

Issues and Challenges in Classroom Management Facing Secondary School Teachers in Sri Lanka

H. M. Lalitha Kumari

Department of Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

Abstract. *The study looked into the problems secondary school teachers face and how they deal with these problems in schools across Sri Lanka. It focused on two main questions: What challenges do teachers face in managing classrooms in secondary schools? And what strategies do they use to handle these challenges? To find answers, the researcher collected data from 200 teachers. These teachers were randomly selected from secondary schools in the Colombo and Jayawardenepura Education Zones. The questionnaire, designed with a four-point modified Likert scale, was validated and its reliability confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a reliability coefficient of 0.81. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The data collected was analyzed using mean and z-test statistical methods. The analysis of the data showed that secondary school teachers in Colombo and Jayawardenepura are facing various classroom management challenges. These issues include student indiscipline, lack of adequate teaching resources, and overcrowded classrooms. However, the study also identified a number of practical strategies that, if effectively implemented, could help teachers manage and overcome these difficulties. To achieve meaningful change, there is a strong need for collaborative efforts among key stakeholders. The Ministry of Education, parents, community leaders, and students must work hand in hand with teachers. Such cooperation can lead to better classroom environments, improved student behavior, and overall enhanced teaching and learning experiences. Addressing these challenges collectively will significantly contribute to the reduction, and possible elimination, of classroom management problems in secondary schools.*

Key words: *Issues and Challenges; Classroom Management; Teachers; Solutions, secondary Schools.*

1. Introduction

Classroom management is essential because it creates a structured, respectful, and focused learning environment. Effective classroom management helps minimize disruptions, maximizes instructional time, and supports positive student behavior. This allows both teachers and students to concentrate on learning, leading to better academic outcomes and a more supportive classroom atmosphere. Classroom management is widely recognized as one of the most challenging aspects of the teaching profession. Many teachers find it difficult and, at times, discouraging due to the complexity of maintaining order while ensuring productive learning takes place. According to Tella, Ajayi, and Olowoye (1990), as cited in Arogundade (2009), classroom management refers to the techniques and strategies employed by teachers to guide students in effectively utilizing available resources to meet the educational goals and objectives of the school system. This aligns with Isuku's (2018) assertion that the teacher, as a manager, bears the primary responsibility for ensuring the efficient use of both human and material resources within the school. Effective classroom management not only promotes

a positive learning environment but also directly impacts student achievement and teacher satisfaction.

Effective classroom management is very important because it helps teachers keep students focused and engaged in learning. When teachers manage their classrooms well, they can use time wisely, maintain consistency, and create a positive learning environment. According to Wickramanayake (2022) and Kumari (2022), classroom management involves both teachers and students using available resources to reach the goals of the education system. Wang et. al. (2025) also pointed out that poor classroom management makes it hard for teachers to teach effectively. This often leads to student distractions and disruptions during lessons. When students are not properly guided, they may lose interest and become less motivated to learn. Even though classroom management is essential, many teachers still face difficulties handling different student behaviors, maintaining discipline, and managing time. Good classroom management not only supports learning but also reduces stress for teachers and helps improve student performance. Wickramanayeka et al. (2022) identified seven core challenges that teachers commonly face in the classroom. These represent the most fundamental struggles teachers encounter in their daily teaching environments. Disruptive behaviours & noise control, large class sizes & overcrowding, diversity in student needs, Student motivation, engagement & attention span, different levels of intelligence, technology integration & distractions, poor seating arrangement, time constraints & pacing the lesson, Inconsistent rules & discipline, teacher stress, burnout & workload, absenteeism & lack of participation, limited resources / material support.

Improving the quality of education around the world depends not only on the commitment of all stakeholders of teachers, parents, school leaders, and governments but also on how well classrooms are managed. Effective teaching and learning cannot take place in a poorly managed classroom. A well-organized, safe, and engaging classroom environment helps students focus, feel supported, secured and achieve better results. Therefore, it is very important for teachers to be trained in modern classroom management strategies. From small rural schools to large urban classrooms, managing student behavior, time, and resources properly is key to creating a positive learning classroom. In today's diverse and often technology-driven classrooms, teachers also need to know how to handle mixed abilities, online distractions, and different learning needs. Good classroom management not only supports better learning outcomes but also reduces teacher stress and improves the overall school climate.

As highlighted by Wickramanayake (2022) to manage a classroom effectively, teachers can use several practical strategies that help create a positive and organized learning environment. One important strategy is setting clear rules and expectations from the beginning, so students know what behavior is acceptable. This helps in building bond, trust and fairness. Teachers can also use routines for daily activities, which help save time and reduce confusion. Building strong relationships with students by showing respect, listening to their concerns, and encouraging participation makes students feel valued and more willing to cooperate. Positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards for good behavior, can motivate students to stay on task. Additionally, using engaging teaching methods, such as group work, games, or hands-on activities, helps keep students interested and reduces chances of misbehavior. Further, effective classroom arrangements promote interaction and ensure visibility. Combining these strategies would support in creating a supportive classroom environment where both teaching and learning can succeed.

