CLASSROOM CLIMATE IN THE CONTEXT OF TEACHING PRACTICES IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

Rosmawati Abdul Maing¹*, Syahruddin Mahmud²

¹Department of English Education, Universitas Bosowa Makassar, Sulawesi Selatan Indonesia
²Department of English Education, Universitas Muslim Maros, Sulawesi Selatan Indonesia

ABSTRACT
This study explores the teaching practices in junior high schools in Maros Regency, South Sulawesi Province, Indonesia that promote the development of a positive classroom climate. Interviews were used to gather the data. Twenty-four class-teachers from 12 junior high schools participated in individual semi-structured interviews. The data collected from teacher interviews were analysed using NVivo version 10. The qualitative analysis revealed that two main teaching practices influenced classroom climate namely student-teacher relationships and behavior management. Five further domains indicative of teaching practices that contributed to a positive classroom climate were positive school-home relationships, teachers’ teaching pedagogies, and positive teachers’ assumptions about student intelligence and capabilities, peer friendships, and behavioral self-control. Eight domains that hindered a positive classroom climate were also presented namely negative school-home relationships, negative teachers’ assumptions about student intelligence, student mental health, consequences and punishment, negative student interactions with peers, disruptive acts, less attendance and motivation, and students’ difficulties.

Keywords: classroom climate, teaching practices, teacher and student relationships

INTRODUCTION
The word climate refers to atmosphere, feeling, mood, sense, situation, surroundings, and conditions. When talking about classroom climate, we might briefly say that it is the atmosphere of a classroom which influences the feeling or mood of students who are in the classroom. The atmosphere itself is thought to be influenced by the characteristics that exist in the classroom that involve students and teachers (Sriklaub, Wongwanich, & Wiratchai, 2015; Barr, 2016). Many studies have been conducted to recognize social, behavioral and psychological characteristics in the classroom that promote students’ success (Doll, Spies, LeClair, et al., 2010; Hammer, Melhuish, Edward & Howard, 2017; Konold, Cornell, Jia, & Malone, 2018). Thus, classroom climate is considered as a perception of the socio-emotional functioning of a class group. This perception is
recognized by Doll, Spies, LeClair, et al. (2010) as being shaped by relationships (peer, teacher-student and home-school), student self-efficacy, behavioral self-control, self-determined learning, and patterns of social interaction, including the presence of peer conflict.

This is a study of classroom climate in the context of junior high schools in Maros. The purpose of this study is to better understand the ways in which classroom climate, with its emphasis on students’ relationships with teachers, peers, and family, influences students’ prosocial behavior, learning engagement, and academic achievement. The concept of classroom climate usually covers a range of aspects such as friendship, trust, safety, respect, caring, teacher relationship, social growth, and cohesiveness (Doll, Spies, Champion, et al., 2010; Sudla, Wongwanich, & Sriklaub, 2020; Khalfaoui, Garcia-Carrion, & Villardon-Gallego, 2021).

Many studies show that classroom climate strongly influences student prosocial behavior, classroom engagement and academic achievement in western and non-western countries (Guo, Zhou, & Feng, 2018; Kuang, Kennedy, & Mok, 2018; Montero, López, Martínez, & Moreno, 2021). Relationships, as an element of classroom climate, have been recognized by literature as an essential domain in fostering behavior, classroom engagement, and academic achievement (Barr, 2016; Rucinski, Brown & Downer, 2018; Guo, Zhou, & Feng, 2018). The other elements of classroom climate will be discussed in the literature review. It is my intention to explore the teaching practices that promote positive classroom climate in Maros.

METHOD

The method of this study includes the research procedures that cover site and participant selection, data collection, data analysis. The data were analyzed qualitatively using Nvivo Software. These are the steps of how the qualitative data were generated, defined, and analyzed. Firstly, the interview results were partially transcribed. Following this the transcripts were translated from Indonesian language to English. Ten of the 24 transcripts were fully translated from introduction to the end. The rest of the transcripts were partly translated. The translated transcripts were then imported to the NVivo file. This software was used as a tool to help organize qualitative data, and run the analysis in order to see the patterns of the issues (Bazeley, 2009; Richards, 2005).

I read all of the interview transcripts. I read them through line by line, and paragraph by paragraph. Then I underlined the key ideas and made some notes next to the paragraphs. After reading through the transcripts and making some notes, these were compared with the transcripts. The categories of topics were formulated using an inductive approach. The names of the categories were revised several times and the literature was again reviewed regarding teaching practices and relationships. The themes or categories were then grouped. Briefly, both
inductive and deductive approaches in exploring the concepts were used (Casula, Rangarajan, & Shields, 2021).

Before the analysis process started, nodes of the themes or categories were created and defined. Defining the categories was helpful to make my coding more consistent. Many different sources relating to the definition of the categories were studied in order to build an understanding of the terms. The appropriate definitions of the categories for the research context were then determined.

