

## Investigating the Classroom Management Challenges that Affect the Academic Performance at the Junior Primary Phase in Namibia

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated classroom management challenges that affect the academic performance of junior primary learners in the Rundu circuit of the Kavango East Region. The study used a qualitative case study design. A purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve (12) junior primary teachers, three (3) school principals and fifteen (15) learners from three schools in the Rundu circuit of Kavango East region. Data collection methods included observations, one-to-one interviews, and focus group interviews. The collected data were analysed using the thematic analysis method. The study identified key classroom management challenges that hinder effective teaching and learning. Notably, issues such as non-compliance with classroom rules and unexpected behavioural disruptions emerged as significant barriers. Additionally, the findings highlighted the impact of inadequate infrastructure and teachers' limited capacity to manage unanticipated situations, both of which compromise instructional effectiveness. In response, the study recommended strategic collaboration between schools and relevant stakeholders to provide targeted support for learners whose behaviour may impede academic achievement. Furthermore, it advocated for the continuous monitoring of learners' attitudes, alongside regular evaluation of teachers' classroom management approaches by school leadership, as essential measures for enhancing academic performance.

**Keywords:** Classroom management, challenges, teachers, academic performance

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that managing classrooms effectively is crucial for learners' academic success (George et al., 2017). Effective classroom management by teachers sets a positive environment for teaching and learning. Seufert et al. (2022) found that poor classroom management significantly hinders learners' academic progress. Classroom management strategies differ among teachers due to their personalities, teaching styles, and preparedness. In schools, including those in the Rundu circuit of the Kavango East Education Directorate, quality education is assessed based on learners' academic performance. According to the Education Management Information System [EMIS], as reported by the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture [MOEAC] (2023), the academic performance of learners in grades 0–3 has been declining annually. This decline may be due to learners not acquiring the basic skills needed to advance to the next grade. Simanu (2015) suggests that

learners' performance reflects the effectiveness of school instructions. Despite school reform programs by the Namibian government to improve academic performance, failure rates remain high (Simanu, 2015).

Classroom management practices may be among the challenges impacting effective teaching in the Rundu circuit. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving academic performance. Waghid (2002, as cited in Simanu, 2015), notes that quality education faces several challenges, such as inadequate resources, unqualified teachers, poor learning environments, lack of teacher motivation and teamwork, poor staff relations, time-wasting, uncoordinated planning, disruptive learner behaviour, and high absenteeism of both teachers and learners. These issues are exacerbated by poor classroom management. According to George et al. (2017), poor classroom management often results in disruptive behaviour like sleeping in class, tardiness, noise, miscopying notes, eating, calling names, and making threats, all of which disrupt learning and hinder learner achievement. This concern led the researcher to study the impact of classroom management challenges on the academic performance of junior primary school learners in the Rundu circuit. No previous research has examined how classroom management issues affect academic performance in this region at junior primary phase. Therefore, this study aims to explore how classroom management challenges affect the academic performance of junior primary school learners in the Rundu circuit. The study seeks to answer the question: What classroom management challenges affect the academic performance of junior primary school learners in the Rundu circuit in the Kavango East region?

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

The study utilised the Choice Theory. According to this theory, individuals are driven by an ongoing pursuit to fulfil five fundamental needs ingrained in their genetic makeup: survival, belonging, power, freedom, and fun. This theory asserts that individuals must assess how these needs influence human behaviour, leading to the concept of "Total behaviour - The behavioural system". A key tenet of Dr. Glasser's work is the assertion that All behavior is purposeful (Kramer et al., 2020), signifying that human behaviour represents the best effort, given the available resources, to meet their needs. Behavior is often an endeavour to align the external world with the internal ideals. Typically, individuals opt for organized behaviour, familiar actions previously utilised (Blatchford & Russell, 2019). In situations where familiar behavior are ineffective, individuals engage in a process termed reorganising, which embodies creativity and the development of new behaviour. The Choice Theory is beneficial as it promotes independence in learners, aiding in their comprehension of decision-making and distinguishing between favourable and unfavourable choices. Moreover, it enhances learners' relationships, motivation, and active engagement. However, a limitation of the Choice Theory lies in its premise that individuals can only control themselves and have limited influence over others. By applying the Choice Theory, individuals can assume responsibility for their own lives while refraining from attempting to dictate the decisions and lives of others (Gaias et al., 2019).

