

# Classroom management practices of English Language Teachers: A Study of senior high schools in Agona West Municipality

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study aimed to ascertain (1) the classroom management practices of language teachers (2) the challenges in implementing the management practices and (3) the importance of classroom management to language pedagogy.

**Research methodology:** The study is qualitative. It used observation and semi-structured interview to engage 22 language teachers selected through random sampling from all the four Senior High Schools in the Agona West Municipality... 3 language class sessions were observed... The data were analyzed thematically

**Results:** It was found that teachers were aware of the relevance of classroom management in language teaching. They employed good student-teacher relationships, deference, physical organization of the classroom, and professionalism in managing the class in spite of challenges such as insufficient and ineffective teaching/learning resources, indiscipline, and large class size among others in the classroom.

**Limitations:** The use of only one approach- - makes it difficult to generalize the findings.

**Contribution:** The study extends knowledge on classroom management in the second language context, and further provides evidence and empirical data for teachers and policymakers to understand the relationship between students' academic achievement and classroom management.

**Keywords:** *Academic achievement, Classroom management, Professionalism, Students' indiscipline*

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## 1. Introduction

Classroom management remains one of the most critical concerns that pertain to education in general (Diniatulhaq, Oktaria, & Abbas, 2020). Specifically to the teaching of language, Islam (2019) asserts that classroom management is a concept whose relevance cannot be overemphasized. Successful teaching and learning go beyond the teacher's delivery and learner's reception of knowledge to include an effective management of the classroom (Rinda & Indrastana, 2020). It is therefore indisputable that the delivery of content and the management of the classroom are inseparable concepts relative to effective teaching and learning. Wahyuni (2016) emphasizes that, when there is a failure in the management of the classroom, the teaching and learning process is equally bound to fail. In fact, classroom management arguably has the largest impact, effect, or influence on the learning achievements of students (Jones & Jones, 2004; Nurhijjah, 2019). This, they believe is so because when classroom management is effectively executed or conducted, the teacher is able to minimize the (mis)conducts of both individual learners or group of learners and maximize conducts that enhance or

facilitate effective learning. McCreary and Fiore (2020) explain classroom management as the strategies and methods which a teacher adopts in order to create and maintain a classroom environment conducive enough to ensure effective teaching, learning, and general students' success. In fact, Diniatulhaq et al. (2020) further explain that the creation of a conducive learning environment is the most significant prerequisite for the effective and efficient implementation of the teaching and learning processes which optimally influences learning outcomes. Classroom management is considered to be a set of skills which an instructor should master such that s/he is able to apply them in the classroom in order to maintain a learning environment that is positive, conducive and disciplined enough to ensure the success of students in the teaching and learning process. More succinctly, Rinda and Indrastana (2020) explain classroom management as a composite of how the teacher works, how the students and the teacher collaborate, how the class works, and how teaching and learning take place. Classroom management is not just about spotting and punishing students for their misbehavior or resolving the attitudinal disorders of learners but it is rather about the strategies and actions that are put in place and used by the teacher to maintain systems and order in the classroom (Sarıçoban, 2005). This is why some scholars contend that classroom management goes beyond and is not synonymous to '*class control*' or '*class discipline*' as some other scholars insinuate.

Relative to the arguments about classroom management being synonymous to *control* or *discipline*, Rochma, Wibawa, and Basikin (2020) opine that there are two major schools of thought. These are the *behaviouristic* and *humanistic* schools of thought. The *behaviouristic* group believes that human beings are inherently deficient hence there is a need to *control* or *discipline* them. For this group, classroom management is primarily limited to the act of *managing*, *disciplining*, and *controlling* the *misbehaviour* of students. To them, the use of *punishment* is a major tool in classroom management. The *humanistic* point of view, on the other hand, contends that human beings are essentially righteous and ethical and therefore, they only need to be directed, corrected, and guided. This group does not see punishment as a major tool for classroom management but rather makes use of tools such as positive climate, organization, and encouragement. In fact, to the *humanistic* group, classroom management goes beyond effectively responding to problems that occur in the classroom to include efforts, techniques, and strategies that are put in place to prevent the occurrence of the problems frequently. O'Toole (2019) asserts that these techniques or strategies include, but are not limited to, keeping the learners organized, attentive, focused, on task, orderly, and academically productive in class. Rochma et al. (2020) corroborate the arguments projected in the two schools of thought and contend that classroom management is an amalgamation of crucial elements such as duties, structures, rules, encouragement, commitment, and motivation to create an effective teaching and learning environment.

Ekere (2006) argues that disruptive behaviors such as noise-making, reporting late to school/class, tagging and calling nicknames, sleeping in class, miscopying and not writing notes, physical or verbal threats and abuse of the teacher or colleagues, and eating in class often characterize a poorly managed classroom. These disruptive behaviors are often able to disorganize the teaching and learning process and hamper students' academic performance and achievement. Kontor (2020) contends that, through effective management of the classroom, the teacher is able to deal with the disruptive behaviors and completely eliminate or minimize them to a level where effective teaching and learning can smoothly take place. It is assumed that once the teacher is able to competently deal with disruptive behaviors in the classroom, the academic performance of students would increase and result in high or desirable academic achievement.

