

# Cultural Sensitivity and Classroom Management of Teachers

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**Citation:** Garcia, K. A., & Pantao, J. G. (2021). Cultural Sensitivity and Classroom Management of Teachers. *International Journal of Professional Development, Learners and Learning*, 3(1), ep2108. <https://doi.org/10.30935/ijpdll/11093>

## ABSTRACT

The diversity of cultures in schools is on its rapid growth. Consequently, the knowledge of teachers on cultural background becomes a valuable input to the way they manage their classroom. This study aimed to find out the relationship of cultural sensitivity with the classroom management of teachers.

The study employed correlational research design. It is quantitative in nature that was complemented by interviews. It involved thirty-one (31) accessible respondents who were public school teachers of Dadiangas South Central Elementary School, General Santos City employed during the school year 2015-2016. Three (3) of the teachers were randomly chosen for an interview. The data needed were gathered using questionnaires following the survey method and interviews of randomly chosen teachers. The data were analyzed using frequency count, weighted mean, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient.

The result of the study revealed that teachers display a high-level cultural sensitivity. They employed ideal classroom management to a great extent. The findings also disclosed that a moderate significant relationship between cultural sensitivity and classroom management exists. Based on the findings, the cultural sensitivity of teachers influences their classroom management. The study recommends capacity-building programs for the teachers such as seminar-workshop on multicultural approaches to education and culturally responsive classroom management strategies for them to enhance their knowledge and skills on culture-sensitive classroom management.

**Keywords:** cultural sensitivity, classroom management, Dadiangas South Central Elementary School

Received: 19 Dec. 2020 ♦ Accepted: 19 May 2021

## INTRODUCTION

The diversity of culture in schools has been increasing and becoming enormous over time (Serdyukov, 2017). Managing classroom with diverse demographics is one of the concerns of teachers nowadays as diversity and inclusivity become very significant in teaching-learning process. As the classrooms get more diverse, teachers are now on the verge of moving from the less effective traditional classroom management strategies to more responsive strategies that address classroom diversity and implement the teacher-learning process effectively. According to Uddin and Johnson (2018), negative effects on students' learning can happen if the classes have diversity lacking classroom management strategies.

Diversity in the classrooms of the Philippines is also present. Known to be a multicultural country having a great number of ethnicities, tribes and culture, schools in the country have classrooms with students having diverse demographic make-up. Consequently, teachers are burdened with mind-boggling exercises on how to address the needs of the culturally diverse students under their tutelage. With the changing classroom demographics, they tailor their management strategies using their personal experiences and cultural knowledge as they attempt to manage their classes with cultural sensitivity.

Sherman (2014) defined cultural sensitivity as a set of skills that enables a person to learn about and get to know people who are different. The cultural sensitivity of teachers may play a big role in handling this diversity. Being aware of how his or her students feel and how much he or she knows about them is one of her primary roles. In order to avoid problems of culturally irrelevant classroom management techniques, teachers must be culturally sensitive and culturally literate (Gabriel et al., 2011). As opined by Weinstein, Tomlison-Clarke, and Curran (2004), lack of multicultural intelligence can higher the level of difficulties the teachers have with classroom management. Thus, classroom management may be dependent on the cultural sensitivity of teachers.

Theoretically, proponents of culturally relevant education posited that students can have maximum learning if they get situated in a classroom environment which are responsive to their needs, including their cultural aspect (Ladson-Billing, 1995). To date, there is extensive research on traditional classroom management and a myriad of resources available on how to deal with behavior issues such as Postholm (2013) on social system; Erdogan et al. (2010) on classroom discipline; Mansor et al. (2020) on a classroom management case study; Erdogan and Kurt (2015) on classroom management literature review. However, only a handful of studies documented the influence of cultural sensitivity on classroom management. A very few have been explored

on its influence on the classroom management, which is very important specially in lower grades when pupils are likely to decrease academic motivation (Anderman, 2013). Locally, there are schools with multicultural composition but no studies have been made to document the ability and management approaches of teachers. It is along with these reasons that the researcher was prompted to undertake the present study.

