

Classroom Management Strategies and Students' discipline in lower secondary classrooms in Mbarara City Secondary Schools in Uganda. A cross-sectional study.

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Abstract Background

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory emphasises that individuals acquire both appropriate and inappropriate behaviours through observation, imitation, and interaction, providing the theoretical framework for the study. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between classroom management strategies and students' discipline in lower secondary classrooms in Mbarara City, Uganda.

Methodology

A mixed-methods cross-sectional study combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The study employed a descriptive survey research design, utilising questionnaires and interviews as the primary data collection methods.

Results

The majority were male teachers (175, 62.0%), while female teachers accounted for 107 (38.0%). The majority of teachers in lower secondary classrooms in Mbarara City establish clear rules and procedures for classroom behaviour, where 74.4% of respondents strongly agreed. Students in lower secondary classrooms generally demonstrate moderate to high levels of discipline, though some weaknesses are evident. The overall mean score for all items was 3.67 (SD = 1.02). Results indicated a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between classroom management strategies and student discipline ($r = .672$, $n = 282$, $p < .01$). This indicates that teachers who employ effective classroom management practices such as clear rule-setting, fair and consistent discipline, active monitoring, calm handling of disruptions, and engaging teaching methods tend to have students who demonstrate higher levels of discipline.

Conclusion

Effective classroom management strategies are crucial for fostering discipline in lower secondary classrooms. While teachers demonstrated competence in maintaining order, there is a need to incorporate more student-centred and motivational approaches to enhance engagement, self-regulation, and a positive learning environment.

Recommendations

Teachers should adopt positive reinforcement strategies, including recognition, praise, and rewards, to motivate students toward desirable behavior, promote active participation, and cultivate a classroom culture where learners feel valued and respected.

Keywords: Classroom management strategies, Students' Discipline, Lower secondary classrooms, Mbarara City.

Submitted: August 31, 2025 **Accepted :** September 15, 2025 **Published:** September 23, 2025

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Background

Classroom management is a crucial component of effective teaching and learning worldwide. It encompasses all strategies employed by teachers to create a conducive learning environment that promotes discipline, minimises disruptive behaviour, and encourages student engagement (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Globally, effective classroom management has been linked to improved student outcomes and academic performance, particularly in lower

secondary education, where students are more prone to behavioral and motivational challenges (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, numerous studies have shown that effective classroom management significantly enhances student discipline. In the African context, classroom management remains a pressing issue, particularly in overcrowded and under-resourced schools. In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES)

acknowledges that discipline-related issues in schools are on the rise, especially in lower secondary classes. The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) reports have highlighted growing concerns about student absenteeism, noise in classrooms, and lack of participation, all of which have been attributed to ineffective classroom management practices. Teachers often lack adequate training in classroom control techniques, and many schools do not provide continuous professional development to address emerging behavioural and instructional challenges. In Mbarara City, located in Western Uganda, secondary schools have reported increased cases of classroom disruptions, indiscipline, and low learner involvement, especially in lower secondary classes. According to the Mbarara District Education Office (2023), these issues are often due to inadequate teacher preparation, overcrowded classrooms, and poor teacher-learner interaction. Although some schools have introduced learner-centred pedagogies, their application remains inconsistent. There is limited research on how classroom management strategies are implemented in Mbarara City and how they influence student discipline, which makes this study both timely and necessary. The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between classroom management strategies and Students' discipline in lower secondary classrooms in secondary schools in Mbarara City, Uganda.

Methodology

Study Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods cross-sectional study, combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between classroom management strategies and student discipline by collecting numerical data through structured questionnaires and gaining deeper insights through interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders such as headteachers, directors of studies, teachers, and students. Using both methods enabled triangulation of data, which improved the reliability and richness of the findings while providing both statistical evidence and contextual understanding.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Mbarara City, located in Western Uganda. Mbarara City was one of the fastest-growing urban centres in the region and served as a major hub for education, commerce, and governance. The choice of Mbarara City as the study area was scientifically justified due to its unique educational dynamics and demographic characteristics that influenced classroom management and student discipline. Mbarara City hosted a diverse range of secondary schools, including government-aided and private institutions, with varying school sizes, student populations, and resource availability. This diversity offered a representative context for examining

classroom management strategies and their effectiveness across different school settings. The city had experienced rapid urbanization and social change, which had impacted student behaviour and school environments, making it a pertinent location to investigate the challenges and practices related to student discipline. Mbarara City's educational policies, aligned with Uganda's revised lower secondary curriculum, emphasised learner-centred pedagogies, which presented new demands on teachers' classroom management skills. Investigating the effectiveness of these strategies in this context provided relevant insights that could inform education policy and practice not only locally but also in similar urban settings across Uganda and East Africa.

Study Population

The study targeted head teachers, directors of studies, teachers, and students in selected lower secondary schools in Mbarara City because each group played a vital role in understanding classroom management and student discipline. Head teachers provided leadership and policy perspectives on school discipline, while directors of studies oversaw academic progress and student behaviour, offering insights into the link between management and discipline. Teachers directly implemented classroom management strategies and interacted daily with students, making their views crucial for evaluating practical challenges and effectiveness. Students, as the primary recipients of these strategies, provided firsthand experiences of how discipline practices affected their behavior and engagement. Including these groups ensured a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student discipline and the effectiveness of management strategies, thus fulfilling the study's purpose.

Sample Size

The total population considered for this study was 3,000, out of which a sample size of 353 respondents was selected. For students, the total population of 2,802 was derived from six government-aided secondary schools in Mbarara City, each with an average student enrollment of approximately 467 students in the lower secondary section (Senior One to Senior Four). These figures were obtained from the enrollment registers of the respective schools, as provided by the head teachers and directors of studies.

The sample size was determined by employing Yamane's (1967) formula of $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$

Where;

- N represents the total population of the study.
- n is the required sample of the study

e is the level of precision = 0.05.

