

# Managing Learner Behaviour in a Virtual Classroom: Experiences of Selected Private High School Teachers in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

The study examined experiences of private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in virtual classrooms. The study was motivated by paradigm shift from physical classroom to virtual classroom in most educational institutions globally because of corona virus pandemic. A qualitative study, rooted in interpretive paradigm employed case study design. The participants who constituted ten teachers were purposively selected from two private high schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The data solicited through emailed open-ended questionnaire were transcribed, coded and thematically analysed. The findings revealed that there is a mixture of good and bad behaviour in a virtual classroom just like in a physical classroom. The results showed that private high school teachers have adopted diverse strategies to manage learners' behaviour in virtual classrooms such as use of collaborative learning, ensuring that learners' videos are on throughout the lesson, constantly referring to learners by their names to remain alert, punctuality in starting online lessons and marking attendance register. The study established that private high school teachers experienced innumerable challenges in managing learners' behaviour in virtual classrooms. It emerged that some learners absent themselves from lessons although they have all resources supporting their learning, and there was lack of collaboration from some parents who were reluctant to guide their children in behaviour modification. The results further suggest that the private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour through various ways which include providing timetable which is shared with learners and parents to ensure that learners do not miss the lessons and distributing school rules with consequences well spelt out, to learners and parents. It emerged that the school heads regularly engage learners to moral and values sessions. The study established that the parents are appraised of their children's attendance and performance through a weekly summary report sent by the schools. The study concludes that the selected private schools apply whole school approach to manage learners' behaviour in virtual learning. The study recommends that private high schools should train parents to acquaint them with roles they should play in assisting their children in virtual learning.

**Key words:** behaviour management, private high schools, strategies, virtual classroom

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## 1. Introduction

The world-wide corona virus pandemic resulted in paradigm shift from traditional physical classroom to virtual classroom in most institutions of learning globally. The transition prompted both learners and teachers to expeditiously adjust to different modalities of teaching and learning in virtual classroom system. A virtual classroom could be described as an online learning system that affords the same opportunities for instructional delivery, beyond the physical parameters of the physical classroom walls (Rufai, Alebiosu, & Adeakin, 2015). A virtual classroom facilitates active learning as it affords a live, contextual and collaborative environment for learners. The benefits of a virtual classroom encompass flexibility, interactivity and stretching the spatial and temporal barriers. Additionally, teachers can control the teaching and learning process as they do in the traditional classroom (Rufai, Alebiosu, & Adeakin, 2015).

Learners in a virtual classroom can explore the facilities of the internet to create meaningful and constructive learning environments. These include synchronous which is communication in which learners and teachers interact in real time, such as online video or asynchronous which is communication separated by time, such as email or online discussion fora. The use of these virtual pedagogical approaches promote the development of higher order learning skills and critical thinking among learners. Thus, accessibility of technology has enhanced communication and interaction of teachers and learners in virtual classrooms as in face to face scenarios (Falloon, 2012; Hanover Research, 2014; Rufai, Alebiosu, & Adeakin, 2015).

It is imperative to note that learners cannot learn and teachers cannot teach in a chaotic virtual classroom environment. As a result, teachers should ensure that they effectively deal with learners' misbehaviour so that instructional delivery is not interrupted. Accordingly, effective teachers create orderly, safe learning environments where learners feel valued and comfortable (Moore & Hansen, 2012). Thus, in view of the sudden shift in the education system from the physical classroom to a virtual classroom, it is crucial to cross-examine how teachers in private high schools manage learner behaviour in a virtual classroom.

## 2. Background

The issue of behaviour management affects all teachers since the behaviour problems experienced in a classroom may increase the stress levels for both the teacher and learners, disturb the flow of lessons and conflict with both learning objectives and the processes of learning. The behaviour problems also change the classroom dynamic as the focus of attention shifts from the academic tasks at hand to the distractions provided by disruptive behaviours. (Parsonson, 2012). According to Wilkinson and Meiers (2007) research studies indicate that factors related to behaviour management play a role in the decision of many early career, and other teachers to leave the profession. However, Woodcock and Reupert (as cited in Page and Jones, 2018) argue that teachers who perceive themselves as more proficient in managing the classroom environment and providing academically sound pedagogy, are less stressed and successively, less likely to leave the profession. Such teachers view behaviour management as an essential part of effective classrooms. It is, therefore, important for teachers to understand and apply classroom management principles such as establishing rules and routines, developing caring relationships, implementing engaging and effective instruction, and addressing discipline issues, as they manage the behaviour of learners during the teaching and learning process in a virtual classroom (Ellis, 2018). For that reason, teachers should be ready to address incongruous learner behaviours and be able to anticipate learner behaviour to enrich learning and minimise disruptions. This could be possible if teachers possess the classroom management skills which consist of the teacher's ability to create an atmosphere where they can teach and learners can learn. (Ellis, 2018).

The abilities required by teachers to manage the virtual classroom which can arouse interest in learners and capture their attention could be grouped in three domains which are technical or computer abilities, affective or emotional abilities and communicative abilities. Technical and affective skills, in turn, positively influence the communicative results of teacher-learner interactions. Accordingly, if the teacher possesses these abilities, and is familiar with the tools and functionalities that the virtual classroom offers, learner engagement can be enhanced and this would minimise untoward behaviour among learners in a virtual classroom (Bigné, Badenes, Ruiz, & Andreu, 2018).