The growing diversity in the school populations necessitates readiness on the part of teachers in employing culturally sensitive management strategies in dealing with the students. There is this imperative to evaluate and study the factors that affect the classroom management of teachers specific to its condition such as cultural sensitivity as teachers deal with more multi-culturally diverse classes (Cortez et al., 2020). With this undertaking, educational leaders and teachers will be able to devise appropriate intervention and capacity building to best cater to the needs of its students. Hence, this study aims to evaluate the bond that exists between cultural sensitivity and classroom management in the context of Filipino teachers.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to relate the cultural sensitivity ad classroom management of teachers. Specifically, it endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of cultural sensitivity of the teachers?
2. To what extent do the teachers employ classroom management practices?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers?

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on an inclusive approach to learning and teaching that tries to fulfil the unique learning needs of each individual student and views them as an opportunity rather than a problem (UNESCO, 2005). Using Diversity Pedagogy Theory (DPT) as a frame of reference, the study argued that the teachers to become effective in managing their classes, they must acknowledge and understand the critical role the cultures of students play in teaching-learning process. The Diversity Pedagogy Theory (DPT) contended that there is a natural and inseparable connection between culture and cognition (Hernandez, 2009). In the context of this study, the specific association of cultural sensitivity on the teacher's classroom management was explored.

The argument of this study comes in complementation with the framework of culturally responsive education of Ladson-Billings (1995) which pointed out that students learn best if catered with appropriate management methodologies after significantly considering their cultural background. This construct shows the importance of allowing

students to learn in all aspects by knowing their cultural referents to contribute knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Tamayao, 2013).

Moreover, the framework is supported by the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura (1997) as cited by Smith and Berge (2009). This theory stressed that an individual learns from his or her interaction with other people in a social context. Similar behaviors can also be developed by observing other people's behavior. This theory is important because the teacher has to adapt or accept the culture of others to prevent barriers from one another and could therefore lead to higher cultural sensitivity.

**Figure 1** shows the research paradigm. The independent variable of the study is cultural sensitivity and the dependent variable is classroom management. Moreover, the arrow represents the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

## METHODOLOGY

This was a quantitative study that used a correlational research approach to ascertain the association between cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers. The data collection instrument was a survey questionnaire for each variable that was content validated by experts and subjected to a pilot test to ensure its reliability. Moreover, the quantitative data were complemented by the narratives generated from the one-on-one interview with accessible teachers.

This study analyzed data collected from all thirty-one (31) accessible respondents who were handling culturally diverse pupils officially enrolled in Dadiangas South Central Elementary School during the school year 2015-2016. The data have been collected using paper-and-pencil questionnaires that the teachers filled out. Three (3) accessible teachers were also interviewed to validate the quantitative data of this study.

In addition, the two self-reported questionnaires were used to collect the needed data for this study. These are the modified Intercultural Sensitivity Scale of Fritz, Mollenberg, and Chen (2002) and Classroom Management Scale adapted from Sugai and Colvin (2004) with Cronbach's reliability alpha of 0.839 and 0.977 respectively. To complement the quantitative data, the researcher prepared guide questions for cultural sensitivity and classroom management made based on the data gathered.

## RESULTS

The present study widens knowledge about the cultural sensitivity of teachers in school. The means imputed for the independent variable are shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1** presents the cultural sensitivity of the teachers. The teachers **strongly agree** that they enjoy interacting with their pupils from different cultures ( $M= 5.00$ ); respect the ways of their pupils from