Halik et al. (2019) argue that effective classroom managers often turn out to become successful teachers. This implies that classroom management revolves around the teacher. It is part of the teacher's responsibility to create a positive or conducive learning atmosphere for the students to succeed. Stronge (2018) posits that different teachers have their own unique ways of managing the classroom because of the differences in personality, teacher's philosophy or school of thought, preparedness, teaching style, number, and backgrounds of learners in the classroom, among others. All these emphasise the centrality of the teacher in classroom management. In fact, Nurhijjah (2019) asserts that the classroom management skills of the teacher greatly influence learning outcomes. It

takes the teacher to initiate, maintain and execute classroom management, regardless of whatever problems or challenges he/she faces. Therefore, the teacher should understand and appreciate the relevance of classroom management in the teaching and learning process (Wahyuni, 2016). Fakhruddin, Selle, and Nurchalis (2019) contend that irrespective of how well a teacher plans his teaching, methods, techniques and materials, media, etc, the teaching and learning process cannot go as successfully as intended if the teacher does not have sufficient awareness and ability to effectively manage the class. Fakhruddin et al. (2019) believe that classroom management entails the teacher's ability to manage the complexity of the class. Espousing some of these complexities, Glasser (2019) states,

*Issues such as classroom discipline, dealing with individual differences and mixed-ability classes, organization of class work, relationships with parents, insufficient and/or inadequate teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, sitting arrangement, noise, and social and cultural activities, to name a few, usually get in the way of teachers, .... In many settings, such issues tend to constitute real challenges that all teachers must learn to cope with (pg. 53).*

Regardless of the relevance of classroom management in the teaching and learning process, it has not received much-needed attention, both in classroom practice and in research studies, especially in the context of Ghana (Henaku & Pobbi, 2017) In fact, Kontor (2020) decries that various stakeholders in the educational system have been passive and have shown little or no interest in the concept and practice of classroom management. In terms of language teaching, most of the earlier studies have focused on contexts outside Ghana and predominantly on the foreign language classroom (Babadjanova, 2020); (Burden, 2020); (Irawati & Listyani, 2020); (Macías, 2018); (Merc & Subaşı, 2015); (Rozimela, 2016).

This study focuses on the second language classroom in Ghana, using the language teachers in the Agona West Municipality as the case. The study seeks to investigate the classroom management practices of language teachers in Ghana, the challenges they face in managing the classroom, and the need for or importance of managing the classroom. The outcome of the study should not only broaden knowledge and literature on classroom management but go further to draw the attention of stakeholders of education on the need to consciously plan and execute effective management of the classroom as they do for the teaching of the lesson as both of them are equally important. In order to achieve the above objectives, the study seeks to provide empirical responses to the following questions.

1. RQ 1: What management techniques/strategies do language teachers employ in the classroom?
2. RQ 2: In the view of language teachers, what challenges hamper effective classroom management?
3. RQ 3: In the view of language teachers, how important is effective classroom management to pedagogy?

## **2. Literature review and hypotheses development**

Diniatulhaq et al. (2020) investigate the perceptions that English language teachers in three Junior High Schools in Yogyakarta hold about classroom management. The study uses the semi-structured interview as a data collection instrument. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The outcome of the study revealed that the English language teachers believe there are three aspects of classroom management. First is behavior management, where the teacher builds relationships with students, teacher applies punishments and discipline, among others. The second is instructional and curriculum management where the teacher prepares lesson plans, assessment strategies, and selects teaching and learning materials. The third is environmental management where the teacher prepares or manages the classroom environment including the arrangement of seats in the classroom, opening of doors and windows to ensure proper ventilation, and ensuring a good lighting system.

Adam-Yawson, Arkorful, Oppong-Masu, and Insaiddoo (2021) investigate the effective means by which the 200 basic school teachers in the Komenda-Edina-Aguafo-Abrem (KEEA) Municipality in

the Central Region of Ghana ensured a productive and disciplined classroom through communication. The study was a quantitative one. It combined simple and quota random sampling techniques to engage all the 200 participants. The questionnaire was the instrument used to collect data. The study uses a descriptive statistical analysis method to analyze the data. It was revealed that the communication and interactions of teachers in the classroom were generally appropriate. The study also proved that teachers are able to handle learners' misbehaviors in the classroom. The study revealed, however, that the teachers had challenges with how they interacted or communicate with the parents of the wards concerning the misbehaviors and discipline of the latter. The study, therefore, recommended that teachers should be given continuous pre- and in-service orientations.

Prystiananta (2020) also conducted a study on the classroom management techniques that English language teachers employed in managing disabled students, specifically, mentally retarded students in SMP Inklusi TPA Jember. The descriptive qualitative study uses interviews and non-participant observation as data collection instruments. The outcome of the study reveals that the teachers use three management strategies- active strategy, demonstration strategy, and modeling strategy, where the modeling strategy is the most used strategy. The study also found that out of the 7 management techniques asserted by Sárosdy, Bencze, Poór, and Vadnay (2006), the teachers used 5 and left out 2 of them. The 5 management practices were displaying professionalism, showing respect for learners, knowing the learners, applying class techniques, and positive attitude toward teachers.

Vijayan, Chakravarthi, and Philips (2016), in their study entitled, "The Role of Teachers' Behaviour and Strategies in Managing a Classroom Environment", focused particularly on how three themes, that is, interventions and rules, practical strategies and teacher behavior, are practiced in a kindergarten and a primary two classrooms in Malaysia. The outcome of the study revealed that the student-centered approach to teaching and learning is the most effective tool in classroom management. The study also revealed that;

*if the teacher has strong purposeful beliefs, high expectations, a positive friendly manner and an enthusiastic and engaging approach to teaching and learning, then the classroom will be set up for students to succeed whatever the situation or place (pg. 215).*

### **Theoretical framework**

Two major approaches of classroom management are adopted as the theoretical frameworks for the present study. The approaches are the behaviorism theory and the instructional management theory. Both approaches have their particular set of techniques that ensure the creation of a conducive learning environment for productive and successful teaching and learning process (Rochma et al., 2020).

