Effective Planning Skills and Other Dimensions of Classroom Management

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Abstract

Research and every teacher's experience have proven that classroom management begins long before the students come into the classroom. Effective teachers plan their classroom management before the school year begins, and know what tasks they will need to undertake at the beginning and throughout the year. In general, classrooms with more structure have been shown to promote more appropriate academic and social behaviors. Effective planning skills do not only play an important role in the general teaching and learning process, but they also affect other dimensions of classroom management. In the study undertaken by the researcher, classroom management is presented in twelve dimensions which have been further presented in three domains. The main aim of this paper is to show the relationship of effective planning skills with other dimensions of classroom management. For the analysis of the data of this quantitative study the SPSS (version 21) program was used. The participants of the study are 1020 students of secondary schools in three cities of Albania, Tirana, Elbasan and Durrës. This paper will show how according to students' perceptions, effective planning skills correlate with other dimensions of classroom management. From the statistical analysis of the data it was found that effective planning skills has a strong positive correlation with other dimensions of classroom management, like, effective implementation of lesson plans (rs = .796, n = 921, p < .005), assessment and feedback (rs = .708, n = 918, p < .005), knowledge of the subject matter (rs = .794, n = 964, p < 005), and teacher's skills as motivator (rs = .730, n = 911, p < .005).

1. Introduction

Classroom management became an area of interest as researchers connected positive student behavior with fewer disruptions and more engaged learning to the techniques used by the classroom teacher (Evertson, 1995; Evertson, Emmer, Sanford, & Clement, 1983).

Emmer (1984) described classroom management as a series of activities directed at establishing a setting in which students engage in learning activities designated by the teacher and in which disruptive behavior is kept at a minimum. He mentions three major phases to the process of establishing and maintaining a well-managed classroom.

Pre-active phase. This phase of classroom management occurs prior to the arrival of students and consists of preparing the physical setting, planning beginning of year activities, and identifying expectations for student behavior and for work requirements.

Beginning the year. The second phase in classroom management occurs when students arrive. During this phase the teacher communicates expectations to students, establishes norms for behavior and work, and establishes routines and procedures for conducting activities. Depending upon the age and grade level of students, this phase may take anywhere from a few days to several weeks to complete.

Remainder of year. In the third phase of classroom management the emphasis is on maintaining norms for behavior and work. During this stage the emphasis in management shifts from socialization of students into the classroom setting to designing and conducting activities in ways that keep students actively engaged. Provisions for student success and adapting instruction to meet individual student needs (especially lower-achieving students) are critical in this stage (Emmer, 1984, p. 137).

This article will focus on the first phase described by Emmer, and will present the correlation between effective planning skills and other dimensions of other phases. Effective planning skills are a very important ingredient to successful classroom management. One ingredient only does not make everything go right, but with effective planning skills, successful classroom management is on the right way. This is supported by the findings of this study as it resulted that effective planning skills have a strong positive correlation with all the other dimensions of classroom management. In this paper it will be presented the positive correlation between effective planning skills and other four dimensions, which are effective implementation of lesson plans, assessment and feedback, knowledge of the subject matter, and teacher's skills as motivator.

2. Literature review
2.1. Effective planning skills

According to Emmer and Evertson (2009), classroom management begins long before the students come into the classroom. Effective teachers plan their classroom management before the school year begins, and know what tasks they will need to undertake at the beginning and throughout the year (Simonsen et al, 2008). In fact, classrooms with more *structure* have been shown to promote more appropriate academic and social behaviors. Students in high structure classrooms exhibited greater task involvement, friendlier peer interactions, more helpful behaviors, more attentive behavior, and less aggression (Simonsen et al, 2008).

Research highlights the importance of pupils always being aware of the purpose of the content of lessons. Research also shows that effective learning occurs where teachers clearly explain the objectives of the lesson at the outset, and refer to these throughout the lesson to maintain focus. These objectives should be related to previous study and to things of personal relevance of the pupils (Brophy & Good, 1990 in Sammons et al,1995).

2.2. Effective implementation of lesson plans

Even the best planned lessons are worthless if not conducted with the right procedures. In order for effective implementation of lesson plans to happen, teachers should ask students questions about their previous knowledge and experience, match the activities with the set objectives, lead the students to practice the acquired knowledge, and give students the opportunity to work individually, in groups or as a whole class, according to the task being performed. Teachers should also give clear instruction to pass from one activity to another, make sure the students are able to perform what they are asked to, and make a summary of the acquired knowledge at the end of each class.