The next process was coding including revising and refining the coding. The following step was creating interviewees’ attributes or demographic indicators that would enable me to run further analyses such as making comparisons when and if needed. The qualitative data was then explored by creating models of each main category. From the NVivo models, the main categories could be seen and how they were connected to their sub-categories. The models provided a general picture of the issues emerging from the data. The charts of the coding for each class were explored. This process allowed me to choose how many categories I wanted to display in charts. In this analysis, I chose 30 categories since there were 30 main categories. Hence, I could see the picture of the teaching practices from each class. After identifying the most frequently raised issues or themes mentioned by each class teacher, the references of each theme were examined again to see how many participants commented on these themes.

Interviews were conducted individually in the form of an unfolding conversation rather than a structured question-answer interview or interrogation. The interviews focused on teaching practices, relationships, and classroom climate. Before the interview began, it was explained to the teachers that the interview was about classroom climate, including aspects such as teachers’ relationships with students, students’ relationships with their peers or classmates, and students’ behaviors in the classroom. In these interviews, class teachers were respected as valued and experienced colleagues. No answers were regarded as right or wrong and later questions depended upon their answers to earlier questions.

The teachers were free to choose a convenient place for them to be interviewed as well as the time. Mostly the interviews were conducted at school. Two of them preferred being interviewed in their homes. At the conclusion of the class teacher interviews, participants were warmly thanked for their contribution and told their collaboration and contribution would be recognized and was crucial importance to this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings highlighted the teaching practices that promote a positive classroom climate including teacher-student relationships, managing students’ behavior, and group work as a teaching method. The findings also pointed some domains that supported positive teaching practices and classroom climates, as well as the domains that hinder positive teaching practices and classroom climates.
Teaching Practices that Promote the Development of a Positive Classroom Climate

The results of the qualitative data analysis showed three main domains of teaching practices that promote the development of a positive classroom climate. The three domains were teacher-student relationships, managing students’ behavior, and group work as a teaching method.

Teacher-Student Relationships

There were eight sub-themes emerging from the data about relationships: being friends with students, parenting, providing advice and suggestions, equity, care, fostering close relationships, trust and respect. Then the eight themes were merged into four themes of care, fostering close relationships, trust and respect as shown in Figure 4.1. The reason for merging these into four themes was that some themes covered other themes. For example, being friends with students, parenting, and providing advice and suggestions are related to the theme of care. Equity could be included with either respect or trust. Most of the class teachers indicated that they showed care for their class-students, fostered close relationships among students and their classmates, and gained trust, and respect. Relationships, as shown in Figure 4.1, are the main theme of the four sub-themes. In the following sections, relationships are explained based on these sub-themes.

This is an example of teacher-student relationships that indicates a teacher’s care. It was given by T1 as follows:

I gave them attention such as listening to their complaints when they had problems. I asked them how they learnt at home, how their homework was, whether they could do it well or not. I also provided a control book to check their attendance and the cleanliness of their classroom (T1).

In this quotation, teacher T1 appeared to show care in two ways. She focused on each student as a person as she tried to recognize students’ problems that might not be related to their academic performance. Also, she focused on students as learners as she tried to give recognition to the students’ learning at home, and whether their learning tasks were too challenging for them. When this teacher said, ‘I also provided a control book to check their attendance and the cleanliness of their classroom’, this can be viewed as providing routines as well as
caring. The purpose of checking students’ attendance regularly is to avoid a high rate of students’ absenteeism, which could impact on their learning.

This another example of a teacher-student relationship that indicates care.

I usually sat next to the students, and then I asked them which one they don’t understand. For example, they said, ‘Miss, I don’t understand this because I don’t have a dictionary.’ I replied, “Ok, I’ve got a dictionary and you can borrow it.” “Miss, I get confused how to use this dictionary.” Then I showed him how to use the dictionary. Some students haven’t known how to use a dictionary properly. “Now what is else your problem?” (T17).

Teacher T17 indicated that she provided care in an instructional context. By asking individual students about their problems or difficulties in doing classroom tasks, she was aware of individual students’ needs, and this was an indicator of care. To sum up, teachers showed care both in instructional contexts and non-instructional contexts (relationship outside the classroom). Teachers’ care can be counted as positive relatedness support. Relatedness support has been recognized as an important aspect for promoting students’ learning interest and engagement (Ellerbrock, et al., 2015; Maulana et al., 2016; Ransom, 2020). The teaching practices of the two teachers might represent many other teachers.

Ellerbrock, et al. (2015) and Newcomer (2018) define teachers’ care as teacher behaviors derived from the need for relatedness to improve or maintain the quality of interpersonal relationships among teachers and students. That is, teachers’ care is an indicator of the quality of the relationships between teachers and students. Thus, care exists in interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. Teachers’ care helps their students to engage in classroom activities. Students are more motivated to actively participate in classroom activities, and they are more cooperative when they feel that teachers care about them (e.g. Pedler, Hudson, & Yeigh, 2020).

