

Full Length Research Paper

Classroom management and students' self-esteem: Creating positive classrooms

Seyithan Demirdag

Department of Educational Sciences, Bulent Ecevit University, Zonguldak, Turkey.

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Middle school students experience substantial changes in their emotion and cognition while they grow. They have mixed feelings, which may negatively affect their motivation, self-esteem, and academic success due to different classroom management strategies of their teachers. There is available research about motivation of middle school students and classroom management approaches of middle school teachers. However, empirical studies are lacking to provide sufficient information about the relationship between student self-esteem and classroom management in middle schools. In this study, classroom management of middle school teachers and self-esteem of middle school students were examined. A total of eight middle school teachers and 60 middle school students from an urban middle school in western United States participated in the study. Data acquired from the *Classroom Management Self – Assessment (CMSA)* and the *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI)* were analyzed with independent samples t-tests. The findings of the study indicated a significant difference between teachers on CMSA and between students on CSEI.

Key words: Classroom management, student self-esteem, teachers, middle school.

INTRODUCTION

Although there is the need for a unique classroom management strategy for middle school students, who grow socially, emotionally, and cognitively while getting effective education has been discussed for decades, the educational community is yet to reach a consensus as to an appropriate classroom management strategy for this age group. Classroom management refers to anything that would create effective student learning in the classroom (Wong and Wong, 2005). Teachers' classroom management skills could be verbal or nonverbal, formal or informal, systematic or unsystematic, rigid or flexible. The way that teachers exhibit classroom management

skills and their interests in the student may change students' behavior (Blanton et al., 1994). Of these skills, the ones that encourage student autonomy create a higher level of student engagement (Nelson, 1984).

Teachers with effective classroom management skills are more likely to believe all students can learn, to demonstrate higher expectations, to accept more responsibility for creating connections, and to exhibit a higher level of participation (Smith and Strahan, 1991). Teachers who expect less of students, were more likely to refer them to special programs, and often blamed students' lack of success on attitudinal factors (Finn,

E-mail: sdemirdag@beun.edu.tr.

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1992). Teachers who set high expectations for their students create a positive association between students and school (Wehlage, 1989). The positive association between students' identification with school and levels of academic engagement and achievement has been well established (Finn, 1992; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow and Grady, 1993; Wehlage, 1989). Basically, students developing a sense of identification with school are likely to experience greater educational gains, expressly as a consequence of active participation in the classroom activities (Finn, 1989).

Teachers, who experience discipline problems in their classrooms, become dissatisfied with students and may spend most of the instructional time on student behavior and much less time on instruction. Promoting responsibility for student behavior is more conducive to effective instruction than punishment. Educators need to help adolescents grow emotionally and socially. Research suggests that establishing consistency in implementing discipline rules and procedures is crucial because students can experience confusion between what teachers say and what they do. Students, who do not have any confusion about classroom rules will make efforts to emulate positive behavior (Good and Brophy, 1994).

Students with positive behaviors value school and exhibit high performance in learning activities (Pintrich and DeGroot, 1990). Research shows that the amount of teacher involvement and support, the degree to which teachers stressed order and organization, and innovation, were positively associated with overall student achievement. On the other hand, the amount of teacher control over students was inversely associated with students' academic success (Ryan and Grolnick, 1986). In a study, researchers found that teacher-student conflicts, which include aggressive misbehavior, are viewed as symptoms of poor classroom management skills of teachers. Gettinger (1988) concluded that successful classroom management required communicating expectations in a proactive approach, which included preventing problems rather than reacting, focusing on managing the classroom as a group rather than the behavior of individual students, and encouraging appropriate student behavior with instruction that encourages student achievement of academic objectives.

