



IMPACT OF CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT ON CHILDREN'S SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

Samuel O. Obaki¹

¹Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, Kenya

ABSTRACT

The primary contribution of this paper is the finding that lack of activities and interesting learning areas prepared by the teacher in the classroom may negatively impact children's social behavior. Classroom design and the teacher's careful selection of materials to be displayed in each of the learning areas do engage young children in learning activities during learning sessions and their free time. When children group themselves according to their interests in different learning areas, they develop various skills and positive attitude towards each other in their groups and all members of the class. Children engagement in different learning areas in their classroom develop and improve language skills, reading skills, listening skills especially during dramatization, numerical skills, acquire general knowledge in various subjects including sciences and their mother tongues. In a participative classroom, children learn how to share and take care of the materials in their learning areas. While in their learning centers, children develop manipulative skills, leadership and managerial skills, learn how to tell simple stories, and learn how to work together as a team. A friendly classroom develops an environment that creates a desired children's social behavior.

Keywords: Early childhood education, Environment, Classroom, Classroom materials, Classroom design, Teacher.

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1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Early childhood including elementary school teachers encounter both good and bad social behavior from their children. These social behaviors develop as a result of both physical and social factors that are associated with classroom environment. Some research studies have found that peer settings and classroom environment play critical roles in children's behavior development. Classroom environment covers a range of learning aspects that include the relationship that exists between learners themselves and their teacher. The classroom environment attempts to spell out the teacher's expectations on the children's motivation for effective learning, the strategies that should be employed for effective teaching, the kind of materials that would motivate children to have greater interest in learning, and the social behavior that should be exhibited in a classroom. Classroom environment comprises of several aspects that may at times be observable. It is conceived to compose a range of educational concepts that include physical setting, the psychological environment that is created through social interactions, and several instructional procedures that are related to teacher characteristics and behavior (Miller and Cunningham, 2003). It directly influences learning engagement, motivation, and social interaction among classroom members. Classroom environment may be considered to be associated with good planning, effective teaching, teacher's concern for the children's welfare, and the beauty that is reflected in the classroom (Barth *et al.*, 2004). Torelli and Durrett (1996) found that physical environment in group care centers affects children themselves, their caregivers, and their movements, making it difficult to interact with each other. Physical environment may affect

children's movement and interfere with their interaction if the teacher has not arranged chairs or desks including tables to give way for children's movement and free play. Classrooms that lack specific architectural design for early childhood learning cause some confusion and sometimes make children develop poor attitudes toward schooling. Classroom design and the teacher's arrangement should focus on the needs of young children and the classroom activities that promote children's exploration of the environment. The beauty, teacher's motherly care and general outlook of the a classroom are some of the agents of children's motivation and change of behavior. The appearance of a classroom makes it look different and yet natural from other rooms that may have been designed for institutional meetings or other gathering venues. Architectural design, the teacher's artistic display of teaching/learning materials and classroom arrangement are the bases for beauty, pride and motivation that encourage children to generate new ideas as they interact freely with each other. Herbert (1998) urged architectures to design buildings that respond to future school visions.

1.1. Classroom Environment

Children regardless of cultural beliefs and customs enjoy learning in a classroom that gives them ample opportunities to play, feel happy, and secure. A noticeable ambience of a classroom is giving children space for easy and safe movement. Motion permits children to move freely in the allocated spaces, create their own boundaries, and explore their abilities by handling different objects. Teachers should create environments that match the age and level of the children they teach. The environment that is created to match children's development provide motherly care, space for sleeping, give an opportunity for children to play and interact with materials. These indicators of caring and effectiveness in teaching young children may assist the teacher in planning for better outlook of the classroom. When children feel comfortable, and secure in their physical environments, they explore materials that help them generate new ideas that deepen their understanding of their surroundings (Olds, 2001). Creating happiness in children is developing eagerness to explore and develop imaginative skills by using the materials that are exposed to them. Relevant and sufficient materials make a classroom for young children to be joyous and encourage them to be creative. An appropriate classroom for young children should contain displays of beautiful materials that include flowers of different colors, display of children's work, collection of different stones, and other materials that encourage children's explorations of nature. Classroom arrangement that focuses on space for groups to work and play, appropriate materials placed in their respective learning areas, and good room lighting system, would be considered environmentally appropriate classroom. The organization of the classroom should include consideration for the seats and tables that are on the age level of the children.

