



Impact of Teachers' Classroom Setting Rules on Academic Performance among Upper Basic Education Students in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria. One research question guided the study, while one hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study had a population of 18,599 teachers from 382 Upper Basic Education schools. A sample of 392 teachers was taken for the study from 20 Upper Basic Education schools. Teachers' Setting of Classroom Rules Questionnaire (TSCRQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts and subjected to a trial test, yielding a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency. Data were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research question and the chi-square (χ^2) test of goodness-of-fit was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that teachers' setting of classroom rules has significant positive impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria. The study concluded that teachers' setting of classroom rules significantly enhances learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria, and therefore recommended that teachers should consistently establish and effectively enforce clear classroom rules to improve learners' discipline, engagement and academic achievement.

Keywords: Teachers, Classroom Rules and Learners' Academic Performance.

Introduction

The alarming decline in pupils' academic performance worldwide has become a growing concern for parents, headteachers and policymakers, raising serious questions about the effectiveness of contemporary teaching and learning practices. Pupils' academic performance, as defined by Aremu and Sokan (2019), is the extent to which learners achieve expected learning outcomes in school subjects and is widely regarded as a key indicator of the quality of an educational system. Similarly, Azubuike (2020) describes it as the measurable outcomes of pupils' learning, typically assessed through their actions, which lead to academic achievement, including class participation, homework, assignments, class attendance, punctuality, reading, writing, debating and quizzes. Despite its centrality, global reports show a persistent downward trend in learners' performance. In many developed Western countries, Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2022) reported dramatic declines among 15-year-olds, with mathematics scores dropping by about 15 points and reading scores by 10 points compared to previous cycles. Shockingly, nearly one in every four learners was classified as a low performer in core subjects, despite strong investments in technology and instructional resources (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023). These trends indicate that learning challenges in advanced nations may be deeper than previous assumptions. Across Africa, the situation is equally troubling and in many cases more severe, due to long-standing structural and systemic constraints. Oketch, Rolleston and Chiswick (2022) report that a large percentage of learners in Sub-Saharan Africa consistently fall below minimum proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy. Persistent issues such as limited teaching resources, overcrowded classrooms, teacher shortages and socio-economic barriers continue to negatively affect learning outcomes across the continent. Despite efforts to expand access to basic education, many pupils complete primary and junior secondary school without mastering essential skills, suggesting that declining academic performance is not only widespread but also worsening. This growing learning deficit has serious implications for national development, future workforce competence and the overall competitiveness of African nations in a global knowledge-based economy. In Nigeria, the decline in pupils' academic performance reflects and amplifies global and regional patterns. Evidence from national and state internal assessments, along with external examinations, consistently shows low pass rates in critical subjects such as Mathematics, English Language and Basic Science. Reports from the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) frequently reveal pass rates below 50% in key subjects, indicating persistent learning gaps and inadequate mastery of curriculum content (Nwankwo, 2021). Internal classroom

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assessments in many public schools also show declining scores, weak comprehension abilities, low concentration levels, and reduced motivation among pupils. These worrying trends highlight the urgent need to improve classroom practices, especially in upper basic education, where foundational academic skills are further consolidated. This situation highlights the importance of examining teachers' setting of classroom rules, as it can make or mar the academic performance of pupils in UBE schools. Teachers' setting of classroom rules appears to play a crucial role in shaping pupils' behaviour and academic performance in schools. Setting classroom rules means the process by which teachers establish clear, specific and consistent guidelines that define acceptable behaviour and expectations within the classroom (Ibuh, 2020). Ibuh further noted that these rules help pupils understand how they should conduct themselves, interact with others and participate in learning activities to maintain an orderly and productive learning environment. According to Emmer and Evertson (2017), well-defined classroom rules provide structure, reduce uncertainties and help learners understand behavioural expectations, which ultimately creates a conducive environment for learning to thrive. Marzano (2023) adds that when teachers involve pupils in establishing and consistently enforcing rules, learners develop a stronger sense of responsibility and are more likely to stay focused on academic tasks. This sense of order minimizes disruptions and maximizes instructional time, which positively influences academic performance. Likewise, Wong and Wong (2018) emphasize that clear rules and routines build predictability and classroom stability, allowing pupils to concentrate better and engage more meaningfully in learning activities. Wong and Wong further stress that pupils in classrooms with clearly communicated and consistently applied rules demonstrate higher levels of discipline, motivation and achievement compared to those in poorly managed classrooms.