The choice of disciplinary approach that teachers adopt is of significance in managing learner behaviour in a virtual classroom. One such approach is the self-discipline approach which is built on the premise that learners can be trusted to reflect upon and regulate their behaviours to benefit themselves and others. In implementing this approach, teachers are expected to exhibit the dispositions of respect, realness, trust, acceptance, and empathy toward learners in order to build and establish working teacher-learner relationships (Moore & Hansen, 2012).

In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE) emphasises that schools should cultivate a school climate which promotes self-discipline among learners supported by positive remedial disciplinary and proactive measures (MOPSE, 2018). However, it is not clear how the schools are coping with managing the behaviour of learners as they deliver instruction in a virtual classroom. This study focused on the experiences of private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. Some researchers have underscored managing learners' behaviour in a physical classroom in public high schools (Mugabe, & Maposa, 2013; Sibanda, 2018; Sibanda & Mathwasa, 2020). Nonetheless, very few studies exist on experiences of private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. Hence, it is against this backdrop, that this study examined what was happening in private high schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province where teachers' views on their experiences in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom were explored.

## 3. Literature Review

Scholars have revealed that behaviour problems are a well-documented and an ever-increasing challenge facing teachers and effective behaviour management strategies that meet these challenges and promote safety for all learners and school community are of noteworthy interest for teachers globally (Wheatley, West, Charlton, Sanders, Smith & Taylor, 2009). As a result, teachers need an effective classroom management repertoire to deal

with learners' waywardness and make the most of instructional time whether in a physical or virtual classroom (Milliken, 2019). Effective classroom management is undoubtedly one of the most imperative tasks faced by teachers in any learning environs. Classroom management can be explained as a preventive activity that results in decreased discipline problems. The classroom problems can be solved through good planning, interesting and relevant lessons, and effective teaching (Stewart, 2008). Hence, in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, the teacher's role is crucial in promoting learners' engagement in online platforms, where dialogue is central to improve learners' performance (Bigné, Badenes, Ruiz, & Andreu, 2018). Accordingly, literature has suggested various strategies which could be adopted by teachers to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. These include instructional approach, establishing rules, applying consequences and positive teacher-learner relationships among others (Milliken, 2019; Moore & Hansen, 2012).

### *3.1 Strategies used to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom*

#### *3.1.1 The Instructional Approach*

As a way of managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, teachers could adopt instructional approach which enables them to actively engage learners in well planned captivating lessons geared to meet the learners' interests, needs and abilities. As a result, learners will be motivated to attend lessons, positively participate in activities, and manage their own behaviour (Moore & Hansen, 2012). In agreement, Hanover Research (2014) acknowledges that evidence suggests that virtual learning programmes provide learners and schools with numerous benefits such as allowing teachers to personalise lessons and provide engaging content that addresses individual learners' needs. Moore and Hansen (2012) further asserts that for teachers to effectively manage learners' behaviour they should actively engage learners in meaningful, challenging educational experiences and provide timeous positive feedback.

Literature reveals that in a virtual environment, the teacher will be the main initiator of discussions to make learners recognise the process of knowledge acquisition as a social and not an individual matter. The teacher should establish intermediate objectives, organise regular meetings and communicate with each and every learner from time to time to ensure motivation and engagement for all of them. In fact, it is the learners themselves that prefer the teacher to guide them in the use of resources and tasks, to acknowledge that their information is correct and to boost their participation. An additional challenge is set, since the teacher will have to apply, and even combine, different learning approaches to improve the learner's engagement and measurable results (Bigné, Badenes, Ruiz, & Andreu, 2018). In view of that, teachers should be proactive to prevent problems, plan engaging instruction, and maximise instructional time (Ellis, 2018). In so doing, the teacher will be able to minimise behaviour problems in a virtual classroom as learners will be active participants in learning.

It is worth mentioning that virtual learning models allow schools to collect learning performance data and tailor instruction specifically to the needs of learners. In a virtual classroom, learners are allowed to learn at their own pace and access lessons from any location. Virtual learning models expand access to education, allowing learners who may otherwise not have had opportunities to obtain other academic materials to prepare them for college and their careers (Hanover Research, 2014). For teachers who implement instructional approach in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, the learners' prosocial behaviour is enhanced and academic engagement across all learning areas increased (Milliken, 2019). Thus, virtual learning teaches learners to be responsible for their learning and behaviour.

#### *3.1.2 Establishing Rules*

According to Moore and Hansen (2012) effective classroom teachers create emotionally safe, orderly environments by establishing a set of specific rules specifying acceptable and forbidden classroom behaviours. Having rules assists teachers to maintain order during the teaching and learning process. Arizona State University (n.d.) confirms that the learner code of conduct and behaviour expectations do not change with the use of remote teaching and learning. It is further emphasised that if the teacher experiences a violation of the learner code of conduct, they should respond to inappropriate behaviour as they would do in a traditional classroom. Learners should be reminded that the learner code of conduct still applies for all learning activities whether remote or physical (Arizona State University, n.d.).