According to Standridge (2002), the behaviorism theory argues that the consequences of one's behavior determine whether they would continue or discontinue practicing such a behavior. This theory is derived from B.F. Skinner's concept of operant conditioning. Practically, the theory teaches that the reaction of a teacher to a behavior of the student in the classroom will determine whether the child would want to continue with such behavior or stop it. When the teacher's reaction is positive or encouraging, the child may want to continue the behavior, but when the reaction of the teacher is negative, then the child may want to stop it. Rochma et al. (2020) put the possible reactions of the teacher into three; positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, and punishment. Positive reinforcement is those reactions that stimulate the recurrence of desired student behavior. Such practice includes providing well-behaved students with privileges, giving gifts, applause and awards, giving positive comments on learners' works, among others. The negative reinforcement is a means of fostering the recurrence of desired students' behaviour by taking away something that the learners do not prefer. For example, a teacher might not give the learners or postpone a class test, exercise or examination due to a positive behavior they showed. Punishment creates an unpleasant or hostile experience so that students would likely put a stop to undesirable behavior.

According to Shindler (2009), the instructional management theory emphasizes that there is a direct correlation between management and instruction. In other words, classroom management is practiced based on the instructions the teacher gives in class. This may include the teacher's instructional plans and practices, formulation of lesson plans to guide effective learning activities, and putting in place strategies that can minimize classroom management issues. Rochma et al. (2020) argue that there are five main practices in instructional management that ensure an effective teaching and learning process. The five practices are smoothness, momentum, overlapping, group focus, and withitness. The smoothness is the capacity of the teacher to remain focused, organized, and attentive to the main purpose for which the class is in session. A student's (mis) behavior does not disrupt him. The momentum is the capacity of the teacher to design, create and operationalize several learning activities in the classroom to ensure that students are able to actively participate in the lesson. Meanwhile, the overlapping is the teacher's ability to multitask or engage in several activities concurrently throughout the teaching and learning process. This helps to address the peculiar needs of individual students in the classroom. The group focus is the ability of the teacher to gain the interest or focus of the students and engage them throughout the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the withitness is the ability of the teacher to anticipate and notice potential management issues in the classroom and develop strategies to address these issues.

### **3. Research methodology**

The present study adopts the qualitative research approach as it seeks to investigate the classroom management practices that are carried out in the English language classroom. The study analyses the views of the language teachers with respect to their classroom management practices and the challenges they face when implementing the management practices. The qualitative approach is adopted because it is proven to be the best tool for carrying out in-depth examination of views, opinions, perspectives, beliefs, and subjective feelings of participants (Rochma et al., 2020).

The participants of the study are three English language classrooms (each class had an average of 60 students) and 22 English language teachers selected from the four Senior High Schools (SHS) located in the Agona West Municipality, Central Region, Ghana. The classrooms or students were spread across the three levels of Senior High education, that is, Forms 1, 2, and 3 respectively. This was to give different experiences and varied perspectives of what management practices were best suited for different levels and to ascertain whether different levels of students necessarily required different management approaches.

Two instruments were used to collect data for the study- semi-structured interviews and classroom observation with the researchers being the primary instrument as they directly contributed to collecting, categorizing, examining, and interpreting the data. Subban and Round (2015) observation checklist was adopted to observe the classroom because Rochma et al. (2020) assert that it is a tool that comprehensively seeks to affirm, encourage and build, instead of judging and criticizing the classroom management practices of the teachers. A semi-structured interview was also conducted with the teachers to corroborate the data obtained from the observation. The interview gave opportunity to the teachers to share or describe their beliefs about classroom management and confirm, deny or explain some of the information that were recorded during the observation.

The data analysis process went through three major stages- data reduction, data display, and conclusion stage (Rochma et al., 2020). At the data reduction stage, the raw data were grouped into themes, taking into consideration common patterns that emerged from the data. The type of analytic tool used was thematic analysis. This helped to reduce the data by removing all information that was not necessarily relevant to the purpose of the study. The refined data were then displayed, or examined and presented. After that, conclusions and comprehensive inferences were made.

### **4. Results and discussion**

In this section, the data gathered from the observation and the interview are corroborated and analyzed in a manner that provides responses to the three fundamental questions that underpin the

study. However, even before attempting the three major questions, data were collected on the fundamental hypothesis of the study, which is that classroom management is needful for teaching language. Figure 1 below illustrates the responses of the participants on the hypothesis.

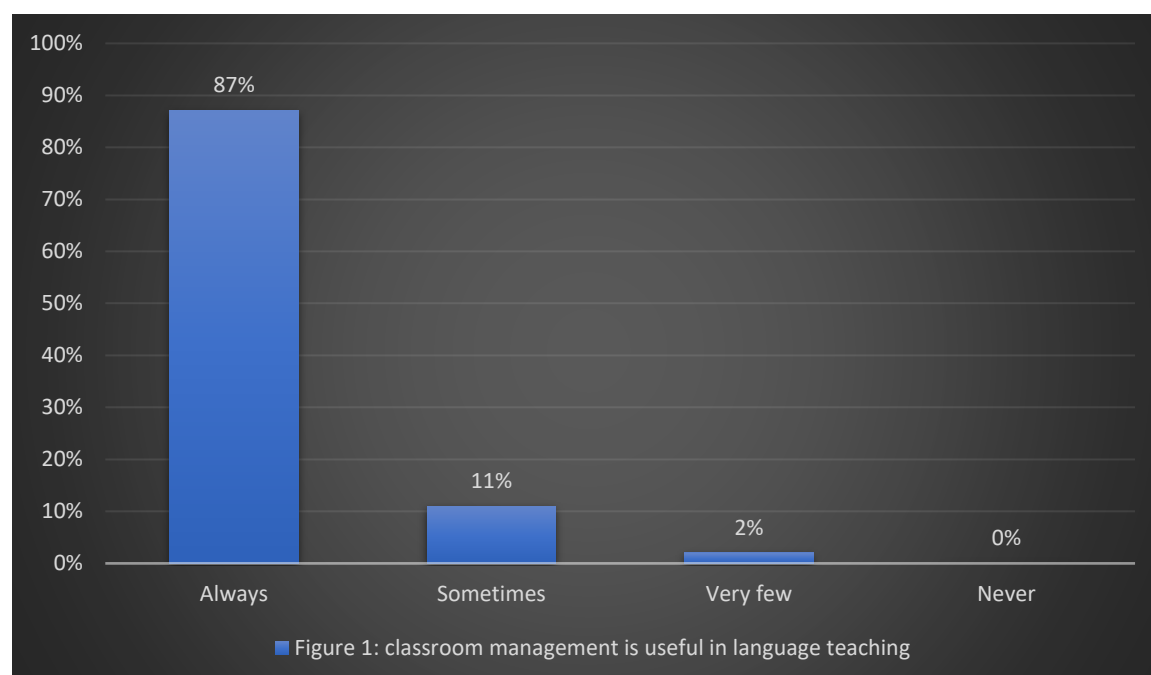


Figure 1. Classroom management is useful in language teaching  
Source: Authors' data