Thus, setting classroom rules is not merely a behavioural control strategy but a powerful instructional tool that enhances pupils' engagement, task completion and overall academic performance and when combined with an effective classroom seating arrangement strategy, it creates a structured environment where learners can focus better, collaborate appropriately and participate more actively in learning tasks. Similarly, Mensah and Agyeman (2023) note that consistent enforcement of classroom rules fosters self-discipline and accountability among learners, allowing teachers to dedicate more time to instructional activities rather than managing behavioral issues. Classroom rules thus create an environment where learners can participate actively, engage meaningfully with lessons and collaborate effectively with peers, which collectively enhances academic performance. Mensah and Agyeman, further note that inconsistent, ambiguous, or poorly enforced rules can result in confusion, misbehavior and disengagement, undermining both instructional delivery and pupil achievement. Nwankwo (2020) further asserts that when learners perceive classroom rules as unfair or unpredictable, their motivation declines, leading to reduced participation, inattentiveness and lower academic outcomes. Therefore, the establishment of clear, consistent, and fair classroom rules is fundamental to creating a conducive learning environment that maximizes both learner engagement and overall academic success. Teachers' involvement of students in the rule-setting process further enhances compliance and learning outcomes. According to Agu (2023), when learners participate in establishing classroom rules, they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility, which fosters intrinsic motivation to adhere to guidelines. This participatory approach also encourages negotiation, respect for peers, and accountability, all of which contribute to a positive learning climate and improved academic results. The manner in which classroom rules are enforced plays a crucial role in shaping learners' academic outcomes, as it directly influences their behaviour, motivation and engagement. Studies conducted by Adesina and Nwankwo (2021); Okafor & Ibe (2022) have shown that rules enforced fairly, consistently and with appropriate consequences promote self-discipline, strengthen positive behaviour and create an enabling environment for effective learning. In contrast, punitive, inconsistent or excessively rigid enforcement practices often generate fear, resentment and disengagement among learners, thereby reducing their interest in learning and undermining academic achievement (Eze & Chukwu, 2021; Adegoke & Balogun, 2023). Effective classroom rule enforcement, therefore, requires a balanced approach that combines discipline with encouragement, enabling learners to feel both accountable and supported. Such an environment enhances active participation, concentration and academic success (Mensah & Agyeman, 2023; Dike, 2022). However, despite the recognized importance of effective classroom rule setting and enforcement, evidence suggests that its application remains inadequate in many schools. This situation is particularly worrisome given the persistent decline in learners' academic performance, especially in core subjects such as Mathematics and English, as reflected in both internal and external examinations (Nwankwo, 2024). The apparent inability of some teachers to enforce classroom rules consistently and constructively, coupled with weak teacher-learner relationships and low learner

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motivation, may be contributing to poor classroom engagement and reduced learning outcomes. If this trend persists, it could further deepen the learning deficits already evident among learners. It is against this backdrop that this study investigated the impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in Upper Basic Education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Learners' academic performance in Upper Basic Education schools remains a major concern among education stakeholders because it serves as a key indicator of the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process. In Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, reports from internal school assessments and the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) have continued to reveal unsatisfactory levels of academic achievement among learners. This persistent decline in performance raises serious concerns about classroom environment factors that may be hindering effective learning. Since the classroom constitutes the primary setting where teaching and learning take place, the manner in which teachers establish and enforce classroom rules is expected to play a significant role in promoting order, learner engagement and academic success. However, evidence from schools in the study area suggests that many learners continue to exhibit poor attention to instruction, low participation in classroom activities and various forms of disruptive behaviour that may have been responsible for the negative academic performance of learners. The situation becomes more worrisome when viewed against the expectation that clearly defined and consistently enforced classroom rules should create a conducive atmosphere for learning. In many Upper Basic Education schools in Makurdi Education Zone, classroom rules often appear unclear, inconsistently enforced or insufficiently communicated to learners, thereby weakening compliance and reducing their effectiveness in guiding behaviour. Consequently, learners may develop negative attitudes towards learning, become less engaged in instructional activities and perform below expectations academically. Despite efforts by government and other educational stakeholders to improve the quality of education through teacher training and the provision of educational resources, learners' academic performance continues to show signs of decline. This raises concern as to whether the manner in which teachers set classroom rules contributes to the academic challenges experienced by learners. It is against this background that this study investigates the impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in Upper Basic Education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Find out the impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypothesis is formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Teachers' setting of classroom rules has no significant impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria. The study also adopted a descriptive survey research design. The study population consisted of 18,599 teachers from 382 upper basic education schools. A sample of 392 teachers, from 20 upper basic education schools, using Taro Yamene sample determination formula. A multi-stage sampling procedure (purposive sampling, proportionate stratified sampling, and simple random sampling techniques) was used to select the sample size. The Teachers' Setting of Classroom Rules Questionnaire (TSCRQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A included items on respondents' personal data. Section B had Cluster I (Items 1-5) focused on impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools. The instrument was validated by three

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experts: two from the Department of Educational Foundations (specializing in Educational Management) and one from the Department of Mathematics and Science Education, all in the Faculty of Education at Rev. Fr. Moses Orshio Adasu University, Makurdi. Subsequently, the instrument underwent a trial test for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha, resulting in coefficients of 0.82, which is considered sufficiently high for the instrument to be reliable for the study. Data were analyzed using Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research question and the chi-square (χ^2) test of goodness of fit was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of Mean and Standard Deviation to answer the research question. A Mean cut-off point of 2.50 was used for decision-making. Items with a Mean score of 2.50 and above were regarded as agreed, while any item with a Mean score of less than 2.50 was regarded as disagreed. Chi-square test of goodness-of-fit was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision rule is that if $P < 0.05$ level of significant is low, the hypothesis is rejected, but if $P > 0.05$ level of significant is high, the hypothesis is not rejected. Chi-square was chosen for the test of hypotheses because it is a non-parametric statistical tool that shows the influence of two categorical variables on one another.