Providing clear expectations for learners is indispensable in management of learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. Wheatley, West, Charlton, Sanders, Smith and Taylor (2009) emphasise that the expectations should consist of defining rules and ensuring that learners and teachers use common language to describe behaviours and consequences. According to Arizona State University (n.d.) teachers in a virtual classroom are expected to

clearly establish expectations from the beginning and should encourage learners to sign-in using real names so that attendance can be validated. If learners do not use the correct names they would have been deemed absent from the lesson. Thus, observations from various scholars affirm that effective teachers set clear behaviour expectations and explicitly teach pro-social behaviour to learners. However, if a teacher does not plan and teach how the learners are expected to behave in a virtual classroom situation, and learners are left to decide what constitutes appropriate behaviour, this could be detrimental to effective instructional delivery in a virtual classroom (Milliken, 2019). It is documented that when learners are left to guess how they are expected to behave, the results are often adverse and could lead to mischievousness such as inappropriate learner conversation, negative attention-seeking behaviour, instructional disruptions and disengagement (Milliken, 2019). Notably, in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, is that, the teacher's expectations should consider the needs and the level of learners' maturity, in order to accommodate all learners in class. This suggests that some learners will need more precisely defined expectations than others (Milliken, 2019).

### *3.1.3 Applying Consequences*

In managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, it is necessary to decide on the consequences for breaking rules as soon as the rules are established. For instance, removing offending learners from the lesson meeting (Arizona State University, n.d.). This would avoid making a decision at the time the rule is broken which could be a difficult task and might result in inconsistency in applying consequences (Moore & Hansen, 2012).

However, it is important to note that negligent enforcement results in already-established rules worthless. Learners test the teacher's limits to see if the teacher will consistently enforce the rules. In such a case, the teacher should quickly, firmly, and calmly apply the consequences (Moore & Hansen, 2012). The teacher should be consistent and fair in enforcement of the rules. It is critical for the teacher to treat all learners equal, but humane. As a result, teachers should respect learners as individuals with rights, values, and feelings, and carefully choose their words and actions to protect learners' dignity. This could be done by avoiding confrontation, and reprimand should be administered privately rather than publicly. This, therefore, suggests that the teacher should consider the reasons for mischievousness and make exceptions with regard to applying the consequences (Moore & Hansen, 2012). Milliken (2019) advises that for teachers to be effective in managing learners' behaviour they should use diverse corrective methods that match the severity of the behaviour infraction.

### *3.1.4 Positive teacher-learner relationships*

It is evident from literature that learners' positive relationship with their teacher results in learners' higher achievement and less engagement in ill-behaviour. Research studies have revealed that positive teacher-learner relationships have become even more significant since absence of connectedness has been associated with high school dropouts and substance abuse (Milliken, 2019). Moore and Hansen (2012) buttress that teachers should ensure that they build trusting relations with learners so as to prevent waywardness and teach self-control. Consequently, teachers who create positive relationships with learners realise the value of preventing disruptive behaviour problems in virtual classrooms (Epstein, Atkins, Cullinan, Kutash, & Weaver, 2008).

Positive teacher-learner relations, enable teachers in a virtual classroom to create climate which causes the sense of belonging to the learning community and promotes engagement in learners, thus, minimising behaviour problems among learners (Bigné, Badenes, Ruiz, & Andreu, 2018). However, Milliken (2019) argues that even with clear expectations and positive teacher-learner relationships, moments of learner misconduct are to be expected. The way in which a teacher reacts to mischievousness will either increase or decrease wayward behaviour of learners in the future.

It is imperative to note that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to eradicate behaviour problems from virtual classrooms. Different approaches work in different circumstances. No behaviour management strategy will work with all learners, all the time. Nevertheless, an approach that works most of the time, for most teachers, will improve the learning environment in virtual classrooms. Whatsoever the behaviour management strategy adopted, the emphasis throughout research literature is on building positive relationships with learners (Wilkinson, & Meiers, 2007).

### *3.2 Challenges encountered in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom*

Research literature confirms that some learners in a virtual classroom could feel isolated and lack of belonging and support, which can have negative impact to their learning experience and contributes to untoward behaviour (Falloon, 2012). Peth, (2008) acknowledges that while the use of technology offers independent learning opportunities, this could be devastating for some learners. Despite the educational institutions' positive move of transition from physical classroom to virtual classroom, some learners were concurrently affected by corresponding hitches such as limited or inadequate access to resources like computers, webcams, reliable internet, and learning spaces free of distractions (Gelles, Lord, Hoople, Chen & Mejia, 2020). Hence, making it difficult for teachers to effectively manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom.

Another considerable drawback to managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom emanates from lack of physical interaction, both teacher-learner and learner-learner. A lot of learners are accustomed to being connected in the physical classroom, not just to a computer. Thus, working alone at a computer everyday without physical contact with the teacher and other learners can isolate a learner, making it easy to abandon a class. Absence of physical social interaction may avert some learners from fully connecting to their virtual classes. Instead, they develop other social links away from school and let virtual classroom responsibilities slip. Hence, lack of physical interaction might cause learners to lose interest in class work which could lead to absconding lessons in a virtual classroom (Peth, 2008; Stewart, 2008).

Scholars have observed that the attitudes of parents towards the value of education are usually reflected by their children. When parents do not see the significance of studying hard to prepare for a future career, their children will pull back at school work, too. Lack of supervision in the home has also contributed to common problems in society (Moore & Hansen, 2012). Thus, there is clear indication that parents also contribute to learners' ill-behaviour in a virtual classroom.

