

## An enquiry into the role of classroom management in enhancing learners' social skills

Una investigación sobre el papel de la gestión del aula en mejorar las habilidades sociales de los estudiantes

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## ABSTRACT

Learners' social skills enhancement is one of the key components of the classroom and the basic obligation of a teacher and school. Thus, it is imperative to manage the classroom in a way that can offer a comfortable teaching-learning environment to learners. Therefore, the study aimed to examine the role of classroom management in enhancing learners' social skills. The interpretive research design was utilized to describe the qualitative data, and a generic qualitative research approach was employed to undertake the study. A total of 18 teachers from six secondary schools were selected by using a purposive sampling technique. It was instituted that classroom management and the social environment of the classroom play a vital role in learners' social skills enhancement. Based on research findings, physical resources, teacher role, class rule, conduct and regulation, socioeconomic status of learners, family background, and poverty are the leading factors that have a strapping role on learners' skills enhancement. The selected schools to accomplish research are lacking resources, however, teachers are considered as a core in teaching-learning. It is, therefore, obligatory to provide resources to classrooms, skills to teachers, and address learners' socioeconomic status to achieve educational goals and enhance social skills.

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**Keywords.** Classroom management, physical management, social environment, social skills development, socioeconomic status

## RESUMEN

El mejoramiento de las habilidades sociales de los estudiantes es uno de los componentes clave del aula y la obligación básica de un maestro y una escuela. Por lo tanto, es imperativo gestionar el aula de manera que pueda ofrecer un ambiente de enseñanza-aprendizaje cómodo a los estudiantes. El estudio tuvo como objetivo examinar el papel de la gestión del aula en la mejora de las habilidades sociales de los estudiantes. Se utilizó un diseño de investigación interpretativa para describir los datos cualitativos, y se empleó un enfoque de investigación cualitativa genérica para llevar a cabo el estudio. Un total de 18 profesores de seis escuelas secundarias fueron seleccionados utilizando una técnica de muestreo intencional. Se instituyó que la gestión del aula y el ambiente social del aula desempeñan un papel vital en la mejora de las habilidades sociales de los estudiantes. Según los hallazgos de la investigación, los recursos físicos, el papel del maestro, las reglas de clase, la conducta y la regulación, el estatus socioeconómico de los estudiantes, el entorno familiar y la pobreza son los principales factores que tienen un papel importante en el mejoramiento de las habilidades de los estudiantes. Las escuelas seleccionadas para llevar a cabo la investigación carecen de recursos, sin embargo, los maestros son considerados como el núcleo de la enseñanza-aprendizaje. Por lo tanto, es obligatorio proporcionar recursos a las aulas, habilidades a los maestros y abordar el estatus socioeconómico de los estudiantes para lograr objetivos educativos y mejorar las habilidades sociales.

**Palabras clave.** Gestión del aula, gestión física, ambiente social, desarrollo de habilidades sociales, estatus socioeconómico.

## INTRODUCTION

Classroom management is unanimously considered critical in teaching-learning and learners' academic and social skills enhancement. It is a place in which teaching and learning take place among teachers and learners and learners and learners. It plays a fundamental role in socially and academically strong individual building. Classroom management (CM) encompasses wide-ranging diversity and educational perceptions, including the surroundings, the emotional environment twisted from side to side, social contexts, and different teaching mechanisms (Irshadullah & Inamullah, 2016). Although it cannot be pinned down as a specific entity, the main factors of CM are the physical management (PM) and, the social environment (SE) of the classroom. These factors can play an important role in learners' social skills development if utilized together and implemented effectively (Merrell & Gimpel, 2014). A cooperative classroom appears to have a higher degree of learners' positive perceptions and social skills development compared to a less cooperative and mismanaged classroom (Tajalli et al., 2022). Based on learners' performance and social skills enhancement, researchers have focussed on classroom management variables. According to research (Medeiros et al., 2021) PM and SE are one of them.

The PM of the classroom is a practice of organizing, maintaining, and conducting activities in a way to enhances learners' academic as well as social skills development. PM of the classroom has a core role in the teaching-learning process. Teaching and learning and learners' social skills enhancement cannot take place if the classroom is not managed effectively. Sieberer-Nagler (2016) explained that the PM of the classroom is the whole practice that a teacher does in class,

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which includes seating arrangements, decoration of the room, the placement of physical materials like tables, desks, chairs, blackboards, and whiteboards, projectors, screens, and charts and put a timetable in place. Gremmen et al. (2016) stated that the placement of materials and their utilization, decoration, seating arrangements, and space utilization, etc. are part of the PM of the classroom which is significant for teaching and learning, however, SE of the classroom also has a considerable role in the educational process, learners' enhancement and social skills development.

The SE of the classroom is linked with teachers' teaching practices, methodologies, and leadership styles like democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire (Hoque & Raya, 2023). It also includes learners' mode of participation in teaching-learning activities such as individualistic, collaborative, or competitive (Hoque & Raya, 2023). Schonert-Reichl (2017) suggested that the SE of the classroom involves the teacher's teaching techniques and actions to create an environment that can facilitate, support, and enhance the active engagement of learners in academic, social, and emotional learning. Schonert-Reichl (2017) further elaborated that the SE of the classroom is not only to apply any teaching technique to manage discipline and deliver a lecture in class but it also requires planning, implementation, execution, monitoring, and evaluation. The SE of the classroom is all about an environment that is comfortable, stimulating, and conducive to learning. Learners' social skills can be enhanced by creating a conducive learning environment and by providing a friendly, socially interactive, and democratic classroom (Singh, 2014). Singh (2014) further stated that a conducive environment provides an opportunity for learners to feel socially, emotionally, and physically free and safe in the classroom. It also provides learners a prospect to interact with each other in a way that can enhance learners' social skills and promote cognitive outcomes.