1.2. Classroom Design

Classrooms are designed according to the number of students that are to use them and the functions that are to be carried out. Olds (2001) explained that:

“A facility that works well for children and staff must be designed from the inside out, and also from outside in, with structural evaluations. The architect is concerned with the type of building and its outlook, mechanical and electrical systems, corridors, exits, and overall public-use space.” (p. 47)

Some architectural designs may provide specifications for carpets, furniture, and lighting. Designing a classroom that has an environment that is conducive to young children's learning should be a collaborative effort. The architect(s) should consult the educationists, health officials, and parents in order to design a classroom that provides enough space for various learning centers, space for the teacher and space for free movement. The collaborators' input should focus on designing a classroom that is going to develop a safe environment to the users. When house designers care for the safety of the users, they build happiness and sense of belonging for the occupants. Hebert in his article (1998) said that thoughtful design of the school and classroom environment can

shape children's self-esteem, and sense of belonging. When children develop self-esteem, self-actualization and feel that their teacher cares for them, they freely interact with each other and develop good social behavior.

After the architectural work is finished and the building or classroom handed over to the users, it is the teacher's responsibility to create a learning environment that promotes creativity, imagination, and the feelings of belonging to such a friendly classroom. Isbell and Raines (2007) thought that such a classroom should be aesthetically pleasing with attractive materials, and flowers for children to explore their understanding of their surrounding and the beauty of colors. Placing beautiful elements in the classroom exposes the children to other explorations and acquisition of new knowledge that can be used during their art lesson. A beautiful classroom with flowers may reflect children's home experiences and learn how to cooperatively care for those flowers and other materials. Designing a pleasant classroom environment depends on the teacher's beliefs about learning strategies, what motivates children to want to learn, the psychology of learning, and the physical space to be used (Mitchell and David). While thinking about how learning takes place in children, a teacher who is a learning designer, should create a classroom environment that resembles children's home environments in order to link classroom ideals and home practices. To make young children feel at home while at school, the teacher should display parents' pictures or interesting works produced by parents in the classroom for the children to enjoy seeing and connecting those pictures and parents' works with their home experiences. Isbell and Raines (2007) reported that "in one Native American Center, the level of dramatic play significantly increased when a Native American family doll was added to other dolls from other ethnic groups." (p. 80).

Dramatic play signifies cooperative spirit in any organization and is an indicator of peace which is the source of social integration in the classroom. It instills leadership and manipulative skills in children as they play different roles. Children learn to work and play cooperatively as they share the provided materials. When a classroom social behavior is contravened by a child or few children, the teacher's role is to find out the reasons and intervene appropriately by counseling or consulting guiding and counseling expert if available in the institution. United States General Accounting Office Washington, D.C. 20548 (1995) pointed out that "schools prepared to support 21st century education should have private areas for students' counseling and testing in order to strengthen parents' activities at home" (Article, 1995). Teachers of young children should collaborate with the parents of the children they teach in order to understand their backgrounds and identify the areas of concern.

Designing schools for the 21 century should be prioritized in order to accommodate the emerging and expanding population and technology that require modern and special facilities. Sustaining such facilities needs experts who focus on the achievement of knowledge that is used to create and solve problems as one family. Problem solving needs unity and understanding of one another. Children in a classroom are compared to members of one family whose goal is to build a strong family that is united, a family that exhibits good social behavior, and a family that works hard to achieve the stated objectives. These goals and objectives can be achieved if the teacher creates an environment that encourages cooperative learning, caring for each other, responsiveness to the use of materials that assist in generating new knowledge and skills. Attaining these aspects is an evident that there is good social behavior between students, teachers, and parents.