As it was mentioned above teachers should ask students questions about their previous knowledge and experience. Loughran (2010) explains that the ideas, information, beliefs and attitudes that learners bring with them to the classroom are some of the elements that comprise what could be termed as their *prior knowledge*, or knowledge gained prior to formal teaching (p. 57). Loughram suggests that students learn much more effectively when they are placed in positions where they are building on what they already know because they can link the new information to their existing information. In so doing, it is more likely that their curiosity will be aroused and that they will be encouraged to create and build their knowledge in ways that might help them to better understand the topic being studied (p. 61).

According to Emmer and Evertson (2009), well-planned lessons with a variety of appropriate activities support the positive learning environment, (Emmer & Evertson 2009). In order to effectively implement lesson plans, teachers should have knowledge about activities, and their types. Emmer and Evertson explain that the term activity describes organized behavior that the teacher and students engage in for a common purpose (p. 88). The authors explain that typical activities in secondary classes include discussions, recitations, group work, presentations, seatwork, and checking, although this is by no means a complete list (p. 88).

2.3. Assessment and feedback

2.3.1. Assessment

Professional practice requires that teachers make good decisions about classroom assessment both because testing requires much time and because its effects on students are important. Typically, tests cover only a small portion of the content and objectives taught, so decisions have to be made about what to include. It is important to sample from the full range of content taught and to include enough items to allow reliable measurements (Good and Brophy, 2008 p. 365).

Although each teacher and testing situation is unique, Good and Brophy, (2008) offer six general guidelines for assessment:

1- If you consider testing important, it is probably a good idea for you to test frequently over short time spans, so that you can use your test data for reteaching and individualized instruction as well as grading.
2- Be clear about learning objectives, so as to minimize problems such as lack of content validity.
3- Allow students ample time to finish a test, unless time is a relevant factor.

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4- If you intend to test over the entire course content, be sure that you test samples equally from different parts of the course.

5- On the other hand, if you wish to stress certain content, alert students to this so that they can adjust their preparation accordingly.

6- Try to maintain some balance between essay tests and objective tests, because certain students do notably better on one type of test than the other. A balance between test types is usually preferable to reliance on only one (Good and Brophy, 2008 p. 311).

Philpott (2009) suggests that assessment should support learning. According to Philpott, assessment for learning is the most critical tool in developing and personalizing an individual student's route through school, as it takes account of the specific learning needs of each student. It is through assessment for learning that a teacher and student come to a purposeful understanding of the individual's learning needs (p. 63). Assessment for learning can allow teachers to know and guide all their students as individual learners. It has many facets and is a complex process that is more than grades and levels. Assessment for learning is most effective when its many aspects become integral to everyday teaching and learning and make up a framework of student classroom provision (Philpott, 2009 p. 64).

2.3.2. Feedback

Feedback is an important feature of both teaching and learning as it can make it possible for students to be reflective about their achievements, and both teacher and students become aware of their next step to learning. The British study of secondary schools by Rutter et al (1979, as cited in Sammons et al,1995) showed that direct and positive feedback such as praise and appreciation had a positive association with student behavior, but that prizes for work had little effect on any outcome measure.

Aims of feedback for students	Aims of feedback for teachers
• To evaluate their progress • To work towards and meet targets • To understand marking criteria • To maximize their own potential • To be rewarded for their success • To move students forward	• To monitor progress • To set work related and personal targets • To measure learning and understanding • To maximize student potential • To improve literacy • To mark effectively and efficiently

Table 1.Adopted from an example of whole school feedback policy (Philpott, 2009 p. 79)

Black and Wiliam (1998) as cited in Philpott (2009) state that feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils. Feedback has shown to improve learning where it gives each pupil specific guidance on strengths and weaknesses, preferably without any overall marks (Philpott, 2009 p. 73)**.**

In order to clarify the difference between marking and feedback Philpott gives the following definitions of both terms. This definition of feedback does not only explain what feedback is but also offers a view of its benefits.

Marking students' work involves passing a judgment on their work and measuring against an internally or externally imposed benchmarking system. Marking allows students to gain a sense of performance against a set criteria and offers a more summative approach to assessing a student's progress. If a student is aware of their target grade they can determine whether they are on target to meet it and plan their future learning upon their current and predicted performance.