### **Research purpose**

The research aimed to examine the current conditions of CM and their role in learners' social skills enhancement. The classroom has been considered crucial in teaching-learning practice and plays a vital role either in encouraging them to learn and understand or discouraging them from losing and misunderstanding. To date, limited research has been done on classroom management and its role in learners' social skills enhancement in Africa in general and South Africa in particular (Richards, 2022).

School authorities, the Department of Basic Education, and policymakers must be cognisant of existing CM styles and their role in teaching and learner performance. The further aims of this research were to develop our understanding and comprehension of secondary school education and to extend our knowledge of CM and its role in learners' social skills enhancement.

### **Research questions**

1. Does the physical management of the classroom play a role in enhancing learner's social skills?
2. Does the social environment of the classroom play a role in enhancing learner's social skills?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theoretical framework**

The research applied Kohn's (2006) student-directed theory. According to Kohn (2006) the critical analysis of school and teaching mainly focused on CM which is conducive to learning and can provide learners a space to pursue topics of their interest and can enhance social skills. He further says that the teacher's main role in the classroom is to develop a "sense of community" in learners – where they feel safe and comfortable, can express their opinions, and can work in a

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cooperative environment towards solutions to their and others' academic, social and behavioral problems, which Kohn (2006) believe can only be attained if learners' are socially skilled and connected with others. Kohn (2006) criticized the use of reward and punishment in the classroom, saying that such a system does not bring positive change and cannot enhance social skills in learners but can develop learner behavior in which they work for rewards only. A punishment and reward system also creates mistrust in learners' judgment, can prevent the development of caring, autonomous personalities, and can hinder social skills enhancement in learners'. Furthermore, a teacher cannot transfer their knowledge to learners but can lead them to discover themes, topics, and new ideas and provide them opportunities to accept challenges and make mistakes, interact with each other, and improve social and civic skills, which form a crucial part of learning.

### **Classroom management**

Classroom management has been regarded as a major variable that affects teaching-learning and learners' academic and social skills development. Effective CM sets the stage for teachers to teach effectively and attain educational goals. Stough and Montague (2015) stated that CM is critical for teaching and learning, positive behavior, and skills development. Stough and Montague (2015) further elucidated that an effective classroom is one in which a teacher can provide an environment to learners that allows them to grow emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Lopes et al. (2017) explained that the concept of CM is broader than the perception of maintaining discipline and controlling misbehaviors. It includes everything a teacher does in the classroom to involve learners in maintaining educational activities to achieve educational goals. Effective teaching-learning can only be possible in a classroom that is conducive to learning and managed effectively. The classroom has two main aspects: PM and SE (Domitrovich et al., 2017). These two aspects can play a significant role if utilized properly. For effective teaching-learning, it is essential to focus on both aspects collectively to achieve the required classroom goal.

### **Physical management of the classroom**

It is widely recognized and acknowledged that CM is significant in the teaching and learning process. It influences learners' academic knowledge, social skills, and behavioral growth. Pangrazi and Beighle (2019) believe that the PM of a classroom needs to be visible, attractive, and comfortable, with all allied facilities to attain set targets and goals for learners to learn and teachers to teach. A well-organised, ordered, comfortable, and attractive classroom can have a positive role on learners', which results in positive educational outcomes (Sithole, 2017). The classroom has two main aspects: the PM and the SE (Puteh et al. 2015). PM refers to the arrangement of chairs, tables, desks, fixtures, and furniture, etc., the painting and the color combination, lighting, temperature, and ventilation, projectors, multimedia, charts, the size of the classroom, windows and doors, blackboards or whiteboards, etc.

For an effective and conducive teaching-learning classroom, the setup of the physical resources is one of the significant features (Amie et al., 2021). The physical resources like; desks and chairs are typically placed in lines or rows, one after the other, although preferred seating arrangements differ from classroom to classroom (Gremmen et al., 2016). This typical desk arrangement can either facilitate or obstruct CM and educational efforts. An advantage of this arrangement is that it enables eye contact between the teacher and learners and learners can see the black/whiteboard and hear the teacher clearly (Stronge, 2018). An effective seating arrangement must, however, facilitate learners according to the teaching-learning methodology in use, such as collaborative learning, lecture style, group work, etc. (Cassum & Gul., 2017). The technologically advanced, modern classroom of today demands that the physical arrangements of the classroom align with teaching-learning tools and equipment.

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An effective classroom must thus support the subject and teaching method, ease teaching-learning, connect the teacher and learner, allow circulation in the classroom, and provide learners with the opportunity to actively participate in learning activities (Shukla et al., 2020). Conversely, an ill-prepared, dull, noisy, mismanaged, stuffy, airless, and nonconductive classroom negatively affects learner participation in teaching-learning activities, which results in lower performance and social skills development (Suleman & Hussain, 2014). It is the responsibility of the teacher to arrange and organize physical resources according to lesson content, class size, and teaching methodology for better teaching and effective learning (Pangrazi & Beighle, 2019). Jalili and Mall-Amiri (2015) asserted that CM generally is conceived to include all actions taken by the teacher to ensure order and the effective use of time during lessons. Egeberg et al. (2016) stated that CM has two unique functions: "(a) it seeks to establish an orderly environment so learners can engage in meaningful academic learning, and (b) it aims to enhance learners' social skills and moral growth".

Nisar et al. (2019) explained that CM is creating an environment conducive to learning, which includes arranging the physical environment, establishing rules and procedures, and maintaining learners' attention to lessons and engagement in activities. In his theory, Kounin (1970) elaborated that CM comprises techniques that facilitate teachers to deal with learners' similarities and differences and put them together for social learning. Nafa (2022) stated that effective CM creates a positive learning atmosphere through teaching interesting lessons, solving problems, and supervising learners. By reviewing the literature, the researcher concluded that CM is a set of planned activities, which includes: lesson planning; teaching techniques and methodology; and class rules and regulations. It also encompasses teachers' capabilities and skills to use in a classroom in such a way as to develop confidence in learners and enhance their social skills and educational outcomes. However, the family setting and socioeconomic background of the learners cannot be ignored in effective CM, classroom environment, and social skills enhancement.

