# Influence of Classroom Misconduct on Academic Performance of Senior Phase Learners: The Teachers' Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

Classroom misconduct among students continues to be a challenge, particularly for South African teachers. Senior phase learners in South African schools have demonstrated an alarming amount of misconduct in classroom settings, and this tends to affect students' academic performance as it disrupts the process of teaching and learning. In this study, the researchers tried to examine the perceptions of teachers on the causes of classroom misconduct among senior phase learners in South Africa and how it influences their academic performance. The study adopted a qualitative research approach and employed a phenomenological research design. The sample of the study comprised 12 high school teachers purposefully selected to participate in the study. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that learners' background, attention-seeking, child-headed responsibilities, and teachers' unpreparedness and inconsistency are among the causes of classroom misconduct among senior phase learners. It was found also that students' classroom misconduct hinders the teaching and learning process in the classroom, and also interferes with other learners' learning disrupts the whole process of teaching and learning, and in the long run, affects the academic performance of students. Based on these findings, the study recommended that teachers should give learners full attention at school to reduce distractions in the classroom. The study further recommends that teachers should be professional and serious in handling teaching and learning matters to keep learners busy, this will help to reduce the rate of misconduct among senior phase students.

## INTRODUCTION

Learner misconduct has a global impact on the effective teaching and learning process in classrooms. Classroom misconduct, according to Pas, Cash, O'Brenan, Debnam, and Bradshaw (2015), generates a learning-unfriendly climate, reduces instructional time, and contributes to unfavorable peer interactions in the classroom. According to Obadire and Senthumule (2021), "learners' indiscipline has increased globally". As a result, misconduct becomes a critical issue in classroom management in any classroom (Wati, Suwastini, & Wasistha, 2019), and the teacher plays an important role in managing the classroom and keeping it congenial. Furthermore, Lamraoui (2016) discovered that classroom misconduct has a direct impact on the learner-teacher connection.

Learners in South African schools, particularly in the senior phase, have demonstrated an alarming degree of wrongdoing in classroom settings. According to Odzere and Karacabey (2020), instructors face many sorts of misconduct daily, and this poor behavior has an impact on the learners' academic performance since it disrupts the teaching and learning process. Thus, Dalgic and Bayhan (2014) note that the number of distinct types of misconduct has expanded considerably over the previous two decades, so it is not surprising that the literature includes multiple words defining and describing diverse types of [learner] misconduct. According to Menikdiwela (2020),

terminology like misbehavior, disciplinary infraction, and disruptive behavior have been used in the literature to identify undesirable conduct. Meanwhile, Mardliyah (2019) defines [learners'] misconduct as any type of behavior that violates the classroom interferes with classroom order, or disrupts the teaching and learning process. It is also defined by Charles (2014) as behavior that is inappropriate for the situation or setting in which it occurs, that is, behavior that disrupts the explicit rules or implicit norms of the classroom, hinders classroom work, and interrupts the teaching and learning process (Dalgç & Bayhan, 2014).

The degree to which misconduct occurs ranges from minor misbehavior to extreme misconduct; in the worst-case scenarios, learners may injure or even kill others within the school grounds (Obadire & Senthumule, 2021). Dalgic and Bayhan (2014) outline the most common learners' misbehaviors as follows: continual chatting during lessons, task avoidance, arriving late to class, verbal animosity towards peers and teachers, indifference to study matter throughout courses, and harming school property. The fact is that some teachers find it difficult to manage classroom misbehavior (Mardliyah, 2019); as a result, they struggle to teach learners, which leads to a plethora of discipline issues; these issues complicate teachers' roles in the classroom and become one source of job stress and burnout for teachers. According to Mardliyah (2019), student misconduct has become a severe issue that has a detrimental impact on the learning environment, disrupts the learning process, and causes teachers distress.

Masingi (2017) discovered that learner disciplinary causes are complex since they are not the product of a single element. One could argue that learners' misbehavior has several causes that stem from environmental factors such as the societal background in which the learner was raised, as well as the school environment where the learner attends school, both of which have a negative impact on the learners' psychological state (Mwaniki, 2018). As a result, it is critical for teachers to pay attention to their students' conduct and attempt to determine the causes of the behavior from the standpoint of their intrinsic and extrinsic elements (Obadire & Senthumule, 2021). As a result, Pas et al. (2015) propose that teachers can establish a good classroom atmosphere by employing classroom management practices. Therefore, this study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of learner misconduct in senior-phase classrooms and how it affects their academic performance.

