

# Classroom Culture and Students' Performance: A Qualitative Study

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**Abstract :** *The researcher before embarking on the journey of research masters was a teacher in the Ghana Education Service (GES) for 8 years. She reflected serially on what appropriate cultures to implement to enhance teaching and learning. Through these reflections, she realized that having a welcoming classroom would make her a stronger facilitator. One of the most important facets of her reflective practice was to consider how to build the culture of her classroom and how to develop it throughout her teaching life. This necessitated the research in to classroom culture and its impact on academic performance of pupils. This qualitative research was conducted in Abbey Korpe in the Shai-Osudoku District of Ghana. After months of research, it was realized that teachers and pupils believed that sustainable education incorporates everything crucial to educating children and the major factor is classroom culture. The researcher then suggested that appropriate classroom cultures be enforced in Ghanaian schools to enhance teaching and learning.*

**Key Words:** *Classroom culture, class participation, reinforcement.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The routine activities of teachers and teachers' actions in their classrooms have much impact on students' achievement just as school policies regarding curriculum, assessment, staff collegiality, and community involvement. Many teachers have difficulties in managing their classrooms hence teaching and learning increasingly become wearisome. It is abstemiously difficult for them to use operative procedures to prevent the growth of classroom discipline problems. Classroom culture is a crucial aspect of teaching which includes the teacher's ability to control the class, enforce rules, ensure that students' sitting arrangement is done based on several considerations. Unfortunately, in our traditional classrooms, students sit at the same position from the beginning of the year till the academic year ends and this sometimes affects the lesson delivering. Effective teacher-students relationship also forms part of the classroom management features but many teachers ignore this vital aspect of educating the child. What are the characteristics of effective teacher-student relationships? Let's first consider what they are not. Effective teacher-student relationships have nothing to do with the teacher's personality or even with whether the students view the teacher as a friend. Rather, the most effective teacher-student relationships are characterized by specific teacher behaviors: exhibiting appropriate levels of dominance; exhibiting appropriate levels of cooperation; and being aware of high-needs students Robert and Jana (2003). The author during her service as a teacher in the Ghana Education Service (GES) had some difficulties herself managing some of the classes she taught but some classes she only needed to put little effort as far as enforcing discipline in the classroom is concerned. First, the meta-analysis found that the middle years of schooling (years 5 to 9) are critical for connecting classroom goal structures and the formation of student attitudes, including an orientation to persist, because it is in these years that parents and teachers become more interested in assessment of success, and there is more overt competition between students (sometimes fostered by parents and teachers). Students in these years are more reluctant to take risks and sometimes avoid the perception of trying hard to avoid censure from other students (Sullivan, Tobias, & McDonough, 2006). It is at these years that it is most important to create the type of classroom culture that can allow teachers to present students with challenges. The research hence is focusing on these years. The overwhelming controversies between classroom culture and the performance of students triggered the researcher to conduct a qualitative study into the classroom culture and its impact on the academic performance of pupils of Abbey Korpe Basic School in the Shai-Osudoku District in the Greater Accra region of Ghana.

### 1.1 Theoretical Framework

Discipline in a classroom aims at securing children's compliance with adult demands (Kohn, 1996) for which, teachers often adopt approach of punishment. Here, the teacher represents the adult and she knows what he or she wants the child to achieve at the end of the lesson. In many instances, teachers use harsh language, threaten students to complete their work on time and criticize students, which may lead to less class participation or behavior problem among students. Lack of respect for teachers is one of the main causes of discipline problems in the classroom. When

students are asked to do something in class, they protest, and refuse to carry out the instruction. The threat and harsh methods can also lead to timidity on the part of the learner. Students entering the classroom should be greeted by teachers who have prepared themselves, their classrooms, and even the work in anticipation for a productive day's learning. A well-managed classroom is one where students know what to answer a question to when to turn in homework, to know how an assignment will be graded Becky (2015).

Becky tabulates the features of discipline and procedure in this way.