### **Social environment of classroom and learners social skills development**

It has become clear to parents, society, and teachers that the educational agenda and demands cannot be fulfilled only through learner academic performance and educational outcomes, but it also demands to increase learner social skills, emotional and cognitive proficiency, build character, and foster commitment to society (Jennings et al., 2011). Thus, in addition to the enrichment of learner academic performance, education must focus on facilitating learners to interact in socially skilled ways; intermingle ethically and responsibly with their peer group, friends, and family; observe affirmative, positive, safe, and sound behavior; achieve fundamental competencies, and learn daily and routine habits and basic values as a responsible and progressive citizen. Besides the academic aspect, the main goal of education is to craft these skills and habits in learners (Lucas & Spencer, 2017).

Formal learning is outlined in the curriculum, but social learning links to the teacher's conduct, skills, emotional proficiency, and efficacy. A teacher with social and emotional proficiency sets the pitch of the classroom by developing encouraging and comforting relationships with learners and by planning lessons to develop learners' strengths, abilities, and skills (Gueldner et al., 2020). This is done by establishing and implementing social conduct in a way that can promote internal motivation; preparing learners to deal with conflict; creating cooperation and collaboration among learners; operating and performing as a role model for well-mannered and appropriate communication, and demonstrating social and civic conduct (Frey et al., 2019).

Teacher conduct links to an advantageous social and emotional classroom environment and learner performance. An advantageous classroom environment is shaped by keeping conflict and disordered behavior to a minimum. It requires quick transitions from one activity to another,

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positive emotional expression, meaningful communication, and respectful behavior regarding individual differences (La Paro & Pianta, 2003).

Furthermore, learners' cognitive growth and social and civic skills enhancement are openly synchronized with their capacity to mix with the environment. Environment attracts, manipulates, influences, and contributes to learner's growth and civic and social skills enhancement. Learners' growth and enhancement require an environment that is friendly and conducive to learning concurrently. A conducive environment helps learners feel socially, emotionally, and physically safe in the classroom. It also provides learners a place in which they can interact with each other in a way that can enhance their cognitive, social, and civic skills (Falsario et al., 2014). Kohan's (2006) critical analysis of schools and teaching mainly focused on CM which is conducive to learning and can provide space for learners to pursue the topics of their interest and improve behaviors and social and civic skills. He says that teachers' main role in the classroom is to develop a "sense of community" in learners where they can feel safe and comfortable, can express their opinions, and can work in a cooperative environment for solutions to their and others' academic, behavioral, social and civic problems, rather than follow traditional teaching methodologies. Kohan (2006) believes that social skills are imperative for social life and it is the teacher's responsibility to focus on learners' social skills development. A conducive learning SE in the classroom is vital for learners' growth and social skills enhancement and it is demonstrated by the teacher's role and leadership style, classroom rules, conduct, and regulations to implement and follow.

#### ***Classroom rules, conduct and regulations and social skills enhancement***

Good teaching-learning emerges in an environment where rules, conduct regulations and order are governing. The establishment of rules and regulations is one of the complicated processes in the classroom. Fish (2021) demonstrated that in a classroom where there are no rules and regulations to exercise or no or less command of class rules to implement, or where the teacher has no control or fails to manage class rules, it results in unproductive learning, academic outcomes, and social skills enhancement.

The formulation and development of classroom rules and regulations are the foundation of a safe learning environment. The fundamental dilemma in putting down classroom rules and regulations is to convince the learners about the necessity of these rules (Fish, 2021). The rules and regulations define the boundaries of actions in the classroom. These rules describe the limitations to learners and teachers regarding what to do and what not to do in the classroom. It is significant for the school, classroom, and teacher to enhance social skills in learners', however; it is not possible to accomplish the target without family involvement and positive contribution. Family setting and socioeconomic status of the learners manipulate positively or negatively learners' skills enhancement (Taylor et al., 2017).

#### ***Family setting, socioeconomic status of the learners, and social skills development***

Family is the fundamental, smallest, most sensitive, and important social entity which is characterized and facilitated by society as a larger social entity. The family, being a powerful influence on the child's development and fundamental driving force of socialization could in no doubt enhance or hinder the civic and social skills enhancement of the learner depending on the social climate and value system of the family (Garbarino, 2017).

It has been found that family characteristics such as parental values, attitudes, manners, involvement, and family relationships are directly and indirectly associated with learners' social well-being and skills development (Hosokawa & Katsura, 2017). Family characteristics refer to the: beliefs, values, and attitudes that parents hold for the development of their child reported that the beliefs, values, and attitudes held and expressed by primary caregivers strongly influence learners' development and social skills enhancement. Hosokawa and Katsura (2017) further

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suggest that parents can have an important impact on the social interactions of their children. In this way, parental beliefs, values, and attitudes may perhaps influence children, which in turn can alter social skills enhancement in them.

However, the attachment theory noted that: Child-adult relationships may be secure (close and trusting), resistant (conflicted and/or needy), avoidant (business-like and emotionless or over bright), or disorganized (a mixture of both patterns of insecurity). The ideal pattern of attachment is conceived as a secure relationship in which a child trusts the adult caregiver to provide consistent, supportive care (Heard & Lake, 2018). Examples of secure attachments can include the following interactions: A child seeks and accepts comfort from the primary caregiver when he/she is upset or hurt, a child shows physical affection toward his/her primary caregiver, a child explores and undertakes new challenges in the company of the caregiver, a child asks for and uses help from the primary caregiver, a child checks in sometimes just visually with the primary caregiver when uncertain, and a child follows directions and suggestions from the primary caregiver (Williams et al., 2016). A child's personality can holistically be developed and social skills can be enhanced in a stable family compared to an unstable or broken family. Research stated that other than family structure socioeconomic status is also one of the imperative components of individual traits and social skills enhancement (Duncan & Magnuson, 2014). It is one of the basic responsibilities of parents to fulfill the fundamental needs of their children (Taylor et al., 2017).