The general purpose of this study is to determine the influence of classroom misconduct on the academic performance of senior phase learners: The teachers' perspectives. Specifically, the study intends to determine: (1) How senior phase teachers perceive classroom misconduct; (2); The types of classroom misconduct teachers experience among senior phase learners; (3) The causes of classroom misconduct among senior phase learners; (4) The strategies that could be implemented to deal with classroom misconduct.

## METHODS
### Research Approach and Design

This study employed the qualitative research approach which aims to share specific enlightenment to a phenomenon which is based on those who have experienced it. Also, the use of phenomenology enabled the participants to put their experiences into perspective and to ascribe meaning to phenomena that they have personally experienced to provide better understanding. The researchers are acquainted with realities that are socially constructed and intimately embedded in this study's context, and of the research setting, participants, and data being collected. Lastly, because the qualitative inquiry is an effective way to explore the perceptions of participants, it is, therefore, the most suitable methodology for this study.

### Participants

The recruited participants were twelve (12) senior phase teachers of a selected public high school in the city of Bloemfontein, Motheo district, in Free State province. A high school situated in a white suburb of Bloemfontein in the Free State province was targeted for data collection. A convenience sampling technique was applied in selecting participants. These participants were Grade 8 and 9 teachers.

### Instruments for Data Collection and Procedure

This study conducted semi-structured interviews which informed the researcher on the logic of questions that were to be asked, how to categorize items/s for analysis, how, and when to probe for more information, this is because

participants were free to answer questions the way they see fit. The experiences that people go through in their daily lives can be best explored when researchers allow participants to describe their personal experiences themselves. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were applied, and a voice recorder was used to record the interviews as an accurate data collection strategy. Interviews were conducted during teacher's free periods so that the teaching and learning time is not disturbed. Also, each teacher was interviewed individually, for the interviewee's comfort, and openness and to avoid any disturbances that might arise.

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Free State, and with ethical clearance obtained from the University, the school principal was approached to get ethical permission from the school, this permission was then taken to the participants to get their informed consent. Participants' anonymity, confidentiality, as well as vulnerability, was maintained. The researcher did not at any point disclose participants' personal information.

**Data Analysis**

Collected data was analyzed using the thematic data analysis method as proposed under the research methodology. Themes and categories were manually discovered through manual coding of the twelve transcribed interviews:

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Below are direct quotes from participants' interviews with different categories and their correlating themes.

**Teachers Perceive Classroom Misconduct**

This category represents research questions one that explore how teachers perceive learners' misconduct in their classrooms. Two themes were discovered from the participants' transcribed interviews, namely: Learners refusing to take instructions, following rules and commands, and disruption of the process of teaching and learning.

1. Learners refusing to follow instructions, obey rules, and command

On the issue of learning and refusing to follow instructions or obey rules and commands, the respondents had these to say:

T1: For starters, a child must take instructions and they must listen to what their teacher is saying

to them, and if not then it means that particular learners are conducting themselves in a bad manner.

T2: Nowadays learners are no longer behaving like those learners that we taught years ago, learners of today refuse to abide by the rules, and they refuse to follow commands or instructions.

T3: We can call it or we can term it as a certain kind of irregularity, where we see learners failing to abide by the rules, they ignore classroom rules which are mounted on the classroom walls, so anything that is defying the rules is a form of irregularity and misconduct.

According to the findings, teachers perceive learners' misconduct as the behavior that leads to learners refusing to follow any instructions, rules, or commands that have been put in place for them to follow, for the smooth running of the classroom and the school as a whole.

2. Disruption of the teaching and learning process

The theme results from the answers that were provided by the participants from the first research sub-questions. Their responses revealed that learners' classroom misconduct not only is a behavior that leads to learners' refusal to follow instructions but it also results in disruption that interferes with the process of teaching and learning. Below are the direct quotes from the participants:

T1: Learners' misconduct is a problem because it disturbs a teacher from doing his/her work. Teachers cannot teach and learners cannot learn when there are disruptions in the classroom.

