

The Suitability of Classroom Management Methods Used in Teaching Sinhala for 21st-Century Learning

D.N.A.U.C. Udarini¹ and A. C. Imesha Kinkini²

^{1,2} Faculty of Education, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

The shift toward 21st-century education has redefined classroom management as a pedagogical construct central to fostering critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy, rather than merely maintaining order. Despite extensive global scholarship on learner-centred pedagogy, there remains a critical lack of subject-specific, contextually grounded evidence on how classroom management practices in language education, particularly in South Asian contexts, align with these evolving demands. Addressing this gap, the present study examines the suitability of classroom management methods for teaching the Sinhala language in Sri Lankan secondary schools. The study is theoretically anchored in constructivist learning theory, behaviourist perspectives, and Fayol's administrative theory, enabling a multidimensional analysis of classroom management as both a behavioural and organisational process. A mixed-methods design was adopted, integrating survey data with classroom observations and semi-structured interviews involving 36 teachers and 72 Grade 9 students across 21 schools. Quantitative data were analyzed using inferential statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. Findings reveal a persistent pedagogical-managerial misalignment: although teachers demonstrate an emerging orientation toward student-centred instruction, classroom management practices remain predominantly traditional, characterised by hierarchical control, limited student agency, and weak dialogic interaction. Moreover, the minimal integration of digital tools and Learning Management Systems further constrains opportunities for interactive and self-directed learning. The study's key contribution lies in conceptualizing classroom management as a mediating mechanism between pedagogical intent and 21st-century skill development, demonstrating how entrenched management practices can undermine otherwise progressive instructional approaches. It argues for a paradigm shift toward flexible, technology-integrated, and participatory classroom management frameworks. These findings offer both theoretical advancement and context-sensitive policy implications for re-aligning language education with contemporary global competencies.

Keywords: Classroom Management, 21st-Century Skills, Student-Centred pedagogy, Sinhala Language Education

INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century has undergone a profound transformation, shifting from the transmission of fixed knowledge to the development of adaptable, higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. This transition is closely linked to the broader forces of globalization, technological advancement, and the knowledge economy, which demand learners who can actively construct knowledge and respond to complex, dynamic environments. As noted by Henderson and McDonough (2014), the teaching-learning process must evolve in alignment with technological literacy and global educational changes, positioning education as a driver of both individual and societal development.

Within this evolving paradigm, classroom management has expanded beyond its traditional function of maintaining discipline to become a central pedagogical mechanism that shapes the quality of learning experiences. Effective classroom management is no longer limited to controlling student behaviour; rather, it

encompasses the organization of physical, social, and cognitive learning environments that facilitate active participation and meaningful engagement. Koran and Koran (2018) conceptualize classroom management as a foundational element of the education system, essential for creating environments that support both academic achievement and socio-emotional development. Similarly, classroom management has been defined as the systematic organization of human, physical, and temporal resources to maximize learning outcomes (Good & Lavigne, 2017).

The theoretical evolution of classroom management reflects broader shifts in educational philosophy. Traditional models, heavily influenced by behaviourist perspectives such as those of B. F. Skinner, emphasized control, reinforcement, and compliance. In contrast, contemporary approaches are increasingly informed by constructivist learning theory, which foregrounds learner agency, social interaction, and knowledge construction. At the same time, management-oriented frameworks such as Fayol's administrative theory provide a structural lens through which classroom processes can be understood as organized, goal-oriented systems involving planning, organizing, directing, and controlling functions. The integration of these theoretical perspectives underscores the multidimensional nature of classroom management as both a behavioural and organisational practice.

In the 21st century, classroom management has further evolved to incorporate technological and interactive dimensions. Modern classrooms are expected to integrate digital tools, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and interactive pedagogical strategies such as flipped learning and collaborative problem-solving. These approaches are designed to foster not only content mastery but also the development of 21st-century competencies, often conceptualized through frameworks such as the "4Cs" and their expanded variants. Consequently, classroom management is increasingly viewed as a dynamic, participatory process that supports learner autonomy, engagement, and self-regulation.