Classroom behaviour issues such as not paying attention, calling out, disturbing others, and non-compliance are frequently observed (van Driel et al., 2022). Learners in classrooms where disruptive behaviour is common tend to show lower academic engagement and achieve poorer academic results (Weber et al., 2018). In settings with high levels of disruption, a lack of effective classroom management can exacerbate the development of aggressive behaviour in children (Zhu et al., 2020). Teachers often encounter discipline problems that impede the teaching process (Hettinger et al., 2021). These situations may lead to learners arriving late or skipping classes due to a perceived lack of interest and ineffective teaching methods. Research indicates that inadequate lesson planning and time management contribute to chaos in the classroom, with new teachers particularly prone to making mistakes that disrupt the learning environment (Kayikçi, 2009). Effective time management enables teachers to plan and implement appropriate teaching strategies and materials, fostering a conducive learning atmosphere (Kramer et al., 2020). Conversely, poor time management can result in unprepared lessons and difficulties in delivering content as planned, leading to behavioural issues during instructions (Lazarides et al., 2020). Teacher anxiety, especially common among new educators, can also impact classroom management by undermining confidence and triggering anxiety-related symptoms, which in turn may encourage disruptive learner behaviour (Neal et al., 2020; Prilop et al., 2021).

Teachers' inability to effectively handle unexpected situations can lead to an increase in disciplinary issues within the classroom. Unforeseen circumstances are bound to occur during teaching, necessitating teachers to be equipped with the skills and experience to address them appropriately (Reis et al., 2022). Dealing with unexpected events often requires a combination of expertise and strategies, which can be challenging for new educators. Many challenges in classroom management stem from institutional factors (Salamat et al., 2018). According to Seufert et al. (2022, p.134), some of these factors include the overwhelming workload imposed on teachers and the excessive demands placed on them by certain schools, limiting their ability to innovate and plan lessons effectively. This situation is particularly prevalent in private schools, where administrators prioritise quantity over quality, leading to heightened pressure, anxiety, and stress among teachers. Insufficient

infrastructure and teaching resources can pose significant challenges in the classroom (Soleimani & Razmjoo, 2019). Schools that are well-equipped with quality infrastructure and teaching tools are more likely to enhance teacher effectiveness, leading to improved learner outcomes. For example, School A, which is equipped with smart boards, quality educational materials, and engaging activities, facilitates better lesson delivery compared to School B, which lacks such resources. Teachers in School A are likely to encounter fewer classroom management issues than their counterparts in School B, who may struggle with the demands of delivering effective lessons (Stahnke & Blömeke, 2021a). Access to support services also plays a crucial role in reducing disruptive behaviour in the classroom.

Schools that offer counselling and other support services tend to foster positive behaviour among learners. Conversely, the absence of such services can contribute to chaos within the school environment. Family dynamics can also influence learner behaviour in school settings (Stahnke & Blömeke, 2021b). Challenges faced at home can manifest in disruptive behaviour at school, with learners experiencing family-related issues more likely to engage in problematic behaviour both inside and outside the classroom. Certain learner disorders, such as autism, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), can also present challenges in classroom management (Strelow et al., 2020). Additionally, a lack of social skills can contribute to behavioural issues within the classroom, affecting learners' relationships with their peers and leading to conflicts during lessons (van Driel et al., 2021). The social environment also plays a significant role in influencing learners' behaviour, as some learners may misbehave to gain acceptance and approval from their peers (van Driel et al., 2022). External factors, such as financial difficulties, heavy workloads, and personal relationships, can also contribute to disruptive behavior in the classroom, as learners may act out in response to these stressors (Weber et al., 2018). Teachers often face various challenges in the classroom, including issues related to teamwork, limited personal time, long-term goal setting, and learner excuses, among others (Zhu et al., 2020). Addressing these common classroom challenges is essential not only for improving teacher retention rates but also for enhancing learner success and the overall quality of education.