Peth (2008) declares that keeping learners motivated and concentrating on completing their work in a timely manner is often a problem in virtual learning. If learners work at their own pace, procrastination could occur easily. Peth, further proclaims that use of technology creates a learning barrier for learners with lower self-efficacy skills, such learners are unlikely to succeed in a virtual classroom if their lack of confidence is associated with computer knowledge and skills. As a result, there is probability of such learners demonstrating untoward behaviour in a virtual classroom.

It has also been noticed that some teachers contribute to learners' bad demeanours in a virtual classroom. There is consensus that some teachers delay in starting the lessons on set time, easily deviate from the lesson, use instructional methods which do not arouse learners' interest, lack competence in using online Learning Management Systems and hold unclear academic and behavioural expectations. Besides, such teachers relinquish obligation for assisting learners to make good behavioural choices by becoming the learners' friends instead of their teachers. When that tactic causes waywardness, these teachers use ridicule, sarcasm, and jibes to restore order. Learners' disregard for these teachers is shown through increased disruption of lessons and lack of participation in virtual learning (Moore & Hansen, 2012).

### *3.3 How schools support the management of learners' behaviour to ensure effective learning*

According to Hanover Research (2014) successful virtual learning programmes set clear goals for learners' learning and provide learners and staff with sufficient training and support. That is, schools should provide comprehensive orientation to help learners and staff adapt to virtual learning. This would help to minimise behaviour problems in virtual classrooms. Wilkinson and Meiers (2007) accentuate that a whole school approach to behaviour management will be more effective than teachers working in isolation and without collegial support. Arizona State University, (n.d.) highlights that offensive behaviour in a virtual classroom should be reported to administrators just as the situation would be in a physical classroom. Bennett (2017) collaborates that school administrators should aim at influencing learners' character and attitudes as a way of helping learners to excel as learners and individuals, and members of their communities. Precisely, the school administrators have an obligation to ensure learners behave positively as they participate in instructional activities. Consequently, school administrators have the responsibility for creating environment where good behaviour is encouraged and supported.

In managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, it is important that school administrators, teachers, and parents work as a team to assist in dealing with learners' mischievousness (Ellis, 2018). Moore and Hansen (2012) retaliate that at times mischief among learners becomes so persistent that the teacher should engage the



school administration and parents. Phoning the parents about their child's untoward behaviour generally produces positive results. Most parents are concerned about the behaviour and progress of their children and are willing to work obligingly in correcting any ill-behaviour. Hence, the positive relationship between parents and the school is critical in successful management of learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. However, there are exceptions, some parents feel that taking care of school misconduct is the teacher's responsibility (Moore & Hansen, 2012). Considering the foregoing discussion from research studies and literature observations, there is, therefore, necessity to interrogate how teachers in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province private high schools manage learners' behaviour in virtual classrooms.

#### 4. Research questions

The study was grounded on the succeeding research questions:

1. How do private high school learners behave in a virtual classroom?
2. Which strategies are used by private high school teachers to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom?
3. What are the challenges encountered by private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom?
4. How do private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour to ensure effective learning in a virtual classroom?

#### 5. Methods

The study was rooted in interpretive paradigm, guided by qualitative approach and employed case study design. These were favoured in this study because they assisted the researcher to get a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the participants and their experiences about the phenomena under study whilst in their natural setting (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The participants who constituted ten teachers who were the key informants were purposively selected from two private high schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The rich data solicited through emailed open-ended questionnaire were transcribed, coded and thematically analysed to respond to the research questions (Kumar, 2011). The issues of credibility and trustworthiness were taken into consideration in the research process. As for ethical considerations, the researcher ensured that informed consent, protection from harm, privacy and confidentiality, as well as honesty were adhered to when conducting the study. In line with the research ethics issue of anonymity, the participants were coded as T1-T10 to conceal their identity.

#### 6. Results

The presented results of the study are anchored on how private high school learners behave in a virtual classroom, strategies used by private high school teachers to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, challenges encountered by private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom and how private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour to ensure effective learning in a virtual classroom. Thus, diverse responses from participants are presented in the subsequent sections.

##### 6.1 How private high school learners behave in a virtual classroom

The participants were asked to give their views on how high school learners behave during virtual learning, the responses indicate that some learners behave well while others showed undesirable behaviour during the lessons in a virtual classroom. The participants' views are presented as follows:

- T1: *The students are attentive and participate in the lesson. Most of the learners show positive attitude towards online learning since they will be learning at their comfort zones at home. However, at times you might find that there are some who behave well while a few behave abnormal.*
- T2: *Generally, learners are well behaved during the lessons. On a few instances they become playful if their video is off. But if I insist that they keep their video on, they all seem to pay attention. However, it is when I am asking probing questions that I may discover that seeming to pay attention does not mean understanding.*
- T3: *Since most virtual learning platforms allow learners to mute the video options, most learners especially the upper forms just log in, mute their videos so that the teacher does not see what they doing behind scenes, attend the lesson for the first few minutes then afterwards they leave gadgets on, and attend to*