Despite these global advancements, empirical evidence suggests that classroom management practices in many developing educational contexts remain largely traditional. In Sri Lanka, particularly within Sinhala language education, there is a persistent reliance on teacher-centred instruction and control-oriented disciplinary practices. Observations highlighted in national reports indicate that classroom interactions are often unidirectional, with limited student engagement and minimal use of interactive or technological resources. Furthermore, studies have identified challenges such as inadequate attention to resource management, limited student motivation, and ineffective time management as ongoing issues in classroom practice (Kumari, 2010).

This situation reveals a critical tension between emerging pedagogical expectations and entrenched classroom management practices. While teachers may demonstrate awareness of modern, student-centred methodologies, the persistence of traditional management structures characterised by hierarchical control, passive learning environments, and limited technological integration raises important questions about their suitability for fostering 21st-century skills. As emphasized in prior research, the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical implementation remains a significant barrier to educational transformation (Wong & Wong, 2009).

Against this backdrop, there is a clear need for context-specific, subject-focused research that examines how classroom management practices operate within particular disciplinary and cultural settings. Although classroom management has been widely studied as a general concept, limited attention has been given to its application in the teaching of Sinhala language and literature, a subject deeply embedded in cultural identity and communicative practice. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how management strategies can be adapted to support both linguistic competence and broader 21st-century learning outcomes.

Accordingly, this study investigates the classroom management methods used by teachers in teaching the Sinhala subject and evaluates their suitability for 21st-century education. By integrating theoretical perspectives with empirical evidence from Sri Lankan classrooms, the study aims to contribute to the reconceptualization of classroom management as a critical mediator between pedagogical intent and learner development in contemporary educational contexts.

Aim of the Research:

Despite the global shift toward learner-centred and technology-integrated education, classroom management practices in Sinhala language teaching in Sri Lanka remain predominantly traditional and control-oriented, misaligning with the development of essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy. This study, therefore, aims to examine the suitability of existing classroom management methods within this context. Specifically, it seeks to identify the classroom management practices currently used by teachers in teaching the Sinhala subject, evaluate their effectiveness in supporting 21st-century skill development, and explore the challenges teachers encounter in implementing more effective and contemporary classroom management strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Classroom Management

Classroom management has evolved from a discipline-focused concept to a multidimensional pedagogical process that supports student engagement and learning outcomes. Contemporary perspectives define it as the effective organization of instructional, social, and physical environments to facilitate meaningful learning (Good & Lavigne, 2017). This broader view positions teachers as facilitators who create inclusive and interactive learning spaces rather than mere controllers of behaviour.

Theoretical Foundations of Classroom Management

Classroom management is grounded in multiple theoretical perspectives. Behaviourist theory emphasizes control and reinforcement, often resulting in teacher-dominated environments. In contrast, constructivist theory promotes learner autonomy, interaction, and knowledge construction. Additionally, Fayol's administrative theory provides a structural framework, highlighting planning, organizing, directing, and controlling as essential management functions. Together, these perspectives illustrate classroom management as both behavioural and organisational.

Classroom Management and 21st-Century Skills

Modern education requires classrooms that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy. As a result, classroom management must support interactive, flexible, and technology-integrated learning environments. Approaches such as collaborative learning, flipped classrooms, and LMS integration shift the focus from teacher control to student participation and self-regulation. However, effective implementation depends on aligning management practices with pedagogical goals.

Empirical Studies and Research Gap:

Empirical studies indicate a persistent reliance on traditional classroom management practices, particularly in developing contexts. In Sri Lanka, classrooms remain largely teacher-centred, with limited student interaction and weak integration of technology (Kumari, 2010). These challenges are further influenced by structural constraints such as limited resources, large class sizes, and insufficient training.

Despite extensive research on classroom management, there is a lack of subject-specific studies focusing on Sinhala language teaching. Moreover, limited attention has been given to how classroom management aligns with 21st-century skill development. This study addresses this gap by examining classroom management practices within a specific linguistic and cultural context. A summary of key local studies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Local Studies on Classroom Management in Sri Lanka