T2: I perceive classroom misconduct as a destruction that hinders the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

T5: Classroom misconduct not only disturbs teachers from doing their work, but it does interferes with other learners' learning and disrupts the whole process of teaching and learning.

T6: It has to be the unacceptable behavior that is intentionally done by learners to defy the rules and to disrupt the process of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Findings revealed that teachers perceive learners' misconduct as the behavior that results in the disruption of lessons, that disturbs the process of teaching and learning, which affects learners' academic success and progress.

**The Types of Classroom Misconduct Teachers Experience Among Senior Phase Learners**

This category aims to establish the types of misconduct that teachers experience in the classrooms. The following themes were discovered from the transcribed interview answers: Noise-making, talking out of turn and without permission; Cheating in tests and examinations; and bullying other learners.

1. Noise-making, talking out of turn, and without permission

In response to the type of learners' classroom misconduct that teachers encounter in their classrooms, participants referred to noise-making, talking out of turn, and talking without being permitted to talk as one of the misconducts that they have encountered in their classrooms. T3, T5, and T6 gave their direct views on this theme as follows:

T3: Learners would just talk to one another, particularly during the lesson, meanwhile they are not even permitted but they would make noise and be so loud when even borrowing stationery from others. Others refuse to do their schoolwork.

T5: Learners steal from others, they steal stationeries, money, lunchboxes, etc. Some make noise deliberately in class, they just decide to stand up or walk from their chairs to other learners' for no apparent reason, which I fell it's misconduct and it's irritating.

T6: One of them has to be laughing, mocking one another, talking out of turn, refusing to do their school work, and noise-making during the lesson, the craziest thing about these children is that one would just roam around the classroom like a headless chicken for absolutely no reason.

According to the findings, participants find it to be an irritating misconduct and misbehavior of learners making noise in the classroom and talking to others or even to teachers without waiting for the right time to talk. They do not allow teachers to permit them to share their views, they just talk right in the middle of the lesson, and that disturbs the lesson itself.

2. Cheating in tests and exams

In this response, the type of learners' classroom misconduct that teachers encounter in their classrooms, is cheating during tests and examinations. Participants referred to cheating as misconduct and an irregularity that they have encountered in their classrooms or during invigilation. T1, T3, and T4 gave their direct views on this theme as follows:

T1: They steal from others and cheat in formal activities because they obviously do not study before coming to write anything.

T3: Cheating in examinations and tests also, you'll find them having little papers with answers on or some even write on their school shirts or laps.

T4: There are a number of examples that I can relate to, let me say number one would be cheating, learners would cheat during tests or exams, or cheating of any kind, which on its own is an irregularity and an offense.

According to the findings, participants mentioned that learners cheating during tests or exams is a result of lack of studying, learners not being serious about their school work, and lastly, learners who are mischievous and are not motivated to achieve pass rates through hard work.

**The Causes of Classroom Misconduct Among Senior Phase Learners**

This category represents one of the research sub-questions and it aims to establish the causes of classroom misconduct that teachers experience in the classrooms. The following four themes were discovered from the transcribed interview answers: learners' misconduct emanates from their background and environment; Attention seeking; Child-headed families; and Lack of teachers' preparedness, consistency, and efficiency.

1. Learners' misconduct emanates from their background and environment

In response to the causes of learners' classroom misconduct that teachers suggest might be the factors to these misbehaviors. Three participants which are T3, T5, and T6 gave their direct views as follows regarding this theme:

T3: Also, learners' backgrounds, you find that parents do not have any kind of communication with learners. Some have lost parents, so they are heading their own families and that affects them emotionally, psychologically, and otherwise.

T5: As teachers, we tend to ignore the reasons why the learners are behaving the way they are, but in most cases, when learners misbehave, there are underlying issues that contribute to that behavior, first of all, as a member of the school's SBST committee, we deal with a lot of learner issues, and the most common cause of learners' misconduct is the child's background.

T6: We come from different backgrounds, and some behaviors are normal in certain cultures. The environment in which the child is raised influences their behavior. For example, a community where people fight or swear influences the child to do the same.