The outcome of the inquiry on whether classroom management is essential to language teaching or otherwise as illustrated in Figure 1 above justifies the relevance of the objectives of the study. It is clear from the opinion and observation of the language teachers in figure 1 that classroom management always plays a major role in ensuring that the teaching of language is successfully conducted. The majority (87%) of the participants believe that classroom management is 'always' essential for language teaching, 11% believe that it is 'sometimes' helpful, and 2% believe that classroom management has no significant impact on teaching and learning. On such premise where 0% or none of the participants did assert that classroom management is 'never' helpful, the researchers proceeded to establish the actual classroom management practices and the challenges.

### ***RQ 1: What management techniques/strategies do language teachers employ in the classroom?***

Data on the classroom management techniques were collected grounded on (Sárosdy et al., 2006) seven classroom management techniques. However, it was realized that five out of Sarosdy et al's seven techniques, were applied in teaching language to the senior high school students. All these five techniques were revealed from the interviews and corroborated with the researchers' own observations made on the occasions where they visited and participated in the teaching and learning process. Excerpts from the interviews are quoted to support and explain these techniques.

One of the management strategies employed in the classroom is respectfulness. The participants indicated that students normally cooperate and actively participate in the teaching and learning process when they feel that their self-esteem, ego, and self-image are not bruised or threatened. This finding is consistent with Prystiananta (2020) who also confirms that teaching and learning progress smoothly when there is mutual respect between the teacher and the student. Senior high school students are generally teenagers who are usually very particular about their self-esteem and image before their colleagues, hence, any little disregard towards them discourages them and makes them coil back. A teacher remarked,

*Everybody loves to be respected. The same applies to our students too. They are particular about their image such that they would not countenance any form of disrespect at all.*

Careful scrutiny of the data shows that the respect towards the students is illustrated in three major forms;

a) call or address students by their names or sanctioned nicknames: students love to be addressed by their real names or nicknames sanctioned by them. When they are addressed by any other name, especially names they consider derogatory, they are likely to rebel and sometimes draw the teacher's attention to the fact that they dislike such tags. This assertion concurs with the finding of Prystiananta (2020) who indicates that students love their names or, even when they are addressed with their nicknames, the teachers do so in a soft voice or low tone in order to quickly shift emphasis from their names to the intention for calling them. A participant remarked,

*My students love to be addressed by their nicknames. However, these nicknames must be sanctioned by them. You can't just call them any name and go scot-free. They will quickly step in and correct you, sometimes, in a very embarrassing manner.*

b) show gratitude or appreciation to them: the students expect that when you ask them to do something for you in the class, you show some (verbal) appreciation or gratitude towards them. Though they don't expect physical items like cash or gifts since they are aware that whatever task they perform is for the general good of the class, and not for the teacher's personal gain, they still wish that a simple 'thank you' would be afforded them. This gingers them to always readily avail themselves of tasks. A respondent had this to say:

*When you send a student or give them a task in the classroom, and you don't say 'thank you', they frown their face. In fact, the next time you need them to do something for you or for the class, they won't even avail themselves.*

c) listen to them: respecting students also includes paying attention and listening to them when they speak. Students love to be heard. In fact, even in situations where their utterances do not carry substance, they still expect the teacher to listen to them. If there is the need for the teacher to cut in, then he/she must do so politely in order not to end up embarrassing the student. This finding corroborates the argument of Fleury (2019) that it is when the teacher listens to the students that they also reciprocate the same. A participant recounted,

*Students, like every human being, love to be listened to. They don't expect the teacher to cut in when they are talking. If the teacher must cut in, then it must be done with a lot of politeness else they will feel you hate them hence they'll also begin to hate you.*

The second classroom management technique employed by the language teachers is behavior modification or defining boundaries of classroom behavior. The data revealed that the teachers, together with the students, discuss the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of the class, the expectations of the students and the teacher, and the punishments that must accompany the breach of any specific set boundary. In some of the classes that were observed, it was realized that there were some internally set rules between the teachers and students that guided their behavior. Some of the rules included,

- i. Any student who reports to class 5 minutes late will stand (not sit) throughout the lesson.
- ii. No student is allowed to speak the native language in the English language class
- iii. No student is allowed to speak English in the Fante (native language) class
- iv. Students are not allowed to eat in the class
- v. Students are not allowed to write while the teacher is talking or giving some explanation to a concept.

- vi. Each student has a maximum of two questions to ask in the class.
- vii. The teacher can only call male and female students in turns and not only one particular gender.

These and several other internal classroom rules were set in order to enhance the teaching and learning process. Students who breached such rules are punished and in fact, in most cases, it was their own colleagues who ensured that their friends comply with the set rules. It must be noted that these rules are strictly internal arrangements and are not necessarily the national code of conduct put together for use by the Ghana Education Service. This finding corroborates (Rosnani, Rahman, & Mesalina, 2019). A participant opined,

*In my class, there are rules. I didn't set them alone. I did that together with the students. I have made them (students) write the rules in their notebooks so when someone breaches any, they are asked to read the corresponding punishment out and oblige by same.*

The third management technique identified in the language classroom is teacher professionalism. The teaching and learning process and general classroom activities are properly coordinated and organized when the teacher conducts himself as a professional. Students normally respect and cooperate with a teacher who knows what is expected of him/her. . The professional teacher should be able to tame, contain, control, and manage, especially, his/her emotions (Prystiananta, 2020) in dealing with the extraordinary behaviors of students. The teacher in dealing with the students should not take anything that happens in the classroom too personal. Exercising a lot of restraint and patience is most ideal in classroom management.

