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The Influence of Classroom Climate on Consumer Science Learning in High Schools: A Case Study of Hhohho Region, Eswatini

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Abstract: This study investigated the influence of classroom climate on student learning outcomes in consumer science education in Eswatini. Given the extensive consumer science curriculum, it was hypothesised that teachers might face challenges in establishing a conducive learning environment. The objectives of the study were to determine the ways in which teachers make the subject matter interesting, as well as to assess teachers' warmth, closeness, and positivity. A mixed-methods research design was employed, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection. Fifty consumer science teachers completed questionnaires, while ten focus groups of students were interviewed. Schools were selected using a systematic random sampling procedure. The findings revealed that effective consumer science teachers actively create a positive classroom climate. This involves implementing engaging teaching strategies, utilising effective evaluation methods, and fostering a motivating learning environment. Additionally, teachers demonstrated warmth, closeness, and positivity towards their students, contributing to a favourable learning atmosphere. It was concluded that establishing a positive classroom climate is crucial for enhancing student engagement and learning in consumer science. The Eswatini Association of Teachers is recommended to organise workshops that equip consumer science educators with strategies for creating and maintaining effective classroom environments.

Keywords: Classroom climate, teacher warmth, positivity, learning environment.

1. Introduction

Classroom climate, characterised by the prevailing mood, attitudes, and standards within a learning environment, significantly influences student behaviour and learning outcomes. It emerges from the interplay of various factors, including physical, material, organisational, and social variables. Classroom climate reflects the broader school culture, a stable quality influenced by underlying factors (Goldenberg & Klavir, 2017). Research suggests a strong correlation between classroom climate and student engagement, behaviour, self-efficacy, achievement, social and emotional development, leadership styles, educational reform, teacher burnout, and overall school quality. This impact is particularly pronounced for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Ashley, 2016).

The broader body of research on organisational climate indicates that excessive emphasis on standardised test scores and external rewards can create a reactive and controlling classroom environment (Aydin & Karabay, 2020). A proactive approach to developing a positive classroom climate requires prioritising the well-being of students and staff, implementing a curriculum that fosters holistic development, empowering teachers to effectively engage with diverse learners, and cultivating intrinsic motivation for learning and teaching (Barksdale, Peters & Corrales, 2021). Given the pivotal role of classroom climate, all school staff should prioritise its establishment and

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maintenance. School psychologists can play a crucial role by collaborating with teachers to enhance their competence and provide support. This involves going beyond traditional consultation and actively participating in classroom settings to improve climate. Furthermore, school psychologists can work with other support staff to foster a positive school climate that promotes well-being and addresses barriers to teaching and learning (Barksdale et al., 2021). Consumer science, a practical subject taught in some secondary and high schools in Eswatini, is influenced by various factors, including classroom climate.

The findings of this research hold significant implications for both educational practitioners and policymakers. Understanding the factors that contribute to a positive classroom climate can equip consumer science teachers with strategies to enhance their teaching methods. By creating a supportive and engaging learning environment, teachers can foster student motivation, participation, and ultimately, academic achievement. Additionally, student outcomes will be enhanced. A positive classroom climate has been shown to correlate with improved student outcomes, including higher grades, increased engagement, and better social and emotional development. Prioritising the creation of such an environment will enable teachers to directly contribute to the overall success of their students. Lastly, the findings of this study can inform the development of consumer science curricula that prioritise the creation of a positive learning environment. By incorporating strategies that promote student engagement, motivation, and collaboration, policymakers can ensure that the curriculum is effective and relevant to students' needs.