Author(s)	Focus Area	Key Findings & Conclusions
Nawastheen et al. (2021)	Classroom management practices of secondary teachers in the Kalutara Zone.	While teachers agreed that classroom management is essential—sometimes even more than teaching itself—its practical application remains inconsistent.
Chathurika (2019)	Effective strategies for primary classroom management.	Success depends on starting/ending lessons on time, maintaining strong teacher-student relationships, clear communication, and immediate feedback.
Wijerathna (2012)	Impact of teacher preparation on classroom management.	Identified that classroom attractiveness and management skills are only at a moderate level, while the use of learning aids is unsatisfactory.
Bandara (2011)	Knowledge and effectiveness of management techniques.	Female and postgraduate teachers showed higher theoretical knowledge, yet actual student engagement remained low during the teaching process.
Kumari (2011)	Current practices in secondary schools.	Teachers often fail to manage human and physical resources effectively, leading to difficulties in capturing and maintaining student attention.
Mallika (2009)	Barriers to successful teaching and learning processes.	Insufficient theoretical knowledge leads to poor punctuality, minimal use of audio-visual aids, and a lack of democratic interaction.
Silva (2006)	Problems faced in classroom management.	Categorized challenges into human resources (large class sizes, discipline) and physical resources (shortages and waste of materials).
National Reports	Classroom interaction	Unidirectional communication; low student engagement
Recent Local Studies	Teaching methods	Limited use of student-centred approaches; minimal technology integration

According to foreign research, classroom management is identified as a key factor that directly influences students’ academic achievement, behavioural development, and the quality of the classroom environment. Brown (2016) points out that in many Asian countries, language teaching still relies heavily on grammar- and teacher-centred approaches, while the use of student-centred methods remains limited.

Kausar et al. (2024) state that strategies such as clear rules, positive reinforcement, classroom routines, flexible seating arrangements, and peer intervention help to increase student participation and improve academic outcomes. Wilkins et al. (2012) found that student autonomy, fairness, positive teacher-student relationships, and restorative disciplinary practices enhance school connectedness.

Oliva and Gordon (Oliva & Gordon, 2013, p. 251) clarify how classroom management has shifted towards an innovative direction by comparing the differences between the traditional classroom and the 21st-century classroom. This comparison highlights the fundamental differences and challenges essential for managing the modern classroom.

Table. 2 - Difference between the traditional classroom and the 21st-century classroom

Traditional Classroom	21st Century Classroom
Time-based	Outcome-based.

Memorizing facts	What students know, can do, and like after all the details are forgotten
The lesson focuses on the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy - knowledge, understanding, and application.	Learning is designed on the higher levels of Bloom's - synthesis, analysis, and evaluation (and includes the lower levels as the curriculum is designed from top to bottom.)
Guided by the textbook	Research-based
Passive learning	Active learning
Learners work in isolation - classroom within 4 walls	Learners work collaboratively with classmates and others around the world - global classroom
Teacher-centered	Student-centered: teacher as facilitator
Fragmented 3 R's - reading, writing, and arithmetic	21st-century multiple literacies are aligned to live and work in a globalized new millennium - audio and visual literacy, financial literacy, eco-literacy, media literacy, information literacy, cyber literacy, emotional literacy, physical fitness/health, and global competencies.

Source - (Oliva & Gordon., 2013, p. 251)

presented by (Abeyapala, 2015, p. 359) clearly notes how the 21st-century classroom should be. This classroom, rather than a place that transmits information, should be a student-centered, active learning environment built around four core competencies (4C's) essential for the modern world. The main role of the teacher in the 21st-century classroom is to provide opportunities for students to develop these essential skills. Since students face a world with an overflow of information, they must be able to select appropriate digital tools to assemble, evaluate, and utilize information. Likewise, they use these real-world tasks to accomplish tasks and to utilize accurate information resources. Therefore, the classroom should be a library or a digital inquiry center that provides space for searching and evaluating information

Putra and Yanto (2025) further indicate that effective classroom management positively affects student achievement across various educational levels and settings. Cambay et al. (2024) highlight that teacher training, positive peer relationships, and effective communication channels are essential for improving student engagement. Opiyo (2024) notes that classroom management practices in Kenyan public schools remain at a moderate level, yet they significantly determine learning outcomes. Regarding 21st-century classroom management, Wagner (2008) emphasizes student autonomy and flexible learning spaces. Venkateshwarlu (2024) explains that digital classrooms require technological tools, digital communication, online collaboration, and clearly established classroom rules.

Therefore, foreign literature shows that successful classroom management is not limited to maintaining discipline alone, but also involves promoting student participation, integrating technology, encouraging collaborative learning, fostering autonomy, and developing the competencies required in the 21st century.