Learners in the classroom have different socioeconomic statuses. Some learners come from rich backgrounds; others are from poor, some from stable, and others from broken backgrounds. There is grace in the classroom. It has been found that learners from stable families are more behaved and socially skilled than learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Livingstone and Sefton-Green (2016) stated that Learners from low-income families have more social problems and are more likely to not develop social skills. This is not to say that it is the case for every learner, but behavioral research shows that children from impoverished homes develop maladaptive social functioning at a greater rate than their affluent counterparts do.

According to Hoff and Laursen (2019) children who grew up with parents of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to have social, emotional, and behavioral issues. They further explained that learners from this background are more likely to be involved in drug abuse and have more social conduct and discipline issues. Drug abuse has turned into a great problem worldwide considering its destructive effects on the development and prosperity of every individual in society (Lyman, 2016). This crisis is extensive to all socioeconomic stages without any restriction to a specific social class and has become a serious dilemma in the society of South Africa. However, Meade et al. (2015) stated that it is a serious issue for people living in a relatively lower socioeconomic status. A large number of school learners are drug addicts. In some areas, school learners are involved in the selling of drugs by drug dealers. Another serious problem in South Africa is the age of onset of substance abuse and research says that some nine years old are also drug addictive.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In the accomplishment of the aims and objectives, and presentation of the result of the study, the qualitative research method was utilized to collect, analyze, and present the findings. According to Tracy (2019) the basic qualitative research design is best suitable for a researcher to exercise to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of educational progression. Creswell's (2009) constructivist paradigm approach whose mother is the interpretive paradigm was employed to make sure that the verdicts of the research exploration were the thoughts, voices, and tones of the respondents, not the researchers' own opinions views, and beliefs. To address the research topic, investigate, explore, draw meanings, and answer the research

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question, the qualitative research approach was the most suitable approach to utilize in the study. A generic qualitative method explicated (Silverman, 2016) the significance of the application of design to this research. Furthermore, to provide research findings, the interpretive research design is used in the research as it describes the qualitative data and is helpful in theory formation in areas with no or inadequate aforementioned theories (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

To study the phenomenon of CM and its role in learners' social skills enhancement, a total of eighteen teachers from six secondary schools were selected by utilizing a purposive sampling technique. The researchers interviewed teachers and compiled field notes, comments, and voice recordings from the research respondents.

As explained by Creswell (2009) data analysis is a kind of methodology that helps researchers to demonstrate, construct, draw meanings, and build theory from collected data. A six-step data analysis framework Braun and Clarke's (2006) was applied to conduct the research. This framework is the most noteworthy approach used in social sciences inquiries because it gives an explicit and practical framework to undertake the data analysis process and generate themes from the data. The following six steps were exercised to accomplish the findings of the research. Step 1: Data familiarization (collected data was read and reread to get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon), Step 2: Reduction of data and primary codes generation, (codes were generated from collected data) Step 3: Exploration of themes (and then codes were combined into themes according to the objectives of the research), Step 4: Evaluation of themes (themes were then reviewed and evaluated), Step 5: Description of themes (thematic map was generated and significance of themes were determined) Step 6: Descriptive analysis write-up (lastly report was generated by relating it to the literature and objectives of the research).

## RESULTS

### **Does the physical management of the classroom play a role in learners' social skill enhancement?**

The respondents' responses were analyzed by employing a phenomenological approach to discover promising themes. To open the talk and start a discussion, the research respondents were asked a question about their experience with CM and its role in learners' social skills enhancement. The researchers were exposed to adequate knowledge and information about the research phenomenon. The results of the research were interpreted through the literature review about the following three themes.

#### **Theme: Physical resources, teacher and social skills development, Teacher role in social skills enhancement**

The research respondents expressed their views according to their experience and observations about the classroom.

#### **Physical resources, teacher, and social skills development**

Physical resources are important and key to effective teaching-learning and learners' social skills enhancement but the teacher's role cannot be ignored.

Respondent 4 replied by saying that *"both are equally important, but the teacher is most important, without effective and competent teachers learning can't happen*. Respondent 1 added, *"Both are equally important, but if I prioritized one of the both, I would say teacher"*. Furthermore, the teacher is the backbone of education and can teach learners if the physical resources are sometimes not available in the classroom. Respondent 14 elaborated that:

*The role of a teacher is always crucial. If the teacher is passionate, inspirational, effective, trained, motivated, and knows what he or she is doing, he or she can teach under the tree. Yes, physical resources are important and have their role in the teaching-*

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*learning process but if the teacher is passionate and trained he or she can teach without resources. On the other hand, if you have all the resources available in the classroom but the teacher is not qualified and inspirational he or she cannot use all this technology and resources for teaching and learning purposes. In my view, in my school majority of the teachers are not passionate and competent and they are not teaching with passion.*

Physical resources are imperative for education but the teacher is the foundation stone in the educational setup. Respondent 3 added by saying *“Physical resources are also equally important, but nothing can replace a teacher. The teacher is the backbone of the classroom and I must say the backbone of the society and future of any nation. It is only teachers that can inculcate skills and transform knowledge in young minds”.*

Similarly, response 6 said *“Both are important but the most important is the teacher, without teacher teaching is not possible. I heard and remember that “a teacher is a nation builder”. There is nothing that can replace teachers in the classroom; our teachers’ need trainings and skills”.*

Respondent 15 concluded by emphasizing the teacher’s importance in these words:

*The classroom is important but the teacher is the most important element in the teaching-learning and schooling process. Without a teacher, you can’t teach even if you have all the modern resources available in the classroom. Like nowadays younger teachers for example can’t manage a class in a way the older teachers can. For example, if we don’t have electricity in a school the younger can’t manage if they come with a PowerPoint presentation, on the other hand, the older teacher knows how and what to do in this situation. It is because new teachers’ have grown up with all these technological things and resources.*