Teachers face numerous challenges in managing multiple roles and responsibilities within the educational setting, often leading to time constraints and increased pressure (Kramer et al., 2020). The demanding tasks of preparing, planning, and executing various responsibilities, coupled with additional roles assigned by school management such as psycho-educator, social worker, and counsellor, contribute to heightened stress levels. In addition to creating quality teaching content, teachers are also tasked with maintaining learner growth indicators and managing administrative paperwork, which can consume a significant amount of their time and impact the quality of their work (Lazarides et al., 2020). The overwhelming workload leaves little room for constructive feedback and can have adverse effects on their well-being, making it challenging to maintain a healthy work-life balance. In today's competitive environment, teachers face pressure to excel in their roles as they are constantly compared to their peers and expected to deliver exceptional performance (Neal et al., 2020). Teachers are increasingly held accountable for various aspects beyond teaching, including learner outcomes, growth indicators, and classroom discipline, adding to the performance pressure they experience. Balancing these multiple responsibilities can be taxing and may lead to increased stress levels and challenges in meeting the expectations placed upon them.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is anchored within the qualitative research method to answer questions about the complex nature of a phenomenon and to describe and understand the phenomenon from the participant's point of view. Qualitative research is characterised as interpretive and naturalistic, with researchers typically studying phenomena in their natural environments to interpret them based on the meanings individuals attribute to them (Maree, 2020). Trochim and Donnelly (2014) also posit that qualitative research is an exploratory method aimed at gathering opinions, thoughts, and feelings from respondents to inform new concepts, theories, and products. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research is descriptive, focusing on depth rather than breadth, and does not heavily rely on numerical or graphical representations or complex mathematical calculations. Qualitative techniques provide a unique depth of understanding that is challenging to achieve through closed-question surveys. In this study, a case study design was employed, which involves a logical examination of a specific incident or interconnected incidents to comprehend and explain the occurrence of such events (Maree, 2020). The case study design allowed the researcher to investigate the classroom management challenges, explore various participants' perspectives and observe the real context of the phenomena to contextualise participants' viewpoints against observed reality. Purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve (12) junior primary teachers, three (3) school principals and fifteen (15) learners from three schools in the Rundu circuit of Kavango East region. Data collection methods involved observations, one-to-one interviews, and focus group interviews. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with school principals and teachers, observed teachers'

lesson presentations, and held focus group discussions with learners to gather data. The collected data were analysed using the thematic analysis method.

#### 4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The following section discussed the classroom management challenges that affect learners' academic performances as described by the participants. The data is presented under one theme and six sub-themes.

Table 1. The classroom management challenges that affect the academic performances of the junior primary school learners in the Rundu circuit in the Kavango East region.

Themes	Sub-themes
<b>Theme 1:</b> The classroom management challenges that affect the academic performances of the junior primary school learners in the Rundu circuit of the Kavango East region.	<b>Sub-theme 1.1:</b> Non-compliance to classroom rules
	<b>Sub-theme 1.2:</b> Aggressive behaviour by the learners
	<b>Sub-theme 1.3:</b> Emergency disorders such as the feeling of nervousness and anxiety in teachers
	<b>Sub-theme 1.4:</b> Teachers' poor time management
	<b>Sub-theme 1.5:</b> Inadequate infrastructure and teaching materials
	<b>Sub-theme 1.6:</b> Inability to deal with unexpected situations

**Theme 1: The classroom management challenges that affect the academic performances of the junior primary learners in the Rundu circuit in the Kavango East region.**

##### 1.1 : Non-compliance with classroom rules

The participants in the study indicated that one of the challenges they face regarding classroom management is the problem of non-compliance with classroom rules. On this issue, this is what participant 8 had to say: *"We have the problem of non-compliance with school rules on the part of the learners"*. This was also supported by Participant 5, who said, *"Our learners do not comply with school rules, and this is a problem, especially in managing the classroom and also in having effective teaching and learning take place. They can frequently interrupt instructions, often do poorly academically, and may show little motivation to learn"*. The findings are in line with Stahnke and Blömeke (2021a), who stated that learner non-compliance in classrooms leads to a loss of effective teaching and learning time for teachers and learners. Learners who are defiant or non-compliant can be among the most challenging to teach. There are no magic strategies for managing the behaviour of defiant learners (Stahnke & Blömeke, 2021b).