Discipline	Procedure
Concerns how students behave	Concerns how things are done
Has penalties and rewards	Have no penalties or rewards

Table.1

Todd Finley (2017), noted Nonverbal Cues, Nonverbal Transition Cues, timeouts, overcorrections, notes of praise, private reminders, greetings, on-spot-correction, Mindfulness Practice among others as classroom management kernels. According to Yeboah (2015), at the core of the classroom culture is the belief of the teachers that majority of the pupils are not academically good. This is likely based on the teachers' experiences. The pattern of non-performing pupils can easily lead the teachers to assume that majority of pupils who attend the school are not academically good. In that same research, pupils attested to the fact that if teachers make an effort to involve them to interact verbally in class, they can do better in class.

Reid & Radhakrishnan (2003), defined classroom climate as the reflection of students' opinions of their academic experience. This includes students' perceptions of the rigor of the class, their interactions with their instructor and class peers, and their involvement in the class.

The current research seeks to answer the question, *what is the relationship between classroom culture and students' academic performance in Abbey Basic School?*

## 2. OBJECTIVES :

The objectives of this research are to;

- a. identify the nature of classroom culture that exist in Abbey Korpe Basic school
- b. examine the relationship between the classroom culture and the academic performance of pupils of Abbey Korpe Basic School.
- c. to examine the difficulties teachers face in maintaining the desired culture in the classroom.

### Significance of the Study

- to identify the desirable classroom culture for pupils of Abbey Basic School
- to make the findings available for classroom teachers and administrators of education.

### The Abbey Korpe Basic School in Context

The Abbey Korpe Basic School like other basic schools in Ghana is sectioned in three parts; kindergarten, primary and junior high school. The kindergarten classes have two teachers in each class and primary classes have one teacher in each class. The junior high teachers however are subject teachers and some teachers are made administrators of each junior high class. Many of the teachers graduated from college of education either by distance or regular and acquired their diploma in basic education as stipulated in college of education act, 2012, act 847. Some of the teachers upgraded themselves by doing the degree some in education, others in other courses. At the time of the research, apart from the headmaster who was posted to the school 2 years as at the time of the research, all teachers served at least 4 years in the school.

## 3. METHOD:

This research employed the qualitative method of research in seeking answers to questions. Qualitative studies are known to help answer the questions "how?" and "why?" of something experienced as well as how people form thoughts and act (Keegan, 2009). A qualitative study is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the world (Yeboah, 2015). Because of the nature of the situation the researcher wanted to delve into, it was more

appropriate to use the qualitative approach. Although the qualitative approach has some limitations such as some sample sizes are generally too small to allow researchers to generalize the data beyond the samples selected for the particular study, its benefits are overwhelming. Interviews, questionnaires, and observation were used as tools for collecting data and descriptive narrative analysis were used in the data presentation.

### Target Population

A research population is generally a large collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific query. The target population refers to the entire group of individuals or objects to which the researcher is interested in generalizing the conclusions (Asamoah-Gyimah & Duodu, 2007). In this regard, the target population of the research is pupils, teachers and headmaster of Abbey Korpe Basic School.

Population of Abbey Korpe Basic School

Headmaster	1
Teachers from primary 1-JSH	28
Pupils, from primary 6-JHS 3	318
<b>Total</b>	<b>347</b>

Table. 2

### Samples

Ideally, one should include every member of the target population in the data set when carrying out research. However, this is unfeasible considering the large population and it is rarely possible to collect data from every person in the group. Sampling is the selection of a subset (a statistical sample) of individuals from within a statistical population to estimate characteristics of the whole population. Statisticians attempt for the samples to represent the population in question. Two advantages of sampling are lower cost and faster data collection than measuring the entire population (Wikipedia.org, 2021).

In this research, the researcher used both probability sampling and stratified sampling.

*Probability sampling* involves random selection, allowing you to make strong statistical inferences about the whole group.

*Stratified sampling* requires the potential samples to be divided into two or more exclusive groups called ‘strata’ based on categories of interest in the research. It aims at unifying samples with similar characteristics into homogenous subsets before sampling. Every person has an equal chance to be nominated from within a particular stratum to adequately represent. (Wikipedia. org, 2021).