1.1 Problem statement

The effective use of Consumer Science in secondary schools is significantly jeopardised by the damaging impacts of the prevailing classroom environments. Despite its critical role in equipping pupils with essential life skills, learning environments cannot fully support the optimal acquisition and application of knowledge. While the importance of a positive climate is widely accepted (Sainio, Eklund, Pakarinen & Kiuru, 2023), the specific negative impacts of adverse climates in Consumer Science, particularly regarding perceived teacher attitudes and syllabus expectations, necessitate further research. Mabuza and Khoza (2021) hypothesise a potential image of Consumer Science teachers as "mean and moody," a characterisation that can foster a climate of fear and anxiety, deterring students from engaging with the subject. This negativity, supported by documentation of its unfavourable effects on pupil performance and enthusiasm (Mabuza, 2020), discourages full participation in essential class discussions, fieldwork, and problem-solving sessions. Compounding this worry is the menace of time constraints brought about by a perceived "too long" syllabus, which, as pointed out by Mpofu and Dlamini (2020), restricts teachers' autonomy to focus on creating a constructive learning environment. This time pressure can lead to rushed teaching decreased teacher-student contact and diminished feelings of community, which will exacerbate the adverse impacts of perceived teacher behaviour. Furthermore, the fact that numerous teachers start out with lofty aspirations but encounter difficult realities presents a likelihood of teacher burnout. Research consistently links teacher burnout with negative classroom climates (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), where emotional overflow from burnout manifests as irritability, impatience, and lower empathy. In a subject like Consumer Science, where students may raise contentious topics, a teacher's emotional well-being plays an important role in creating a safe and friendly environment. Finally, a positive atmosphere may motivate students to participate in experiential, practical exercises, such as cooking or budgeting simulations, for fear of being condemned or judged.

2. Literature Review

Classroom climate, defined as the prevailing mood and tone experienced by both teachers and students, is a critical element in fostering effective educational environments (Ashley, 2016). This literature review explores understanding how classroom climate impacts student learning and

performance, particularly in Consumer Science classrooms. It classifies relevant literature into five key areas: theoretical frameworks, presage variables, context variables, process variables, and product variables.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The chosen theoretical framework for the study is based on Dunkin and Biddle's (1974) model of teaching and learning, which evolved from earlier educational theories developed in the 1960s. This model emphasises the interactions between teachers, students, and the classroom context, outlining 13 classes of variables that influence learning outcomes, categorised into four broad types such as presage, context, process, and product. The model asserts that various factors within these categories are critical for understanding the teaching and learning experience.

Presage variables relate to characteristics intrinsic to the teacher, influencing their teaching methods and strategies (Metzler, 2014). These include formative experiences, background, training, personal attributes, and beliefs. It posits that teachers' formative experiences (e.g., cultural background and educational history) significantly shape their instructional practices, which consequently affect student learning and achievement. Context variables address environmental conditions that impact teaching, encompassing pupil formative experiences, classroom dynamics, and school characteristics. It highlights that students enter the classroom with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and experiences that shape their learning. These contextual factors, along with institutional characteristics like school resources and community influences, play a central role in determining the effectiveness of teaching strategies.

Process variables encompass the actual teaching and learning activities that occur in the classroom, including the behaviours of both teachers and students. The interaction styles adopted—whether teacher-centred or student-centred—strongly affect student engagement and participation. Process variables focus on observable behaviours that create a dynamic learning environment, influencing overall student performance. Product variables represent the learning outcomes resulting from educational activities, signifying both cognitive and social-emotional outcomes (Metzler, 2014). They are influenced primarily by the quality of teaching and the context in which learning occurs, revealing that classroom climate can produce both positive and negative academic results.

Dunkin and Biddle's (1974) model effectively frames the research on classroom climate's influence on Consumer Science learning. The four categories of variables in the model—presage, context, process, and product—provide a coherent structure. Presage variables, which focus on teacher characteristics, explain how perceived negativity or burnout impacts climate. Context variables, such as syllabus demands and student backgrounds, outline environmental determinants. Process variables, which examine teacher-student relationships, indicate how teaching approaches impact the learning environment. Finally, product variables, as measures of learning outcomes, demonstrate the causal link between climate and student achievement. By studying teacher attributes, environmental factors, instructional practices, and learning outcomes, researchers can observe how classroom climate affects Consumer Science teaching. This model allows for a comprehensive investigation of the complex interactions that result in student achievement.

2.2 Factors contributing to classroom climate

Several factors are identified as contributing to a positive classroom climate, including student participation, teacher-student interaction, effective teaching strategies, motivational factors, and teacher warmth and positivity (Aydin & Karabay, 2020). Student participation involves encouraging student engagement through varied instructional methodologies tailored to diverse learning styles, which fosters a dynamic classroom environment. Teacher-student interaction creates positive teacher-student relationships that significantly enhance student motivation and engagement. Effective teaching strategies promote flexibility in teaching methods, and the use of diverse

instructional strategies tailored to classroom contexts can lead to improved student outcomes (Goldenberg & Klavir, 2017). On the other hand, students must be motivated to learn. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is crucial for engaging students in the learning process. Students inherently seek relevance in their education, which affects their desire to learn. Lastly, teacher warmth and positivity play a significant role. A teacher's warmth, closeness, and positivity enhance the classroom climate and consequently student achievement. Establishing a supportive atmosphere where students feel valued promotes engagement, participation, and a sense of community.