2. Statement of the problem

The way students and teachers interact in the classroom mostly depends on how well the teacher leads and manages the classroom. A teacher's ability to foster a positive classroom climate directly impacts student morale, behavior, and discipline. In secondary schools, this becomes even more critical, as students are at a complex stage of development and come from diverse cultural, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds. In Sri Lanka, classrooms often consist of students with varying learning abilities, home environments, and attitudes toward education, which can create significant challenges for teachers. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, behavioral issues, or disengagement if teachers failed to properly manage the classroom. As such, it is essential to explore how secondary school teachers in Sri Lanka are managing these challenges, what strategies they use, and how

effective they are in creating supportive learning environments for their students. Conducting a study on this topic is vital, as it can reveal gaps in teacher training, highlight successful practices, and inform future policy or professional development efforts. Eventually, improving classroom management contributes not only to better academic outcomes but also to student well-being and teacher job satisfaction across the education system.

3. Research Questions

In order to achieve the main aim of this research, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What types of classroom management challenges do teachers encounter in secondary schools?
2. What strategies can teachers use to effectively address and overcome these classroom management challenges in secondary schools?

4. Research Method

This study adopted a survey research design, which is widely used in educational research for gathering data from a large population within a limited timeframe. The purpose of the study was to gather relevant information about the classroom management challenges faced by teachers in secondary schools, as well as the strategies they use to overcome these challenges in public secondary schools in Sri Lanka.

The target population for the study included all teachers working in public secondary schools across the Jayewardenapura and Colombo education Zones. A total of 200 teachers were selected using the simple random sampling technique, ensuring that each teacher had an equal chance of being included and reducing potential bias in the sample.

Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire focused on identifying key issues and challenges related to classroom management in secondary schools. To capture the teachers' opinions, a four-point Likert scale was used, consisting of: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was validated through face and content validity, ensuring that the items accurately reflected the intended topics. Additionally, the Cronbach Alpha method was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire, resulting in a coefficient value of 0.81. According to standard reliability benchmarks, any coefficient above 0.7 is considered acceptable, so a value of 0.81 indicates that the instrument was highly reliable for the study.

The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the selected teachers and successfully collected all 200 completed responses, which ensured full participation and strengthened the credibility of the findings. For data analysis, mean scores were used to answer the research questions. The following values were assigned to the scale responses:

Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1

To interpret the results, a cut-off mean score of 2.50 was set. Any item with a mean of 2.50 or above was considered accepted or agreed upon by the respondents, while items scoring below 2.50 were considered rejected or disagreed with. This method allowed for a clear and straightforward analysis of teachers' opinions and experiences regarding classroom management.

5. Study Findings

5.1 Description of demographic characteristics of the secondary level school teachers

The study revealed that the age range of secondary level school teachers was 32 to 58 years. The average age was 35 years. Out of 200 sample units of 152 teachers who responded, were female and 48 were males. Majority (88.50%) of the teachers had a Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE). Teaching experience ranged from 2 to 25 years with an average teaching experience of 15 years (SD = 6.42).

Research Question 1; What types of classroom management challenges do teachers encounter in secondary schools?

Table 5.1: Classroom management challenges teachers face in secondary schools (Mean scores)

S/N	Items	Teachers Opinion	Decision
1.	Overcrowded Classrooms Leading to High Noise Levels	3.87	Accepted
2.	Limited Physical Space Resulting in Poor Seating Arrangements	3.90	Accepted
3.	Teachers Handling Mixed-Ability Learners Without Adequate Support	4.25	Accepted
4.	Lack of Adequate Time and Resources for Lesson Planning	2.11	Rejected
5.	Excessive Teacher Responsibility Beyond Academic Instruction	2.15	Rejected
6.	Teachers Playing Multiple Roles Simultaneously	3.98	Accepted
7.	Minimal Collaboration and Teamwork Among Students	3.25	Accepted
8.	Overloaded and Rigid Curriculum Demands	4.25	Accepted
9.	Persistent Challenge of Managing Large Class Sizes	4.66	Accepted
10	Disruptive students' behaviors & noise control	4.24	Accepted
11	High level of absenteeism & lack of participation for lessons	3.78	Accepted
Section Mean		3.67	Accepted