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

**Table 1.** Cultural Sensitivity of Teachers

Indicator	WM	Description	Verbal Interpretation
1. I enjoy interacting with my pupils from other culture.	5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
2. I am open-minded to my pupils from Different cultures.	4.55	Strongly Agree	Very High
3. I make time to have conversations with my culturally-distinct pupils.	4.10	Agree	High
4. I often show my culturally-distinct Pupils my understanding of their culture through verbal or nonverbal cues.	4.19	Agree	High
5. I have a feeling of enjoyment towards my differences with my culturally-distinct pupils.	4.10	Agree	High
6. I think my pupils from other cultures are open-minded.	4.16	Agree	High
7. I respect the values of my pupils from different cultures.	4.55	Strongly Agree	Very High
8. I respect the ways of my pupils from different cultures	4.58	Strongly Agree	Very High
9. I accept the opinions of my pupils from different cultures.	4.45	Agree	High
10. I think my culture is equal to my pupils' cultures.	3.90	Agree	High
11. I am aware of the cultural upbringing of my pupils	4.10	Agree	High
12. I find it easy to talk with my pupils from different cultures	3.61	Agree	High
13. I always know what to say when interacting with my pupils from different cultures.	3.81	Agree	High
14. I socialize well when interacting with my pupils from different cultures.	3.94	Agree	High
15. I have confidence when interacting with my pupils from different cultures	4.23	Agree	High
16. I am excited when interacting with my pupils from different cultures.	4.06	Agree	High
17. I often get encouraged when I am with my pupils from different cultures.	4.16	Agree	High
18. I often feel useful when interacting with my pupils from different cultures.	4.16	Agree	High
19. I enjoy discovering the similarities and differences of my students' culture	4.35	Agree	High
20. I am enthusiastic in responding to the needs of my students from the other culture	4.23	Agree	High
21. I am very observant when interacting with my pupils from other cultures.	4.26	Agree	High
22. I take time to get information as I can when interacting with my pupils from different cultures.	4.06	Agree	High
23. I am sensitive to the feelings and perception of my culturally-distinct pupils during our interaction.	4.26	Agree	High
24. I am observant to how my students interact with their classmates from different cultures.	4.32	Agree	High
25. I listen to different views of my students from different culture.	4.39	Agree	High
Mean	<b>4.22</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>High</b>

N=31

different cultures ( $M=4.58$ ) open-minded to their pupils from different cultures ( $M=4.55$ ); and respect the values of their pupils from different cultures ( $M=4.55$ ). Moreover, they agree that they listen to different views of their students from different culture ( $M=3.39$ ) and are observant to how their students interact with their classmates from different cultures ( $M=3.32$ ).

The result complements the result of the interview that the teachers show respect to the pupils of different cultures. In one interview, the teacher said she showed open-mindedness to her pupils by allowing them to express and disclose their cultural norms and values. In general, the cultural sensitivity of teachers obtained a weighted mean of 4.22 described as **agree**.

**Table 2** displays the classroom management of teachers in Dadiangas South Central Elementary School. The teachers **often** speak with their pupils with respect and dignity ( $M=4.39$ ); provide specific activities for students to get to know one another and solve problems collaboratively ( $M=4.35$ ); arrange room to maximize (teacher to-student) proximity and minimize crowding and distraction ( $M=4.32$ ); prepare lessons/activities such as filler activities, materials readied, fluent presentation, clear directions ( $M=4.32$ ); use varied methods to check students' understanding ( $M=4.32$ ); use general classroom procedures and student jobs to enhance student responsibility ( $M=4.32$ ); provide students with self-control and self-monitoring strategies ( $M=4.32$ ). To sum up, the teachers employ classroom management with the mean of 4.16 described as **often**.

**Table 3** displays the result of the correlated variables. The bivariate analysis shows that cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers is moderately significant. This is supported by the  $r$  value of

0.616 and a  $p$  value of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 margin of error. The statistical result of the data showed that only 38% of the classroom management of the teachers is affected by their cultural sensitivity. Thus, the result suggests that there are other factors that can affect the teachers' classroom management (62%).

## DISCUSSION

The present study endeavored to determine the cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers. Generally, the findings revealed that the teachers have high level of ability to assess and evaluate other cultures to know how a teacher can appropriately approach the pupils and communicate with them accordingly. The generated evidences suggest that the teachers are making effort to understand and try to adapt to the new culture they have been encountering every day in the classroom. This result complements to the study that teachers have high level of cultural competence in terms of message skills, intercultural management, behavioral flexibility, identity management, and relationship cultivation (Panuncillo, 2016).

Also, the result strengthens the suggestion that an effective cross-cultural communicator should not only tolerate ambiguity well but also be able to adapt to "new social conventions and behavior demands", and then understand his or her own culture and its effect on personal behavior. Anent to this, one study further affirmed that teachers were open-minded, and gave the positive interaction to people of another raise (Jantawej & Inada, 2011).