$N = 3000$

$e = 0.05$

$n = \frac{3000}{1+3000(0.05)^2}$

$n = \frac{3000}{1+3000(0.0025)}$

$n = \frac{3000}{1+7.5}$

n=3000/8.5
n= 353 participants

A sample of 245 students was selected from this total using simple random sampling to ensure that each student had an equal chance of being selected, thus enhancing the representativeness of the study findings.

Table 1: Summary of the study population

Category of respondents	Total Population	Sample size	Sampling technique
Head teachers	8	8	Purposive sampling
Director of studies	30	16	Purposive sampling
Teachers	160	84	Simple random sampling
Students	2802	245	Simple random sampling
Total	3000	353	

Sampling procedures

Purposive sampling and simple random sampling were used to select participants. These methods ensured that the study included individuals who could provide relevant information while maintaining fairness and minimising selection bias.

Purposive Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was used to select Head Teachers and Directors of Studies because they possessed key knowledge and experience regarding school management and students' discipline in lower secondary classrooms. The first step involved identifying all secondary schools within Mbarara City, and a list of these schools was obtained from the District Education Office or relevant authorities. Once the schools were identified, the researcher sought permission from school administrators to conduct the study. The selection of Head Teachers and Directors of Studies was intentional due to their critical role in overseeing students' discipline in lower secondary classrooms, implementing school policies, and managing teaching and learning strategies. These individuals were approached directly, and their participation was sought based on their expertise and responsibility in school leadership. Their knowledge of classroom management practices and their direct influence on students' academic progress made them valuable sources of information for this study. The use of purposive sampling in this context ensured that only those individuals with relevant experience were included in the study. Since Head Teachers and Directors of Studies were responsible for the implementation of school policies and classroom management strategies, their insights were essential in understanding how management practices influenced students' discipline in lower secondary classrooms.

Simple Random Sampling Procedure

Simple random sampling was used to select students and teachers to ensure that the study captured diverse perspectives and minimised selection bias. The researcher first obtained a list of all students and teachers from the selected schools. Based on the total number of students and

teachers, the researcher determined an appropriate sample size using standard sampling techniques such as Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table or Cochran's formula. To ensure fairness in selection, each eligible student and teacher was assigned a unique identification number. These numbers were either written on small pieces of paper and placed in a container for a lottery-style selection process, or a computer-generated randomization method was used. The researcher then randomly drew numbers without replacement, meaning once a participant was selected, they were not included again. Simple random sampling proved to be an effective probability sampling method because it ensured that every individual in the population had an equal chance of being selected. This process minimised bias and made the findings more generalizable to the entire population of students and teachers. It also allowed the study to capture a wide range of experiences and viewpoints, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between classroom management and academic performance.

Data Collection Methods

The study used two data collection methods, namely the questionnaire survey method and the interview method.

Questionnaire Survey

This method was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data from students and teachers. A questionnaire survey helped to collect data from both groups. The questionnaire included both closed- and open-ended items. This method of data collection proved useful because it was quick and efficient. Teachers and students responded easily to the items due to their ability to read and write, as well as their general proficiency in English, which was the language used in the questionnaire.

Interview method

This method was used to collect qualitative data from Head Teachers and Directors of Studies. The interviews helped in obtaining detailed responses to the items on the interview guide, allowing for deeper exploration and

clarity. The responses contributed to the attainment of the study objectives.

Data Collection Instruments

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Self-administered Questionnaire

A self-administered questionnaire, based on the study objectives, was used to collect data from students and teachers. The self-administered questionnaire enabled the respondents to take more time to understand the meaning of each question and compose their answers, which improved the quality of the responses. A questionnaire was used because it allowed for quick collection and production of results.

Interview Guide

Qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide designed with open-ended questions to capture detailed insights from headteachers and directors of studies regarding classroom management strategies and student discipline in lower secondary classrooms. The interview guide was organised around key themes such as the types of classroom management practices employed (e.g., rules and routines, reward and punishment systems, participatory methods), common discipline issues observed among students, and the perceived relationship between management strategies and student behaviour. This tool allowed respondents the flexibility to share experiences and opinions in their own words, thus enriching the quantitative findings with contextual depth. Interviews were conducted in a quiet environment within the school setting, recorded with permission, and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

Procedure of Data Collection

The researcher first developed a well-structured research proposal detailing the study's objectives, research questions, methodology, sampling procedures, and ethical considerations. The proposal was then submitted to the Bishop Stuart University Ethics Review Committee for approval to ensure adherence to research ethics, including confidentiality and informed consent. Once ethical clearance was granted, the researcher prepared the data collection tools, such as questionnaires and interview guides, ensuring they aligned with the study's objectives. A pilot test was conducted to check the clarity and reliability of these instruments. Additionally, the researcher organised necessary logistics, including transportation, stationery, and recording devices, to facilitate effective data collection. With all these preparations in place, the researcher obtained an introductory letter from the Directorate of Graduate Studies, Research, and Innovations at Bishop Stuart University, which was presented to the Education Officer of Mbarara City to request official permission to conduct research in secondary schools. Upon receiving permission, the researcher proceeded to the schools and presented the authority letter to the

headteachers, requesting access to the required participants and scheduling in the school program. The researcher followed the program provided by the headteachers. Once access to the participants was granted, the researcher informed respondents about the purpose of the study and requested that they willingly provide the information required. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the respondents and collected them after they were completed.

Following the administration of questionnaires, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with Head Teachers, Directors of Studies, and selected teachers to gain in-depth insights into classroom management practices and their impact on student academic performance. These interviews were scheduled in advance and conducted in quiet, private settings to encourage open and honest discussions. Before each interview, the researcher explained the study's purpose, sought informed consent, and assured participants of confidentiality. A semi-structured interview guide was used, allowing for both structured and open-ended discussions. Responses were recorded through detailed note-taking, and with consent, audio recordings were made for accuracy. The interviews concluded with the researcher expressing gratitude to participants, clarifying any questions, and reassuring them about the confidentiality of their responses. The collected data were then analysed to identify patterns and themes that contributed to understanding the relationship between classroom management and student academic performance.