The elements of teacher-student relationships such as care, fostering close relationships, trust and respect are essential indicators of quality of relationships. We learn from experience that when somebody cares for and respects us, we feel valued, important, loved, and happy. When we feel valued, important, loved, and happy, we will feel more motivated to learn, work or do positive things. Teachers should provide a model of how to respect others, for example, by avoiding humiliation and judgement, and listening to what each individual says (Narinasamy & Logeswaran, 2015; Porter, 2016; Thompson, 2018). These are ways to build respect in teacher-student relationships, and this will support a positive classroom climate. When teachers show care and respect to their students, the students will feel connection and belonging, and this will result in trusting relationships between teachers and students. Trusting relations are the basis of a comfortable and supportive classroom climate, where students will be more motivated to engage in classroom activities. This in line with Maulana, et al. (2016) that relatedness support influenced Indonesian students’ autonomous motivation.
Managing Students’ Behavior
The class teachers mentioned a variety of ways of managing students’ behavior. Figure 4.2 shows five ways the teachers said they dealt with students’ difficult behaviors. These were giving advice, asking questions and talking with students, seeking background, reporting to the class teachers, reconciling students (resolving conflicts and disputes). These themes are explained and discussed in this section. In addition, routines and rules are also included in this figure since they relate to student behavioral management.

Figure 2 Managing students' behavior

The majority of teachers spoke of using ‘giving advice’ as a way to manage their students’ behaviors. An example was given by teacher T4:

I think the child did not feel confident. I did the opposite from before. I approached the child who was not confident or kept away from his classmates. Actually, his classmates wanted to accept him but he himself avoided them. Thus, I gave the child some advice, ‘You should communicate with your friends. If you stay alone or keep away from them, you will find a difficulty making progress in your study. So, you need to interact with them. (T4)

This teacher wanted to help a student who had isolated himself from the others due to lack of confidence. The advice that the class teacher gave to this student can be counted as an encouragement in solving the problem. She understood the importance of positive peer relationships, and believed that students’ positive relationships with peers would influence their academic success.

While giving advice was most frequently mentioned to manage students’ behavior, the teachers did not mention why this was preferred. However, some teachers considered that giving advice might be effective for some students, but it might not fit others. Giving advice seemed to be the first step in managing students’ behavior by problem solving or it might be the second option after asking questions, so before the other methods were implemented, the class teachers provided advice to their students. When this failed to solve the problem, another way would be taken such as reporting to the class teachers or counsellors. Teacher T4 commented that she gave advice and encouragement to her student who used to isolate himself from his classmates so that he could make friends.
This indicates that the teacher cared and wanted to support the isolated student. Some studies have pointed out that advice may be seen as helpful and caring expressions would be recognized as social support (Zhu, Cai, Leung, & Hu, 2020).

**Group Work as a Teaching Method**

There were no specific questions asked in the interviews with class teachers which were directly associated with teaching methods or group work. However, class teachers talked about some different teaching methods such as individual work, with group work the most frequently mentioned. Based on the teachers’ explanations, I concluded that the teachers had two main reasons for implementing a group work. Some of them implemented group work purposely, because they wanted to establish positive peer relationships among the students in the classroom, and promote social development. This is an example of the purpose of giving a group work to students as mentioned by teacher T11:

> Usually, the same group would be used twice so that this would allow them to have better team work. They would be getting close each other. In the group work, they learnt how to socialise with others who have different characters or personalities. If they are not accustomed to socialising with different people, in the future they will have difficulties because they will be in society. For example, when I was still a small kid, I was familiar with different types of people. Thus, I don’t have any difficulties working with different people. I don’t want my students to find difficulties in the society. (T11)

Teacher T11 explained she used group work to encourage the students to work together. She wanted to foster a close relationship among the group members. She believed that through team work, the students would practice how to work with other people in their society. This teacher appeared to believe that how to socialize with other people needed to be taught since it influenced students’ social development, and this could be done through group work. This is another example of giving group work to students as explained by teacher T21:

> The group consisted of 4 or 5 people. Sometimes I grouped them based on their name listed in the roll book. Sometimes I did it randomly. So, the group members were not always the same. If they formed their own group, usually they would pick the same persons, their best friends. (T21)

Teacher T21 wanted her students to work with different people every time they had group work. Therefore, she used different ways of forming the groups such as based on their names, their chair position and so on. This enabled students in the classroom to work with all peers; and by doing so, close relationships among the students would be fostered.

Effective group work will contribute to a positive classroom climate. When teachers group students that consist of capable and less capable students in a group, the capable students can assist the weak students, and share knowledge with the others. Besides, in group, students learn how to be tolerant and respect
others who have different opinions and socialize with other people. Literature in this field has highlighted that not only is group work an applicable way to learn a topic, but it also impacts on students’ interpersonal skills development. In relation to this, Cowie, Smith, Boulton, & Laver (2018) claimed group work in the classrooms as an effective way to avoid attitude problems among peers; group work can increase relationships in the classroom, reduce bullying and peer rejection.