In this study, the population Abbey Korpe Basic School was stratified as headmaster, teachers and students. The headmaster was then selected, 50% of teachers selected randomly and 50% of students selected randomly. The table below shows the sample for the research.

Headmaster	1
Teachers	14
Pupils	159
<b>Total</b>	<b>188</b>

Table.3

Therefore, the above sample were the participants of the research.

Before the data collection, the researcher took permission from the Ghana education service (GES) Shai-Osudoku district to conduct the research in the school. This initiative was to ensure that the data collection does not interrupt the daily activities of the school. The education office then wrote a letter to the headmaster who the researcher already spoke with granting the permission for the research to be carried out in the school.

### Data Collection Instruments

In this research, the main data collection instruments employed were structured observations, questionnaires, interviews and document analysis.

### Structured observation

Structured observation is a methodology in which an event or series of events is observed in its natural setting and recorded by an independent researcher. The observations are structured in the sense that pre-determined categories are used to guide the recording process (Jack, 1985). Structured observation was desirable for the study because it is flexible and allowed the researcher to change the length of the observation periods from time to time.

In this study, the researcher used observation to note the behaviour and activity of the study participants as well as situations and events in the school. This enabled the researcher to obtain an accurate information.

In this research, the researcher observed the behaviour of the teachers and pupils in the classroom during lessons. She also observed the behaviour of the headmaster during teaching hours of the school. The following were noted during the observation; sitting arrangements, students' engagement, physical classroom environment, facial expression, negative and positive reinforcement, supervision by headmaster among others.

### **Interview**

The qualitative research interview seeks to describe and the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say (Kvale,1996). Interviews are predominantly suitable for getting the story behind a participant's experiences. The interviewer can pursue in-depth information around the topic. In this research, the researcher interviewed the participants (headmaster and teachers) to find in-depth knowledge about the topic. The interview was face-to-face and most of the questions were open ended to make way for explanation where necessary. An in-depth discussion is achieved during interview, which can be beneficial regarding information gathering. In order to cover the areas of management culture, classroom organization and the attitude towards the pupils during lessons, an interview guide was developed.

### **Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. Questionnaires can be thought of as a kind of written interview. They can be carried out face to face, by telephone, computer or post. Questionnaires provide a relatively cheap, quick and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people (Saul McLeod, 2018). Though questionnaires have many advantages including being economical and less time consuming, answers provided by this instrument lack details because the responses are fixed, there is less scope for respondents to supply answers which reflect their true feelings on a topic. In this case, the pupils of Abbey Korpe Basic School were given questionnaire and were guided by the researcher and some teachers to answer. Pupils chose their own answers, the researcher and teachers only helped to read some of the questions in cases where some pupils found it difficult to read and understand.

## **4. DATA ANALYSIS**

The qualitative data obtained were transcribed and processed into information that could be described. Tables and graphs were drawn to illustrate the data. These graphs and tables showed simple frequencies and percentages.

For objective

1. to identify the nature of classroom culture of Abbey Korpe Basic school, the following indicators were used

- teacher existence in the classroom and type of reinforcement in the classroom
- physical classroom environment
- punctuality and regularity

## **5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS:**

### **5.1 Teacher existence in the classroom and type of reinforcement in the classrooms**

In this situation, the teacher existence considers the presence of teachers in class and its effects on discipline. Whether there are always teachers in the classrooms, whether is the same teacher in the class or different teachers. Again, apart from teacher being physically in the classroom, does the presence of teacher in the class control the class? It was realized from the observation, interviews and questionnaires that apart from the primary section which had permanent teachers in the classrooms, the JHS classrooms did not have permanent teachers. Teachers went to the classrooms as and when they had classes. Where there were free periods, it meant there would be no teacher in the classrooms. The mere presence of some teachers controlled the classes but some teachers had to use punishment to control the class. From the interview with headmaster and teachers, it was realized that they believed that punishment could control the pupils not only the presence of teachers in the classroom. However, many of the pupils said, the presence of teacher in the classroom was enough to control the class. Six teachers said they would wish caning be brought back to school since that is the language pupils understand most and it helped in the control of classroom. Five teachers believed that other means such as advice, eye contact, change of sitting arrangement could be used instead of caning and they do not cane in their classes. Three teachers said as they did not want any problem from parents and other stakeholders, they would just teach and walk away.