Validity of the Instruments

Validity was determined using content-related evidence of validity. A list of objectives, which guided the construction of the instrument, and a separate list of items designed specifically to answer the research questions, were provided to two knowledgeable persons familiar with the study topic. These knowledgeable persons were independently asked to thoroughly inspect the items and link each objective with the respective items, assessing the relevancy of the items to the content addressed in the objectives. They were asked to rate each item on a 4-point scale, namely: not relevant (NR), somewhat relevant (SR), quite relevant (QR), and very relevant (VR). The researcher then computed the level of agreement between the two knowledgeable persons as inter-rater agreement to determine the extent to which they agreed.

Content validity was understood as the degree to which an instrument contained an appropriate sample of items for the construct being measured and was considered an important procedure in scale development.

Therefore: $CVI = n/N$

CVI = Content Validity Index,

n = Number of items rated relevant

N = Total number of items in the questionnaire.

A Content Validity Index of 0.7 and above, according to Amin (2005), qualifies the instrument to be used.

Reliability of instruments

A split-half reliability method was used to determine the reliability of the instruments. The researcher administered the instrument to teachers, and the items in the instrument were divided into two halves: the odd-numbered and even-numbered items. For each instrument, the scores from the odd and even items were computed. The two sets of scores were then correlated using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient. If the results indicated a figure greater than 0.7, the instruments were regarded as reliable. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), a correlation coefficient of 0.7 or above was considered appropriate and, therefore, reliable for collecting data.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods, as explained below: Qualitative data from objectives one and two were systematically organised, reviewed, and categorised into relevant sub-themes. The analysis involved identifying key patterns and themes within respondents' responses, interpreting their meanings, and examining how these insights contributed to answering the research questions. This process included coding the data, categorizing it based on both predetermined categories and emerging patterns, and interpreting the findings in the context of the study's theoretical framework and objectives. The goal was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the data and its relevance to the research questions.

Quantitative data from objective three were summarised and entered into the SPSS data analysis program, where frequency tables and mean scores were generated for easy interpretation of findings. The correlation between classroom management strategies and students' academic performance in Mbarara City secondary schools was

determined to find out whether there was a positive, statistically significant relationship between the variables, as the research hypothesis suggested. This was done using the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient.

Ethical Considerations

During the planning, data collection, and processing phases, the researcher adhered strictly to established ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of all participants. Informed consent was sought from each respondent after fully explaining the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw or refuse to answer any questions without any negative consequences. To ensure a clear understanding, all explanations and instructions were provided in Runyankole, the language familiar to the participants. The researcher respected respondents' privacy and guaranteed the confidentiality and anonymity of their information by not disclosing names or school identities. Approval and ethical clearance were obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Bishop Stuart University, as well as registration and authorisation from the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST). Additionally, permission was sought from the Mbarara City Education Officer to access selected secondary schools, followed by official requests to headteachers to conduct the study within their institutions. The researcher complied with school schedules and protocols, and upon introduction to participants, reiterated the study's purpose and encouraged honest and voluntary participation.

FINDINGS

Gender of respondents

The study was gender sensitive, it involved both males and females to avoid gender bias, and the findings are summarised in Table 2

Table 2: Gender of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	175	62.0
Female	107	38.0
Total	282	100.0

Source: Field data 2025

Table 2 presents the gender distribution of respondents who participated in the study. Out of the 282 respondents, the majority were male teachers (175, representing 62.0%), while female teachers accounted for 107 (38.0%) of the sample. This distribution suggests that teaching in lower secondary schools in Mbarara City is male-dominated, although a significant proportion of females are also

actively engaged. The presence of 38% female participation shows that women also make a substantial contribution to the teaching workforce in Mbarara City. This gender balance, though unequal, is still sufficient to provide perspectives from both sexes and reduces the risk of gender bias in the findings.

Classroom management strategies utilised by teachers in lower secondary classrooms

Page | 6 **Table 3: Classroom management strategies utilised by teachers in lower secondary classrooms**

Statement	S.A	A	N	D	SD
I establish clear rules and procedures for classroom behaviour.	210 (74.4%)	59 (20.9%)	0 (0%)	13 (4.6%)	0 (0%)
I involve students in developing classroom rules.	40 (14.1%)	58 (20.5%)	0(0%)	180 (63.8%)	4 (1.4%)
I apply discipline measures consistently and fairly.	180 (63.8%)	47 (16.6%)	23 (8.1%)	11 (3.9%)	0(0%)
I use rewards and praise to promote good behavior.	0 (0%)	92 (23.6%)	0 (0%)	15 (5.3%)	175 (62.0%)
I use a variety of teaching methods to keep students engaged.	215 (76.2%)	52 (18.4%)	0 (0%)	15 (5.3%)	0 (0%)
I handle disruptive behaviour calmly and professionally.	55 (19.5%)	170 (60.2%)	0 (0%)	42 (14.8%)	15 (5.3%)
I monitor student behaviour throughout the lesson	203 (71.9%)	42 (14.8%)	0(0%)	37 (13.1%)	0(0%)

Source: Field data 2025

Table 3 revealed that the majority of teachers in lower secondary classrooms in Mbarara City establish clear rules and procedures for classroom behaviour. Specifically, 74.4% of respondents strongly agreed and 20.9% agreed with this statement, while only 4.6% disagreed. This indicates that most teachers value structure and predictability, which are essential for maintaining order in the classroom. One head teacher emphasised this point during an interview, stating: *“We encourage our teachers to begin every term by laying down clear rules so that learners know exactly what is expected of them. Without such rules, discipline becomes very difficult to maintain.”* This testimony highlights how school leadership also prioritizes clarity and consistency in behaviour expectations. According to Marzano (2003), establishing clear rules enhances predictability and provides students with a secure learning environment, which explains why it is among the most common practices.