In Table 1 above, all items except item 4 and 5 recorded mean scores of 3.25 and above, with an overall section mean of 3.67. This clearly indicates that the majority of teachers agreed that these represent genuine classroom management challenges they regularly face. The consistent high scores reflect a shared experience among teachers regarding issues such as overcrowding, mixed-ability learners, and multitasking beyond their teaching role. However, item 4 which states that "Lack of Adequate Time and Resources for Lesson Planning " received a lower mean score, suggesting disagreement. This may be because teachers view lesson preparation as a core professional responsibility, and admitting a lack of time to plan adequately could be perceived as neglecting a fundamental duty. Also, many teachers still try to make time for lesson planning, even with their heavy workloads, which may be why they are less likely to see this as a major challenge. Item 5, "Excessive Teacher Responsibility Beyond Academic Instruction" also received a lower mean score, suggesting disagreement. This may be because teachers often see responsibilities beyond academic instruction such as mentoring, providing emotional support, and addressing students' personal challenges as part of their broader role in shaping personality of a child. As a result, they may not perceive these added duties as troublesome, even though they contribute significantly to their workload and stress levels.

The second research question of this study was to identify strategies teachers use to effectively address and overcome classroom management challenges in secondary schools?

Table 5.2: Strategies teachers use to effectively address and overcome classroom management challenges in secondary schools (Mean Score)

S/N	Items	Teachers Opinion	Decision
1	Teachers demonstrating expertise in their subject areas	3.00	Accepted
2.	Use of appropriate instructional materials to support learning	3.65	Accepted
3.	Teaching with appropriate and varied methodologies	3.85	Accepted
4.	Ensuring teachers are audible and communicate clearly	4.00	Accepted
5.	Promoting respect for student rights and dignity	4.00	Accepted
6.	Avoiding all forms of bullying, intimidation, or abuse	3.97	Accepted
7.	Knowing students by their names and recognizing their	4.00	Accepted

	individuality		
8.	Having adequate time for thoughtful lesson planning	4.00	Accepted
9.	Establishing clear classroom rules and expectations	4.00	Accepted
10.	Building a strong and consistent classroom structure	3.86	Accepted
11	Making the lessons more interactive by adding activities	3.75	Accepted
Section Mean		3.82	Accepted

In Table 2 above, all items (1–11) recorded mean scores above 2.50, with an overall section mean of 3.82, indicating a strong level of agreement among teachers regarding the effectiveness of the listed strategies for overcoming classroom management challenges in secondary schools in Sri Lanka. This suggests that these strategies are not only recognized as practical but are also considered relevant and applicable within the current educational context. The high section mean reflects a shared professional agreement that, when these strategies are properly implemented, teachers can significantly enhance classroom discipline, student engagement, and quality of teaching effectiveness.

This outcome implies that teachers are not only aware of the strategies but are willing to accept them as practical solutions to common classroom management issues such as student misbehavior, lack of participation, poor time management, and disruptive learning environments. It is therefore, teachers, and school administrators' responsibility to make sure these strategies are put into practice in their everyday teaching. Doing so will contribute to a more structured, respectful, and productive classroom atmosphere, ultimately leading to improved academic outcomes. The section mean of 3.82 further reinforces the credibility and applicability of the strategies discussed, confirming that they are both research-based and grounded in the practical experiences of teachers.

6. Conclusion

Teachers in the Jayewardenepura and Colombo Education Zones undeniably encounter a wide range of classroom management challenges, including student indiscipline, lack of engagement, limited resources, and overcrowded classrooms. However, these challenges can be addressed. By applying appropriate strategies, teachers can take control of their classrooms and foster a supportive and productive learning environment. Success in this regard depends not only on the commitment of teachers but also on the active support of key stakeholders including the government, Ministry of Education, parents, local communities, and the students themselves. When each party fulfills its responsibilities, such as providing adequate resources, enforcing supportive policies, promoting positive behavior at home, and encouraging mutual trust and respect in schools teachers are better positioned to implement effective classroom management techniques that lead to improved student outcomes and overall school performance.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following actionable recommendations are proposed to improve classroom management in secondary schools within the Jayewardenepura and Colombo Education Zones:

Teachers should apply diverse and effective teaching methodologies.

Teachers should demonstrate mastery of their subject areas.

Adequate time should be allocated for lesson planning.

Teachers should use appropriate and varied instructional materials.

Teachers should respect the rights and dignity of all students.

Teachers should avoid all forms of bullying, verbal abuse, or intimidation.

Teachers should build strong classroom structures and routines.

Teachers should attempt to know their students personally.

The Ministry of Education should regulate class sizes in secondary schools.

The Ministry of Education should review and streamline the curriculum.

Students should be encouraged to build a spirit of teamwork and collaboration.

Parental and guardian involvement is essential in supporting effective classroom instruction and promoting a smooth pedagogical process.

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