The following respondents talked about the importance and the role of a teacher in classrooms: Respondent 7 said *“Both, the physical resources and teacher are important but the teacher is most important, a teacher can even teach through the virtual set-up, as we were doing online during Covid-19 without the classroom”.* Similarly, Respondent 10 believe that *“both are very important, without one of these two, you can’t expect the result and output you want. But I must say the teacher is always on top of everything in teaching-learning. If the teacher is efficient he or she can perform well. Even efficient teachers can teach under the tree, I grew up in this environment in school”.* Respondent 12 said likewise *“Both are important but the teacher’s role is crucial, resources play their role but if there is no teacher there is no learning as I can teach without resources, I can make a plan if there is no soft board or if the projector is not working, etc. but if there are physical resources available in the classroom, you can add up and get extra benefits”.* Furthermore, Respondent 13 said *“I think the teacher has a key role in the teaching-learning process. Physical resources are essential but we cannot rely on them totally because all schools do not have funds. So the teacher is important if he or she is qualified”.*

Thus, a teacher has a central value in the education system. It is imperative for effective teaching-learning and required educational outcomes to provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and abilities and to provide physical resources to classrooms so that learners can satisfy their educational needs.

### **Teacher role in social skills enhancement**

Social skills are the key to learning and social life and are part of teaching and teachers' duties. Substantial evidence suggests that, among all physical resources, the teacher is the most important component of the effective teaching-learning process. Learners' academic and skills enhancement is linked with teachers' role and effectiveness.

Research respondent replied to the question as follows:

*It is one of the fundamental duties of a teacher to develop social skills in learners in the classroom and it can only happen if a teacher is effective. Social and academic learning are equally important in the classroom, both should go side by side. We cannot say that*

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*teachers' main duty is to focus on academics only. In my view, if a learner is excellent in academics but not good in social and civic skills he or she can not be as productive for society as required (Respondent 6).*

Another respondent asserted that “we are grooming future leadership in schools. Today’s learners are future leaders, so it is the major responsibility of the school institution, classroom, and teacher to develop them holistically (Respondent 7). Similarly, Respondent 1 says “Social skills are very important in teaching and learning. For this to be achieved it is one of the basic duties of a teacher and school to develop social skills in learners. Today’s learners are future leaders, so the teacher must develop good character in learners”.

The respondents highlighted the role and responsibility of a teacher in the classroom in the development of social skills in learners. According to them, teachers' main duty is not only to focus on academics but on social skills too. Respondent 12 added that:

*It is the responsibility of both teachers and schools to develop social skills in learners. Most teachers say and think that this is not our responsibility to develop social skills in learners. Parents should also play their role, but in my view, learners are spending quality time in school, so it should be the main responsibility of a teacher and school to develop social skills in learners. I further say an effective, skilled, and trained teacher can accomplish this.*

Similarly, Respondent 13 noted the following:

*The purpose of school is to put learners of the same age from different cultural backgrounds together in a classroom for them to interact and share their expertise and can develop them holistically so that when they are posted out from school to society they can play a positive role in different places and characters. I believe schools are the places where we are preparing these characters for society. There should be a permanent change in the behaviour of the learners and social skills should be enhanced to enable them to play a productive role in society.*

The importance of social skills enhancement was identified by respondents as follows: “Social development is very critical in school, it is the core of teaching and learning and very important for teachers to teach and learners to learn social skills in the classroom and school (Respondent 10). Similarly, Respondent 14 added “Social skills development is very vital in class and class does develop the social skills of learners. I must say if the school management is chaotic socially and academically it means you are not going to create a solid foundation of learners and difficult to produce balanced personalities. Respondent 18 said that civilization and social skills are imperative for human life. “Academic outcomes are important but without social skills, education is not completed. Civilization and social skills are significant for human life.

Social skills enhancement is one of the responsibilities of the teacher. Without social skills learning, education is incomplete. However, only respondent 16 thinks differently about it:

*For me in the classroom, there should be only academics. Social learning should happen in breaks and Life Orientation subjects, I am teaching math and I think this is not my responsibility to teach or develop social skills. Social sciences teachers can play their role. I think my role is suppressing social skills rather than development as I am teaching maths. I am not doing work on social skills. I have in teaching for the last 37 years and I never focus on social skills. I was teaching the Zulu language for many years. For a very long I have been teaching maths. I don't know much about socialization and social activities or social skills development in the classroom. My strategy is more teacher-oriented than that of social activities or group activities. I never focused on social skills development in class*

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## Does the social environment of the classroom play a role in learners' social skill enhancement?

Theme: Class rules, conduct, and regulations and social skills development; family setting and socioeconomic status of learners and social skills development; poverty, drug abuse, and social skills development.

### **Class rules, conduct and regulations, and social skills development**

Effective teaching-learning social skill emerges in an environment where rules and order are governing. The establishment of rules and regulations is one of the complicated processes in the classroom. It has been demonstrated that in a classroom where there are no rules and regulations to exercise or no or less command of class rules to implement, or where teachers have no control or fail to manage class rules, it results in unproductive learning and a negative impact on social skills enhancement. Research respondent 1 explained that *“social skills are important in teaching and learning and it is one of the basic duties of a teacher and school to enhance skills in learners. Being a teacher we should create rules and regulations for the classroom to achieve this goal”*. Respondent 8 noted that family plays playing role in learners' skills enhancement. She said *“Some of the learners are from child-headed families- they don't have fathers or mothers. These learners usually have more social and psychological problems. They are aggressive; most of the time they don't follow school rules and class instructions. The reason could be the ignorance of the family and the unavailability of the parental figure at home”*. Furthermore, policies restrict teachers from implementing rules and dealing with different behaviors. Respondent 7 replied *“Policies are designed in a way where teachers have nothing to do with learners, we need to revise policies, and we don't have rules and conducts. The child has more power in schools than a teacher. How do I control a child who is about 18 years old and whose behavior in the classroom is not good? We being teachers most of the time give up by handling learners with problems.*