For instance, when a student behaves in a negative manner, it is not expected that the professional teacher would insult, verbally abuse or even physically abuse such student. The teacher is rather expected to correct or guide the student to desist from repeating such behaviors. In cases where there is the need to punish the student, the teacher is expected to carry it so professionally that the learner would not end up with undue bruises. Similarly, the teacher is not expected to show any form of negative emotions such as hatred, regret, or anger towards the student. Ideally, no student must be made to feel hated by his/her teacher. When this happens, the student is tempted to fight back, retaliate or completely avoid the teacher which ends up disrupting the management of the class. A participant had this to say:

*There was a student who reported to class about 30 minutes late. This was after the class had agreed on the rule that no one reports 5 minutes late. I was very angry at her. But I patiently waited and listened to her explanation. I got to realize that she was suffering from ill-health hence if I had reacted, it would have been borne out of unnecessary malice.*

On the other hand, in situations where the student displays positive behavior, the professional teacher is not expected to display or express over-excitement towards the student. The professional teacher is not supposed to get emotionally connected to any of the students. Therefore, the teacher is expected to control or manage his love, affection, or admiration for any particular student. When the rest of the students are given the impression that their teacher takes a special liking to one of their colleagues, they are likely to accuse such a teacher of discrimination and unfairness. Hence, regardless of how happy or excited a teacher is towards the positive behavior of a student, he/she is ideally not to show any strong emotional affection towards the student, most especially, in case of the opposite sex. A respondent indicated.

*There was a case where I hugged one of my students for obtaining a grade A in my test. Immediately after, I heard a loud noise from the class saying "Eeei". It was very embarrassing and all the students who also obtained A, and even B, asked for a hug too. To avoid being accused of discrimination, I had to comply.*



Using professionalism as a classroom management technique was also found in the study of Fakolade, Adeniyi, and Tella (2009). In the study, Fakolade argues that being a professional teacher ensures that one does not show any favorable attitude towards any particular learner and fosters inclusivity in the classroom, where all learners are treated equally.

The fourth management practice identified in the collected data is the physical arrangement of the classroom. The seating arrangements in the classroom, the grouping of students according to factors such as gender, ability, or competence; the standing or sitting position of the teacher, the order of distribution and use of teaching and learning materials in the classroom, ventilation, lighting system, sound system, and several physical class techniques are important classroom management practices. The teacher is expected to ensure that the physical setting of the classroom is conducive enough for teaching and learning to be successful. A hostile classroom environment tends to disrupt teaching. For instance, if the lighting system of the class is poor, a lot of pupils may not be able to read from the board or write in their notebooks. Also, when seating arrangements are poorly done such that tall students sit at the front desk whilst short ones sit behind, the latter's view might be blocked. Similarly, when students are not given and not made to use age-appropriate teaching and learning materials, they may not be able to manipulate the tools well. Again, when the classroom is poorly ventilated, the students may feel uncomfortable and not be able to concentrate in class. Specifically, in the language class, the teacher is expected to ensure that the wording of comprehension passages is age-appropriate and does not go beyond the understanding of the students whilst also ensuring that the texts or messages encoded in the text are not over sensual, seductive, and do not teach anti-cultural lessons. Seeing to it that all these arrangements and many others are properly put in place is an integral part of classroom management. A respondent indicated,

*Since my school is situated at the roadside, noise from passing vehicles sometimes disrupts the class. However, being conscious of classroom management, I normally pause my teaching for the few seconds that the noisy vehicles pass since I'm aware that even if I talk, the students will not hear me.*

One other participant insinuated,

*Whenever I am assigning group tasks, I make sure good readers are mixed with weak ones so that through peer reading, the good ones can support the weak ones. In cases of class presentations too, I make sure that every group has someone with a good speaking skill who can present the group's work on their behalf.*

The practice of physical arrangement as part of classroom management of the language classroom is consistent with the research finding of Karimian and Farokhi (2018) Karim asserts that the physical arrangements in the classroom ensure a successful teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, social interaction and teacher-student relationships is a classroom management tools employed by language teachers (Kontu & Pirttimaa, 2016). It is observed that students learn better and teachers are able to deliver their lessons well when the emotional and psychological relationship that exists between the two parties are right. When the teacher is emotionally and psychologically in sync with the students, teaching is able to meet its overall goals and objectives. A highly tensed classroom environment, where the students are 'afraid' to talk or contribute to classroom discussions, is not able to encourage students to bring out their best. As part of the classroom management techniques, teachers develop a friendly attitude in dealing with the students. They do that in order to make the students feel 'comfortable' in the classroom. The technique corroborates Kontu and Pirttimaa (2016) who argue that teachers should be friendly with the students if they want the students to enjoy the class and actively participate in the teaching and learning process. A respondent explained,

*I believe that one of the ways to manage a class is to establish a good relationship with the students. This technique has helped me a lot. I have a very cordial but respectful relationship with the students. That makes them cooperate very well in classroom activities.*

The final technique is to ‘know’ ones students. Beyond merely knowing their names and academic performance, teachers believe that the classroom could be managed well when the teacher knows and understands the family background, cultural background, financial situation, religious beliefs, and the problems/challenges of the students. It is important for the teacher to know these because, most of the time, a student’s condition and personal challenges influence their academic performance. Hence, knowing it can guide a teacher’s attitude in the classroom. For example, dealing with a student who is going through some serious sexual abuse, poverty, domestic violence, etc. cannot be business as usual. It definitely needs some extra care and attention. Recognizing and appreciating the diversity and uniqueness of students can help the teacher to figure out the individual approach to apply to each learner (Prystiananta, 2020) With the technique of knowing the students, a participant noted,

*Dealing with the students' en bloc is not the best. Each individual has their peculiar competencies, expectations, and needs. Therefore, it is important for the teacher to identify each student's uniqueness and deal with them appropriately. This is how I manage my class.*

## **RQ 2: In the view of language teachers, what challenges hamper effective classroom management?**

In question one, attempts are made to explore, expose and discuss the various techniques that language teachers employ to manage their language classroom. However, the effective use of these classroom management techniques comes with its own challenges. In fact, figure 2 below illustrates the responses of the participant when they were asked whether they face challenges in the implementation of the classroom management techniques.