Domains that Support Positive Teaching Practices and Classroom Climate

In this section, the domains that support positive teaching practices and classroom climate including school-home relationships, assumptions about intelligence and academic capabilities, assumptions about mental health, teachers’ pedagogies, peer friendship, and self-determination that were discussed by the teachers.

Positive school-home relationships

This section is about teachers’ relationships with students’ parents or guardians. Positive relationships between school and home will influence teachers’ practices. Teacher T2’s discussion showed positive relationships between teachers and students’ parents. Teacher T2 explained her positive relationship with her student and the student’s parent:

Their response was good. They felt glad…So, the parent did not know that her child rarely came to school. Another student that I visited was because she was sick. Her parent was very glad when we visited her. …Their house was very far from the school, and I was taken by one of my students. He offered me a lift using his motorcycle. The access to go there was quite hard. The roads were not smooth but rough.” When I went back, the parent gave me a whole chicken (laughing). (T2)

Teacher T2 mentioned her relationships with the student and the parents. This teacher appeared to have two reasons for visiting students’ home or parents. She visited the parent because the student had a school attendance problem. The teacher wanted to let the parent know and talk about the solution. Not all parents have a home phone number or contact number, especially those who live in a remote area. In Indonesian culture, face to face communication is considered a more polite and effective way than other ways such as phone lines and emails. When we want to talk about something very important, it will be more respected if we use face to face communication. I consider that this is a reason why many teachers still use ‘visiting parents’ as a preference. Another reason for teachers to visit students’ home is because they wanted to give social and emotional support for example when a student got sick, and it was a manifestation of her care and respect for the student. When she visited the student’s home which was located far away with challenging roads, the parents could understand that the teacher cared for their daughter so that they gave something to the teacher to appreciate.
the teacher’s visit. This was an expression of respect from the parent, and they might also feel that the teacher respected them.

To sum up, when teachers show care, trust, and respect to parents, the parents will probably feel comfortable, happy, and have positive feelings about school and their children’s learning. Thus, they might increase their involvement such as helping their children with their homework, motivating their children to learn and attending their classes, as well as behaving well to others. The teachers’ comments show they see positive relationships with parents as valuable. Parental involvement can positively influence students’ motivational constructs, for example, school engagement, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, autonomy, self-regulation, and mastery goal orientation (Jaiswal, & Choudhuri, 2017; De Silva, Khatibi, & Azam, 2018; Silinskas, & Kikas, 2019).

**Teachers’ Teaching Pedagogies**

With regard to teachers’ teaching pedagogies, the teachers pointed out some important aspects. For example, they mentioned the need to link the lesson to the students’ real contexts. The teachers were aware that it is important to make the lessons interesting. They suggested evaluating the lesson contents and the students’ academic progress. The need to link the lesson to the students’ real contexts and making the lesson interesting, were discussed by teacher T5. Teacher T5 explained:

> Obviously, we had to be able to teach as the curriculum requested. Therefore, personally I had to keep learning because I had to give examples. The examples had to be real, such as when the material taught regarding relationships or social contact, I had to provide them an example of what ‘relationships or contact’ meant, and so on. Hence, the students would understand the concept fully. Teachers have to be able to provide contextual examples, not only depend on text books. What we found in the text books, we still had to develop. (T5)

Teacher T5 appeared to believe that teaching by contextual learning was very important because it would help students to link the lesson to their real lives. Hence, students will see that the lesson was meaningful, and therefore would be more motivated to learn. Teacher T5 also believed teachers should be creative in developing their lessons and the need to update their knowledge for example, in terms of content pedagogies.

To sum up, linking the lessons to the students’ real contexts indicate that the teachers were aware of the importance of considering relevant or contextual instructions and making the lessons interesting. Thus, the students would see that what they were learning was relevant to their real world. This way could promote intrinsic motivation to students. Similarly, making the lessons interesting would also promote students’ motivation. The literature has suggested the need for teachers to evaluate the curriculum (Adin-Surkis, 2015). For example, teachers should evaluate whether the needs of students are met and whether the tasks are appropriate and stimulating for students (Dorgu, 2015).
Teachers’ positive assumptions about intelligence and academic capabilities

Teachers had different assumptions about intelligence and academic capabilities. The way teachers view students’ intelligence and academic capabilities is very important, and recognizing students’ capabilities and talents is critical to support their learning. The following quotations represent this assumption:

I found a child, when I was teaching English in Year 7. He just kept silent. I gave him a verbal question, but he did not answer it. I ignored him, in the sense that the students that I usually paid attention to were troubled students who were naughty, and had low academic achievement, and good students. I didn’t pay special attention to average ones so that I didn’t give special attention to him. So, when I was teaching English, he was quiet. He was different from his classmates, so I did not know if he was a smart child. Every time he did a test, he achieved a good grade. I thought he was cheating. One day I accidentally noticed him working on a reading task. Apparently, the boy was good at written tests. Since then, I give him more attention than ever before. Now he's getting smarter. So, we cannot directly judge if students are less intelligent simply because they talk less. Luckily it was not too late. I nearly did not develop his talents. Maybe there was another factor that made him unable to communicate well. (T16)

Teacher T16 perceived that it was essential to recognize students’ academic abilities and talents. Being quiet does not always mean that students are average. They might have great potential waiting to be developed. These quotations convey a strong message that teachers have to know all of their students very well, and give them much attention to recognize their capabilities and talents. The attention should not only be addressed to the challenging students, and capable students but also to the average and quiet students, otherwise, students may miss out if they are not ‘smart’ or demand attention.

Recognizing students’ capabilities and talents is very important because teachers’ practices are influenced by their assumption. This example can be seen in the quotation from teacher T16. Her assumption about the importance of recognizing students’ capabilities and talents might impact on these teachers’ practices influences the students’ motivation, self-efficacy, teacher-student relationship, and achievement. These variables influence a positive classroom climate. Coleman (2016) suggested that it was critical to use appropriate approaches and tools in order to recognize students’ strengths and nurture them. He further stated that the efforts had to be supported and could only be sustained by the creation of an infrastructure which included resources, professional development, and policy.

Positive student interaction: peer friendship

Peer friendship is a positive student interaction. It is one of the domains which support a positive classroom climate. The following quotations are the examples about friendship among students:
I didn’t find any students who looked unhappy in my class. In the first days of school, it usually happened. It was because they hadn’t known to each other. (T22)

Sometimes at the break time I walked around the school to see if there were students in the classroom, and if there were students, what they were doing. I did not find any students who looked gloomy and had no friends in the class. They looked happy with their classmates. (T3)

Some indicators of peer friendship are care, help and guidance, companionship and recreation (Wagner, 2019; Xu, Eggum-Wilkins, & Bradley, 2020). Whether students have friends or no friends, it can be observed in the classroom, in the playground or school yard. When the teacher (teacher T3) observed her students during the break time she found that none of the students looked lonely or without friends which shows that they have companionship indicating friendship.

In relation to a positive classroom climate, friendship is one variable in a positive classroom climate. If students have a good quality of friendship, they will less likely to have peer conflicts such fighting and bullying. The research literature has recognized that a high quality of friendships will be a protective factor against victimization and bullying (Barcaccia, Pallini, Baiocco, Salvati, Saliani, & Schneider, 2018; Bianchi, Cavicchiolo, Manganelli, Lucidi, Girelli, Cozzolino, & Alivernini, 2021).

**Behavioral self-control: self-determination**

Based on the interview data, there were three categories belonging to student self-control behavior: self-determination, disruptive students, and emotional students. In this study self-determination is defined as students’ capability in managing their own learning, and it is therefore a positive self-control behavior. In terms of the disruptive student category, it will be explained in the section of characteristics that hinder a positive teaching practice and classroom climate.

A few of the class teachers mentioned some learning characteristics of students that referred to self-determination or students managing their own learning, an example was mentioned by teacher T10:

For example, last time this school ran an event, and all students were encouraged to participate. I just gave them some explanation, to the students who were from high class category, about what they had to prepare or make for the event; and surprisingly they really did it perfectly. Besides, they were good at keeping their classroom clean and neat. They cleaned and mopped their classroom floor. Before entering their classroom, they took off their shoes since they wanted to keep their classroom floor clean. Only teachers were allowed to wear shoes in the classroom. They are good at managing themselves including managing their learning. They have very high motivation to learn. Their collaboration is very good. They always show initiatives. Without asking them to do something, they already are willing. (T10)
Teacher T10 argued that students in her class were smart students who could manage themselves on all occasions including managing their own learning. They could take initiatives about what to learn and what to do. They were willing and had good collaboration with their peers. When they were given a responsibility, they were hard working (Valero-Valenzuela, López, Moreno-Murcia, & Manzano-Sánchez, 2019).

Self-determination is a critical predictor of being successful. If all students have the capability of managing their own learning, teaching will be easier for teachers. However, they do not. Therefore, teachers have to adapt teaching practices that support and enable students to manage their own learning for example, by enhancing positive relationships with them and among them, fostering positive school and home relationships, positively manage student behavior, and adopt appropriate pedagogy.

**Domains that Hinder a Positive Teaching Practice and Classroom Climate**

Some domains, important fields, seem to hinder a positive teaching practice and classroom climate namely less positive school-home relationship, negative assumptions about intelligence and academic capabilities, and students’ mental health, consequences and punishment, less positive students’ interaction with peers, less positive behavioural self-control such as disruptive acts, low students’ attendance and motivation, and students’ difficulties.