Moreover, Respondent 8 believed:

*This is a twofold story, parents think and practice that they cannot control their children, and schools are not allowed to punish learners, and learners are taking this as an advantage. We have adopted a system that we are not prepared to adopt; it says the law is protecting them, which results in the form of deviance in society. At the end of the day when you send them to school, they create a problem because of the educational law. I think strict rules and regulations are necessary.*

By all means, we have to follow the rules and regulations for effective teaching-learning and social skills enhancement. Respondents 15 and 17 think that poverty is one of the reasons for it:

*Learners sometimes don't follow the rules, there is bunking in school. In the past, we used to follow all school rules but now things have changed, and learners want to do what they want or like to. Teachers are tired of dealing with these problems, kids are not on track, and they always just don't follow, not doing tasks and assignments. Poverty is one of the major reasons for all these issues and problems (Respondent 15).*

*To be consistent we need to follow certain rules and regulations in the classroom and school. We have codes of conduct in our school regarding how to behave, act and react, how to dress, etc. We also have a merits and demerits system for learners to behave in a way so that real teaching and learning can happen and personalities are groomed perfectly. At the beginning of the year, parents and learners sign the affidavit that the learner will follow rules and regulations and parents will make sure that their child is not disrespecting school rules and regulations. But on the ground, things are different; learners don't follow rules. I think poverty is one of the reasons for it (Respondent 17).*

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## Family setting and socioeconomic status of learners and social skills development

Family is a permeable system that is influenced by the setting that experienced some differences with the level of family organization. Each family has a specific dynamism gives it a particular autonomy and individuality. The socioeconomic status of learners' in one way or the other, affects learners' social skills enhancement. It is widely accepted that if learners are to enhance social skills, they will need the full support of their parents and families. Research respondent 18 replied to the question posed:

*A real teacher should try to know about the family background and status of a learner. It helps the teacher to deal with learners in the classroom in a way to improves their weaknesses and polishes their strengths. Family background has a strong influence on a learner's holistic development. We are facing family structure challenges in our society. In our school catchment area over 60 % of learners are from broken families and they have more social and academic issues than the learners from stable families.*

Respondent 12 added the same: *"You need to know about the socioeconomic background and status of the learners, some children are coming from rich backgrounds; others are from poor, some from stable, others from broken families or no one at home. There is grace in the classroom".* However, Respondent 1 believed that: *"I must say school plays a major role in child development, the family also does play a role but it depends on the family structure; some families have strong ties and have joint types of families. In those families, learners learn social skills and know how to interact in different situations and with people, on the other hand, children coming from broken families are usually lacking social skills and have behavioral issues".*

Family is the fundamental, smallest, most sensitive, and important social entity which is characterized and facilitated by society as a larger social entity. The family, being a powerful influence on the child's development and a fundamental driving force of socialization could no doubt enhance or hinder the social skills development of the child depending on the social climate and value system of the family (Garbarino, 2017). Research respondent 10 seconded the view of Garbarino (2017) by saying the following. *"If there is a bullying or social skills problem in learners, the fault is neither in society nor in the teacher or school, but in the family because the child is living most of the time in the family. The reasons could be that a child is not raised in a good family environment, the child has no father figure at home, the child is neglected by parents and family members, and so on. The teacher does not have much influence on learners because learners stay at school for shorter periods".*

Family and faith-based values also influence social skills development. Respondent 10 explained: *"It is all about the values system whether family values or cultural values or religious values at home. In my view, faith-based values are the cornerstones in which children grow up. At a very young age, you can inculcate the values until grade 5, age 13 years. We are lacking values in our families; we are living in a broken family system".* However, Respondent 13 believed that all cases are not the same: *"Some single parents, not all raised their children in a very good way. I guess it is because of either their cultural or faith-based or strong family values".* Responded, 15 added that *"developing social skills in learners is the responsibility of both teachers and parents, and I must add the society as well. It starts at home and skills refined by the teachers at school. The reasons behind all these skill issues are poverty, drugs, and broken families.* Learners from low-income families have more social problems and are more likely to not develop social skills. This is not to say that this is the case for every learner, but "behavioral research shows that children from impoverished homes develop maladaptive social functioning at a greater rate than their affluent counterparts do" (Unity et al., 2013).

Respondent, 10 agreed that: *"Socially our learners are generally well-behaved, we don't have a major discipline problem in school, and they abide by school laws, and follow instructions. I must say well-cultured learners', we don't have ill-disciplined learners. Exceptional cases are obvious everywhere. One of the reasons could be the background of the learners. We are a fee-*

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*paying school and the majority of learners in this school are from financially strong backgrounds". Similarly, Respondent 14 said: "I think learners in schools have different cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. In my experience, learners from fortunate backgrounds have more manners, skills, and respect for others in school and class than those from deprived backgrounds". Respondent 11 added the same: "In my experience in teaching and schooling, we don't have many social problems with learners. Most of the learners are well-behaved in fee-paying schools, but the learners in quintile 1 schools (free schools) have some social issues because of poverty".*

### **Poverty, drug abuse, and social skills development**

Children from low-income families often do not receive the stimulation and do not learn the required skills required to prepare themselves for school and get involved in drug abuse. Typical problems are poverty and lack of basic human needs; food, clothing, and a comfortable living environment. Research respondent, 5 noted that *"our learners are not socially equipped because of the poverty in our society. We are having ill-discipline learners in our school. The motives are the family structures; like absent father learners, and teenage pregnancies as young as 14-15-year-old girls; we have 14 and 15 years old 19 pregnant girls right now in our school. It is all because of poverty and the parent's economic conditions.*