- something else. The teacher can only identify that when he/she tries to involve everyone by calling names, that only a few are actually attending the lesson. In addition, some learners always give excuses of network connectivity when they are assigned work to do during lessons and avoid handing in the work after the lesson. If a teacher is lenient on this issue, learners hardly do their work during lessons.*
- T4: *Learners' behaviour varies but generally those that are less able struggle in winning it all and those that are more able are at times quick to grasp the concepts being taught. Some learners hardly attend lessons due to network challenges.*
- T5: *Most students tend to be rather casual in their approach to online learning unlike when it is a face to face scenario. You do find some that are very motivated with online learning and would actively participate as they are using gadgets that they are more familiar with and use quite often.*
- T6: *There are those who bunk all lessons and those who attend all lessons. Some of the learners deliberately interrupt the lessons by asking questions which divert attention. Some lie about network problems while others connect then go away, they just pretend to be present and switch off their video.*
- T7: *Usually, they behave as they do in a physical classroom, that is, the hard workers behave responsible and take advantage of technology and improve themselves/their skills while the badly behaved also take advantage of technology to perfect their bad behaviour, for example, giving excuses such as network problems, lack of data only to find out they are not telling the truth when parents are contacted.*
- T9: *Some learners may connect to a meeting lesson, mute the microphone and camera off and disappear. They can decide to become passive learners under the pretext of using desktops. However, some of the shy learners are able to ask questions without any fear. Participation has increased as there is competition caused by learning from different environments.*
- T10: *The behaviour of learners is difficult to monitor during virtual learning because most of the work is posted for completion in their own time. During video calls with their microphones silenced you may never know if they are working silently or making noise. But since each one will be working on their own they do not disturb others, what they do in as much as it affects them, may not affect the whole class.*

There is evidence from the presented data that there is a mixture of good and bad behaviour in a virtual classroom just like in a physical classroom. The participants revealed that some learners are attentive and actively participate in class, they have developed positive attitude towards their work and are very motivated with online learning as they use gadgets that they are more familiar with. It also came out that some learners take advantage of technology to improve their skills and competences in various subject areas. The responses show that some of the shy learners are able to ask questions without any fear in a virtual classroom and participation has increased among such learners. However, data confirms the prevalence of untoward behaviour among high school learners in a virtual classroom. For the instance, the participants mentioned that some learners just log in, mute their microphones and switch off the videos so that the teacher does not see or hear what they are doing behind the scenes, attend the lesson for the first few minutes then afterwards they leave gadgets on, and attend to something else up to the end of the lesson. There is also revelation that some learners always give excuses of network connectivity when they are assigned work to do during lessons and avoid handing in the work after the lesson. It came out that in a virtual classroom there are learners who deliberately interrupt the lessons by asking irrelevant questions which divert attention of the class. Furthermore, the responses show that some learners may decide to become passive during the lesson under the pretext of using desktops.

#### *6.2 Strategies used by private high school teachers to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom*

Concerning the strategies that the high school teachers used to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom, the participants gave varied responses. This is what they said:

- T1: *I usually use collaborative learning and this strategy has been useful in managing learners' behaviour during online learning.*
- T2: *I involve the learners as much as possible by asking them to repeat what I would have said so that they listen attentively. I also ensure that their videos are on throughout the lesson. I sometimes ask them to read what I would be presenting to check if they are following. I also ask them to make video*

- presentations during the lessons. Above all, I constantly refer to them by their names. This has helped me a lot to manage the behaviour of learners during online lessons.*
- T3: *I use learner centred approaches where all learners logged in would be engaged in the class activities planned for the lesson. I prepare all the materials required according to the set schemes of work. I also mark the register during every lesson to check on attendance then I make sure everyone is actively involved in all the activities during the lesson by picking learners randomly throughout the lesson to make some contributions. For those who always complain about connectivity issues, I always tell them to write the work on paper, take photos and send on WhatsApp, then when they get network connection, they post the same work on the official learning platform recommended by the school.*
- T4: *On strategies, I use synchronous or asynchronous methods of online teaching depending on how difficult or easy the topic is and also whether it is a junior, middle junior or senior classes. I use online interactions; screen sharing of any material in any format such as PowerPoint, pdf or even simple word documents. At times I send them notes and ask them to go through before the resumption of lessons. On lack of attendance, I also use different approaches such as informing the school authorities or I directly communicate with their parents or guardians, I also do not mark any work that has been submitted late so that they learn to do their work on time.*
- T5: *As a teacher, I set the tone for the lesson by starting the meeting on time. This ensures that learners also log in on time if they realise that the teacher is very particular about time, and I constantly check whether the learners are still in the meeting by use of microphones and cameras during the lessons. I also, invite the executive members of the school to be part of the lesson just to observe the general behaviour of learners, this strategy helps a lot in managing learner behaviour in a virtual classroom.*
- T6: *If I notice that there is a learner who is misbehaving in class, I first give the learner a warning in a private chat, I always keep their mobile numbers. If the problem persists I communicate with the parents and if there is no behaviour change I then refer the case to the school head. I have also noticed that being always in charge of the lesson, keeping the videos on and creating connection with learners has proved to be effective in managing learner behaviour in online learning.*
- T7: *I usually make the presentations interactive and exciting by engaging the learners all the time. I give the learners roles such as accepting other learners into the meeting, making them share their screen, let them share with the class what they have learnt through demonstration. I involve parents to cross check if some excuses such as lack of Wi-Fi connectivity are valid or not.*
- T8: *I constantly remind learners about the classroom ground rules and consequences of breaking the rules. I have also selected on-line leader who is very influential to the rest of learners and assign him to check and reprimand learners who are misbehaving.*
- T9: *We agree as a class and set the rules that govern the behaviour of learners, then I always encourage learners to abide by those rules. During the lessons I constantly check if the learners are attentive.*
- T10: *I make sure that during video lessons their camera is on so that I can see their faces. I also call on anyone at random to answer questions. That way they remain alert.*