When teachers view student behaviors as disruptions, they raise their voices, and are more likely to respond in defensive fashions, asserting their power in authoritarian ways (Purkey and Strahan, 1986). Such teachers project a confrontational stance, which escalates tensions, lower student self-esteem, and make students feel combative (George et al., 1992). Effective discipline strategies seek to encourage responsible behavior, discourage misconduct, and promote a higher level of self-esteem. Student discipline problems are a reflection of the student morale level within the classroom. Raebeck (1992) concluded that when discipline problems are high,

student self-esteem is low, and vice versa. Focusing on causes of actions rather than symptoms provides effective solutions to discipline problems and encourage positive self-esteem among students (George et al., 1992).

The middle school students are best characterized by nature of the transition and changes they experience during their early development (Moss, 1969). School systems need to realize that all students can learn with sufficient time and help even though they experience substantial changes in their bodies and feelings. The idea behind middle school education asserts that adolescents step into an expanded social and intellectual world which includes new concepts, knowledge, and academic expectations, new role models and friendships, and multiple social interactions (Jung and Gunn, 1990). Concurrently, middle school students' perceptions, and expectations of his/her self-worth and abilities, of school and society, of his/her decisions and responsibilities, and of others are in a constant state of change and questioning. This transitional period may be quite challenging for many teachers in regard to discipline and classroom management. Positive relationships with middle school teachers perceived to empower students' self-esteem. Self-esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself, either by his own sense of competence or the concepts of others (Coopersmith, 1967).

The developmental characteristics of middle school students may increase students' behavior problems. Some of the behavioral problems are associated with teachers' attitudes towards students, teaching approaches and student self-esteem (Shockley and Sevier, 1991). Teachers' misunderstanding of the basic developmental needs of the middle school students is critical in raising student self-esteem (Shockley and Sevier, 1991). Middle school students constantly think about school and how teachers value their actions in the classroom. Students have seen a teacher's respect as an act of giving particular attention or consideration, high or special regard, the quality or state of being esteemed, and honor (Hunter, 1990). Educators' positive reinforcement has strengthened students' good behaviors. Some examples of reinforcements include positive comments by the teacher on students' verbal contributions, accepting contributions by positive verbal and written commendations, and other examples of reinforcement which can increase student effort, and feelings of being valued. These reinforcements help define teacher respect of students (Wiersma, 1995).

Educators have high expectations for adolescents so that they can achieve specific educational goals and objectives. They agree that the perceptions of students explain the effect of school and behaviors of teachers on their learning. Teachers require students to abide by certain rules and procedures for a successful learning environment. These rules and procedures should help

organize the classrooms and support instruction. Some teachers, who use humanistic processes to establish and maintain effective classrooms, tend to be more successful than those who place more emphasis on being authoritative figures. The authoritative teacher figures are viewed as custodial in their instructional methods (Good and Brophy, 1994). Because this age group has certain psychosocial needs, middle school students are vulnerable to rejection in the classroom (George et al., 1992). Research suggests that middle school students must be respected by the adults in their lives because of these psychosocial needs if they are to succeed both socially and academically in school. Students can master basic learning skills in an atmosphere which creates enthusiasm for learning. They value their teachers' fairness, safety, consistency, and trustworthiness (George et al., 1992).

Student self-esteem has become a crucial factor in the prevention of discipline problems (Newmann et al., 1992). Students with a higher level of self-esteem are academically successful, and do not present a problem for educators (Goodenow, 1993). However, those who become confrontational with their teachers are less likely to succeed and more likely to be associated with negative learning behaviors, such as lower levels of classroom participation and involvement in academic activities, lowered academic motivation and attention, verbal and physical abuse of school, disruptive behavior in the classroom, and a lower self-esteem (Finn, 1989; Goodenow, 1993). Teachers with effective classroom management strategies are those who smile to praise and compliment students. Such teacher skills are extremely effective in increasing desirable student behavior and self-esteem.