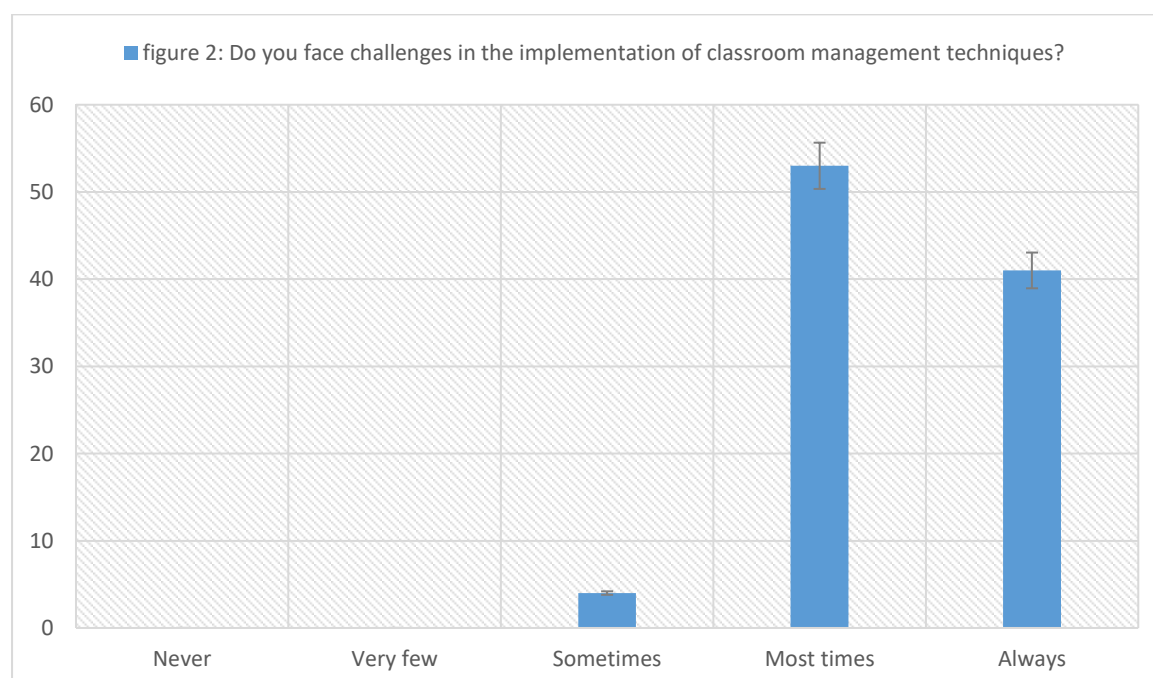


Figure 2. Do you face challenges in the implementation of classroom management techniques?

Source: Authors' data

From figure 2 above, 98% of the respondents indicated that they face challenges when implementing classroom management techniques *most times* and *always*. This number is very significant and

emphasizes how challenging it is to manage the language classroom in Ghana. The respondents were then asked to detail the challenges they face in managing the classroom. The details they gave are organized into five broad themes and discussed in the paragraphs below.

Firstly, the respondents lamented the *physical organization of the class* as one of the major challenges to the effective management of the classroom. It was discovered during the observation that the average classroom population of the schools were at least 60 students. It is thus difficult for a single teacher to effectively handle such a large population who sometimes even fights for seating space with the obviously insufficient tables and chairs in the classroom. The classrooms are packed with mono desks/chairs, meanwhile, due to the insufficient number of seats, the students are made to perch with each other. This creates a lot of discomfort in the classroom. Besides, the classroom is not spacious enough to accommodate all the seats so even the front space, where the teacher is expected to stand and deliver his/her lessons, is occupied with seats. Therefore, the teacher is not able to effectively use management practices such as role-play, dramatization, and other space-demanding teaching and learning materials and methodologies in the teaching of concepts that might need such tools to help learners to better understand them. There is also the problem of ventilation in the classroom as a result of the lack of sufficient spacing. Fresh air is not able to ventilate the classrooms. Again, it was identified that teachers are not able to effectively use group discussions/tasks in teaching because the arrangements of the seats coupled with the lack of space made it difficult for any teacher to change or modify the arrangements to suit the demands of any particular teaching strategy. On the issue of the physical arrangement of the class, a respondent had this to say,

*As you can observe for yourself, there is no sufficient space left in the front for me to teach.*

*Everywhere is packed with seats. It is difficult when I want to dramatize a concept for the learners. If you are not careful, whilst dramatizing, you may end up falling on a seat or even on a student.*

Another participant who concurs with the above assertion shares a similar experience,

*The classroom is overpopulated. My class has 83 students. Sometimes, I wish I can give each student some special attention and respond to their individual language needs but it's not possible. By the time I'm done answering questions from just about 5 students, my lesson period is over. On a number of occasions, I have even heard students accuse me of discrimination since I don't attend to all of them.*

Secondly, the heterogeneous nature of the classroom is a major challenge to the effective implementation of classroom management techniques. The classroom is a microscopic reflection of the larger Ghanaian society which is a much-diversified one. In the classroom, there are people from different ethnic, linguistic, religious, and social class/financial backgrounds. Therefore, it is generally difficult for a teacher, in his/her quest to ensure effective management of the classroom, to issue a blanket instruction and expect that it will cut across or sit well with all the learners. It was identified during the observation and interview sessions that whilst some instructions sit well with some students, others take offense or are not able to comply with the same instruction due to the demands of their background and orientations. This finding corroborates Habibi et al. (2018) who identified that classroom management in a heterogeneous classroom is very challenging. A teacher shares his experience on how linguistic diversity affects the teaching of relatively difficult concepts that could better be explained in the native language.