The above information reveal that private high school teachers have adopted diverse strategies to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. The responses indicate that teachers use strategies such as collaborative learning, ensure that learners' videos are on throughout the lesson, and constantly referring to learners by their names so that they remain alert. It is evident from the data that teachers prepare all the materials required according to the set schemes of work, plan the learning activities which are exciting and use interactive learner centred approaches which engage learners all the time. Punctuality in starting online lessons and marking the register during every lesson to check on attendance have been mentioned as effective strategies to manage learner behaviour in a virtual classroom. It also came out from the responses that misbehaving learners are given warning in a private chat and if the problem persists teachers communicate with the parents and if there is no behaviour change then they refer the learner to the school head. It was further revealed that the learners are given roles such as accepting other learners into the lessons, making them share their screen, let them share what they have learnt with the class, through demonstration. The participants indicated that learners are always encouraged to abide by the class rules that are set by the teacher and the learners, the consequences of breaking the rules are



also explained. For those learners who always complained about connectivity issues, it was mentioned that teachers used alternative online learning platform like WhatsApp so that learners submit their work on time.

### *6.3 Challenges encountered by private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom*

As for the challenges encountered by the private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour, the participants expressed that they experienced various behaviour problems in a virtual classroom. Thus, the following sentiments were highlighted.

- T1: *A challenge arises when learners do not mute their microphones and we can hear their comments when they have not been permitted to speak.*
- T3: *Some parents are not forthcoming in the supervision of their children. For the first lessons starting at half past seven in the morning, very few learners attend the lessons highlighting that they will still be busy with their household chores at that time, so if the same subject is slotted during that time for more than once then the learner loses out a lot.*
- T4: *Due to poor network connectivity at times, some learners tend to abscond lessons even if the connection is good. Some learners lack parental supervision as parents will be busy with work or managing their businesses, hence, their children show untoward behaviour in a virtual classroom.*
- T5: *Some learners use network challenges as an excuse for not submitting assignments or attending lessons on time. There is also counter attraction from the use of cellphones or other gadgets during online learning.*
- T6: *Some learners do not have personal cell phones hence you cannot talk to them directly if you notice any form of unbecoming behaviour during the lesson. You end up talking to parents instead of private chat with the learner. Some learners do not join online lessons at all, no matter how many invitations you send to them, they choose to miss the lessons.*
- T8: *Some parents always think that their child is always right so in trying to engage them in disciplinary issues they quickly call the school office pointing that the teacher is unable to teach and therefore victimizes their child. Learners are ahead in terms of technology, thus, during lessons especially, zoom platform, they have a tendency of logging in and pretend as if they are there in class while they would have long gone out.*
- T9: *When they decide to argue on the correct answer, they can have a continuous discussion and all have the microphones on until their point has been heard. The other challenge is that of late submission of work or submission after class work revision has been done and the learners still expect the teacher to mark the work.*
- T10: *The biggest problem is absenteeism. A learner may choose not to attend a lesson even though they have all resources required. Some do not hand in work on time. For these, I communicate directly with parents to find out what the problem is. Once they know I can call their parents they often do their work.*

The responses from participants show that there are innumerable challenges that are experienced by teachers in private high schools in a bid to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. It has been revealed that some learners join the lessons late claiming that they will still be busy with their household chores when lessons start. There is clear indication that there is lack of collaboration from some parents who seem to be reluctant to guide their children in terms behaviour modification. Such parents tend to accuse teachers of inefficiency in their work. The data unveiled that the biggest problem in a virtual classroom is absenteeism as some learners may choose not to attend lessons even though they have all resources that support their learning. The revelation from the responses further suggests that some learners use network challenges as an excuse for late submission of classwork and assignments or not attending lessons on time. There is also counter attraction from the use of smart phones or other gadgets which deviate learners' attention during online lessons. Some learners do not have personal cell phones and this hinders direct communication with the learner if any form of unbecoming behaviour has been noticed in a virtual classroom.