According to the findings, As Mwaniki (2018) has mentioned, one would say that learners' misbehavior has several causes that stem from environmental factors which include the societal background in which the learner was brought up as well as the school environment where the learner goes to school which influences the learners' psychological state in a negative way, therefore participants mentioned that learners' background plays an important role in the child's upbringing and overall behavior.

2. Lack of teachers' preparedness, consistency, and efficiency

This response emerged from the responses of the participants in regards to the causes of learners' classroom misconduct which teachers suggest might also be the contributing factors to this misbehavior. Here, five participants which are T1, T2, T3, T4, and T6 gave their direct views as follows regarding this last theme:

T1: If learners are not given work to do in the classroom, they start to misbehave, but if a teacher is consistence in giving out activities to learners then there won't be a problem.

T2: Learners get irritated when a teacher is not well-prepared for the lesson and when they do not have anything much to do in class with the teacher, they start playing on their phones and start literally irritating others as well.

T3: A teacher has to come to class prepared, there should be lesson plans, if they do not have lesson plans and do not know which activities to give to learners with clear objectives and goals, I assure you that there will be disruptions in that classroom.

T4: If there is no set of rules or if the teacher is not effective enough, you will find a mess in class. One other thing that we normally use in our school is learner orientation. It really works and it helps with a lot of confusion that learners might have.

T6: If there is no set of rules or if the teacher is not effective enough, you will find a mess in class. A teacher has to have a particular method of teaching; they have to use all methods to keep the situation under control. Also, a teacher has to come to class prepared, there should be lesson plans, if they do not have lesson plans and do not know which activities to give to learners with clear objectives and goals, I assure you that there will be disruptions in that classroom.

According to the findings, participants concluded that learners misbehave in class as a result of teachers who come to class unprepared. They suggest that a teacher should have a lesson plan. With clear goals and objectives of what he or she wants learners to know or achieve at the end of the lesson. Also, efficiency and consistency are the main elements that they have mentioned as prerequisites to the teacher, and if these are not in place, learners will definitely misbehave in the classroom.

**The Strategies Could Be Implemented to Deal with Classroom Misconduct**

This category represents one of the research sub-questions and it aims to establish the strategies that can be implemented to deal with classroom misconduct that teachers experience in the classrooms. The following three themes were discovered from the interview transcription of participants: Parental involvement; Social workers' intervention and School Governing Body's support and policy implementation; and Learners' orientation sessions.

1. Parental involvement

This response emerged from the responses of the participants in regard to strategies that might be implemented to deal with learners' misconduct among senior phase learners. Here, are direct quotes from three participants' responses which are T2, T3, and T5 who gave their views as follows regarding this first theme:

T2: The best way is to call the parents to school to get them involved in the disciplinary process. If the parents are aware of what or how their child has been behaving at school or in the classroom, they will definitely take it upon themselves to discipline their child.

T3: Among the best strategies that we can implement is parental involvement in disciplining the child. Although some parents don't come to school when they are called or asked to do so, their involvement not only helps in dealing with learners' misconduct but it helps even in the improvement of their academic performance.

T5: Involving parents is a very important strategy because in most cases, the parents are not aware of their children's behavior at school. As a result, when parents are involved, they can assist by disciplining the learners from home.

According to the findings, participants suggested that parental involvement is important in learners' discipline and academic performance. According to Ntekane (2018), parental involvement refers to a process in which parents get involved in their children's educational matters, they invite themselves and are also invited by teachers and schools to become part of their children's education. Also, Myers-Young (2018) comments that parental involvement is linked to improved [learner] behavior, low absenteeism, and optimistic attitudes.

2. Social workers' intervention and the School Governing Body's support and policy implementation

This response emerged from the responses of the participants in regard to strategies that might be implemented to deal with learners' misconduct among senior phase learners. Here, are direct quotes from four participants' responses which are T1, T2, T4, and T6 who gave their views as follows regarding this first theme:

T1: There is a school social worker who helps by talking to learners and trying to establish what might be the problem of their misbehavior in the classroom. Also, the School Governing Body does take follow-up steps in trying to deal with learners who misbehave.