Presentation of Results

The data were analyzed and interpreted in response to the research question and hypothesis.

Research Question 1: What is the impact of teachers' setting of classroom rules on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria?

Table 1:

Mean Ratings and Standard Deviations of Respondents on Impact of Teachers' Setting of Classroom Rules on Learners' Academic Performance in Upper Basic Education Schools

S/No	Item Description	N	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	In my school, teachers set clear classroom rules that improve pupils' attention during lessons.	392	152	173	40	27	3.15	0.86	Agreed
2	In my school, the enforcement of classroom rules reduces disruptive behaviour that affects pupils' understanding.	392	96	200	55	41	2.90	0.89	Agreed
3	In my school, classroom rules improve pupils' ability to concentrate on academic tasks.	392	120	154	46	72	2.82	1.06	Agreed
4	In my school, classroom rules encourage punctual submission of assignments by pupils.	392	135	162	63	32	3.02	0.91	Agreed
5	In my school, classroom rules reduce off-task behaviour that affects academic performance.	392	100	181	63	48	2.85	0.94	Agreed
Cluster Mean							2.95		Agreed

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 1 shows that the mean ratings of items 1-5 are 3.15, 2.90, 2.82, 3.02 and 2.85 with the corresponding standard deviations of 0.86, 0.89, 1.06, 0.91 and 0.94 respectively. The respondents agreed that in their schools, teachers set clear classroom rules that improve pupils' attention during lessons. Respondents were also of the opinion that in their schools, the enforcement of classroom rules reduces disruptive behaviour that affects pupils' understanding. The respondents further agreed that in their schools, classroom rules improve pupils' ability to concentrate on academic tasks. In addition, the respondents also opined that in their schools, classroom rules encourage punctual submission of assignments by pupils. Moreover, the respondents agreed that in their schools, classroom rules reduce off-task behaviour that affects academic performance. The cluster mean of 2.95 was above the cut-off point of 2.50. This means teachers' setting of classroom rules have impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis One: Teachers' setting of classroom rules has no significant impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria.

Table 2:

Chi-square test of the Impact of Teachers' Setting of Classroom Rules on Learners' Academic Performance in Upper Basic Education Schools

Responses	Observed Frequency	Expected Frequency	df	Level of Sig.	χ^2	P-value	Decision
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SA	121	98.0					
A	174	98.0	3	0.05	114.755 ^a	.000	Significant
D	54	98.0					
SD	44	98.0					
Total	392						

$P=.000<0.05$; $df=3$; and χ^2 -calculated = 114.755.

Table 2 shows that $P<.05$ with 3 degrees of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis, which states that teachers' setting of classroom rules has no significant impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria, was rejected. This result clearly showed that teachers' setting of classroom rules has significant positive impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the study shows that teachers' setting of classroom rules has a significant positive impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria. This means that when teachers establish clear, well-structured and consistently enforced classroom rules, learners tend to exhibit better discipline, improved attention, higher motivation and increased participation in classroom activities, which in turn enhance their academic performance. It also implies that effective classroom rule-setting creates an orderly learning environment that supports teaching effectiveness and reduces disruptive behaviours that could hinder academic success. Conversely, where classroom rules are poorly defined or inconsistently applied, learners are more likely to become disengaged, less focused and academically underperforming. This finding agrees with that of Adesina and Nwankwo (2021) who found that well-enforced classroom rules promote self-regulation and improve learners' academic outcomes. It also aligns with Okafor and Ibe (2022) who reported that fair and consistent rule enforcement enhances learners' trust in the teacher and increases classroom participation. Similarly, Eze and Chukwu (2021) established that weak or inconsistent application of classroom rules contributes to learner disengagement and poor academic performance. The researcher therefore affirms that teachers' ability to set and enforce clear classroom rules is a critical determinant of learners' academic success, as it fosters discipline, improves classroom control and enhances effective learning outcomes in upper basic education schools.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that teachers' setting of classroom rules has a significant positive impact on learners' academic performance in upper basic education schools in Makurdi Education Zone of Benue State, Nigeria. This indicates that effective establishment and consistent enforcement of classroom rules play a vital role in improving learners' discipline, engagement and overall academic achievement. The continued presence of clear and well-implemented classroom rules suggests the strengthening of classroom order and instructional effectiveness, which may be steadily enhancing learners' academic performance and improving the overall quality of teaching and learning in the study area.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers should always establish clear, consistent and well-communicated classroom rules and ensure their effective enforcement to promote discipline, enhance learner engagement and improve academic performance in upper basic education schools.
2. Educational authorities such as the Teaching Service Board and the Ministry of Education and school administrators should provide regular training and professional development programmes for teachers on effective classroom management strategies, particularly on how to set and enforce classroom rules fairly and consistently to enhance learners' academic performance.

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