Students have tendency of making attributions or simple explanations for behaviors, actions, and practices of teachers in classroom (Kelley, 1967). Therefore, this quantitative study employed attribution theory to explain the teachers' classroom management approaches and their effects on students' self-esteem. Understanding what causes situations to occur in the world provides perceivers with some perception to foresee the consequences of events and with knowledge to guide their own feelings, understandings, and personal behavior. The feeling of belonging to school may enhance students' academic growth in learning. Maslow indicated that if the need for belonging or being included is not satisfied, the pursuit of higher goals will be impeded. Students who do not experience a sense of being included and valued early in their educational settings often have difficulty sustaining a commitment to school rules throughout their learning career (Goodenow, 1991). As a result, a feeling of alienation may have serious negative effects upon students' self-esteem and academic success (Goodenow, 1991). Research showed that teachers' actions and their classroom management experiences will have consequences, which can have a substantial impact on

success, motivation, self-esteem, and behaviors of students throughout their educational careers (Berliner, 1989).

Purpose of the study

Healthy growth and development of adolescents in middle schools are necessary of their academic success. Teachers must be aware of and dedicated for the needs of students (Lunenborg, 1983). The literature indicates that students achieve an improved self-esteem, have fewer conflicts with teachers, and are more motivated if they have teachers with effective classroom management skills, and are exposed to a humanistic learning environment (Foley and Brooks, 1978). Teachers, who are aware of the needs of their students, value and respect all students, thus enhance student motivation and self-esteem (Ames and Miller, 1994). When teachers implement disciplinary procedures, they must know strengths, weaknesses, the needs, and individual differences of students to maintain a high level of self-esteem among students, and create a learner-centered setting.

Respect of students is important in promoting social support and emphasizing life skills training. Mutual respect is a key factor of classroom management (George et al., 1992). Such respect creates trust between teacher and students. Students exhibit best behaviors when they have teachers who respect them (George et al., 1992). Teachers who have earned the respect of their students are able to successfully teach and motivate students because they are willing to be fair without giving away authority, and elicit student response free of threat and intimidation (Cross and Markus, 1994).

A learning environment should be free of stress and maintain high expectations for students. Teachers with effective classroom management skills create stress free environments so that even when disappointments or failures are encountered, students should still maintain their motivation and engage in classroom activities (Cross and Markus, 1994). While literature is available about the relationship between student motivation and effective classroom management, not enough is known about the relationship between teachers' classroom management practices and self-esteem of students in middle school (Bean, 1992). Available research about this topic has provided conflicting evidence about classroom management and student self-esteem.

Empirical evidence is lacking regarding the relationship between teachers' classroom management skills and self-esteem of students in middle school. This study thus aims to explore the relationship between classroom management of middle school teachers and self-esteem of middle school students.

In line with this aim, the following questions were studied:

1. How does self-esteem of middle school students get affected by the teachers with poor or strong classroom management skills?
2. What are the beliefs of middle school teachers on their own classroom management?

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as a quantitative study and included randomly selection of participants. This design was used because it measured facts and objectives (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984), such as classroom management self-assessment of teachers and student self-esteem. This methodology offered many opportunities for the researcher to collect information through surveys in a middle school. It employed statistical methods and presented the outcomes objectively (Powdermaker, 1966). For validity and reliability of the study member checking and triangulation were used.

Participants

Survey instruments were conducted at an urban middle school in western United States. The total school enrollment was approximately 1,100 students. The school had a diverse student population coming from low-income families. It had Hispanic students at 80%, African - American students at 10%, Caucasian students, 8%, and the other students at 2%. The school had about 68 teachers with varying years of experience. The study included random selection of the participants including middle school teachers and students from 6th and 7th grades. It included four grade 6 and four grade 7 teachers to assess their own classroom management strategies. In addition, the study assessed self-esteem of 30 grade 6 students and 30 grade 7 students.

Data collection tools

This research includes two instruments. *The Classroom Management Self – Assessment* (CMSA) survey was used to measure the classroom management self – assessment of middle school teachers. The instrument included 10 questions, and was developed by Sugai (2008). The survey was modified and pilot-tested with 18 middle school teachers to determine the readability and suitability for middle school teachers. The researcher calculated the coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951) to assess the reliability of the instrument with his sample. After the pilot testing, the researcher found that the survey was reliable, as the coefficient alpha was .78. On the other hand, a survey called *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory* (CSEI) was used to measure student self-esteem. The instrument included 25 questions, and was developed by Coopersmith (1967). The reliability coefficient of this instrument found to be .76. Both instruments included a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating strong disagreement, 2 indicating disagreement, 3 indicating neither disagreement or agreement, 4 indicating agreement, and 5 indicating strong agreement. The participants filled in the bubble corresponding to the correct answer choice on the surveys.