The theoretical framework highlights the importance of teacher characteristics and classroom context in shaping the classroom climate. It underscores the need for educators to cultivate supportive environments that not only cater to academic needs but also acknowledge students' social-emotional requirements. This is essential for enhancing classroom behaviour and performance, thereby improving the educational experience (Aydin & Karabay, 2020). The literature emphasises that a positive classroom climate is multifaceted, influenced by various interrelated factors. Teacher attributes, classroom context, the process of teaching, and the resultant academic outcomes interact dynamically to foster effective learning environments. For educators, understanding these variables and their implications can significantly enhance their approach to creating supportive and engaging classrooms that facilitate optimal learning experiences for all students. Ultimately, this study seeks to reinforce the importance of a conducive classroom climate in the context of modern agricultural education in Eswatini, aligning with the broader goals of improving educational quality and outcomes.

2.3 The influence of classroom climate on learning

The pervasive impact of classroom climate on student learning extends far beyond the mere physical environment, encompassing the intricate interplay of emotional, social, and intellectual factors that influence student engagement. Recent studies emphasise the central role of a positive climate in facilitating effective learning. First and foremost, an emotionally safe and inclusive climate is essential. When students feel secure, they are more likely to take risks with their knowledge, ask questions, and participate actively, as recent studies have highlighted the relationship between positive teacher-student relationships and emotional well-being (Garcia-Peinado, 2023). Conversely, a negative climate characterised by fear or anxiety can lead to withdrawal and disengagement, hindering learning. Furthermore, a supportive climate promotes positive social interaction and collaboration. Students learn from each other and think critically as they collaborate on projects, benefitting from the diversity of thought fostered in an inclusive environment. Feeling connected to classmates and teachers significantly increases the likelihood of participation. Recent research, including studies that examine the interaction between social classroom climate and social participation for students with special educational needs, confirms this as well (Zurbriggen et al, 2023).

Additionally, a positive climate fosters intellectual stimulation and growth. Students who are challenged yet supported are inspired to embrace new ideas and tackle resilient tasks. Educators who create thought-provoking environments that encourage students to express themselves freely promote deeper learning and critical thinking. Studies such as Treairo (2020) demonstrate that classroom climate positively affects students' academic motivation, with academic self-efficacy serving essentially as a mediator of that effect, illustrating that the connection between climate and motivation is significant. Finally, a well-organised and controlled classroom, in terms of norms and application, reduces misbehaviour among students. When a safe and fair environment exists within the class, misbehaviour decreases, and stress diminishes.

3. Methodology

This study utilised a mixed-method descriptive research design to examine the contribution of classroom climate to the teaching of Consumer Science. Descriptive research aims to provide a snapshot of a situation as it naturally occurs, focusing on "what, when, where, and how" questions without delving into "why" questions (Lincoln & Guba, 2018). Given the rich literature in the area of classroom climate, a concurrent triangulation design was employed. The methodology thus involved data collection through qualitative and quantitative means simultaneously, which included interviews and questionnaires.

The population for this research consisted of 69 Consumer Science teachers and an undocumented number of students in the Hhohho region. A systematic sampling procedure was employed, selecting every nth school from an ordered list of schools to ensure a representative sample. Specifically, 25 schools were chosen from a total of 39 in the region, incorporating both urban and rural locations, along with approximately fifty (n=50) Consumer Science teachers, as each school has two teachers. Two focus groups, consisting of 5 students each, were established. The students were selected using convenience sampling from ten different schools. For data collection, the researcher first obtained permission from the schools. Interviews were conducted with Consumer Science students during a Consumer Science day at Mfanyana Hall to capture their perspectives on classroom climate. The survey questionnaire was developed with the help of a literature review following the research objectives. It was pilot-tested with 20 teachers from the Manzini region who were not part of the study, where a reliability coefficient of 0.83 was established. The validity of the instrument was ensured through a panel of educators in the Faculty of Education, who reviewed the questions for content and construct validity. The questionnaires were then administered to teachers to assess various factors influencing the classroom environment. They included different rating scales for measuring responses related to motivation, teacher warmth, and strategies for making the subject engaging. Quantitative data from the questionnaires was processed using SPSS version 20.0, yielding statistical insights such as mean and standard deviation.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, several strategies were employed: credibility was established through triangulation of data from interviews and questionnaires; transferability was supported by providing a rich contextual background; dependability was achieved by maintaining clear and traceable documentation of the research process; confirmability was addressed by being explicit about the researcher's assumptions; validity was ensured through appropriate methodological choices and data integrity; and reliability was reinforced by consistently applying the research methods. Thematic content analysis was used to identify and analyse patterns and themes in the qualitative data. This approach involved familiarising oneself with the data, coding, and developing themes to address the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The analysis provided insights into recurring themes and patterns relevant to the study.