Additionally, Respondent 16 added some other challenges and concluded that poverty is the mother of all these issues. He further stated that drug abuse is also one of the serious challenges for schools, especially in lower socioeconomic status families and areas: *"Drugs are a serious problem in our school locality, we teach them about the harms of drugs but learners do not understand about the facts and harm. The reason is the overall environment of the society in which they are living because this is what is happening in schools' surroundings. I must say behind all these issues there is poverty. Poverty is the mother of all social ills".*

Similarly, in the view of respondent 8: *"Drug is also a serious and challenging issue for all of us as teachers, parents, and society members. Many learners from our school are involved in drugs. We need counseling for our school's learners to get rid of this poison".* In the same way Respondent 7 said: *"Both boys and girls are smoking "Dhaka" (a kind of drug), learners never disclose from where they are getting it because they know that if you disclose it you will get hammered. Everyone is scared to talk about drugs, even as a teacher we are scared to ask about the drug seller because of the danger of harm. Drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and poverty are the reasons for achievements and skills enhancement in learners"*

The Schools Act of 1996 also stipulates Regulations for Safety Measures at Schools and categorically states that dangerous objects and drugs are not allowed on school premises. However, learners continue to bring drugs and some learners working under drug dealers sell them to other learners. A large number of school learners in South Africa are drug addicts (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Respondent 14 said likewise: *"One girl in our school is involved in the transportation of drugs, she wants to come out from it but now she is scared to leave because the gangster will harass her sexually if she refuses to transport drugs. Drug sellers had hired her to sell drugs, if she failed to sell, they would demand sex from her.*

## **DISCUSSION**

The research endeavored to determine the role of the CM in enhancing learners' social skills. The respondents noted that the CM is fundamental for civic and social skills enhancement. The findings confirm existing studies that CM is bracketed by the physical resources available in the classroom, the teacher's role and personality, class rules, conduct and regulations, family setting, and socioeconomic status of learners. In an attempt to substantiate the role of CM on learners' social skills development, the research respondents indicated that the classroom is the crucial

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place that plays a role either in motivating learners to enhance learning and skills or de-motivate them from learning. Stough and Montague (2015) stated that CM is critical for teaching and learning, positive behavior, and skills development. To enhance learners' social skills, participants believed that physical resources such as textbooks, boards, charts, and projectors are essential for effective teaching and learning and social skills enhancement but the teacher is the most important among all. In some scenarios teaching and learning are possible without the existence of physical resources in the classroom but not promising if the teacher is not available or not effective (Stronge, 2018). Strong's (2018) view supports the respondents' views that physical resources are imperative for education but the teacher is the foundation stone in the educational setup. Teachers are the ones who instill values, develop positive behaviors, create positive personalities, and promote social skills in learners. Some respondents indicated that an effective classroom is one in which teachers can provide an environment to learners that allows them to grow emotionally, socially, and intellectually. Physical resources in classrooms are not promising and hinder learners' learning and social skills development.

To identify the role of teacher and CM in effective teaching and learning it was found that both are vital, but the teacher who is academically and professionally strong and equipped with the requisite have primacy over resources. A research respondent replied identically *"Both physical resources and teacher are equally important, but if I prioritized one of both, I would say teacher"*. Teacher is the backbone of education and can teach learners if the physical resources are sometimes not available. Another respondent was of the view that *physical resources are important and have their role in the teaching-learning process but if the teacher is passionate and trained he or she can teach without resources*. The findings collaborate with Falsario et al. (2014) that effective teaching and learning is a central focus of CM in education. Effective teaching and learning cannot happen without efficient teachers. If you have all the resources available in the classroom but the teacher is not qualified and skilled he or she cannot use technology and resources for teaching and learning purposes. Learners' social skills development depends on the efficacy and quality of the teacher. Secondary school teachers need skills and training before they enter the classroom to teach and enhance social skills. Another respondent added, *"Physical resources are also equally important, but nothing can replace a teacher"*. It is only teachers that can inculcate skills and transform knowledge in young minds. Falsario et al. (2014) further confirmed that the classroom shapes the future of the world and the future of a nation lies in the hands of teachers and how they teach learners in the classroom. There is nothing that can replace a teacher in the classroom. Thus, the research concluded that effective teaching-learning and learners' social skills development must provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their professional skills and abilities and to provide physical resources to classrooms so that learners can satisfy their educational needs and enhance social skills.

The findings collaborated with Pan and Chen's (2021) thoughts that besides physical resources and teacher role; class rules, conduct, and regulations also have an impact on learners' performance and skills enhancement. It was revealed by research respondents that if class rules, conduct, and regulations are not to be fixed, implemented, and followed, the teaching-learning process cannot be guaranteed. In a classroom where there are no rules and regulations to exercise or no or less command of class rules to implement, or where teachers have no control or fail to manage class rules, it results in unproductive learning and a negative impact on social skills enhancement. Research responses further indicated that schools' policies are designed in a way in which teachers have nothing to do with learners'. School rules, conduct, and policies require revision and changes for learners to follow and teachers to implement strictly. Learners have more power in school than teachers. Bessa et al. (2019) confirmed that effective teaching-learning and social skill emerges in an environment where rules and order are governing. A respondent added by saying *"Being a teacher we should implement and follow rules and regulations for the classroom to achieve goals"*. The result indicated that schools have

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failed to enhance the social skills of learners. It was further found that other than school rules and conduct family background and socioeconomic status also play a role in learner personality and social skills development. It was instituted that issues related to class rule and conduct are the reasons for the socioeconomic status of the learners'. Thus, the teacher must find ways to remedy behavioral issues and address the reasons why learners break rules, regulations, and laws. Teachers' interventions are required when class rules are broken. Such interventions should be corrective actions aimed at stopping misbehavior and bringing the learner back into the class to learn social skills. It is furthermore essential for the schools to involve parents, families, and communities in educational doings for learners' holistic improvement. This approach can bring about positive changes in learners and can enhance their social skills.