### **5.2 physical classroom environment**

The researcher through observation realized that, the classroom buildings were uncompleted. No doors, no windows and not spacious. Pupils were crowded in the classroom as one classroom takes 80 pupils. Teachers lamented on their inability to rearrange classroom for different classes owing to the fact that there is no space. The desks remain inert in the classroom. Sometimes, especially in the afternoon, the flow of delivering lessons and assimilation becomes a problem as the temperature of the classroom increases. Students stated that, the nature of the classroom affect their academic performance. A pupil confessed how she wished to be in the friend's school as she visited the school and saw bright classrooms which were fully equipped with desks, chalkboards and supplies, in stark contrast to her school environment, which consisted of several small, deteriorating structures with broken cemented floors, two pupils seating in a desk and no electricity.

### **5.3 punctuality and regularity**

It was observed that, pupils and teachers arrive in school after 8am everyday. The researcher checked previous attendance registers and realized that, prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the school opened by 6:30am every day. Government then made a policy during the outbreak which ensures that schools open after 8am daily. After morning assembly every day, the class teachers mark the attendance register before starting classes but after break, they do not check the attendance again. Some pupils had to go home to have lunch since they could not afford to buy food in the school. Some of these pupils do not return to the classrooms after break.

### **5.4 teacher-learner relationship and Class participation**

Through observation, the researcher realized that generally, the teachers had approachable relationship with pupils which made it easy for the pupils to ask questions without hesitation. Pupils also confirmed this in the questionnaires when they answered that they see teachers as friends or families. However, active class participation was low in many of the classes, only few and certain pupils participated in lessons. In rare cases, opportunities were given to some pupils to explain to others. When interviewed, teachers and headmaster complained that because of the large class sizes, it would be difficult to engage every learner actively in the lessons. They affirmed that they sometimes used small-group discussions to aid participation. In these cases, pupils had to move outside the classroom and sit under trees for discussions. A remedy the teachers described as taxing as they had to move around to control the groups.

### **5.5 to examine the difficulties teachers face in maintaining the desired culture in the classroom**

Many of the teachers alluded to the inconvenient nature of their classrooms as far as physical structure is concerned as being a hindrance to proper classroom culture. The headmaster lamented that, sometimes, he wished his teachers could adapt other means of handling the classes but it's like asking a hunter to shoot animals knowing he has no weapon. Again, some pupils presented that, their homes were far from the school and since they had to trek to school every day, they get tired thereby making it difficult to concentrate in the classroom. This made it difficult for the teachers to actively engage them in lessons classes.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS :**

The Ghana Education Service should ensure that there are adequate classrooms to enforce the teacher-to-pupils ratio. More teachers need to be employed. There should be regular in-service training on classroom culture. Videos and games should be used to improve the assimilation and retention of knowledge. Teachers should endeavor to encourage and increase pupils' participation and interaction in the teaching of all subjects.

## **7. CONCLUSION:**

The classroom culture plays a major role in the academic performance of pupils. A relaxed and welcoming classroom is a step closer to the success of the learners. The physical facilities of the classroom and the socio-emotional environment makes it easier for assimilation and digestion of learned contents. The mood of a teacher from the beginning of the lesson to the end of the lesson is very vital to enhancing the teaching and learning. Facial expression and other non-verbal communication skills can to a large extent control the class and ensure that the learning process goes on with little or no destruction. A well-designed classroom will by no doubt improve the academic performance of pupils. In the case of Abbey where the classrooms are congested with 80 or more pupils in the classroom, there would not be avenue discovering learning. For example, a music corner where pupils could play instruments made from natural materials or a builder's corner to allow children to build structures using small bricks and wooden blocks, mathematics corner for manipulation of objects and many more.

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