However, when it comes to involving students in developing classroom rules, the data present a contrasting picture. A significant 63.8% of respondents disagreed, while only 14.1% strongly agreed and 20.5% agreed that they involve learners in the rule-making process. This suggests that teachers largely adopt a teacher-centered approach to classroom management, where rules are imposed rather than negotiated. During the interviews, one head teacher admitted: *“Our teachers rarely involve students in making rules because they fear it may undermine authority. Yet I believe involving learners could promote a sense of ownership and reduce cases of indiscipline.”*

In terms of applying discipline measures consistently and fairly, the findings are more positive. A total of 80.4% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they are consistent and fair in disciplinary matters. Only a small percentage expressed neutrality or disagreement. This demonstrates teachers’ awareness of the importance of fairness, which is critical in avoiding perceptions of favouritism. Supporting this, a head teacher remarked: *“Fairness is key. When students see that punishments are applied equally, they respect the system more. But when they suspect bias, they easily become rebellious.”* This indicates that most teachers strive for fairness in handling disciplinary issues.

The results on the use of rewards and praise to promote good behaviour, however, show a worrying trend. An overwhelming 62.0% strongly disagreed with this practice, while only 23.6% agreed. This suggests that positive reinforcement is rarely employed in classrooms across Mbarara City secondary schools. Many teachers appear to rely more on punishment than on recognition of positive behavior. As one head teacher lamented: *“Teachers here are quick to punish but very slow to praise. Yet sometimes a simple word of encouragement can change a child’s attitude far better than punishment.”* This observation reveals a missed opportunity in using motivational strategies to shape behaviour positively.

Most teachers reported using a variety of teaching methods to keep learners engaged. About 76.2% strongly agreed and 18.4% agreed that they employ diverse instructional strategies. This reflects an understanding that engaging lessons reduces opportunities for disruptive behavior. Similarly, a majority of teachers (79.7%) confirmed that

they handle disruptive behavior calmly and professionally. While 20.1% disagreed, this suggests that most teachers remain composed under pressure, an important trait for effective classroom management. One head teacher explained: *“We always advise teachers not to lose their temper before students. A calm teacher can solve a conflict better than an angry one.”* This shows that teachers appreciate the role of engaging pedagogy in minimizing disruptive behavior.

Monitoring student behaviour throughout the lesson emerged as another strength. About 71.9% strongly agreed and 14.8% agreed that they constantly observe learners’ actions during lessons. Only 13.1% disagreed. This proactive strategy is consistent with Kounin’s concept of “withitness,” which stresses the teacher’s awareness of everything happening in the classroom. As a head teacher put it: *“The best-managed classes are those where*

teachers are alert. Once learners notice that a teacher is watchful, they are less likely to misbehave.”

Generally, the findings show that teachers in Mbarara City secondary schools excel in establishing clear rules, monitoring students, applying discipline fairly, and engaging learners through varied methods. However, they fall short in two critical areas: involving students in decision-making and using rewards and praise as positive reinforcement. These weaknesses suggest that classroom management in the region is still heavily inclined towards authoritative approaches, with limited use of student-centred and motivational strategies. The testimonies from head teachers confirm this reality, showing that while structure and consistency are prioritized, the role of encouragement and student involvement is undervalued. This imbalance may explain why cases of indiscipline persist despite teachers’ efforts.

The level of students’ discipline in lower secondary classrooms in Mbarara City secondary schools, Uganda.

Table 4: Level of students’ discipline in lower secondary classrooms in Mbarara City secondary schools, Uganda.

Statement	S.A	A	N	D	SD
Students in my class show respect for the teacher and classmates	54 (19.1%)	195 (69.1%)	0 (0%)	30 (10.6%)	3 (1.0%)
Cases of indiscipline have reduced due to my management strategies	130 (46.0%)	86 (30.4%)	0 (0%)	40 (14.1%)	26 (9.2%)
Students understand the consequences of their misbehavior.	65 (23.0%)	151 (53.5%)	23 (8.1%)	20 (7.0%)	21 (7.4%)
My classroom is generally free of behavioural disruptions.	21 (7.4%)	86 (30.4%)	50 (17.7%)	68 (24.1%)	57 (20.2%)
Students arrive at class on time and are prepared to learn.	122 (43.2%)	68 (24.1%)	40 (14.1%)	52 (18.4%)	0 (0%)
Bullying and fighting among students are rare in my classroom.	78 (27.6%)	180 (63.8%)	20 (7.0%)	4 (1.4%)	0 (0%)
Students complete their assignments and homework regularly.	86 (30.4%)	173 (61.3%)	0 (0%)	20 (7.0%)	3 (1.0%)
Students actively participate in classroom activities without causing disruptions.	25 (8.8%)	72 (25.5%)	2 (0.7%)	120 (42.5%)	63 (22.3%)
There is minimal use of mobile phones or other distractions during lessons.	240 (85.0%)	42 (14.8%)	0	0	0
Students demonstrate self-discipline and manage their behaviour appropriately.	7 (2.4%)	50 (17.7%)	0	150 (53.1%)	73 (25.8)
There is clear respect for classroom rules and routines among students.	75 (26.5%)	201 (71.2%)	0	6 (2.1%)	0
Peer pressure negatively affecting discipline in class is well managed	195 (69.1%)	46 (16.3%)	0	40 (14.1%)	1 (0.3%)

Source: Field data 2025

Table 4 showed that students in lower secondary classrooms in Mbarara City secondary schools generally demonstrate moderate to high levels of discipline, though some weaknesses are evident. The overall mean score for

all items was 3.67 (SD = 1.02), indicating a fairly positive perception of discipline among teachers, with variations across specific indicators.

To begin with, respect for teachers and classmates was highly emphasised, with a mean of 3.95 (SD = 0.82). About 88.2% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that students show respect, confirming that respect remains a cornerstone of classroom order. One head teacher noted: *“Respect is both taught and modelled by teachers. Where teachers respect learners, it is reciprocated. The few disrespect cases are often linked to external factors such as poor parental guidance.”*

In terms of managing indiscipline, the item *“cases of indiscipline have reduced due to my management strategies”* scored a mean of 3.84 (SD = 1.09). This suggests that most teachers’ strategies are effective, although not uniformly applied. A head teacher testified: *“We encourage teachers to use proactive discipline techniques such as positive reinforcement, but some still rely on punitive methods. Where proactive approaches are consistent, indiscipline cases fall drastically.”*

Students’ awareness of the consequences of misbehaviour was also highly rated (mean = 3.78, SD = 1.06). This implies that schools effectively communicate rules and sanctions. However, a minority disagreed, showing that some learners still downplay the seriousness of rules.