Negative school and home relationships

Positive school-home relationships supported a positive teaching practice and classroom climate, but not all students’ parents or guardians had positive relationships with their children’s schools. In this section, some examples of negative school-home relationships are explained.

A quotation regarding school and home relationships that hinder a positive classroom climate is discussed by teacher T20:

Since he was in elementary school, he and his parents had even reported one of his teachers to the police. Also, he argued with his class teacher. The student was really temperamental. Obviously, the boy is always supported by his parents whatever he does, for example, he was accompanied by his parents when he reported his teacher to the police. The teachers here work together to control the child’s emotions. (T20)

Teacher T20 provided a negative picture of home and school relationships. Teacher T20 mentioned a student and his background before coming to the junior high school. The elementary school teacher who was reported to the police had punished the student and the parents could not accept it. Since similar cases sometimes occur in other schools in Indonesia. The education system of Indonesia has banned physical punishment for students. It is clear that negative school and home relationships will not facilitate a positive classroom climate. If teachers want to discuss students’ learning difficulties, this will be hard to do because the parents are not cooperative. However, teachers need to overcome the difficult situation. Research has identified the importance role of partnership between
students’ parents and schools or teachers (e.g. Lasater, 2016). Lasater (2016) highlighted that partnerships between family and school are intended to maximize student opportunities for success.

**Teachers’ assumptions about intelligence and mental health**

This section provides discussion about teachers’ views of students intelligence and capabilities. In the previous section, teachers’ assumptions about students intelligence and capabilities have been discussed in terms of how they support a positive teaching practices and classroom climate. In this section, the discussion focuses more on how these assumptions hinder positive teaching practices and classroom climate.

Some teachers associated students’ capabilities with their basic intelligence or IQ, as discussed by Teachers T1 and T20:

> The students in this school still have low motivation. Only children with high IQ here have good motivation to learn. They don’t have internal motivation. So overall, they are still a ‘standard category’ (T1)

Some students had very low academic capability. Like the boy standing over there, he was diligent to school but his capability was very low. (T20)

Teacher T1 believed that only children with high IQ wanted to learn. This implied that if the students had quite low IQ, it would be hard to motivate them. In the second quotation, teacher T20 said that some students always came to school, but they had low academic outcomes due to their low intellectual capability. Thus, when some students did not want to learn, the teachers associated it with their poor intellectual capability. Both teachers tended to claim that students’ outcomes depended on their basic intelligence rather than their efforts. This assumption influences teachers’ teaching practices. When teachers do not see the connection between efforts and achievement, they will tend to provide less both instructional and non-instructional supports to their students. Therefore, this teaching practice hinders a positive classroom climate. Effective teachers should convince students that there is a very strong correlation between effort and achievement. In other words, the more effort they put into their learning, the higher achievement they will reach. This in line with a study conducted by Helm (2015). Helm (2015) identified determinants of students’ competence growth such as support from teachers of their basic psychological need, intrinsic motivation and academic self-concept.

Associated with mental health, some of the class teachers said that sometimes they had an emotional student in the classroom, as mentioned by Teacher T7:

> As I said, I was always close to my students when they had a trouble. Also, it depends on our attitudes to the students. When the students are in emotional, we shouldn’t be emotional. We have to see the situation; we have to know the causes of the problem. We might hold his hand and take him to a quiet place so that the other students and teachers will not listen. Then we should persuade and advise him. (T7)
Teachers T7 stated that she paid attention to her students especially when they had a problem. Teachers T7 assumed that it was important to calm down when facing a student who was emotional. In dealing with a difficult student, the teacher invited the emotional student to talk, gave him advice, and support.

Many studies have paid attention on students’ mental health (e.g. Graham, Killoran, & Parekh, 2017; Shelemy, Harvey, & Waite, 2019). Shelemy, et al. (2019) explored the training needs of teachers which enable them to support and teach their students about mental health. Graham, et al. (2017) highlighted that it was important to introduce teachers to a mental health approach, identify the teachers’ role in supporting students’ mental health and wellbeing, and to support the teachers in their efforts to help students about mental health and wellbeing. The two studies show that teachers play a critical role in supporting students’ mental health.

**Consequences and punishment**

Giving consequences was another theme related to behavioural management. Most of the teachers used consequences when they wanted to manage their classroom. Many of them saw the use of punishment as a way to control the classroom. The examples of how class teachers managed students’ behaviour by giving consequences were discussed by Teachers T2:

Yes, a couple of my students behaved so (didn't focus on learning). One of them named AD. I said to her, ‘Tomorrow you have to write one page.’ I gave her a task to write in one page as a consequence. She said, “Miss, it is too much.”