#### *6.4 How private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour to ensure effective learning in a virtual classroom*

The participants were asked to shed light on how private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. Their opinions are presented as follows:

- T1: *The school ensures that online learning lessons are conducted as per school timetable which is shared with learners and parents to ensure that learners do not miss the lessons. School rules with consequences well spelt out are also distributed to learners and parents so that they are aware of the school's expectations regarding behaviour of learners in a virtual classroom. The school also ensures that zoom lessons are recorded and assignments are submitted and marked on google classroom platform as a way of monitoring instructional delivery.*
- T3: *The school checks on the progress of individual learners most often, especially, the writing classes and the form ones and twos who usually abscond online lessons. All the names of the learners who fail to comply with online regulations are sent to the school administration and the parent is sent an email, advising him/her to monitor his/her child's work.*
- T4: *The school also informs the affected learner's parents through emails and telephone communication. The platforms used also allow parents to personally monitor the performance of their children as they are also part of the online classroom. They receive a summary report about their children's performance every week.*
- T5: *Teachers are encouraged to submit names of learners whose behaviour is untoward and who miss lessons regularly. The school then makes follow up on those learners who miss any google meet or zoom lessons by way of phoning the parents or emailing the parents/guardians of the concerned learners.*
- T6: *Our school administration is quite supportive, the school head will call learners one by one once you report a problem. There is effective communication between the school administration and parents. The school administration frequently asks for the names of misbehaving learners from teachers so that they can assist in curbing such form of behaviour.*
- T7: *The school head is readily available to contact parents and ensure learners are attending lessons.*
- T8: *The school supports a lot in managing learners' behaviour, if cases are reported, the school head quickly addresses the problem to minimise the interruption of online lessons. The school administration also monitors learners' progress and if they notice a problem, they summon the guardian to check what could be the cause of such behaviour. They also have incentives which they give to learners to encourage positive behaviour in a virtual classroom. The school head constantly engages learners to moral and values sessions.*
- T9: *The school usually invites the parents to monitor their children's activities which might hinder their children's fully participation in virtual classroom. There is also constant follow up on the learners not attending lessons and those not submitting their work.*
- T10: *The school is very helpful. The school head follows up on students who are absent and those who do not submit school work. The school calls parents to discuss undesirable behaviour of the learner, if necessary.*

The presented data provides evidence that the private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour through various ways. The participants acknowledged that schools provide a timetable which is shared with learners and parents to ensure that learners do not miss the lessons. School rules with consequences well spelt out are also distributed to learners and parents so that they are aware of the school's expectations regarding behaviour of learners in a virtual classroom. It was revealed from the responses that the names of all learners who fail to comply with the virtual classroom rules are sent to the school heads who communicate with the parents either through telephone calls or emails to discuss undesirable behaviour of their children and also advise the parents to monitor their children's school work. It emerged that the school heads regularly engage learners to moral and values sessions. The participants' responses established that the parents are appraised of their children's attendance and performance through a weekly summary report sent by the schools.

## 7. Discussion

Evidence from the findings indicate that there is a mixture of good and bad behaviour in virtual classrooms just like in physical classrooms. The results revealed that some learners are attentive and actively participate in class, they have developed positive attitude towards their work and are very motivated with online learning as they use gadgets that they are more familiar with. It also came out that some learners take advantage of technology to improve their skills and competences in various subject areas. The findings showed that some of the shy learners are able to ask questions without any fear in a virtual classroom and participation has increased among such learners. However, the results of the study revealed the prevalence of untoward behaviour among private high school learners in a virtual classroom. It came out that some learners just log in, mute their microphones and switch off the videos so that the teacher does not see or hear what they are doing behind the scenes, attend the lesson for the first few minutes then afterwards they leave gadgets on, and attend to something else up to the end of the lesson. It was indicated that some learners always give excuses of network connectivity when they are assigned work to do during lessons and avoid handing in the work after the lesson. It came out that in a virtual classroom there are learners who deliberately interrupt the lessons by asking irrelevant questions which divert attention of the class. The study found that some learners may decide to become passive during the lesson under the pretext of using desktops. These findings are consistent with Milliken's (2019) observation that in every school there are pockets of both good and bad behaviour which vary in duration, severity and extent.

The findings of this study revealed that private high school teachers have adopted diverse strategies to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. The results indicated that teachers use strategies such as collaborative learning, ensure that learners' videos are on throughout the lesson, and constantly referring to learners by their names so that they remain alert. It was found that teachers prepare all the materials required according to the set schemes of work, plan the learning activities which are exciting and use interactive learner centred approaches which engage learners all the time. This is in line with Moore and Hansen's (2012) view that for teachers to effectively manage learners' behaviour they should actively engage learners in meaningful and challenging educational experiences. This study findings are also in agreement with Stewart (2008) who affirms that the classroom problems can be solved through good planning, interesting and relevant lessons, and effective teaching.

Punctuality in starting online lessons and marking the register during every lesson to check on attendance have been found to be effective strategies to manage learner behaviour in a virtual classroom. The results correspond with what is stated by Arizona State University (n.d.) that teachers in a virtual classroom should encourage learners to sign-in using real names so that attendance can be validated. It also came out from this study that misbehaving learners are given warning in a private chat and if the problem persists teachers communicate with the parents and if there is no behaviour change then they refer the learner to the school head. This finding is commensurate with Moore and Hansen's (2012) advice that at times mischief among learners becomes so persistent that the teacher should engage the school administration and parents. They indicate that phoning the parents about their child's untoward behaviour generally produces positive results. It was further revealed in this study that the learners are given roles such as accepting other learners into the lessons, making them share their screen, let them share with the class through demonstration what they have learnt. This finding corresponds with literature revelation that positive teacher-learner relations, enable teachers in a virtual classroom to create climate which causes the sense of belonging to the learning community and promotes engagement in learners, thus, minimising behaviour problems among learners (Bigné, Badenes, Ruiz, & Andreu, 2018). The study indicated that learners are always encouraged to abide by the class rules that are set by the teacher and the learners, the consequences of breaking the rules are also explained. The finding is in agreement with Wheatley, et al. (2009) who underscore that the teachers' expectations should consist of defining rules and ensuring that learners and teachers use common language to describe behaviours and consequences. This finding also supports Arizona State University (n.d.) which confirms that the learner code of conduct and behaviour expectations do not change with the use of remote teaching and learning. It was also found that there were learners who always complained about connectivity issues and to assist such learners, teachers used alternative online learning platform like WhatsApp so that learners submit their work on time.