Interestingly, the statement *“My classroom is generally free of disruptions”* received one of the lowest means (2.81, SD = 1.21). Nearly half of the respondents disagreed, pointing to frequent behavioural interruptions, especially in large or overcrowded classrooms. As one head teacher explained: *“Disruptions are inevitable in crowded classrooms where individual attention is difficult. Teachers often spend more time managing behaviour than delivering lessons.”*

Regarding punctuality and preparedness, the results were encouraging (mean = 3.92, SD = 1.04). Most teachers confirmed that students generally arrive on time and ready to learn, though isolated cases of lateness persist. Similarly,

bullying and fighting were reported as minimal, reflected in a strong mean of 4.18 (SD = 0.67). This indicates effective anti-bullying measures in schools.

Assignment completion was also rated highly (mean = 4.13, SD = 0.76), suggesting that students take academic responsibilities seriously. However, some teachers mentioned that socio-economic challenges still prevent certain learners from completing homework consistently. A head teacher observed: *“Students from homes without electricity or support often struggle with homework, but in-school homework clubs have helped bridge this gap.”*

The weakest area emerged in *student active participation without disruptions* (mean = 2.61, SD = 1.27) and *self-discipline* (mean = 2.23, SD = 1.08). These low means highlight that many students rely heavily on external control rather than self-regulation. According to one head teacher, *“Our learners are obedient when supervised, but very few demonstrate internal self-discipline. They require continuous monitoring to stay on task.”*

On the other hand, there was strong consensus that students respect classroom rules and routines (mean = 4.21, SD = 0.58) and that peer pressure is generally well managed (mean = 4.06, SD = 0.94). These results imply that institutional frameworks such as guidance and counselling, prefect systems, and peer mentorship programs are effective in curbing indiscipline.

Therefore, the findings reveal that students in Mbarara City’s lower secondary classrooms exhibit commendable respect for teachers and rules, reduced bullying, punctuality, and good homework completion. However, challenges persist in sustaining disruption-free classrooms, encouraging active participation, and promoting self-discipline. Head teachers emphasised that where teachers are consistent, proactive, and supported by school systems, discipline thrives. Yet, overcrowding and over-reliance on external supervision weaken overall discipline outcomes.

The relationship between classroom management strategies and student discipline in lower secondary schools in Mbarara City, Uganda.

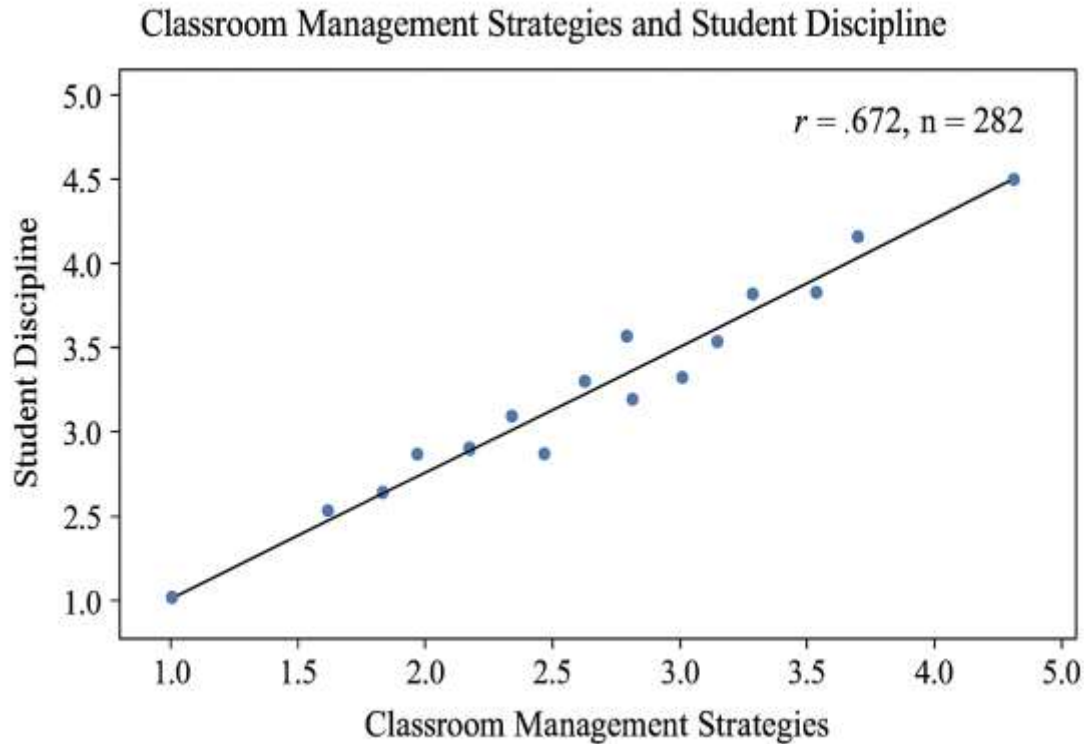
Table 5 Pearson Correlation Between Classroom Management Strategies and Student Discipline in Lower Secondary Schools, Mbarara City

	CM Strategies	Student Discipline
CM Strategies	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	43.123
	Covariance	.567
	N	282
Student Discipline	Pearson Correlation	.672**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	36.521
	Covariance	.475
	N	282

Note:

- ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

- *CM Strategies = Composite of all 7 classroom management items*
- *Student Discipline = Composite of all 12 student discipline items*



A Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between classroom management strategies and student discipline in lower secondary schools in Mbarara City. The results indicated a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation between classroom management strategies and student discipline ($r = .672, n = 282, p < .01$). This indicates that teachers who employ effective classroom management practices such as clear rule-setting, fair and consistent discipline, active monitoring, calm handling of disruptions, and engaging teaching methods tend to have students who demonstrate higher levels of discipline.

These findings suggest that structured and proactive classroom management strategies are closely associated with desirable behavioural outcomes among learners. In practice, this means that improvements in teacher management strategies can directly enhance students' adherence to rules, respect for authority, punctuality, completion of academic tasks, and self-regulation in the classroom.