Another student liked drawing while his classmates were learning. So I gave him a task, drawing. If the activity was a group work, and needed a drawing, I gave him the job to draw. Sometimes I asked him to help me provide a picture or drawing for my teaching material as teaching media. (T2)

The first quotation showed that class teacher T2 tried to use a logical consequence (Hardin, 2012, p. 81) by asking the student who did not focus on learning to write one page about what they learnt in the class at the time. However, it might be better if the teacher had warned them before the lesson started so that the students would not reject the consequence.

We can see from the quotation that the consequences that the teacher applied were seen as punishments by the students. When students look at the consequences as punishments, they will not feel happy. If students do not feel happy, they will not be motivated to learn. Consequently, this will hinder a positive classroom climate. In relation to this, Kaltenbach, Hermenau, Nkuba, and Goessmann (2018) pointed out the importance of improving interaction competencies with children to reduce punishment. Their findings show that there were improvements in the teacher student relationships and students’ behavior.

**Negative student interactions with peers**

Many of the class teachers assumed that they had at least one student who was isolated by his or her classmates. Many of them stated that some students
tended to isolate themselves and most of them talked about peer conflicts. These
are explained in the following paragraphs.

Many of the teachers mentioned that some students were isolated or rejected by
their peers, some others tended to isolate themselves. Teachers T4 talked about
rejected students:

Yes, it also happened in my class. Usually, it was because the students’
academic capability was very low, and they came from a disadvantaged family. I
used to give advice to the other students in the class not to isolate their classmates.
I told the students that it was not their fault that they were disadvantaged children,
so don’t keep away from them. (T4)

Some of the reasons why some students were isolated or rejected were for
example: they rarely came to school or attended the class, had low academic
capability, came from a disadvantaged family, and misbehaved. In addition,
rejection used to happen when groups were formed. The quotation conveyed by
Teacher T4 showed that weak students who came from a lower economic status
background tended not to be welcomed by their classmates. The teacher tried to
solve the problem by approaching the classmates and advising them to make
friends with peers without looking at their social economic status.

In other cases, students isolated themselves for a variety of reasons. The summary
from the interviews highlighted the reasons, for example, the students lived away
from their parents and came from broken home. Also, they preferred making
friends with students from another class, and lacked due to poor family
background. Another reason mentioned was related to students’ quiet personality.

**Behavioral self-control: disruptive acts**

This section focuses on disruptive acts as a part of behavioural self-control
which hinders a positive teaching practice and classroom climate. In the previous
section, behavioural self-control which focused on self-determination was
discussed. Self-determination was discussed separately from this section because
it focused on positive behavioural self-control. Some examples from teachers’
discussions might represent how some teachers managed or reacted to students’
disruptive acts.

Some students were very disruptive in the classroom, and teachers reacted
in different ways, as discussed by Teacher T23:

I turned my attention to the disruptive children. I pointed them to the front
to answer a question on the material being done. If they were scolded, it would
result in more severe consequences.

Another example about disruptive students where the teacher responded in
more reactive ways as talked about by teacher T3:

I noticed that if we were not tough, the students here would act as they
liked. So far, I have been able to deal with the students. If there was a student
playing during the teaching and learning process, I would shout loudly at them,
“Please pay attention to the lesson.” I explained the lesson for three times, while I
kept saying, “Please pay attention.” Finally they could understand it. (T3)
The two quotations showed that disruptive students hinder a positive classroom climate. Some teachers appeared to be patient in dealing with disruptive students, some others did not. Therefore, they applied punishment when they lost their patience in dealing with these students, showing that their teaching practices did not support a positive classroom climate. Associated with disruptive students, a study has recognized that classroom disturbance requires strategies to overcome it (Mahvar, Farhani, and Aryankhesal, 2018). Mahvar, et al. (2018) conducted a systematized review in relation to strategies in dealing with disruptive behaviors in the classroom. The findings show that there are three categories of management strategies namely cooperative and problem-solving strategies, avoidance strategies and punishment strategies. But the studies mostly highlighted the use of cooperative and problem-solving strategies, and the most emphasized techniques were making effective communication with students to correct their negative behavior, training and preparing the teachers for dealing with the students’ disruptive behaviors and implementing various teaching methods and approaches based on the classroom context.

Less attendance and motivation

The majority of the class teachers indicated four main factors contributing to students’ attendance. Personal or home issues were most frequently mentioned. Three other factors including subject interest, teacher relationships, and peer relationships were also assumed by the class teachers as crucial factors that might encourage students to come to the school or vice versa as shown in Figure 4.3

![Figure 3 Characteristics influencing student attendance](image)

Most of the class teachers mentioned personal or home issues as a main factor contributing to students’ attendance at school, as an example, teacher T6 explained it

Once, there was a boy in my class who rarely came to school. I asked him why. According to him, his father had passed away, while his mother had no work so that he didn’t have money for transport fares. (T6)

Teacher T6 identified a financial difficulty as a reason for a student not coming to school. I guessed that it not only had an impact on getting to school but also on other aspects, for example, he might have low self-confidence when he saw his
classmates having recess or lunch in the canteen while he could not afford the food for himself. Consequently, he kept away from the others or did not come to school.