However, the outcome contrasts to the study which revealed that that though teachers had extensive preparation in handling a diverse

**Table 2.** Classroom Management of Teachers

Indicator	WM	Description	Verbal Interpretation
1. I establish and explicitly teach student procedures.	4.19	Often	Great Extent
2. I arrange my room to maximize (teacher to-student) proximity and minimize crowding and distraction.	4.32	Often	Great Extent
3. I actively supervise (move, san, interact, reinforce).	4.19	Often	Great Extent
4. My rules are stated as “do’s” instead of “nos” or “don’ts	4.03	Often	Great Extent
5. I actively involve students in establishing classroom rules.	4.16	Often	Great Extent
6. I explicitly teach and review expectations or classroom “rules” in the context of routines.	4.19	Often	Great Extent
7. I conduct smooth and efficient transitions between activities	4.23	Often	Great Extent
8. I am prepared for lessons/activities (filler activities, materials readied, fluent presentation, clear directions).	4.32	Often	Great Extent
9. I provide a clear explanation of outcomes/objectives.	4.29	Often	Great Extent
10. I end lessons/activities with specific feedback.	4.10	Often	Great Extent
11. I maximize multiple and varied opportunities for each student to respond during my instruction.	4.10	Often	Great Extent
12. I engage my students in observable ways during teacher directed instruction (i.e., I use response cards, choral responding, votes, and other methods).	4.06	Often	Great Extent
13. I use varied methods to check students’ understanding.	4.32	Often	Great Extent
14. At the end of the activity, I know how many students have met the objective.	4.23	Often	Great Extent
15. I use persistence coaching for students who struggle.	4.10	Often	Great Extent
16. I consider and note needed improvements (to lesson) for next time.	4.03	Often	Great Extent
17. I see to it that the academic climate is motivating/engaging.	4.19	Often	Great Extent
18. I maintain a ratio of 4:1 positive interactions	4.06	Often	Great Extent
19. I positively interact with every student at least 2-3 times per hour on average.	3.94	Often	Great Extent
20. After correcting rule violations, I use acknowledgement and positive reinforcement for rule following.	4.16	Often	Great Extent
21. I provide specific and immediate contingent acknowledgement for academic and social behaviours (e.g., following expectations).	4.10	Often	Great Extent
22. I also use multiple systems to acknowledge appropriate behaviour (teacher reaction, group contingencies, behaviour contracts, or token systems).	4.03	Often	Great Extent
23. I use different reinforcement strategies to address problem behaviour.	4.19	Often	Great Extent
24. I provide specific, contingent, and brief error corrections (stating expected behavior) for academic and social errors.	4.13	Often	Great Extent
25. In addition, I use the least restrictive procedure to discourage inappropriate behaviour (non-verbal, proximity, teacher reaction, re-teaching, etc.) and proceed to more restrictive procedures when only needed.	3.97	Often	Great Extent
26. I respond to inappropriate behaviour in a calm, emotionally objective and business-like manner.	4.10	Often	Great Extent
27. I learn and use student names by the end of week 2.	4.03	Often	Great Extent
28. I use explicit activities to learn about students.	4.10	Often	Great Extent
29. I promote parent involvement through Teacher-to-parent letters/newsletters periodically.	4.10	Often	Great Extent
30. I speak to students with dignity and respect—even when providing correction!	4.39	Often	Great Extent
31. I use general classroom procedures and student jobs to enhance student responsibility.	4.32	Often	Great Extent
32. I provide students with self-control and self-monitoring strategies	4.32	Often	Great Extent
33. I provide social skills instruction and problem solving strategies.	4.23	Often	Great Extent
34. I provide specific activities for students to get to know one another and solve problems collaboratively.	4.35	Often	Great Extent
	<b>4.16</b>	<b>Often</b>	<b>Great Extent</b>

N=31

**Table 3.** Relationship between the Cultural Sensitivity and Classroom Management of Teachers

Variables Correlated	R	p-value	Extent of Relationship	Remarks
Cultural Sensitivity and Classroom Management	0.616	0.000	Moderate	Significant

N=31

classroom, they still suffered from a cultural shock (Killick, 2008). This suggests that the teachers are sensitive enough to know the actions they will be intervening without offending the children of different cultures. The length of stay has exposed the teachers to pupils from different cultural orientations and this exposure has made them adept to the various cultures of the pupils. Theoretically, this condition can be explained by the acculturation theory which according to Acton and Walker de Felix (1986) as cited by Polok (2006) is a continuous adaptation to a particular culture without intentionally forgetting one's original and native identity.