Summary of the Literature

The reviewed literature demonstrates that classroom management has evolved into a complex, multidimensional construct influenced by behavioural, constructivist, and organisational theories. While modern approaches emphasise learner-centred, technology-integrated practices, empirical evidence indicates a continued reliance on traditional methods in many educational contexts, including Sri Lanka. The persistence of this gap highlights the need for context-specific research that critically examines the suitability of existing classroom management practices for contemporary educational demands.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Paradigm

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of classroom management practices in Sinhala language teaching. The mixed-methods approach enables methodological triangulation, enhancing the credibility and depth of findings by combining numerical trends with contextual insights.

The study is grounded in a pragmatic research paradigm, which allows for the integration of multiple methods to address complex educational phenomena. This paradigm is particularly appropriate for examining classroom management, as it encompasses both observable practices and subjective experiences.

Conceptual Framework

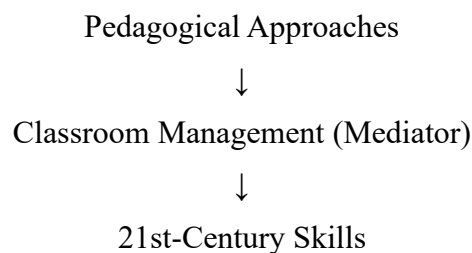
This study conceptualizes classroom management as a mediating mechanism between pedagogical approaches and 21st-century learning outcomes. The framework integrates behaviourist, constructivist, and administrative perspectives to explain how management practices influence student engagement, interaction, and skill development.

Specifically:

- Behaviourist elements explain control-oriented practices
- Constructivist elements explain student-centred engagement
- Administrative theory explains organisational classroom processes

This integrated framework guides data collection and analysis by linking classroom practices with learning outcomes such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy. The conceptual relationships among variables are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study



Research Context and Sampling Strategy

The study was conducted in the Minuwangoda Education Zone in the Gampaha District, Sri Lanka, focusing on Sinhala-medium government schools categorized as Type 1AB, 1C, and Type 2. These school types were selected to ensure representation across different institutional contexts.

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to enhance representativeness and reduce sampling bias. Schools were first categorized based on type, and participants were then randomly selected within each stratum. The final sample consisted of: 36 Sinhala language teachers, 72 Grade 9 students and 21 schools. This sample size is considered adequate for exploratory mixed-methods research, allowing for both statistical analysis and in-depth qualitative interpretation. The inclusion of both teachers and students strengthens the study by capturing multiple perspectives on classroom management practices.

Table .3 Sample of study

Type of school	Number of schools	Sinhala subject teachers	Grade 9 students	Sinhala subject teacher consultant	Sinhala Subject Director	The entire sample
1AB	3	12	24	01	01	
1C	6	12	24			
Type 2	12	12	24			
Total	21	36	72	01	01	110

Data Collection Instruments

Multiple instruments were used to ensure data triangulation:

Questionnaires

Structured questionnaires were administered to teachers and students to collect quantitative data on classroom management practices and perceptions. The questionnaires included both closed-ended and Likert-scale items designed to measure: Teaching practices, Student engagement, Use of technology, Perceived challenges.

Classroom Observations

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to capture actual teaching practices and classroom dynamics. An observation checklist was developed based on key dimensions of classroom management, including: Teacher–student interaction, Student participation, Use of teaching aids and Classroom control strategies.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected teachers and educational officers to gain deeper insights into classroom management practices and contextual challenges. The flexible structure of the interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives.

Validity and Reliability of Instruments

To ensure the rigour of the study, several measures were taken to establish validity and reliability:

Content Validity

The research instruments were reviewed by subject experts in education to ensure alignment with the study objectives and theoretical framework. Expert feedback was incorporated to refine the instruments.

Pilot Testing

A pilot study was conducted with a small group of teachers and students outside the main sample. This helped identify ambiguities, improve clarity, and ensure the instruments' appropriateness.

Reliability of Quantitative Data

The internal consistency of the questionnaire items was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, which indicated acceptable reliability ($\alpha > 0.70$). This suggests that the instrument produced consistent and reliable measurements.

Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

The credibility of qualitative data was ensured through: Triangulation of data sources (questionnaires, observations, interviews), member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to confirm interpretations and maintaining detailed field notes to support transparency

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were employed, including Frequencies and percentages and comparative analysis of responses. These analyses were used to identify patterns in classroom management practices and their alignment with 21st-century skills.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved: Familiarisation with the data, Coding of key themes, Categorisation of recurring patterns, and Interpretation in relation to the research objectives. To enhance reliability, coding was conducted systematically, and themes were cross-checked for consistency.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly maintained throughout the study. Approval was obtained from relevant educational authorities and school administrations prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by not disclosing personal or institutional identities. Data were used solely for academic purposes.

Limitations of the Study

Despite efforts to ensure rigor, the study has certain limitations. The research is geographically limited to a single education zone, which may affect generalizability. Additionally, the focus on Sinhala-language teaching limits its applicability to other subject areas. Time and resource constraints also limited the number of classroom observations and interviews conducted.

RESULTS

Overview of Key Findings

This section presents the empirical findings derived from questionnaires, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The results are organized according to the study objectives, focusing on (i) current classroom management practices, (ii) their alignment with 21st-century skills, and (iii) challenges faced by teachers.

The findings of this study reveal a clear misalignment between emerging pedagogical orientations and prevailing classroom management practices in the teaching of the Sinhala language. Although teachers demonstrate an awareness of student-centred instructional approaches, their classroom management strategies remain largely rooted in traditional, control-oriented models. These findings indicate a difference between reported pedagogical approaches and observed classroom practices

The below data table has been presented by analyzing the answers given by the 36 teachers in the sample to the question of what is meant by classroom management, which was addressed to teachers teaching Sinhala through the teacher questionnaire.

Table. 4. 1 Gender Distribution of Teachers

Gender	Count	Percentage (%)
Female	30	83.3%
Male	6	16.7%
Total	36	100%

Source - Survey data (2025)

Current Classroom Management Practices in Sinhala Teaching

Teacher-Reported Practices

Analysis of questionnaire data revealed that a majority of teachers continue to rely on teacher-centred classroom management approaches. Approximately 70% of teachers reported primarily using lecture-based instruction combined with direct control strategies to maintain classroom discipline.

While 65% of teachers reported using questioning techniques, these were largely limited to short-response interactions rather than extended discussion or dialogic engagement. Only 38% of teachers reported regularly implementing group work or collaborative learning activities.

These findings indicate that although elements of student-centred strategies are present, they are not systematically integrated into classroom management practices. The key classroom management practices are summarized in Table 2.

Table 4.2: Summary of Classroom Management Practices

Category	Indicator	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Teaching Method	Lecture-based instruction	70%	Dominant traditional approach
Interaction	Questioning techniques	65%	Limited depth
Collaboration	Group work	38%	Low implementation

Source - Survey data (2025)

Classroom Observation Findings

Classroom observations further confirmed the dominance of traditional practices. In most observed lessons, teacher talk time exceeded 75% of classroom interaction, student participation was limited to answering direct questions, and group-based interaction was minimal. Additionally, classroom discipline was primarily maintained through directive instructions and authoritative control, rather than through participatory or self-regulatory strategies.

Student Perspectives

Student questionnaire responses indicated that 62% of students perceived lessons as predominantly teacher-driven, only 34% reported frequent opportunities for active participation, and a majority preferred more interactive and engaging learning activities. These findings suggest a disconnect between student expectations and classroom practices.

Suitability of Classroom Management for 21st-Century Skills

To examine whether differences in classroom management practices were statistically significant across demographic variables, inferential statistical tests were conducted. An independent-samples t-test was performed

to compare gender differences in students' perceptions of classroom interaction. The results indicated a statistically significant difference ($t = 2.31, p < 0.05$), suggesting that female students reported higher engagement levels than male students.

Additionally, a chi-square test was conducted to examine the association between teacher experience and the use of student-centred strategies. The results revealed a significant relationship ($\chi^2 = 6.45, p < 0.05$), indicating that more experienced teachers were more likely to adopt traditional management approaches.

Development of Critical Thinking and Collaboration

The data indicate that current classroom management practices provide limited support for 21st-century skill development. Only 40% of teachers reported regularly encouraging critical thinking through problem-solving or open-ended tasks. Collaborative learning opportunities were observed in fewer than 35% of classrooms. This suggests that while teachers are aware of the importance of these skills, their classroom management strategies do not consistently facilitate their development.

