order number | Sub thematic units | Number of references | Average% |
|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1. | Rules | 37 | 42,4% |
| 2. | Routines | 20 | 22,7% |
| 3. | Enhance of positive behavior | 14 | 15,90% |
| 4. | Ignorance of unwanted behavior | 12 | 13,63% |
| 5. | Avoidance of punishment | 5 | 5,68% |
| | Total number of references | 88 | 100% |

From the above, it is clear that the participants, consider the implementation of rules the most important fact in managing discipline issues (42,4%). Routines children should follow in the class come second according to the percentage (22,7%), the enhancing of positive behavior comes very close at (15,90%).

These three sub thematic units are referred to what a teacher should do in order to prevent any unwanted behavior. While, the two last sub thematic units that follow which are ignorance of unwanted behavior (13,63%) and avoidance of punishment (5,68%) are referred to how any unwanted behavior should be confronted.

Table 3. The characteristics of teachers

| Order number | Sub thematic units | Number of references | Average% |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1. | Responsibility | 24 | 30,37% |
| 2. | Equity | 17 | 21,5% |
| 3. | Organization | 12 | 15,18% |
| 4. | With sense of humor | 11 | 13,92% |
| 5. | With love for children | 9 | 11,39% |
| 6. | With empathy | 6 | 7,6% |
| | Total number of references | 79 | 100% |

As far as the characteristics of teachers are concerned, the biggest portion of the participants referred to the responsibility (30,37%) a teacher should demonstrate towards his/her students. It follows the equity (21,5%) a teacher should show to all the students, by ensuring that all of them receive what they need. Some other references are about the organizational skills (15,18%) a teacher should have in order to be well prepared, the sense of humor (13,92%), the real love he/she should feel and demonstrate to his/her children (11,39%), and finally the empathy that should show to his/her students (7,6%).

Table 4. Psychosocial environment

| Order number | Sub thematic units | Number of references | Average% |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1. | Secure | 30 | 41,66% |
| 2. | Positive relationships | 23 | 31,94% |
| 3. | Effective communication | 19 | 26,38% |
| | Total number of references | 72 | 100% |

The psychosocial environment is referred mostly to the feeling of security children need to develop in their school (41,66%). It follows positive relationships (31,94%) that should be cultivated between students and teacher and among students, and finally there should be an effective communication among all the members of the school community (26,38%).

Table 5. Teaching environment

| Order number | Sub thematic units | Number of references | Average% |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1. | Active participation | 15 | 38,46% |
| 2. | Team teaching | 10 | 25,64% |
| 3. | Experiential learning | 9 | 23,07% |
| 4. | Preparation for teaching | 5 | 12,82% |
| | Total number of references | 39 | 100% |

According to the quantitative data of table 5 about the teaching environment, teachers consider that active participation (38,46%) is of great importance, following team teaching (25,64%), experiential learning (23,07%) and preparation for teaching (12,82%).

Table 6. External factors that influence classroom management

| Order number | Sub thematic units | Number of references | Average% |
|--------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1. | Parents | 21 | 56,75% |
| 2. | Colleagues | 10 | 27,02% |
| 3. | Principal | 6 | 16,21% |
| | Total number of references | 37 | 100% |

As far as external factors that influence classroom management are concerned the collaboration with parents (56,75%) is of great importance, following the collaboration with colleagues (27,02%) and the collaboration with the principal (16,21%).

Table 7. Physical environment

| Order number | Sub thematic units | Number of references | Average % |
|--------------|---|----------------------|-----------|
| 1. | Space configuration | 5 | 38,46% |
| 2. | Usage of appropriate educational material | 4 | 30,76% |
| 3. | Heating | 2 | 15,38% |
| 4. | Lighting | 2 | 15,38% |
| | Total number of references | 13 | 100% |

The physical environment is referred mostly to the space configuration (38,46%), to the usage of appropriate educational material (30,76%), heating (15,38%) and lighting (15,38%).

3.2 Qualitative analysis

As far as what teachers think that classroom management is mostly connected to, it came up that it is mostly connected to managing discipline issues. Especially, from one teacher it was referred: “the most demanding bet for a teacher is to have the control of his class, by stopping in time any unwanted behavior”, this view is strengthened by another participant who declares that: “teachers who manage effectively discipline issues create an excellent working environment for students, for colleagues and for themselves”. Finally, it is interesting the ascertainment of a teacher who says: “if you cannot manage effectively discipline issues the whole school year will be a disaster and you will feel insufficient”. The thematic unit that follows is referred to the teacher and his/her distinctive features that contribute to the effective classroom management. According to a participant: “teachers are the only people apart from parents, that can transmit to their children knowledge, sentiments, values and to guide them to a more balanced life”. Moreover, due to another participant: “teachers, by unfolding all the good elements of their character they have, can inspire children and give them initiatives to fulfill their dreams”. The psychosocial environment, is the third thematic unit that teachers are referred to. It is typically mentioned the view of a participant: “if the classroom environment is oriented to the psychosocial development of children, it is a matter of time for children to blossom like flowers”.