Feedback is the information communicated to a student in regard to their understanding of shared learning objectives of a given task against an agreed set of criteria. This information will include guidance on how to improve. Feedback is the information that is relayed to the student about their progress and can be based upon a variety of forms of evidence including: marked work, un-graded teacher checked worked, oral contribution, practical displays, draft work and re-drafted work. This information can be relayed to the student in a written comment or in a face to face discussion. It is widely agreed to be the single most determining factor in enabling student to make progress and is recognized as such through the personalization agenda (p. 74).

2.4. Knowledge of the subject matter

Adequate knowledge was seen as a necessary prerequisite (although not in itself a sufficient condition) for effective teaching and learning (Sammons et al,1995). Several studies have found that deep content-area knowledge appear to positively impact student achievement (Brown & Bachler, 2013). Through deep knowledge of content the teacher knows how to transform the instructional design into a sequence of activities and exercises that make it accessible to students (Brown & Bachler, 2013).

According to Good and Brophy (2008), teachers need to make instructional decisions about both content (subject matter) and process (teaching methods). Teachers need to decide what to teach before they think about how to teach it, for two important reasons:
(1) They need to make sure that the content they intend to teach is worth teaching; and
(2) Any given type of content is better suited to some teaching methods than others, so they will need to use methods that are well suited to the content they want to develop (Good & Brophy, 2008 p. 275).

2.5. Teacher's skills as motivator

Appropriate curricula and good teaching are necessary but not sufficient that students learn. Teaching, however purposeful, cannot automatically lead to learning for the simple reason that learning is primarily a personal construct controlled by the individual learner (Kumaravadivelu, 2003 p. 44). If students minimize their investment of attention and effort, they won't learn much. The degree to which they invest attention and effort depends on their motivation (Good & Brophy, 2008 p. 143). By motivation to learn, Good and Brophy mean a student's tendency to find learning activities meaningful and worthwhile and to try to get the intended learning benefits from them. Motivating students to learn means not only stimulating them to take an interest in and see the value of what they are learning but also providing them with guidance about how to go about learning it (Good & Brophy, 2008 p. 168).

Research shows that Second Language motivation has important social and psychological dimensions which distinguish it from other forms of learning motivation, since learners are expected not simply to acquire knowledge of the language but to identify with the target language community and adopt their distinctive speech behaviors and styles (Ushioda, 2012 p.78). Finding ways of sparkling students' initial interest and enthusiasm is not enough, since motivation needs to be regulated and sustained though the long and arduous learning process, so the key lies in orchestrating the social learning environment and learning experience in such a way that students will want to participate and want to learn (Ushioda, 2012)

Ushioda (2012) suggests that in order to increase students' motivation, teachers need to engage students in using the target language to express their own personal meanings, interests and identities, rather than treating them as language "learners" who are merely practicing or demonstrating knowledge of the language (p.83). Another element that enhances motivation to learn is teacher's enthusiasm. When teachers are enthusiastic about a subject, students are likely to develop enthusiasm of their own, and as a result achieve at higher levels. According to Good and Brophy (2008), teacher enthusiasm includes at least two major aspects. The first is conveying sincere interest in the subject, and the second aspect is dynamic vigor. Enthusiastic teachers are alive in the room; they show surprise, suspense, joy, and other feelings in their voices and they make material interesting by relating it to their experiences and showing that they themselves are interested in it (Good and Brophy, 2008 p. 311).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Population and sampling

The population of this study consisted of all secondary school students in the cities of Tirana, Durres and Elbasan. Out of the total population, a sample of 1020 students was randomly selected as respondents. To ensure equality of representation, the secondary schools were selected to be private and public secondary schools, general and professional secondary schools, and lastly the schools were chosen from the suburb as well as the central areas of the cities. Of all the 1020 participants in this study 34.% (n=347) of the respondents responded to be males, 63.7% (n=650) of the respondents responded to be females, and 2.3% (n=23) of the respondents did not give this information.

3.2. Analysis of the data

Data was collected from 1020 secondary school students using a questionnaire. The 1020 questionnaires that were personally administered to each respondent were collected back by the researcher personally and the response rate was 100%. The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS program.

3.3. The instrument

Considering the complexity and the variation among learning settings, research findings – no matter how clear the relevant theory or how robust the findings – must be interpreted in relation to individual teachers and schools. Effective use of any concept taken from research on teaching can take many forms, and a teaching behavior may be appropriate in some context but not in others (Good & Brophy, 2008 p.31). For this reason the questionnaire used in this study is created with the Albanian education system in mind, for example the use of technology, the classroom equipment encountered in many books about classroom management are not applicable for most Albanian classroom, with the exception of private schools.