Data analysis

The participants were allowed 30 min to answer all questions on the surveys. Upon the completion of data collection, the data set was imported for further analysis. Results of the data analysis were then

Table 1. Results of independent samples test.

Levene's test for equality of variances		
	F	Sig
Self-Esteem	2.70	.10

examined in the light of research and literature about the classroom management self-assessment of teachers and student self-esteem in a middle school. For the analysis of the data regarding this study, descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was used. SPSS 21.0 was used to conduct independent samples t-tests in order to determine the significant means and distribution of variances between the groups in the study.

FINDINGS

In this section, the results are presented according to the relationships between classroom management skills of classroom teachers and self-esteem of middle school students. The independent samples t-tests results indicated that there were statistically significant results after the analysis of data. The purpose of this study is to analyze middle school teachers' self-assessment of classroom management and student self-esteem in an urban school district. After analyzing data, it was found that there were significant mean scores between teachers on CMSA survey and between students on CSEI survey.

The Levene's test was conducted to examine homogeneity for both participant groups in order to determine whether variances in the populations were normally distributed. The Levene's test showed that the variances in both populations were normally distributed as the significant value for this test was greater than .05 (Table 1). After analyzing data on the beliefs of middle school teachers on their own classroom management in CMSA, the findings showed that with an alpha level of .05, 6th grade teachers ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .30$) had a significantly higher mean score (see Table 2) than 7th grade teachers ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 0.64$) with conditions, $t(6) = 3.12$, $p = .02$ (see Table 2). The beliefs of 7th grade teachers were negative about their own classroom management.

As it can be seen in Table 3, out of 60 student participants of CSEI survey, 61.7% were females and 38.3% were males. As the study employed a quantitative methodology, which included random selection of participants, there were more females than males in the study.

Analyzing data on how self-esteem of middle school students get affected by the teachers with poor or strong classroom management skills showed significant differences on means. The study findings showed significant mean differences between students in 6th and 7th grade levels on CSEI. With an alpha level of .05, 6th grade students ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .46$) had a significantly higher

Table 2. Summary of ranges, means, and standard deviations on CMSA

Group	<i>n</i>	Min-Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
6 th Grade Teachers	4	3.85-4.54	4.09	.3	3.12	.02
7 th Grade Teachers	4	2.50-3.88	2.98	.64		

Note. CMSA = Classroom Management Self – Assessment. This construct consisted of 10 Likert scale items with a possible score of 1-5.

Table 3. Percentages of genders participating in the study.

Group	<i>n</i>	Percent	Cumulative percent
Female	37	61.7	61.7
Male	23	38.3	100.0
Total	60		

mean score than 7th grade students ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.36$) with conditions, $t(58) = 3.91$, $p = .00$ (Table 4). Students in 6th grade classrooms were more positive about their own self-esteem.

By considering these results, it can be concluded that teachers, who exhibited strong classroom management skills, had students with higher self-esteem. In addition to these findings, it can be seen that students, who exhibited low self-esteem had teachers with poor classroom management skills.

DISCUSSION

It is known that classroom management strategies used by teachers in the classrooms may have a positive or a negative effect on student self-esteem. There are very few studies which have researched whether or not there was a relationship between classroom management and student self-esteem. Students, who perceive that teachers are adequate in classroom management, have increased their level of self-esteem (Calabrese, 1987). While teachers with strong classroom management skills may be able to make connections with their students and contribute to student self-esteem (Berliner, 1989); those with lack of classroom management skills may negatively affect student self-esteem (Barber and McClellan, 1987).