Discussions

Classroom Management Strategies Utilised by Teachers

The findings of this study indicate that the majority of teachers in Mbarara City secondary schools establish clear rules and procedures for classroom behaviour, with 74.4% of respondents strongly agreeing and 20.9% agreeing with this practice. This finding corroborates the assertions of Marzano (2003), who emphasised that setting clear rules enhances predictability and creates a secure learning environment for students. The qualitative testimonies from head teachers reinforce this observation, as one noted: "*We encourage our teachers to begin every term by laying down*

clear rules so that learners know exactly what is expected of them. Without such rules, discipline becomes very difficult to maintain." This alignment demonstrates that both empirical literature and local experiences recognise the central role of structured classroom management in promoting order and facilitating learning.

Conversely, the study revealed that student involvement in developing classroom rules is notably low, with 63.8% of respondents disagreeing with this practice. This indicates a predominance of teacher-centred approaches to classroom management, where rules are imposed rather than negotiated. This finding aligns with the observations of Evertson and Weinstein (2006), who argued that student participation in rule-making promotes ownership and adherence to classroom expectations. During interviews, a head teacher explained: *"Our teachers rarely involve students in making rules because they fear it may undermine authority. Yet I believe involving learners could promote a sense of ownership and reduce cases of indiscipline."* The combination of quantitative and qualitative data highlights that while rules are clearly defined, the absence of collaborative rule-setting may limit students' internalisation of behavioural expectations, which is consistent with literature emphasising the benefits of student engagement in management practices.

The study further found that teachers generally apply discipline measures consistently and fairly, with 80.4% of respondents affirming this practice. This demonstrates teachers' awareness of the importance of fairness in maintaining classroom order and avoiding perceptions of favouritism. A head teacher noted: *"Fairness is key. When students see that punishments are applied equally, they respect the system more. But when they suspect bias, they easily become rebellious."* This testimony complements the quantitative data, showing that equitable application of rules is both recognised and valued in practice, reinforcing the link between fairness and effective classroom management.

A concerning trend observed in the study is the limited use of rewards and praise to promote positive behavior, with 62% of teachers strongly disagreeing that they employ this strategy. This suggests a reliance on punitive rather than motivational approaches. Skinner's reinforcement theory (1953) emphasises that positive reinforcement is highly effective in shaping behaviour, and similar conclusions were drawn by Rahimi and Karkami (2015), who argued that reward-based strategies are more effective than punishment in maintaining student engagement. One head teacher reflected: *"Teachers here are quick to punish but very slow to praise. Yet sometimes a simple word of encouragement can change a child's attitude far better than punishment."* This finding highlights a gap between theoretical best practices and their implementation, underscoring the need for teacher training in motivational strategies to complement disciplinary measures.

The study also found that the majority of teachers use a variety of teaching methods to keep students engaged (76.2% strongly agreed, 18.4% agreed) and handle disruptive behaviour calmly and professionally (79.7%). This is consistent with Oliver, Wehby, and Reschly (2011), who emphasised that engaging instructional methods reduce opportunities for misbehaviour and that teacher composure under pressure is critical for effective classroom management. A head teacher explained: *"We always advise teachers not to lose their temper before students. A calm teacher can solve a conflict better than an angry one."* This qualitative insight confirms that teachers recognize the practical importance of calm and engaging pedagogical approaches in managing behavior, aligning with global evidence on the role of instructional strategies in maintaining discipline.

Finally, monitoring student behaviour throughout lessons emerged as another strong practice, with 71.9% of respondents strongly agreeing. A head teacher noted: *"The best-managed classes are those where teachers are alert. Once learners notice that a teacher is watchful, they are less likely to misbehave."* The convergence of literature, quantitative data, and qualitative testimony illustrates that vigilant supervision is a critical component of effective classroom management.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that teachers in Mbarara City secondary schools excel in structuring classrooms, monitoring behaviour, applying discipline fairly, and engaging students through varied instructional methods. However, gaps remain in student involvement in rule-making and the use of positive reinforcement. These weaknesses reflect a reliance on authoritative classroom management approaches and highlight opportunities for adopting more student-centered and motivational strategies. The qualitative testimonies from head teachers further reinforce these conclusions, providing practical insight into the realities of classroom management within the context of Mbarara City.

Students' Discipline in Lower Secondary Classrooms

The findings from this study reveal that students in Mbarara City secondary schools generally demonstrate moderate to high levels of discipline, though some areas require improvement. Respect for teachers and classmates emerged as a prominent feature, with 88.2% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that students exhibit respect. This aligns with Asiyai (2011), who emphasised that maintaining respect is foundational to effective classroom order and student engagement. A head teacher supported this view, noting: *"Respect is both taught and modelled by teachers. Where teachers respect learners, it is reciprocated. The few disrespect cases are often linked to external factors such as poor parental guidance."* This demonstrates that respect, cultivated through both teacher

behaviour and structured rules, remains a cornerstone of discipline in lower secondary classrooms.

The study further indicated that teachers' classroom management strategies effectively reduced cases of indiscipline, as evidenced by a mean score of 3.84 (SD = 1.09). This finding resonates with Ofoyuru and Too-Okema (2023), who reported that structured management strategies such as rewards, punishment, and counselling positively influence student behaviour. Qualitative feedback from head teachers emphasised that proactive disciplinary approaches, including positive reinforcement, are effective when consistently applied: *"We encourage teachers to use proactive discipline techniques such as positive reinforcement, but some still rely on punitive methods. Where proactive approaches are consistent, indiscipline cases fall drastically."* This demonstrates the interplay between teacher strategies and student compliance, highlighting the need for consistent implementation to sustain positive behaviour outcomes.

Students' awareness of the consequences of misbehaviour was also rated highly (mean = 3.78, SD = 1.06), suggesting effective communication of rules and sanctions. This supports Evertson and Weinstein's (2013) findings that proactive management and clear expectations contribute significantly to improved student behaviour. However, the presence of a minority of students who downplay rules suggests that communication alone is insufficient without consistent reinforcement and monitoring.