Cedeno et al. (2016) explained that the family is a permeable system that is influenced by the surroundings and settings and has a specific dynamism that gives it particular autonomy and individuality. Socioeconomic status in one way or the other, affects learners' personality and social skills enhancement. Research respondents stated that if learners are to enhance their social skills, they will need the full support of their parents and families. Family structure is broken which is considered as one of the basic pillars of learner social wellbeing and skills enhancement. Research results say that over 60% of learners in schools belong to broken families which plays a major role in learners' skills development. Research respondents mentioned that learners belonging to broken families have more social skills development issues than learners from stable families. Schools are trying to play their role but the broken family structure is not supporting learners to enhance their social skills. Another respondent added the importance of family background by saying *"A real teacher is the one who should try to know about the family background of the learners"*. It helps the teachers to deal with learners in the classroom to improve their weaknesses and polish their strengths. Studies such as Felisilda & Torreon (2020) have found that the stability of the family creates a building block for children to progress throughout life. When a parent separates or divorces, the children are left with no steadiness in their lives causing them to lose basic concepts of childhood and negative perception that may carry with them throughout life. However, one respondent believed that *"all cases are not the same, some single parents raised their children in a very good way. It is because of either their cultural or faith-based or strong family values"*.

Furthermore, research results stated that poverty and drug abuse are also the reasons for learners' social skills issues. In line with Lisha and Sussan's (2010) research, drug abuse has turned into a great problem worldwide considering its destructive effects on learners' social skills development and prosperity. This problem is extensive in learners who belong to poor financial backgrounds in South African society. It was noted by research respondents that learners from less privileged backgrounds are more likely to be involved in drugs and have more behavioral and social skills problems. This verdict is supported by Main (2019) who said material factors such as household income play an important role in a child's holistic development. It is not always possible for lower-income parents to provide educational resources to their children equal to those that middle or upper-class parents provide.

A serious intervention is required to deal with issues affecting learners' social skills development in secondary schools. Even though the classrooms are equipped with all the required resources and teachers are effective and skilled, many learners fail to enhance their social skills. Social skills are a part of education; it is significant for schools, classrooms, and teachers to implant these skills in learners. This can only be achieved if classrooms are provided resources, teachers are skilled and professional, class rules and conduct are implemented and followed, the issue of poverty and drug abuse are addressed and all stakeholders (learners, parents, and teachers) play their active roles. Therefore, departments must provide skills and training to teachers, the schools must introduce parenting sessions for parents to guide them on

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how to deal with learners at home and in society so that they can understand their role and the importance of social skills enhancement in learners'.

## CONCLUSION

The study aimed to examine the role of classroom rooms in learners' social skills enhancement. It is indicated in the results that PM, educational resources, and the SE of the classroom play a central part in teaching-learning. Educational resources are imperative for PM which is the basic need of any classroom. However, educational goals and learners' social skills enhancement are linked with the SE of the classroom. The SE of the classroom is a combination of the teacher's role, class rules, conduct and regulations, family setting, and socioeconomic status of learners.

Physical resources are essential to effective teaching-learning and learners' social skills enhancement but the teacher's role cannot be ignored in the entire educational scenario. A teacher has a central value in the educational setup. It is imperative for effective teaching-learning and required educational outcomes to provide opportunities for teachers to enhance their skills and abilities. A skilled, effective, and efficient teacher can enhance learners' skills and can apply class rules, conduct, and regulations in the classroom for better and more effective teaching-learning.

Effective teaching-learning emerges in an environment where rules, conduct, and regulations are governing. The establishment of rules and regulations is one of the complicated processes in the classroom. A classroom where there are no rules and regulations to exercise no or less command of class rules to implement, or where the teacher has no control or fails to manage class rules, results in unproductive learning and social skills enhancement.

The formulation and development of classroom rules and regulations are the foundation of a safe learning environment. To keep things structured and achieve educational goals it is significant to follow rules and fundamental for schools to implement rules and conduct and define boundaries of actions in the classroom. For this to be materialized merits and demerits system for learners can be applied so that learners can behave properly, and so that real teaching and learning can happen and personalities can be groomed. Class rules and conducts are not to be followed and implemented because of the socioeconomic status and family background of the learners.

Family is the fundamental, smallest, most sensitive, and important social entity which is characterized and facilitated by society as a larger social entity. Socioeconomic status and poverty influence learners' traits and habits. Furthermore, learners from this background are more likely to be involved in drug abuse and have more social conduct and discipline issues. The family, being a powerful influence on the child's development and fundamental driving force of socialization could in no doubt enhance or hinder the social skills development of the child depending on the social climate and value system of the family.

Learners' social skills enhancement is linked with CM. A classroom can only be managed if required resources are available and utilized properly. The schools selected to conduct research lack resources and learners from less privileged socioeconomic status have issues like class rules and conduct to follow, some male learners' are involved in drug abuse, and female learners fall pregnant. These challenges hinder learners' social skills enhancement. It is significant for schools, classrooms, and teachers to address these challenges and implant social skills in learners. This can only be achieved if all stakeholders (learners, parents, and teachers) play their active roles. Therefore, the schools must involve all stakeholders and introduce parenting sessions for parents and society, so that they can understand their role and responsibility for learners' growth. Schools should also try to engage non-profit organizations to provide financial support to some learners' families to fulfill their basic living needs.

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## Limitations and suggestions for further research

The results of the study cannot be taken as decisive as the study was constrained by some limitations. Six schools and 18 teachers were the research respondents, therefore; these results cannot be generalized to all secondary schools. The focus of the research was the CM, PM, and SE of the classroom and their role in learners' social skills enhancement; other factors that may influence learners' skills enhancement have not been included in the research. The study utilized the qualitative methods of research which always has questions to answer and gaps to fill. Additional research may be required to fill the gaps and provide more detailed results on the role of CM in learners' social skills enhancement.

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