*There are times that students are not able to grasp concepts very well in the English language. In such cases, one of the ideal things to do is to teach using the L1. But, the students come from linguistically heterogeneous backgrounds and that makes it difficult to adopt any one particular L1 to teach.*

Thirdly, the behavior and general indiscipline among students hamper the effective management of the language classroom. It was revealed in the interview sessions that some of the students are generally indisciplined. They do not comply with the laid down rules and regulations in the classroom. They flatly disobey, abuse and sometimes act in an exact opposite manner to what they are expected to do. This recalcitrant demeanor of some of the students makes it difficult to any effective management to be practiced in the class. There were reports of students who report to class late, regularly absent themselves from class, engage in brawls and fisticuffs with their colleagues, and engage in verbal, and sometimes, physical exchanges with teachers. In fact, there were reports of students who indulge in drug abuse and other socially unacceptable behaviors. Some of the students, especially those from rich homes, rarely respect their colleagues from poor homes who are already struggling with an inferiority complex. The students have a lot of ego issues, as characteristic of most youths, and they try to visit their ego issues on their friends, colleagues, and sometimes, teachers. In fact, this finding corroborates the study of (Merc & Subaşı, 2015) who confirm that students' behavior is a major source of classroom management problems. Some of the respondents remarked,

*My students like fighting among themselves a lot. You know they are young people so they fight over what as an adult, I consider to be frivolous and irrelevant. I remember three of the girls once fought over whose wristwatch was more beautiful. I had asked the students to form a sentence each with the word 'beautiful' and one of them said, 'my watch is beautiful', the next thing I heard was 'her watch is not beautiful' and within the next few minutes, they were already exchanging blows.*

Fourthly, a teacher's own (in)competence level is identified to be a challenge to classroom management. It takes a lot of wit, skill, dexterity, creativity, and competence to manage a class, especially as diversified and heterogeneous as the typical Ghanaian classroom. This is supported by Sasidher, Vanaja, and Parimalavenu (2012) who opine that a large class made up of different people is a challenge to classroom management. Obviously, when dealing with a population of about 60 students who come from different ethnic, tribal, religious, financial, and social backgrounds, it takes a lot of depth and critical thinking to be able to deal squarely with all of them. A respondent indicated,

The teacher is also expected to be competent in dealing with the different temperaments of the students. Lack of ability to handle the temperamental dispositions of the students is a serious problem for effective classroom management. Some students are quick-tempered, and others get overly excited about 'little' things. While some students make fun of serious issues, others are fearful and jittery. All these emotional disparities deserve unique attention and it takes a competent teacher to handle them adequately. A respondent indicated,

*Some of my students are very quick-tempered. They fight a lot in class. This disrupts my class often. At first, my solution was to quickly punish them anytime they fought. However, with time, I have come to realize that punishments would not solve the problem. I started talking to them and guiding them on how to manage their tempers. Things are better now.*

Again, it takes competence to manage and use teaching and learning materials effectively. Teaching is an art that goes with a lot of teaching and learning materials. The manipulation of these materials takes competence, and sometimes, training. For example, a teacher needs to be competent in the use of computers to be able to integrate technology into the language lesson or classroom. A respondent indicated,

*Managing the language classroom effectively is about being able to use and manipulate teaching and learning materials effectively. When the tools are effectively utilized, teaching is well organized and students better appreciate concepts.*

Finally, the lack of teaching and learning facilities/materials is a major impediment to effective classroom management. The provision of the necessary materials for teaching enhances teaching. For instance, a teacher needs a computer, good internet and network facilities, good electricity, among others to be able to integrate ICT effectively in the teaching of language. Just as all professionals like farmers, engineers, and doctors cannot work without their tools, the same way a teacher cannot also work effectively without tools. A participant recounts,

*The lack of adequate teaching and learning materials is a serious problem in the language classroom. For example, it has become very important to integrate ICT into language teaching but there are no computers.*

***RQ 3: In the view of language teachers, how important is effective classroom management to pedagogy?***

Hypothetically, every classroom activity, methodology, or technique is employed in order to achieve a specific aim or purpose. With this research question, an attempt is made to investigate and reveal the essence of ensuring effective classroom management in language pedagogy. If classroom management has no impact, influence, or some positive effects on the teaching and learning of language, there would be no need for the teacher to practice it. Hence, the researchers approached this question with the hypothesis that every classroom management practice or technique employed by the teacher has its own impact hence the need to reveal these impacts from the teachers' own perspective. The responses of the teachers with respect to the research question are thematized and discussed below with support from relevant excerpts.

Firstly, the language teachers indicated that an effective classroom management practice ensures the attainment of lesson objectives. Every lesson has its goals and objectives. Teaching and learning are considered to be successfully conducted when these objectives are met. Therefore, the onus lies on the teacher to employ any method or technique that will ensure that the objectives of the lesson are attained. A lesson taught or delivered anyhow without putting in place effective management structures would not achieve its purpose. This is supported by Jacob (2019) who confirms that classroom management aids to achieve the objectives of a lesson. A respondent indicated,

*When I employ group tasks or discussion method in the class, it encourages all the students to participate in the teaching and learning process. The activeness with which they engage in the learning process makes them understand everything that is taught.*

Another participant noted,

*There is no single method to teach all the topics in the language. Every topic has its own technique that can effectively deliver the aims and objectives. It is therefore up to the teacher to know which technique is appropriate for which topic.*

It is obvious from the observations above that language teachers believe that a good classroom management practice is able to help them achieve the lesson objectives.