Despite these positive trends, the study found that classrooms are not entirely free from disruptions, with a mean score of 2.81 (SD = 1.21). Nearly half of the respondents indicated frequent behavioural interruptions, particularly in overcrowded classrooms. This observation is consistent with Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), who argued that student engagement is influenced by class size, available resources, and instructional strategies. A head teacher noted: *"Disruptions are inevitable in crowded classrooms where individual attention is difficult. Teachers often spend more time managing behaviour than delivering lessons."* This highlights the practical challenges faced by teachers in resource-constrained settings, reinforcing the importance of innovative classroom management and engagement techniques to minimise disruptions.

Punctuality and preparedness were relatively strong, with a mean of 3.92 (SD = 1.04), indicating that most students arrive on time and ready to learn. Similarly, instances of bullying and fighting were minimal (mean = 4.18, SD = 0.67), suggesting that preventive strategies and school policies, such as guidance and counselling or peer mentorship, are effective. These results echo Wubbels et al. (2015), who found that positive teacher-student relationships reduce behavioral issues and foster a conducive learning environment. A head teacher reflected: *"Students generally respect rules, and bullying is rare due to supervision by teachers and peer mentors."* This

demonstrates that relational and supervisory interventions play a crucial role in maintaining discipline.

Homework completion and assignment submission were also rated highly (mean = 4.13, SD = 0.76), indicating strong academic responsibility among students. However, qualitative testimonies revealed that socio-economic challenges hinder consistent completion for some learners: *"Students from homes without electricity or support often struggle with homework, but in-school homework clubs have helped bridge this gap."* This aligns with Marzano and Marzano (2003), who emphasized that environmental factors and institutional support significantly influence student behaviour and academic outcomes.

The weakest aspects of discipline were active participation without causing disruptions (mean = 2.61, SD = 1.27) and self-discipline (mean = 2.23, SD = 1.08). These findings suggest that many students rely heavily on external control rather than self-regulation, reflecting Morrison and Vaandering's (2012) observations that restorative and student-centred approaches can promote responsibility and internalised discipline. A head teacher noted: *"Our learners are obedient when supervised, but very few demonstrate internal self-discipline. They require continuous monitoring to stay on task."* This highlights the need for strategies that cultivate intrinsic motivation and self-management skills, beyond reliance on punitive or supervisory measures.

Finally, strong adherence to classroom rules (mean = 4.21, SD = 0.58) and effective management of peer pressure (mean = 4.06, SD = 0.94) suggest that institutional structures, including guidance programs, prefect systems, and peer mentorship, are instrumental in supporting discipline. This finding complements the literature on proactive classroom management (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013) and relational approaches (Wubbels et al., 2015), showing that when teacher strategies are combined with institutional support, student discipline improves significantly.

In conclusion, the study confirms that students in Mbarara City secondary schools demonstrate commendable respect for teachers, adherence to rules, punctuality, and homework completion. However, challenges persist in maintaining disruption-free classrooms, promoting active participation, and developing self-discipline. Head teachers' testimonies suggest that where teachers are consistent, proactive, and supported by school systems, discipline thrives. These findings underscore the importance of combining structured management strategies with relational, motivational, and restorative approaches, particularly in resource-limited and overcrowded classroom contexts.

The Relationship Between Classroom Management Strategies and Students' Discipline

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The study examined how classroom management strategies employed by teachers in lower secondary classrooms influence student discipline in Mbarara City secondary schools. The findings indicate a clear connection between structured teacher practices and positive student behavior, corroborating the assertions of multiple scholars in the literature review.

Firstly, teachers' establishment of clear rules and procedures was identified as the most consistently applied classroom management strategy, with 74.4% of respondents strongly agreeing and 20.9% agreeing that they maintain explicit behavioural expectations. This practice is directly related to higher levels of student respect for teachers and peers, as reflected in the discipline indicators (mean = 3.95, SD = 0.82). These findings align with Evertson and Weinstein (2013), who emphasised that clear routines, consistent expectations, and proactive classroom management reduce behavioural disruptions. A head teacher reinforced this link, stating: *"We encourage our teachers to begin every term by laying down clear rules so that learners know exactly what is expected of them. Without such rules, discipline becomes very difficult to maintain."* This testimony underscores the practical influence of structured management on promoting respect and adherence to rules.

Secondly, the use of diverse teaching methods to keep students engaged was another strategy positively associated with student discipline. The study found that 76.2% of teachers strongly agreed that they employ varied instructional approaches. This corresponds with Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), who reported that engaging instructional strategies such as cooperative learning, project-based tasks, and participatory activities enhance student involvement and reduce misbehavior. Qualitative feedback supported this, with one teacher noting: *"When lessons are interesting, students focus more and fewer disruptions occur."* Therefore, active instructional engagement appears to moderate disruptive tendencies among students, highlighting the link between pedagogical strategies and discipline outcomes.

Thirdly, the consistent and fair application of disciplinary measures was shown to reinforce students' understanding of behavioural consequences. A majority of teachers (80.4%) confirmed that they apply discipline fairly and consistently. This aligns with Ofoyuru and Too-Okema (2023), who suggested that fairness and transparency in disciplinary measures strengthen compliance and reduce behavioral infractions. Head teachers' testimonies emphasised that students are more likely to respect rules when they perceive punishments as impartial: *"Fairness is key. When students see that punishments are applied equally, they respect the system more."* The strong association between fairness and students' perception of

rules suggests that consistent disciplinary strategies are fundamental to promoting a disciplined classroom environment.

Despite these positive outcomes, some management strategies were underutilised, particularly involving students in developing classroom rules (63.8% disagreed) and the use of rewards and praise to reinforce positive behaviour (62% strongly disagreed). These gaps indicate an overreliance on authoritarian approaches and limited adoption of motivational strategies. Morrison and Vaandering (2012) and Skinner (1953) emphasised that restorative practices and positive reinforcement are critical in cultivating intrinsic discipline and engagement. Head teachers highlighted this concern: *"Teachers here are quick to punish but very slow to praise. Yet sometimes a simple word of encouragement can change a child's attitude far better than punishment."* This underlines the potential for improving student self-discipline and participation by integrating student-centred and motivational strategies alongside traditional rule enforcement.