##### 1.2 : Aggressive behaviour by the learners

Another challenge faced by teachers in their desire to manage classrooms for effective teaching and learning is the aggressive behaviour by the learners. On this issue, this is what participant 12 had to say: *"One of the challenges we face is the issue of persistent aggressive behaviour by learners who do not want to conform to school rules"*. This sentiment was echoed by Participant 10 when she said, *"Learners' incessant aggressive behavior is one of the impediments to classroom management that we face as a school in Rundu Circuit"*. It can be indicated that aggressive behavior can lead to physical or emotional damage to others. The affected people can feel bullied, embarrassed, ashamed, or cheated. Once that aggressive tendency creeps in, a learner might not even realise when it starts impacting their behaviour. These citations above cement the findings of Strelow et al. (2020), who stated that aggressive behaviour is behaviour that is hostile and insensitive towards others. Learners often face challenges at work and in life that leave them irritated or fatigued (van Driel et al., 2021). However, when they are unable to change or improve these situations over time, they may be tempted to respond aggressively and express their displeasure. This can create a volcano-like situation internally, where resentment builds up and can lead to violent behaviour (van Driel et al., 2022).

##### 1.3 : Emergency disorders such as the feeling of nervousness and anxiety in teachers

The study participants indicated that another challenge they face in their classroom management practices is emergency disorders such as the feeling of nervousness and anxiety in teachers. Related to this, one of the school principals (participant 5) had this to say: *"We have had the challenge of developed disorders such as the feeling of nervousness and anxiety in teachers."* This was also supported by Participant 2 when he said that *"illnesses such as the feeling of uneasiness and nervousness in the teachers have become one of the commonest challenges, we face in our bid to indulge in effective classroom management practices for the learners in our school"*. However, learners who experience anxiety at schools may have a more serious anxiety disorder that requires treatment. The best way to help anxious students is to know how to address their anxiety. Often, their anxiety goes unnoticed, and their unpredictable behaviour, such as skipping class, may be mistakenly seen as laziness or irresponsibility. These findings are consistent with those of Weber et al. (2018), who stated that feeling anxious is a normal reaction to exciting, stressful, or new situations. These issues are challenging for all teachers, especially those who suffer from anxiety themselves. Unsurprisingly, a survey by Education Support found that 75% of teachers reported experiencing anxiety or stress-related symptoms in the past two years (Cho et al., 2020).

#### 1.4: Teachers' poor time management

Time management is another challenge that teachers face in their classroom management efforts. Participant 2 in the study had this to say on this issue: *"There is not enough time to instil some of the classroom management rules in our classes, and sometimes we spend so much time dealing with misbehaving learners at the expense of those who are behaving, and this is quite detrimental to the learning progress of those who behave well"*. Participant 4 agreed with this sentiment when she said, *"We don't seem to have enough time to manage our classrooms because sometimes the disruptions that take place in there require that you terminate the lesson and lose so much time"*. The major classroom time management problems and how to nip them in the bud. Unclear procedures and classrooms without defined procedures can become a time management nightmare for teachers. Teaching has increasingly become more difficult with time and learner success is falling at an alarming rate. These findings support those of Gaias et al. (2019), who noted that poor time management occurs when teachers struggle to follow their lesson plans. For instance, ineffective transitioning strategies can lead to disruptive behaviour during lessons. A lack of structure results in the loss of valuable instructional time for both teachers and learners (Hettinger et al., 2021)

#### 1.5: Inadequate infrastructure and teaching materials

Inadequate infrastructures and teaching materials are also some of the classroom management challenges mentioned by the participants that affects learners' performance. On this issue, this is what the study participants had to say: one of the learners said, *"We don't have enough resources needed by the disabled learners"*. This problem is making it hard in general. Several studies have identified a range of similar factors as widespread barriers. Participant 15 in the study had this to say: *"We have a shortage of computers, a lack of quality software, a lack of time, technical problems, teachers' attitudes towards computers, poor funding, a lack of teacher confidence, and resistance to change, poor administrative confidence, a lack of competence, and a lack of access to resources"*. It can be indicated that a lack of resources inhibits the teachers from fully utilizing some of the classroom management strategies they would want to use in their teaching and learning processes. These findings harmonize with the findings of Soleimani and Razmjoo (2019) who recommended that the government should support the schools by providing the most needed equipment, and this should be done through integration in schools, classroom resources, and effective professional means of improving teaching and learning in the classroom.