1.3. Classroom Arrangement

Good classroom arrangement inspires, and encourages children to easily interact with each other and develop various skills including language, and social behavior. Poor classroom physical arrangement may affect children's free movement and can result into social behavior problems. Social behavior problems erupt in places that are not well managed, have no guiding rules, and have mixed objectives to achieve. Effective teachers arrange their classrooms physical environment so that children can spend some of their learning time in the learning areas that interest them. Materials that are placed in learning centers that engage children in various activities and learning should be attractive and on the age level of the children. If the materials located in learning areas are beyond the

age level of the children, they may be hard for them to comprehend and formulate new knowledge but instead, they will cause discomfort and sometimes aggression which may cause pushing and at times fighting. [Isbell and Raines \(2007\)](#); [Beaty \(1996\)](#) explained that “the materials placed in every learning area should match the age, development level, and the interest of those children for which they are intended” (p. 82). If inappropriate materials are placed in any given learning area, children may ignore or they may not use them to explore new ideas. The materials that are more advanced compared to the age of the children may cause some behavior problems and they may be torn or mishandled thus making some children be categorized as disruptive and yet the misbehavior originates from the teacher.

1.4. Peer Group Contributions in Classroom Social Behavior

Although human behavior may be related to genetics, it is largely influenced by the environmental factors. Children like any other persons may be exposed to good or bad behaviors exhibited by peers and copy any of the characteristics. When behaviors begin to change in a young child from good to bad, the parents of the child should investigate to ascertain the peers their child associates with and take intervention steps before other children with good behaviors reject the child. Some children are rejected by their peer groups when they exhibit behaviors that are considered by that group as undesired and injurious. Social rejection is detrimental to the child's self-esteem and pride of belonging. It reduces the child's ability to maintain social competence he or she might have developed. This is a serious problem that parents at times fail to correct at the earliest stage. Disruptive, bully, aggressive children are most of the time rejected by others who are opposed to those acts of behavior. When a child is rejected by others because of aggressiveness or any other behavior, he or she begins to associate with other aggressive children who reinforce and solidify the pattern and frequencies of the aggressiveness, disruptiveness, truancy, and other disobedient behaviors. [Morris et al. \(1995\)](#) and [Trawick-Smith \(2010\)](#) observed that some children are isolated (rejected) by their peer groups while others may be isolated from their peer group (neglected) because of poor social behaviors and socio-economic status. Rejected children engage in high rate of aggression and disruption behaviors which may make them drop out of their schools. Children who are neglected because of their families' socio-economic status tend to have higher level of feeling of insecurity and thus reduce good social behavior and social competence.

Children who effectively interact with peers that exhibit desirable behaviors are normally accepted by other peer groups. Social behavior, therefore, appears to be the measure of human beings acceptance by an individual or peer groups. Children's interaction with others encourages them to develop attachments that make them feel inspired to want to explore more both academically and socially. Teachers of young children should encourage and support good behaviors and peer related competences because they are the foundations of future adulthood behavior that will be exhibited in their societies.

1.5. Teacher's Role in Children's Social Behavior

Effective learning occurs when children are actively engaged in the learning process or are paying special attention to what they are learning. The classroom teacher does not only observe but engages children in learning activities and posing questions to promote their reasoning abilities and widening their knowledge in the subject matter ([DeVries et al., 2002](#)). Keeping children engaged help them to be more constructive than would be destructive if left unengaged. A teacher who engages his or her children in a meaningful learning situation is a resourceful and a facilitator. The teacher facilitates learning by giving his or her children examples on how he or she would like them to do the given work, provide the needed resources, and give guidelines on classroom behavior. A good teacher is a researcher and a lifelong learner. As a researcher, the teacher gets new information, invites guest speakers on topical issues to speak to children, finds and avails suitable resources to be used in teaching and learning. Such a teacher demonstrates good mastery of the subject matter that encourages and interests children in