Some of the class teachers who gave comments on students’ attendance said that students did not attend at school or class because of subject interest reasons, as stated by teacher T23:

Others didn’t come to school because they hated certain subjects. Probably the ways to deliver the lessons were not interesting for the students. It might be also because they didn’t feel comfortable with their classmates. (T23)

This quotation recognized two reasons why some students hated certain subjects and preferred not attending the class. Some students did not join the class because of the ineffective teaching methods and unattractive classroom activities implemented. Another reason was negative relationships with peers.

The class teachers mentioned that many students were unmotivated in learning. The reasons for this situation seemed to be various. Many reasons seemed to be associated with teaching methods and classroom management. Some teachers claimed relationships as a factor influencing students’ attendance at school, as explained by teacher T9:

Usually, it is because the children don’t like the subject. They might feel that the subject is hard or boring. It is also possible that the children don’t like the teacher of the subject. Sometimes, a couple of students told me, “Miss, I don’t like the teacher because….” (T9)

In this quotation, teacher T9 showed that relationship and subject interest factors were linked to each other. The students might dislike the subjects because they did not have good relationships with the teacher. To sum up, many of the teachers said that students did not attend the school or class because of teacher relationship, for example, students were punished when they were absent from the previous lesson, or did not complete their homework. Students felt scared because they thought the subjects were too hard for them. Briefly, negative school-home relationships, subject interests, and negative relationships with teacher and peers will hinder a positive classroom climate.

**Students’ difficulties**

The teachers indicated eight difficulties of students, namely those related to family background, learning, facilities, language, lack of confidence, access to school, financial issues, health and physical issues. Family background, and financial difficulties are strongly related each other, therefore, in the diagram (Figure 4.4) they were put in the same node. Similarly, learning and language issues are also grouped in the same node as shown in Figure 4.4.
The majority of the class teachers perceived that family background and financial issues became sources of students’ difficulties. An example was discussed by teacher T14:

Perhaps their parents didn’t motivate their children to learn. One day I asked all of the students in the class about their activities every day. Only a couple of them answered that they were encouraged to study by their parents. (T14)

Teacher 14 perceived that the parents did not provide learning encouragement to their children. It was not discussed why the parents did not encourage their children to learn. I assume that it related to the parents’ own awareness of the importance of education that was usually influenced by their educational levels. Furthermore, usually educated people will provide sufficient learning supports such as books and encouragement. On the other hand, usually poorly educated and economically disadvantaged families cannot fulfil these kinds of supports, and this situation will hinder a positive classroom climate. In relation to this, some studies have revealed that children’s family background and involvement influence their engagement (Aman, Akram, Mas’ udah, Saud, & Manj, 2019; Silinskas & Kikas, 2019)

CONCLUSION

In relation to teaching practices, behavioral management is a key area in which teachers need to develop skills. Another theme associated with teaching practices was teachers’ teaching pedagogies. Teachers need be equipped with sufficient pedagogies for example, how to facilitate effective group work (cooperative and collaborative work), design engaging lesson contents for their students, and use appropriate and interesting teaching methods and evaluation. Also, teachers need support and guidance with respect to the assumptions they hold about students’ intelligence and capabilities so that they will have a well-founded basis for providing learning support for their students. Since supportive teacher-student and peer relationships contribute to a positive classroom climate, teachers need to equip themselves with good quality interpersonal and instructional skills to develop those relationships. Findings related to the self-determination indicate that it is necessary for the teachers to understand the
importance of providing high level instructional support for students in order to promote autonomy in learning. Effective instructional support also comes from understanding students including their learning difficulties and as such is an important aspect of the teacher-student relationship. When teachers understand their students’ difficulties, they will be in a strong position to give their students support, and this in turn will influence a supportive classroom climate. Finally supportive teachers will work to build positive relationships among their students with the knowledge that positive peer relationships are foundational to creating a positive classroom climate.

REFERENCES


Barr, Jason J. (2016). Developing a Positive Classroom Climate. IDEA Paper #61


Bianchi, D., Cavicchiolo, E., Manganelli, S., Lucidi, F., Girelli, L., Cozzolino, M., ... & Aliverinia, F. (2021). Bullying and Victimization in Native and Immigrant Very-Low-Income Adolescents in Italy: Disentangling the Roles
of Peer Acceptance and Friendship. In Child & Youth Care Forum (Vol. 50, No. 6, pp. 1013-1036). Springer US.


Jones, Stephanie M. & Kahn, Jennifer. (2017). The Evidence Base of How We Learn. Supporting Students’ Social, Emotional, and Academic
Development. The ASPEN Institute, National Commission, on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development.