The fourth thematic unit is the teaching environment. One participant presents his view by saying: “teaching can become a great experience for everyone if a teacher shows to her children how much she loves it and how she loves to acquire knowledge”. The fifth thematic is referred to the external factors that can affect classroom management.

One of the participants deposits his personal belief, by saying: “apart from students and teachers, there are some other factors, that might sound of minor importance, but on the contrary I strongly believe that can play a very important role in classroom management. According to my very personal opinion, parents, colleagues and the principal of a school can create either a positive or a negative climate in the school that will for sure, have a significant influence on teacher’s work”. Finally, the last in references thematic unit is the physical environment. According to a teacher: “the way a classroom is organized, for example, if it has enough light and if it has sufficient and appropriate educational material, can create a very warm and friendly environment”.

As far as managing discipline issues is concerned, the implementation of rules comes at first place. Specifically, a teacher declares that: “rules have to be established from the very first day of the school year”. According to another teacher: “rules have to be co-decided with children”. In the same context moves the wording of one more teacher, by saying: “you should organize the classroom rules with the children and take mutual decisions about the way these rules should be implemented”. From the above, it is obvious that teachers believe that by posing classroom rules, and by children participating to this procedure, it makes children feel more engaged and more responsible in following the rules as they are. Moreover, second in references come the routines.

The routines are about having a specific programme throughout the day, that should be followed without deviations. Towards this direction, a participant claims the following: “the teacher should implement a routine for smooth transition from leisure to organized activities. This routine has to be the same every single time”. In addition another participant refers that: “routines help children feel more secure, as they know what follows next”. Third comes the enhancement of positive behavior. As a participant typically argues: “we have to encourage children’s positive behavior, whenever we see it, as an example to imitate for others”. Supplementary to this point of view, another teacher says: “if a good behavior is reinforced, a child will have the incentive to try even more the next time”. Fourth comes the ignorance of unwanted behavior. According to a reference: “when you notice disruptive behavior the best you should do is at first to ignore them”. This position is enhanced by another teacher who says: “if a wrong behavior is emerging you should at first ignore it, and if it continues you should talk to the kid in private”. Final comes the importance of avoiding punishment. As it was said: “teacher should never use punishment in general and especially physical punishment in order to stop a provocative behavior”. According to another teacher: “physical punishment is forbidden by law, so should never be used. Teacher should avoid in general punishment, especially as primary school children are concerned, because there is a danger for children to hate school and always feel insecure in the school community”.

As far as the characteristics of a teacher are concerned, the one that comes first in references is the responsibility. According to a participant: “the teacher should be responsible for his children. He should care for their physical security”. Moreover, another participant declares that: “the most important characteristic a teacher should have is to be responsible. He should convince the principal, parents and students that he is worth their trust”. Finally, a participant clarifies that: “if a teacher is responsible children will feel more secure and they will trust him easily”. Equity is referred as a second characteristic a teacher should have. More specifically, a teacher says: “when a teacher treats his students with equity, children feel better at school and a positive climate is created”. Another participant mentions: “when children feel that they are all treated with love by the teacher, and they feel equal to him no competitive relationships take place and they care more for each other”. The third characteristic a teacher should have in order to be led to effective classroom management is organization. One participant refers to: “it is very important for a teacher to organize in the best possible way the programme of the day. Of course, some times things will go differently, but in general he should have a plan”. Another one also reports: “When children grow with a well organized teacher they become more responsible”. Having a sense of humor, is referred as the fourth characteristic a teacher should have. Especially, it is referred by two participants that: “the sense of humor is one of the top characteristics a teacher should have”.

According to another one: “making fun and telling jokes in the class, without of course insulting anyone, is a characteristic that all teachers should cultivate, especially the ones that they feel they do not have it at all”. The fifth characteristic a teacher should have is to have a big heart for his/her children and of course to show his/her love to them. According to a participant: “when teachers show their love and care to their children they have a positive impact to the mentality of the children”.

Moreover, according to one more participant: “the most important thing for children is to know their teacher loves them, as their parents do so”. The final characteristic a teacher should have, is to show empathy to his/her children. Towards this direction, a participant says: “only when a teacher shows to children that she understands their needs, their anxieties, their desires she can build a great relationship with them full of love and respect”.

As far as the psychosocial environment is concerned, first in references comes the feeling of security. As it is mentioned: “if children feel secure in their environment they develop more intimate relationships with their colleagues and their teachers”. Additionally, according to another participant: “when one feels secure he can unfold better himself and build intimate relationships with others”. Second come positive relationships. One teacher says: “we should, all the teachers, keep in mind that the positive relationships among our students start mostly from us. We should not create a competitive classroom environment and we should treat our children equally”. According to another teacher: “positive relationships between students and teachers are of great importance for the mental and sentimental health of students”.

Last comes the effective communication among the members of the school community, and between teachers and students. Especially, a teacher says: “what is missing nowadays from schools, is the effective communication among all the members of the school community”. According to another teacher: “the relationships in a classroom can become much better when the teacher listens actively to his students and tries to help wherever he can”.