The study established that there were innumerable challenges that are experienced by teachers in private high schools in a bid to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. It was revealed that some learners join the lessons late claiming that they would be busy with household chores when lessons start. It came out that there is lack of collaboration from some parents who seem to be reluctant to guide their children in terms behaviour modification. Such parents tend to accuse teachers of inefficiency in their work. This finding reinforces assertion by Moore and Hansen (2012) that there are some parents who feel that taking care of school misconduct is the teacher's responsibility. This lack of supervision in the home has also contributed to common

problems in society (Moore & Hansen, 2012). The study found that the biggest problem in a virtual classroom is absenteeism as some learners may choose not to attend lessons even though they have all resources that support their learning. This finding strengthens the proclamations by Peth (2008) and Stewart (2008) that absence of physical social interaction in virtual classes might cause learners to lose interest in class work which could lead to absconding of lessons. The revelation from the findings of this study further suggests that some learners use network challenges as an excuse for late submission of classwork and assignments or not attending lessons on time. This finding is in line with Peth's (2008) declaration that keeping learners motivated and concentrating on completing their work in a timely manner is often a problem in virtual learning. If learners work at their own pace, procrastination could occur easily. The study also found that there was counter attraction from the use of smart phones or other gadgets which deviate learners' attention during online lessons. It also came out that some learners did not have personal cell phones which hindered direct communication with the learners if any form of unbecoming behaviour had been noticed in a virtual classroom.

There is evidence from this study that the private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour through various ways. The findings revealed that schools provide timetable which is shared with learners and parents to ensure that learners do not miss the lessons. The results indicate that school rules with consequences well spelt out are also distributed to learners and parents so that they are aware of the school's expectations regarding behaviour of learners in a virtual classroom. It emerged from the study that the names of all learners who fail to comply with the virtual classroom rules are sent to the school heads who communicate with the parents either through telephone calls or emails to discuss undesirable behaviour of their children and also advise the parents to monitor their children's school work. It emerged that the school heads regularly engage learners to moral and values sessions. The study established that the parents are appraised of their children's attendance and performance through a weekly summary report sent by the schools. The findings of the current study concur with observations by Wilkinson and Meiers (2007) who stress that a whole school approach to behaviour management will be more effective than teachers working in isolation and without collegial support. The results of this study further support Bennett's (2017) view that school administrators should aim at influencing learners' character and attitudes as a way of helping learners to excel as learners and individuals, and members of their communities. Precisely, the school administrators have an obligation to ensure learners behave positively as they participate in instructional activities.

## **8. Conclusion**

The study cross-examined the experiences of private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in virtual classrooms. The findings revealed that there is a mixture of good and bad behaviour in virtual classrooms just like in physical classrooms. It came out that some learners including shy learners who were hesitant to participate in a physical classroom, actively participated in virtual learning. Whilst, the results of the study also revealed the prevalence of untoward behaviour among private high school learners in a virtual classroom as some learners would just log in, mute their microphones and switch off the videos so that the teacher does not see or hear what they are doing behind the scenes, attend the lesson for the first few minutes then afterwards they leave gadgets on, and attend to something else up to the end of the lesson. The findings also showed that private high school teachers have adopted diverse strategies to manage learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom such as use of collaborative learning, ensuring that learners' videos are on throughout the lesson, and constantly referring to learners by their names so that they remain alert. It was found that teachers prepare all the learning materials required according to the set schemes of work, plan the learning activities which are exciting and use interactive learner centred approaches which engage learners all the time. Punctuality in starting online lessons and marking the register during every lesson to check on attendance have been found to be effective strategies to manage learner behaviour in virtual classrooms. The study further established that there were innumerable challenges that are experienced by private high school teachers in managing learners' behaviour in a virtual classroom. It emerged that some learners join the lessons late claiming that they would be busy with household chores when lessons start, whereas others would absent themselves from lessons even though they have all resources that support their learning. It came out that there is lack of collaboration from some parents who seem to be reluctant to guide their children in terms behaviour modification. The results of this study further suggest that the private high schools support the management of learners' behaviour through various ways which include providing timetable which is shared with learners and parents to ensure that learners do not miss the lessons and distributing to learners and parents the school rules with consequences well spelt out so that they are aware of the school's expectations regarding behaviour of learners in a virtual classroom. It emerged from the study that the school heads constantly communicate with the parents either through telephone calls or emails to discuss undesirable behaviour of their children and also advise the parents to monitor their children's school work. It emerged that the school heads regularly engage learners to moral and values sessions. The study established that

the parents are appraised of their children's attendance and performance through a weekly summary report sent by the schools. The study recommends that private high schools should train parents to acquaint them on roles they should play in assisting their children in virtual learning.

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