#### 1.6: Inability to deal with unexpected situations

The participants in the study indicated that sometimes teachers face the challenges of unexpected situations in their efforts to effectively manage their classrooms. Participant 3 in the study had shared these sentiments: *"Sometimes we are faced with unexpected situations that can have unpleasant consequences that affect us deeply"*. This was well supported by one school principal (participant 14) when she said, *"Unexpected events are part of life, which is why we must be prepared to face the feeling of insecurity in the face of the unknown. The next step in dealing with unexpected situations is to remember your long-term goals"*. It can be indicated that when dealing with unexpected situations, remember the long-term goals. In this way, the teacher abandons short-term thinking, which will help him or her prioritize your needs to address the situation. In addition, it will help him or her to distance himself or herself from the problem and be able to observe it from a different perspective. These findings align with Neal et al. (2020), who stated that unexpected events are a part of life, and we must be prepared to handle the resulting insecurity. People generally prefer to control their circumstances because it makes them feel more comfortable (Prilop et al., 2021). Teachers should be ready for

unexpected situations and know how to manage them calmly (Reis et al., 2022). Panicking will not resolve the issues and may even worsen them. Teachers need to remember that such situations are inevitable in life and can sometimes be highly stressful (Seufert et al., 2022).

## **5. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study addresses the core objective of investigating classroom management challenges that impact the academic performance of junior primary learners. The findings clearly demonstrate that disruptive learner behaviour undermines the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes, contributing directly to low academic achievement. When classroom management is weak, learners are deprived of structured, focused learning environments, resulting in diminished academic outcomes.

A well-disciplined classroom, grounded in consistent rules and reinforced through appropriate use of rewards and consequences, is essential for promoting positive learner behaviour. The study affirms that learner behaviour during instruction significantly influences academic success. Key influencing factors include learner motivation, teaching methodologies, and the attitudes and intentions of both teachers and learners.

In addition, the research highlights that personality traits—such as conscientiousness and self-esteem—play a substantial role in academic behaviour, with class attendance emerging as a strong predictor of learner achievement. Broader influences, including personal well-being, home and school environments, study habits, parental involvement, and the condition of educational facilities, further shape academic performance.

Crucially, the study underscores the importance of teachers being well-versed in learners' behavioural tendencies, learning styles, and preferences. Such knowledge enables teachers to tailor classroom management strategies and instructional methods that respond directly to learner needs, thereby enhancing academic outcomes. This personalised approach not only fosters stronger engagement but also empowers learners to identify their strengths and improve in areas of weakness.

Furthermore, the study stresses that the role of a teacher must extend beyond academic instruction. Teachers must actively support learners in developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, discipline, and resilience. By serving as mentors, teachers can guide learners in establishing effective study routines, managing time efficiently, coping with academic pressures, and cultivating a genuine interest in learning.

The involvement of parents is equally critical. Schools must create deliberate opportunities for parent engagement, educating them on the direct link between effective classroom management and learner success. Strengthening the home-school partnership can reinforce learners' study habits, encourage consistent discipline, and deepen their appreciation for education.

The academic performance of junior primary learners is a direct reflection of both the quality of their learning environment and their behavioural development. Effective classroom management—anchored in collaboration, informed strategies, and holistic support—must be prioritised as a non-negotiable pillar of educational success.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The study highlights critical classroom management challenges that hinder effective teaching and learning in junior primary phase. Chief among these is learners' non-compliance with classroom rules, the occurrence of emergency disorders such as teacher anxiety and nervousness, and the presence of aggressive learner behaviours. Furthermore, inadequate infrastructure and teachers' limited ability to manage unforeseen circumstances emerged as significant obstacles. The findings also underscore that poor teacher management skills contribute substantially to ineffective classroom practices. Collectively, these challenges compromise the learning environment and impede learners' academic progress. Addressing them requires targeted professional development for teachers, improved school infrastructure, and comprehensive support systems that enable educators to manage diverse and dynamic classroom contexts effectively.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Classroom management is significantly undermined by learners' non-compliance with rules and sudden behavioural disruptions. These challenges are further exacerbated by inadequate infrastructure and some teachers' inability to respond effectively to unforeseen classroom situations. Collectively, these factors create substantial barriers to effective teaching and learning, diminishing the overall quality of the educational experience in light of these findings, the study firmly recommends that schools must engage proactively with key stakeholders to provide structured support for learners exhibiting behaviours detrimental to academic success. Moreover, there must be a system of continuous monitoring of learner attitudes, coupled with regular, evidence-

based evaluation of teachers' classroom management practices by school leadership. These measures are not optional—they are essential to creating disciplined, focused learning environments and achieving sustained improvements in learner outcomes.

### Conflicts of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose concerning the publication of this paper.

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