As far as the teaching environment is concerned, the most important characteristic is referred to be the active participation of the children. One participant supports that: “the aim that a teacher should pose before he starts teaching is to mobilize his children to participate in the class”. According to another participant: “once children actively participate in the class teaching should be considered successful”. The second thing a teacher should do is to use the method of team teaching. Specifically, a teacher says: “in order for my children to work in a more effective way and to acquire skills such as team working, I use mostly the team teaching”. Another one mentions that: “team teaching help children work in groups. They learn how to cooperate and to look for new knowledge”. Experiential learning comes third in references. According to a teacher: “children can learn only by doing”. Another teacher refers to the following: “according to a saying: tell me something and I will probably forget it, show it to me and I will probably remember it, let me do it and I will always remember it”. Preparation for teaching, comes fourth in references. One participant supports the view that: “a well prepared teacher feels more secure and can make teaching an interesting procedure”. According to another one: “when a teacher is well prepared teaching keeps a good rhythm and children do not lose their interest”.

In addition, classroom management is influenced by external factors, mainly by parents, that are mentioned by half of the participants. Specifically, three teachers referred to the importance of the good cooperation with parents. One participant said: “teachers should create positive relationship with parents, because only then children could feel more secure”. The relationship with colleagues comes second. In particular, it is supported that: “the good relationship with colleagues, especially with the ones that share the same class, meet better children needs”. Another teacher says: “it is good for teachers to be in a working environment where there are positive relationships among the colleagues”. Finally, the relationship with the principal comes third in references. It is reported that: “the principal should try to inspire the teachers by first of all acquiring positive relationships with them”. Moreover, it is mentioned: “if there are positive relationships between the principle and the teachers, teachers will be more effective in their classroom”.

In the end, space configuration had the biggest amount of references mentioning the physical environment. According to a teacher: “the classroom should have space for children to move. Furniture should not be many, only the ones that are really needed, because children need space. It would be a good idea if teachers use folding tables”. Another teacher expressed the following opinion: “tables should be put all together to one side of the classroom, and on the other side should be a library and a place for children to play and read their books”. Second comes the usage of appropriate educational material. As it is said: “the educational material of the class has to be constantly checked in order to see if there are damages”. According to another teacher: “Teachers should bring to class educational material that covers the particular needs of the children of this specific age in order for this material to be useful”. Third comes the heating of the school. As it is said: “children cannot concentrate on their work, if they feel cold in their school”. Finally, fourth comes the lighting: “it is logical that in a dark class, children will feel more that they want to sleep than they want to be in their school and if the lighting is not enough they will have difficulty in doing their work”.

4. Discussion-conclusion

The findings of the study meet to a great extent, the contemporary literature. Specifically, as far as discipline issues are concerned, Andreadou and Andreadou (2017), referred that when a teacher puts his energy in the prevention of unwanted behavior, these behaviors do not even appear. Towards this direction, a major part of the participants emphasized mostly on the prevention of unwanted behavior, which is strongly connected to effective classroom management (Stampouli, 2017). Only 19,31% referred to what teachers should do in order to confront unwanted behavior. This is a positive finding, as it is obvious that nowadays, the orientation of teachers is to prevent than to heal discipline issues.

This fact can implicit that teachers try more to acquire warmer and caring relationships with their students in their effort to avoid unwanted situations. The findings of the study on the characteristics of an effective teacher are very close to the contemporary literature. The 24,08% of participants referred that specific characteristics of teachers are connected to classroom management. In theory teachers, according to the findings, seem to know what characteristics should showcase in order to be led to an effective classroom management, regardless of whether they practise it or not. Such characteristics are: impartiality, sense of humor, fairness (Katsamagou, 2004), patience (Demir, 2009). Teachers seem to be aware of their important role in providing a safe and cozy classroom environment for their students to blossom.

As far as the psychosocial, teaching and physical, environment is concerned, all the participants referred at least one of them. As the sample was gathered from primary school teachers, it is logical that the 21,95% of participants declared that the most important thing in class is the psychosocial environment. What one could probably expect is that this percentage would be much higher, as this environment is mostly about how children feel at their school and whether they develop positive relationships with their teachers and their classmates. The teaching environment was referred by the 11,89% of participants emphasizing mostly on the active participation of children in the educational process. The physical environment had the fewer references. That means that from the study it derived that for those participants the physical environment is at slightly connected to the effective classroom management.

Finally, as for the external factors that are connected to classroom management, we see that the positive interaction between family and school leads to the promotion of children's psychosocial development (Babalís, 2017), and psychosocial development is closely connected to an effective classroom environment. Moreover, teachers effectiveness is influenced by external factors, for this it is important for the teacher to maintain good relationship with his/her colleagues, and with the principal as well (Brown et al., 2001).

Last but not least, it is important to mention that the study findings cannot be generalized, as the size of the sample does not allow the researcher to do so. Nevertheless, it is important that a great amount of teachers are aware of what effective classroom management is about. Throughout the indexation of the texts emerged teacher's need to be well informed on how they can practically succeed effective classroom management and to acquire even more specific knowledge on how to deal effectively with all its extensions.

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