In terms of classroom management, the teachers have employed effective classroom management that create positive classroom climate

within which effective teaching and learning can occur to great extent. Generally, the teachers employed non-punitive practices. According to Eleftheria, Kafenia, and Andreou (2013), non-punitive practices include establishing and re-establishing rules, encouraging children to be responsible, promoting students to discuss a topic involving behavior, emotions or situations of concern. One of the interviewees of this study shared that she incorporated reflective consequences when mistakes are created and develop the students towards self-regulation on speaking words that are not good and helpful. Evidently, these actions are reflected in the indicators with the highest mean. Thus, these findings corroborate with the result of researches on classroom management that are grounded locally. Local studies conducted in

General Santos City and Sarangani Province also found out that the teachers employ classroom management to a great extent (Celajes, 2015; Digo, 2009; Durato, 2013; Yusop, 2014).

In addition, the study yielded modest relationship between cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers. This implies that the cultural sensitivity of teachers influences the classroom management. For instance, another teacher interviewed revealed that she used a language that she thought was appropriate and understandable to all her students. She considered the pupils background when interacting with them involving certainty of the words she is uttering. The finding corroborates the Diversity Pedagogy Theory used as a frame of reference for this study. It is revealed that teachers view classroom management to be more effective when they acknowledge the role of culture in the classroom set-up. Moreover, the Culturally Responsive Teaching of Ladson-Billing (1995) supports this as teachers consider their students' culture when dealing with them.

This result strengthens the findings of some studies that use constructs associated with cultural sensitivity such as emotional intelligence and social intelligence. In fact, experts like Cherbosque, Gardenswartz, and Rowe, (2008) stated that awareness of the impact culture has in shaping behavior is a crucial part of emotional intelligence. Hence, cultural sensitivity and emotional intelligence are interrelated to one another. Moreover, Dong, Koper, and Collaco, (2008) suggested that social intelligence can serve as a foundation for, and help facilitate in the development of intercultural sensitivity. As such, social intelligence and emotional intelligence are significant pointers to be considered in this study.

Generally, the result of the research suggests that there are still other factors affecting the classroom management of teachers. Manalata (2011) specified these factors such as effective instruction, setting and implementing rules, managing intervention, feedback on appropriate behaviors, and classroom environment.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has given account on cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers. The results of this paper revealed that the teachers have high level of cultural sensitivity with high level of ability to assess and consider other cultures. In terms of classroom management, teachers have done activities that create a positive classroom climate within which effective teaching and learning can occur to a great extent. This paper indeed revealed that cultural sensitivity has modest influence on the classroom management of teachers.

Therefore, the study recommends that teachers may endeavor to initiate intercultural dialogue with children and parent and conduct seminar-workshop on multicultural approaches to education and culturally responsive classroom management strategies. Pursuing this study with different variables is also recommended to uncover the other factors that can influence the classroom management practices of teachers.

This study acknowledges its limitation as being conducted to a small sample, however considered appropriate precautions to satisfy the purpose of the study. It does not intend to generalize the results but to quantitatively describe the cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers, and test their association. Finally, while this

study is focused on a multicultural context, future studies involving these variables with larger sample size should be conducted to further understand the cultural sensitivity and classroom management of teachers across levels.

**Author contributions:** All authors were involved in concept, design, collection of data, interpretation, writing, and critically revising the article. All authors approve final version of the article.

**Funding:** The authors received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

**Declaration of interest:** Authors declare no competing interest.

**Data availability:** Data generated or analysed during this study are available from the authors on request.

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