their imagination and creativity. Experts in different areas of study from the community in which the school is located would be invited by the school administration or classroom teacher to visit and talk about the benefits of good behavior in a society. Changing children's behavior is a process that takes a period of time. It may involve a teacher explaining clearly on the benefits of good behavior and providing an opportunity for positive interaction in the classroom. A teacher who understands how children learn, develops social interaction within his or her children, gives the children an opportunity to play with materials. The teacher according to [Allen and Goetz \(1982\)](#); [Isbell and Exelby \(2001\)](#) should subdivide the classroom into learning areas according to children's interest and equip those areas with learning and playing materials. Understanding children's needs, interests, and the skills to be developed would help the teacher to identify the type of learning areas to be developed in the classroom. The following learning areas as shown in the diagram below would be developed in a classroom.



Teachers are designers of their work and their classrooms. They remodel their classrooms according to the expected learning experiences. The expected learning experiences are stipulated in a curriculum that is designed or planned for each grade level for the semester or for the year

Since a greater part of children's learning occurs through playing and handling materials, the teacher should provide sufficient space in the classroom for play. Classroom spaces should be created to provide specific skills, knowledge, or attitudes that are needed for children to develop. Conducive learning environment enhances intuitive desire to interact, create, and discover new ideas. The creation and development of learning areas in the classroom gives children an opportunity to interact, shape their activities, remodel their plays, and explore their own knowledge ([Isbell and Raines, 2007](#)). [Petraikos and Howe \(1996\)](#) said that "environmental setup should be determined from theoretical principles and connected to the daily schedule of activities" (Article, 1996). The role of a teacher in a classroom that has a conducive learning environment is to provide good leadership and management skills. Such a teacher provides strong interrelationships between children, other teachers and parents. Conflicts and destruction in the classroom occur when the teacher has not provided guidelines and rules to guide each child.

1.6. Parents' Contribution in a Good Classroom Environment

Children may exhibit several behavior problems when their parents do not monitor or show interest in their school attendance or classroom work. [Simpkins and Parke \(2002\)](#) referred to previous researches which had found that poorly monitored children have lower academic skills, lower peer acceptance, join delinquent groups, and show higher feelings of depression. Parents should show interest and monitor their children's activities, classroom

performance, and social movements. Both parents can regulate their children's social behavior through the provision of rules and guidelines about the activities that focus on good behavior. Parents can also guide their children by selecting their playmates and when they can play. Some parents have become selective of the groups for their children to associate and play with either at home or at school. Neglected children who may have lost their playmates because of poor social behavior or aggression walk around looking for new attachments or those who might match their characters. If socially behaved children get attached to peers who exhibit poor social behavior, they also develop poor social behavior. Rejected children engage in relatively high rates of aggressive and disruptive behavior.

2. DISCUSSION

Children's social behaviors depend on several factors both human and physical environment. Classroom teachers and parents contribute immensely to the children's social behaviors. A teacher who displays motherly behavior, care, and support for his or her students, infuse positive behavior. If a classroom teacher exhibit administrative behavior without recognition of each child's needs and love, then the teacher will be encouraging bullying and developing children's hostility among themselves. A teacher who inventively and creatively plan and conducts his or her teaching in a motherly manner using appropriate methods, instills positive social behavior in the children. If a teacher uses appropriate teaching/learning materials, children will develop interest in learning and become cooperative. Advanced materials may cause misunderstanding and confusion among children and as a result children start developing poor social behavior.

3. CONCLUSION

This research paper explores the impact of classroom environment on the children's social behavior. Several researchers and scholars have echoed how environmental factors contribute to the children's social behavior at both school and home but little has been said on how classroom environment impacts children's social behavior.

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