Digital Literacy and Technology Integration

A significant finding of the study is the low level of technology integration: Only 25% of teachers reported using digital tools regularly. The use of Learning Management Systems (LMS) was reported by less than 15% of participants. Classroom observations showed minimal use of multimedia or interactive technologies. This indicates that classroom management practices are not aligned with the technological demands of 21st-century education.

Challenges in Implementing Effective Classroom Management

Teacher-Reported Challenges

Teachers identified several key challenges, including a lack of professional training, limited technological resources, large class sizes, and time constraints.

Insights from Interviews

Qualitative data from interviews revealed deeper contextual issues. Teachers expressed that:

“Although we know about student-centred methods, it is difficult to apply them due to a lack of time and resources.”

Another respondent noted, “We do not have enough training on how to manage classrooms using technology.” These responses highlight a gap between theoretical awareness and practical implementation capacity.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Overall, the findings demonstrate that classroom management practices in Sinhala language teaching are predominantly traditional and teacher-centred, only partially aligned with student-centred approaches, weak in supporting 21st-century skills, particularly collaboration and digital literacy, and constrained by systemic and contextual challenges

DISCUSSION

Overview of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a clear misalignment between emerging pedagogical orientations and prevailing classroom management practices in Sinhala language teaching. Although a considerable proportion of teachers

reported awareness of student-centred approaches, empirical data indicate that classroom management remains predominantly traditional. For instance, questionnaire results showed that approximately 70% of teachers relied on lecture-based instruction, while classroom observations confirmed that teacher talk accounted for more than 75% of lesson time. This discrepancy highlights a persistent gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation, reinforcing concerns raised in prior literature about the theory–practice divide in educational settings.

Persistence of Traditional Classroom Management Practices

The dominance of teacher-centred classroom management practices is strongly supported by both quantitative and observational data. The majority of teachers reported using directive control strategies to maintain discipline, and classroom observations revealed that students participated only minimally, responding only to teacher questions. Furthermore, 62% of students perceived lessons as teacher-driven, confirming that classroom dynamics are largely controlled by the teacher.

These findings reflect the continued influence of behaviourist traditions, where classroom order is maintained through authority and control. While such approaches may be effective in ensuring discipline, they restrict opportunities for active engagement and higher-order thinking. This aligns with existing research indicating that traditional classroom environments prioritize content delivery over interaction, thereby limiting the development of critical and creative skills necessary for 21st-century learning.

Limited and Inconsistent Implementation of Student-Centered Approaches

Although 65% of teachers reported using questioning techniques, the nature of these interactions was largely superficial, focusing on short responses rather than extended discussion. Additionally, only 38% of teachers reported regularly using group work, and classroom observations confirmed that collaborative activities were infrequent.

This suggests that while elements of student-centred pedagogy are present, they are not systematically embedded within classroom management practices. From a constructivist perspective, meaningful learning requires active participation, dialogue, and knowledge construction. However, the limited depth and consistency of these practices indicate that constructivist principles are not fully operationalized. Instead, they appear as supplementary techniques within a predominantly traditional management framework.

Insufficient Integration of Technology in Classroom Management

The findings also reveal a significant gap in the integration of digital tools. Only 25% of teachers reported regular use of digital resources, and fewer than 15% indicated using Learning Management Systems (LMS). Classroom observations further confirmed minimal use of multimedia or interactive technologies.

This lack of technological integration severely constrains the development of digital literacy and self-directed learning. In the context of 21st-century education, technology is not merely an instructional aid but a critical component of classroom management that facilitates engagement, interaction, and personalized learning. The limited use observed in this study indicates that classroom management practices have not yet adapted to the technological demands of modern education.

Classroom Management as a Mediating Mechanism

A key insight emerging from the findings is that classroom management functions as a mediating mechanism between pedagogical intent and learning outcomes. Although teachers expressed awareness of student-centred approaches, the persistence of traditional management practices, evidenced by high teacher talk time and limited student interaction, undermines their implementation.

For example, while teachers reported using interactive strategies, observational data showed that these were rarely sustained or integrated into the lesson's overall structure. This creates a contradiction in which instructional

intentions aim to promote engagement, but management practices reinforce passivity and control. As a result, the development of 21st-century skills such as collaboration and critical thinking remains limited.