The questionnaire used in this study investigates three main areas of classroom management which are further subdivided in a total of twelve dimensions. The dimensions included in this paper are; effective planning skills, effective implementation of lesson plans, assessment and feedback, knowledge of the subject matter, and teacher's skills as motivator. The questionnaire was designed based on a Five Point Likert scale; 1 - It never happens in my class, 2 - It helps me very little in knowledge acquisition, 3 - It helps me somehow in knowledge acquisition, 4 - It helps me very much in knowledge acquisition, 5 - It is one of the elements that helps me the most in knowledge acquisition.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collecting tool, a pilot study was conducted in three secondary schools; each one selected from each city included in the study. The questionnaire was reviewed and revised in the light of the results gained from the pilot study. Furthermore, three lecturers of SLA and Teaching Methodology in the Foreign Language Department, Aleksander Moisiu University, Durres, were engaged to cross check the items and finally the questionnaires were administered to the selected sample by the researcher. Cronbach Alpha was calculated to ensure reliability of the instrument (Tab. 2).

Table 2. Instrument reliability. Cronbach's Alpha before and after the piloting of the instrument.

Dimensions	Cronbach's Alpha (Piloting)	Cronbach's Alpha (Final)	Nr of items
Effective planning skills	.754	.771	10
Effective implementation of lesson plans	.773	.781	10
Assessment and feedback	.767	.739	8
Knowledge of the subject matter	.816	.723	6
Teacher's skills as motivator	.864	.823	11

4. Findings and discussion

Findings and results of this study are presented in the following tables that represent the views and perceptions of the respondents.

According to the significance of the correlation, effective planning skills and the other dimensions correlations are ranked as follows;

Table 3. The ranking of the correlations.

Dimension	Dimension	Correlation
Effective planning skills (EPS)	Effective implementation of lesson plans (EILP)	.769[**]
Effective planning skills (EPS)	Knowledge of the subject matter (KSM)	.749[**]
Effective planning skills (EPS)	Teacher's skills as motivator (TSM)	.730[**]
Effective planning skills (EPS)	Assessment and feedback (AF)	.708[**]

Cohen (1988) suggests the following guidelines; small r = .10 to .29, medium r = .30 to .49 and, large r = .50 to .1.0. The relationship between Effective planning skills and Effective implementation of lesson plans was investigated using Spearman's rho correlation coefficient. Preliminary analysis were performed and results violation of the assumption of normality, linearity and

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homoscedasticity therefore there were used nonparametric tests. There was a strong positive correlation between the two dimensions, rs = .769, n = 921, p < .005 with high levels of EPS associated with high levels of EILP (Table 4).

There was also a strong positive correlation between Effective Planning Skills and Knowledge of the Subject Matter, rs = .749, n = 964, p < 005, with high levels of EPS associated with high levels of KSM (Table 8).

As it was mentioned at the beginning of this paper Effective Planning Skills has a strong positive correlation with all the other dimensions of classroom management. As a result, so is the case with the two remaining dimensions investigated in this paper. There is a strong positive correlation between Effective Planning Skills and Teacher's Skills as Motivator, rs = .730, n = 911, p < .005, with high levels of EPS associated with high levels of TSM (Table 10).

The final correlation presented in this paper is that between Effective Planning Skills and Assessment and Feedback. There is a strong positive correlation between Effective Planning Skills and Assessment and Feedback, rs = .708, n = 918, p < .005, with high levels of EPS associated with high levels of AF (Table 6).

5. Conclusions

As the experience of every good teacher would suggest, well planned and structured teaching begins long before the students come to class. This is also supported by research and studies in classroom management (Emmer & Evertson, 2009, Simonsen et al, 2008).

From the study in here presented, it was found that the dimension of effective planning skills is not only an important feature of a well managed classroom but it also affects positively other dimensions of classroom management. As it resulted from the analysis of the 1020 questionnaires administered to students of secondary schools, according to these students' perceptions, effective planning skills have a strong positive correlation with effective implementation of lesson plans, knowledge of the subject matter, teacher's skills as motivator, and assessment and feedback.

Future papers will aim at presenting other correlations and students' perceptions related to the twelve dimensions investigated using the questionnaire used for the present study.