These findings suggest that the presence of structured, consistent, and engaging classroom management strategies contributes significantly to better student discipline. Proactive strategies, such as clear rules, active monitoring, and varied instructional methods, correlate with higher respect for authority, reduced behavioral disruptions, and improved adherence to classroom routines. Conversely, limited use of student participation and positive reinforcement corresponds with lower levels of intrinsic self-discipline and active engagement. This balance between authoritative and motivational strategies appears critical for achieving comprehensive classroom discipline. The quantitative patterns observed in this study provide a rationale for testing the statistical relationship between classroom management strategies and student discipline. Given the observed associations where effective management aligns with higher discipline levels and gaps in participatory or reinforcement strategies correspond with weaker discipline, the Pearson correlation coefficient can quantify the strength and direction of this relationship. This statistical test will help determine whether the relationship is significant and substantiate the qualitative and descriptive evidence with empirical rigor.

Conclusions

Teachers in lower secondary classrooms employ a variety of classroom management strategies to maintain order and facilitate learning. Most teachers reported establishing clear rules and procedures, monitoring student behavior consistently, applying discipline measures fairly, and using diverse instructional methods to engage learners. However, there were notable gaps in involving students in rule-making and using rewards and praise as positive reinforcement, indicating that classroom management practices remain largely teacher-centered and authoritative.

These findings suggest that while teachers prioritise structure and consistency, motivational and student-centred strategies are underutilised.

Secondly, the study examined the level of students' discipline in lower secondary classrooms and found that students generally exhibited moderate to high levels of discipline. Most learners demonstrated respect for teachers and peers, punctuality, adherence to rules, and completion of assignments. Nevertheless, challenges were observed in sustaining disruption-free classrooms, encouraging active participation, and fostering self-discipline, particularly in large or overcrowded classrooms. This highlights that while formal classroom management strategies support order, students' internalisation of discipline remains uneven, often relying on external supervision and teacher control.

Finally, the analysis of the relationship between classroom management strategies and student discipline revealed a strong positive and statistically significant correlation. This indicates that effective classroom management practices are associated with higher levels of student discipline. Teachers' consistent, structured, and proactive approaches create environments conducive to positive behaviour, demonstrating that strategies such as clear rules, continuous monitoring, and fair application of discipline play a critical role in shaping students' conduct.

Therefore, the study concluded that effective classroom management strategies are essential for fostering discipline in lower secondary classrooms. While teachers demonstrate competence in maintaining order, there is a need to incorporate more student-centered and motivational approaches to enhance engagement and self-regulation among learners. Strengthening these practices could improve both classroom behaviour and overall learning outcomes in Mbarara City secondary schools.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that teachers in Mbarara City secondary schools adopt more student-centred classroom management approaches. While the study showed that teachers effectively establish rules and monitor behaviour, involving students in developing classroom rules and routines can enhance their sense of ownership and responsibility. When learners participate in setting expectations, they are more likely to comply voluntarily, which fosters internalised self-discipline and reduces reliance on external supervision.

Additionally, teachers should incorporate positive reinforcement strategies such as praise, recognition, and rewards to motivate students toward desirable behavior. These strategies not only encourage engagement but also help create a positive learning environment where students feel valued and respected.

School administrators and headteachers are encouraged to provide continuous professional development for teachers on modern and evidence-based classroom management

practices. Training should include techniques for fostering positive student-teacher relationships, implementing restorative discipline methods, and managing large classrooms effectively.

Support from the administration, including clear policies and guidance on consistent disciplinary measures, is essential for ensuring that teachers can apply these strategies effectively. Schools should also invest in improving classroom environments by providing adequate resources, suitable layouts, and tools that facilitate student engagement and minimise behavioural disruptions. Such improvements can enhance both teaching effectiveness and student discipline.

At the policy level, education authorities and policymakers should develop guidelines and frameworks that promote proactive, student-centred classroom management across secondary schools. Policies should encourage the integration of motivational strategies and restorative practices in daily classroom routines.

Measures to reduce class sizes and improve resources are critical in supporting teachers' ability to maintain discipline and engage students effectively. Recognition programs that reward schools or teachers who demonstrate excellence in classroom management can also motivate the adoption of innovative and effective strategies.

For future research, it is recommended to investigate the long-term effects of student-centred classroom management on both academic outcomes and behavioural development. Studies could also explore the applicability and effectiveness of restorative discipline approaches in Ugandan classrooms and compare practices between urban and rural settings. Such research would provide deeper insights into the contextual factors affecting classroom management and student discipline, offering practical solutions for improving education quality in Uganda.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I give thanks to God Almighty for His guidance, strength, and abundant blessings throughout the entire process of this research. Without His grace, this achievement would not have been possible. I am profoundly grateful to my research supervisors, Dr. Basil Tibanyendera (PhD) and Rev. Wilson Mugisha, for their invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and unwavering support. Their expertise, patience, and encouragement were instrumental in the successful completion of this study. My heartfelt appreciation also goes to my children Ampurira Poshia, Ampaire Nina, Atuhaire Laureen, and Kabehe Timmy, whose love, sacrifices, and prayers have laid the foundation for my academic journey. I am equally thankful to all my lecturers, colleagues, and friends who offered moral support, encouragement, and insightful contributions along the way. Finally, I sincerely acknowledge the support of all the respondents who willingly participated in this study.

Your patience, cooperation, and motivation were a constant source of inspiration throughout this research journey.

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List of abbreviations

CM	Classroom management
CMS strategies	Classroom management strategies
MoES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NCDC	National Curriculum Development Centre
U.S.	United States
UK	United Kingdom
UNEB	Uganda National Examinations Board

Source of funding

The study was not funded

Conflict of interest

The author did not declare any conflict of interest

Data availability

Data is available upon request

Author contributions

Patience Katusiime collected data and drafted the manuscript of the study.

Dr .. Tibanyendera (PhD) supervised the study

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PUBLISHER DETAILS:

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