This study investigated the perceptions of teachers on their classroom management skills and how such strategies impact student self-esteem. According to Blanton et al. (1994) and Nelson (1984), classroom management practices of teachers have an effect on student behavior, motivation, and self-esteem. Effective classroom management skills not only utilize effective learning environment, it promotes student self-esteem (Blanton et al., 1994; Nelson, 1984). In parallel research findings, Gettinger (1988) found that classroom management was directly linked to student self-esteem

because teachers, who had less behavioral problems in their classrooms, were able to establish a meaningful learning environment and promoted a higher level of self-esteem than teachers who lacked in classroom management.

The findings of this study indicated consistency with those of research aimed at testing teachers' classroom management self-assessment and student self-esteem (Blanton et al., 1994; Gettinger, 1988; Nelson, 1984; Ryan and Grolnick; 1986). The study results indicated that teachers, who had positive beliefs about their own classroom management skills successfully established expectations for student attitudes in order to develop self-esteem among all students (Cross and Markus, 1994).

In their study, Pintrich and DeGroot (1990) and Berliner (1989) found that students with a positive behavior and high self-esteem had classroom teachers with good personalities and effective classroom management strategies. However, in their study, Ryan and Grolnick (1986) found that teachers with lack of classroom management were authoritarian and had a limiting effect on student self-esteem. The findings of this study suggest that it is necessary to correctly understand the reasons and motives behind relationships, not just facts and information, and understanding the attributes of other people. When students misinterpret or misunderstand attributes of their teachers, it is more likely that students might feel uncomfortable, depressed, and exhibit negative behavior and low self-esteem in school (Kelley, 1967). Teachers need to be prudent when they manage their classrooms because the consequences of their actions will help students gain self-esteem, and be more successful in learning activities (Kelley, 1967).

The majority of studies in literature on the relationship between classroom management skills of teachers and student self-esteem have findings in parallel with those of the current study. Therefore it is possible to suggest that there is a relationship between classroom management and self-esteem. The significant findings of this study can be evaluated as students with lower self-esteem have teachers with poor classroom management skills in the classrooms, and vice versa.

Limitations

This study has important limitations that must be considered if the findings are to be adequately

Table 4. Summary of ranges, means, and standard deviations on CSEI.

Group	<i>n</i>	Min-Max	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
6 th Grade Students	30	3.08-4.58	3.75	.46	3.91	.00
7 th Grade Students	30	2.69-4.00	3.33	.36		

Note. CSEI = Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. This construct consisted of 25 Likert scale items with a possible score of 1-5.

interpreted. First, the small sample size may not be generalized to the entire population of teachers and students in the state or the nation. Second, the homogeneity of the sample may affect the generalizability of this study to the larger population. Lastly, possible researcher bias, due to the researcher being the sole person responsible for data collection and analysis. To minimize researcher biases and to strengthen the case study design, strategies were used to enhance the reliability and validity of this study, as well as adherence to protocols of data collection and analysis.

Suggestions for further research

Future research should build on these analyses by replicating data-informed findings for teachers and students from different school settings. Future efforts should build on this study with teachers at upper grade levels to test their classroom management self-assessment and its relationship with student self-esteem. Furthermore, future efforts should seek to use a larger sample size of teachers to increase the generalizability of results and incorporate steps to strengthen interrater reliability.

Conclusion

The key results and conclusion of the data analysis revealed that classroom management skills could affect students' self-esteem. Teachers, who lacked in classroom management strategies, had frequent problems with classroom control, used most of the instructional time on classroom management, and had a negative impact on student self-esteem. School communities need teachers with a better understanding of classroom management approaches. Schools should provide training and professional development on classroom management strategies for all teachers so that they can be efficient utilizing classroom management approaches and be able to promote student self-esteem. Otherwise, teachers, who are inadequate in classroom management will continue having conflicts with their students and use most of instructional time to control student behavior. As a result, stakeholders in education need to be one step ahead of the situation and understand the basic developmental

needs of the middle school students, as these students continue to experience substantial changes in their body and cognition.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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