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Appendixes

Table 4. Correlation between Effective planning skills and Effective implementation of lesson plans.

Correlations			Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Zbatimi efektiv i planit mësimor
Spearman's rho	Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.769[**]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	911	842
	Zbatimi efektiv i planit mësimor	Correlation Coefficient	.769[**]	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	842	921
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 5. Scatterplot for Effective planning skills and Effective implementation of lesson plans.
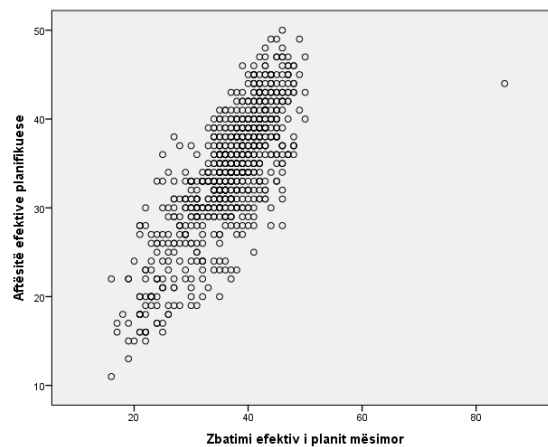

Table 6. Correlation between Effective planning skills and Assessment and feedback.

Correlations			Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Vlerësimi i punës së nxënësve dhe fidbeku
Spearman's rho	Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.708[**]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	911	832
	Vlerësimi i punës së nxënësve dhe fidbeku	Correlation Coefficient	.708[**]	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	832	918
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

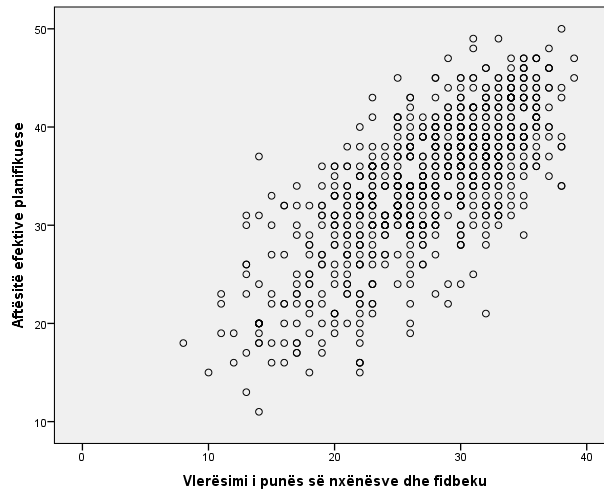Table 7. Scatterplot between Effective planning skills and Assessment and feedback.
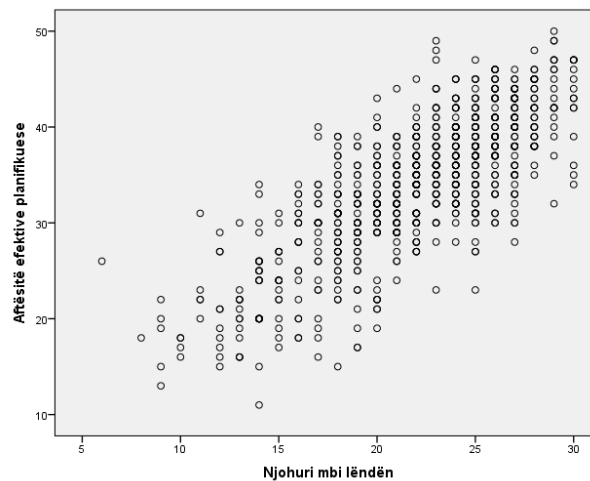
Table 8. Correlation between Effective planning skills and Knowledge of the subject matter.

Correlations			Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Njohuri mbi lëndën
Spearman's rho	Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.749**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	911	871
	Njohuri mbi lëndën	Correlation Coefficient	.749**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	871	964
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 9. Scatterplot for Effective planning skills and Knowledge of the subject matter.

Table 10. Correlation between Effective planning skills and Teacher's skills as motivator.

Correlations				
			Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Aftësitë motivuese të mësuesit/es
Spearman's rho	Aftësitë efektive planifikuese	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.730[**]
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	911	809
	Aftësitë motivuese të mësuesit/es	Correlation Coefficient	.730[**]	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	809	882
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

Table 11. Scatterplot for Effective planning skills and Teacher's skills as motivator.