T2: The School Governing Body can only implement policies where learners' misconduct is concerned. Learners are expected to follow the rules and regulations of the school's conduct. Although there are steps to be followed when disciplining the child, the school's social worker also plays a role in dealing with learners with behavioral problems, and if the behavior escalates, the chairperson of the SGB will then take a decision to expel a learner from school.

T4: The School Governing Body has the right to suspend learners and call parents to come to school so that any misconduct that a learner has done can be dealt with accordingly.

T6: I involve the parents, the SGB, and other stakeholders such as the social workers in a case where there's a need for referral, as this has an influence on their behavior and attitudes.

According to the findings, participants concluded that the School Governing Body and the school social worker must work together to provide intervention measures when learners are having problems at school. They also suggest that policies such as the school code of conduct should be implemented where necessary and that disciplinary measures should be taken if need be to deal with those learners who are misbehaving.

This study's findings reveal that a high percentage of participants (senior phase teachers who participated in this study) understood what learners' classroom misconduct is and they all agree that classroom misconduct is a behavior that causes disruptions in the classroom. They defined classroom misconduct as the behavior that interferes with the process of teaching and learning. This definition is in line with the description of Sun (2015) which states that classroom misconduct is refers to any "disruptive behavior, which creates disorder in the classroom and hinders teaching and learning" making it difficult for learning aims to be attained.

Also, participants understood the relationship between learners' classroom misconduct and learners' academic performance. They seem concerned about learners who behave badly in the classroom as this behavior leads not only to learning and teaching disruption but it causes distress to teachers. Although some participants suggested that keeping learners busy in class by giving them work/activities to do normally keeps the classroom in order, they still showed concerns about the fact that some learners leave their books at their respective homes. Thus, making it difficult for the teachers to do their work properly, without any difficulties. However, most participants provided similar suggestions on the causes of classroom misconduct, and factors such as attention-seeking, child-headed families, teachers' preparedness, and learners' backgrounds were pointed out. Participants believed that learners who are not given attention from home will definitely seek it from teachers and other learners in the classroom. This is in agreement with Lecheler (2014) statement which says that it makes sense that if a child is not getting attention and nurture at home, they will seek it out in maladaptive ways. Also, participants mentioned that in some families, children are left alone to take care of each other because their parents might have

died as a result of diseases such as COVID-19 or HIV and AIDS. Thus, these particular learners are left with a huge burden of taking care of themselves and their siblings, which results in learners showing signs of disrespect and ill behavior in the classroom.

Furthermore, according to the participants of this study, learners' background plays a big role in how they conduct themselves in the classroom. This means that whatever they do reflects where they are coming from. Lastly, the findings obtained from this study revealed that when a teacher is not well-prepared for the lesson this will cause disruptions in the classroom because learners will lose focus and start making noise and all sorts of misconducts. Therefore, participants suggested a number of ways in which this behavior can be dealt with. They mentioned learners' orientation sessions, teachers' preparedness, and parental involvement are important strategies that can be implemented to deal with this phenomenon. These findings are in line with Sapungan and Sapungan (2014) who suggest that parental involvement promotes better behavior and social adjustment. Also, Ntekane (2018) attests that parental involvement is linked to learners' behavior that is improved and attitudes that are optimistic.

## CONCLUSION

The study explored the influence of classroom misconduct on the academic performance of senior-phase learners from the teachers' perspectives. The aim of this study was to look into how teachers perceive learners' misconduct in senior-phase classrooms, how it influences their academic performance, and what strategies could be implemented to deal with this phenomenon. From the literature related to this study, as well as the findings of this particular study, there were clear indicators that learners' classroom misconduct, learners' academic performance, and teachers' psychological well-being were interrelated and that their effects had detrimental consequences on those that were directly involved. A specific conclusion that can be drawn from this research is that teacher's perceptions are different and that their work and learners' misconduct experiences differ in terms of intensity and how they view challenges. It is therefore recommended that the education department should consider equipping teachers with the necessary skills and coping mechanisms to deal

with learners' classroom misconduct to minimize unnecessary disruptions in the classrooms, and to allow the smooth running of the process of teaching and learning for the benefit of all learners.

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