Secondly, a good classroom management technique ensures that learners are effectively monitored, supervised, and guided. Supervision is an important component in teaching and learning. However, in the typical Ghanaian classroom setting, where a single class is 'overpopulated' with about 60-80 students, it is difficult to effectively supervise the activities of all the students within the limited contact hours. It is for such reason that an effective management technique needs to be employed by the teacher to ensure that all the students are properly supervised and engaged in the teaching and learning process. In this regard, a respondent opined,

*You know, it is very difficult to effectively control all my 71 students. Therefore, anytime I go to class, I put them into smaller groups and when that is done, I am able to effectively manage these groups.*

In a similar opinion, another respondent indicated,

*Managing students is not an easy task at all. Each student is unique and needs to be handled in a special way. Mostly, what I do is, I put the students into smaller groups and appoint group leaders. I then deal with the students through their group leaders. Delegation of power has proven to be very effective for me.*

It is obvious from the above assertions that when teachers put in place proper classroom management techniques, it helps them to be able to monitor, supervise and guide the students effectively. In their study, Farooqui, Shah, and Saboowala (2021) confirm that a good classroom management technique ensures that learners are effectively monitored, supervised, and guided.

Thirdly, it is revealed in the data that the language teachers believe that a good classroom management practice ensures effective and productive use of time. In teaching and learning, and in life generally, time is a very important non-renewable or non-retrievable resource. Therefore, it is important for one to use any time they have very productively. The same principle applies in the language classroom. When the classroom is properly managed, time is not wasted. At every point in time, the teacher knows what activity which must be done. Therefore, there is no room for wastage of time. Knowing what to do at what point in time is part of classroom management. A respondent chipped in,

*I have realized that when the lesson is well planned and the classroom is managed properly, time is productively utilized. A well-structured classroom or lesson does not waste time. In such a class, every student knows what to do or what is expected to be done and the teacher ensures that they do them.*

The opinions of the language teachers as excerpted above emphasize the fact that time resources can only be properly utilized through effective classroom management. A haphazardly conducted teaching and learning session is a conduit for waste of time. An ill-prepared teacher does not know what to do. Evertson (2017) confirms that students who are not properly checked, guided, or controlled end up wasting time. When such practice continues for a long period of time, the overall goals and objectives of the educational process would not be achieved.

Fourthly, effective classroom management technique inculcates in students' critical thinking skills. The ability to think critically, creatively and come up with problem-solving skills is developed through the manner in which a teacher conducts his/her lesson. The students do not only develop these skills from *what* they are taught. They develop them also from *how* they are taught. Retnaningtyas (2018) affirms that the *how* of teaching is what is technically described as classroom management techniques. For instance, when the students are given the opportunity to brainstorm, or given more open-ended questions and case studies to think through it and provide appropriate responses, they are able to think critically. A teacher recounted,

*In my classroom, I always provoke the imaginative and critical thinking skills of my students. I do this by giving them tasks to brainstorm. Whilst they engage in that, I go round to supervise and guide those who need some extra attention. Such management practice is good, in my opinion.*

Another respondent who believes that good classroom management develops critical and creative thinking skills in learners shared her opinion,

*I believe that when the classroom is properly managed, the creative and critical thinking skills of learners are enhanced. Every student has the innate ability to think. However, they can only think when the right classroom atmosphere is created for them. This is where I believe classroom management techniques come in. The right classroom atmosphere can only be created when the teacher is able to discipline students, give them tasks, allow them to ask questions, supervise and guide students' works, reward or punish deserving students, among several other management practices.*

Finally, the respondents believe that, through effective classroom management, the language competencies of learners can be enhanced Marzano (2016). There are four language competencies. These are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Even though most of these competencies are 'what' must be taught in the language class, the 'how' they are taught is equally important. If a teacher wants to help the students develop their language competencies, then he/she must set the right tone or atmosphere for the students to continually practice them. A respondent intimates how he punishes students who laugh at the mistakes of others as part of his management practice

*I believe that the language competencies are developed, not only through teaching the students but also by allowing them or giving them the opportunity to continuously practice. However, I have realized that some students make a mockery of those who commit mistakes whilst practicing. This attitude of theirs discourages and kills initiative. Therefore, as part of my classroom management practice, I punish such students and also advise and encourage them to desist from it.*

It is clear from the assertions above that an effective management of the language classroom can help the students to develop their language competencies. This shows that classroom management complements the contents that are taught in the classroom. Indeed, skills are more developed from continuous practice, therefore, if the teacher is only interested in teaching the students what they must know and does not give them the right learning environment to put what they have learned into practice, the development rate of the skills will be retarded. Effective classroom management is therefore not negotiable.

## **5. Conclusion**

The current qualitative study has attempted an investigation and analysis of the management cultures of English language teachers in the Senior High School classroom in Ghana. Engaging the English language teachers from the Agona West Municipality, the study is able to fairly conclude that,

1. Teachers are aware that classroom management is an important part of academic success.
2. Teachers use several strategies to manage the English language classroom. Some of such strategies include respectfulness, professionalism, knowing the students, physical arrangement of the classroom, and ensuring a good student-teacher relationship.
3. Teachers face challenges in the implementation of classroom management. Such challenges include large classroom size, the attitude of students, competence of the teacher, and the lack of appropriate teaching and learning facilities.

## **Limitations and recommendations**

The study was limited to only one municipality in the country. It also adopted only the qualitative approach. It is recommended, therefore, that a future further study on classroom management in the Ghanaian context especially in English teaching could extend to other territories and probably do a comparative study of different districts. A future study could also adopt the mixed-method approach in order to encourage diversity in data collection and analysis. More importantly, it is recommended for teachers and policymakers to become more conscious of classroom management practices and be intentional about their implementation.

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