Contextual Challenges Influencing Classroom Practices

The study also highlights several contextual factors that contribute to the persistence of traditional practices. Teachers identified challenges such as a lack of professional training, limited access to technological resources, large class sizes, and time constraints. These findings are supported by interview data, where teachers acknowledged difficulties in implementing student-centred methods despite recognizing their importance.

Such constraints suggest that classroom management practices are shaped not only by teacher beliefs but also by systemic conditions. The reliance on traditional approaches may therefore reflect practical adaptation to contextual limitations rather than resistance to change. Addressing these issues requires institutional support, resource provision, and targeted professional development.

Implications for 21st-Century Education

The findings indicate that current classroom management practices are not adequately aligned with the requirements of 21st-century education. The limited use of collaborative strategies (reported by fewer than 40% of teachers) and the minimal integration of technology highlight significant gaps in the support of critical competencies such as communication, creativity, and digital literacy.

Without a shift toward more participatory and technology-integrated approaches, classroom environments will continue to restrict opportunities for meaningful learning. Therefore, aligning classroom management with 21st-century pedagogical goals is essential for improving both student engagement and learning outcomes.

Synthesis and Theoretical Implications

Overall, this study reinforces the need to reconceptualize classroom management as a dynamic and integrative process that aligns with contemporary educational paradigms. The findings demonstrate that classroom management is not merely a supportive function but a central determinant of how effectively pedagogical approaches are implemented.

By providing empirical evidence of the gap between pedagogical intent and management practices, this study contributes to the literature by highlighting the mediating role of classroom management. It also offers context-specific insights into Sinhala language education, emphasizing the need for strategies that bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern educational demands.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the suitability of classroom management methods used in teaching the Sinhala language in relation to the demands of 21st-century education. The findings reveal a clear and persistent misalignment between contemporary pedagogical expectations and actual classroom management practices. While teachers demonstrate an emerging awareness of student-centered approaches, their classroom management strategies remain predominantly traditional, characterized by hierarchical control, limited student agency, and minimal integration of technology.

The study confirms that classroom management is not merely a supportive component of teaching but a critical determinant of how effectively pedagogical intentions are translated into meaningful learning experiences. The continued reliance on control-oriented practices constrains opportunities for active engagement, collaborative learning, and the development of higher-order cognitive skills. Furthermore, the limited use of digital tools and Learning Management Systems hinders the development of essential competencies, such as digital literacy and self-directed learning, that are central to 21st-century education.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the persistence of traditional classroom management practices is influenced not only by individual teacher choices but also by broader systemic and contextual factors, including limited access to resources, insufficient professional development, and institutional constraints. These challenges highlight the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to educational reform.

This study contributes to the field by demonstrating that classroom management functions as a key mediating mechanism between instructional approaches and student learning outcomes. It emphasizes that without aligning management practices with learner-centred and technology-integrated pedagogies, efforts to promote 21st-century skills will remain limited. Therefore, a paradigm shift is required, one that reconceptualizes classroom management as a flexible, participatory, and pedagogically integrated process.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the urgent need for systemic reforms that go beyond individual classroom practices. Educational authorities must prioritize continuous professional development programs that specifically focus on integrating classroom management with modern pedagogical strategies. Without such targeted interventions, teachers may continue to rely on traditional approaches despite being aware of innovative methods.

In addition, infrastructure development, particularly in relation to digital technologies, is essential for supporting 21st-century classroom environments. The limited use of Learning Management Systems and digital tools identified in this study suggests that technological integration is not yet embedded in everyday teaching practices. Addressing this gap requires both institutional investment and teacher training.

Finally, curriculum designers and policymakers should recognize classroom management as a central component of pedagogical reform rather than a peripheral concern. Aligning curriculum expectations with practical classroom realities will ensure that teaching strategies and management practices work cohesively to support student learning.

In conclusion, enhancing the quality of Sinhala language education in the 21st century requires not only changes in teaching methods but also a fundamental transformation in how classrooms are managed. Such transformation must be supported by targeted teacher training, improved resource allocation, and policy-level initiatives that collectively enable the adoption of more effective, contemporary classroom management practices.

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