4. Findings and Discussions

The study presents findings from ten participants, whose demographics are detailed in Table 1. They are between 16 and 20 years old. All but one are female. Notably, all participants studied food and nutrition, while others also studied fashion and fabrics.

Table 1: *Participant Demographics*

Participant ID	Age	Gender	School	Consumer Science Subject enrolled	School location
Focus Group 1					
Participant 1	16	Female	School 1	Food & Nutrition	Urban
Participant 2	16	Female	School 2	Food & Nutrition Fashion and Fabrics	Urban

Participant 3	17	Female	School 3	Food & Nutrition	Semi-Urban
Participant 4	18	Female	School 4	Food & Nutrition Fashion and Fabrics	Rural
Participant 5	20	Female	School 5	Food & Nutrition	Rural
Focus Group 2					
Participant 6	18	Female	School 6	Food & Nutrition Fashion and Fabrics	Urban
Participant 7	17	Male	School 7	Food & Nutrition Fashion and Fabrics	Urban
Participant 8	17	Female	School 8	Food & Nutrition Fashion and Fabrics	Semi-Urban
Participant 9	18	Female	School 9	Food & Nutrition	Rural
Participant 10	18	Female	School 10	Food & Nutrition Fashion and Fabrics	Rural

4.1 Teacher warmth

Consumer Science teachers were surveyed to assess their perceptions of warmth as a strategy for making the subject more engaging. The findings presented in Table 2 reveal that, overall, teachers agree ($\bar{x}$=5.38) that they aim to create a warm atmosphere to enhance students' interest in the subject. Notably, the results indicate strong agreement that teachers genuinely care about their students' academic and social wellbeing ($\bar{x}$=5.62) and that students can count on them for support ($\bar{x}$=5.76). Additionally, teachers indicated that they express love for their students ($\bar{x}$=5.42), maintain positive relationships with them ($\bar{x}$=5.38), and ensure that students feel comfortable seeking help without fear of rejection ($\bar{x}$=5.34). They also believe they provide adequate assistance during practical lessons ($\bar{x}$=5.34), consistently wear a smile ($\bar{x}$=4.84), foster a warm and affectionate relationship with students ($\bar{x}$=5.10), and focus on offering warmth, friendliness, and encouragement to all students ($\bar{x}$=5.08). With an overall standard deviation of 0.82, the data suggest minimal variation in Consumer Science teachers' evaluations related to warmth, indicating a consensus in their responses.

Table 2: *Teacher warmth as a way of making the subject matter interesting in CS (n=50)*

Teacher warmth	$\bar{x}$	STD	DE
I show my students love	5.42	0.57	A
I get along well with my students	5.38	0.56	A
I care about my students' academic and social wellbeing	5.62	0.53	SA
My students are free to ask for my help without fear of rejection	5.34	0.62	A
I provide adequate help to my students during practical lessons	5.34	0.77	A
I wear a smile every time	4.84	0.52	A
I share an affectionate warm relationship with my students	5.12	0.76	A
I concentrate on extending warmth, friendliness and encouragement to all students	5.08	0.73	A
My students can rely on me	5.76	0.75	SA
Averages	5.38	0.82	A

The quantitative data from Consumer Science teachers indicates that effective teachers make a concerted effort to foster a warm environment for their students, thereby facilitating a positive learning atmosphere. This includes showing genuine concern for students' academic and social well-being, encouraging them to seek help without fear of rejection, providing ample assistance during

practical lessons, consistently wearing a smile, nurturing affectionate relationships with students, and focusing on extending warmth, friendliness, and encouragement to all. Interviews with students confirmed that their Consumer Science teachers indeed strive to be warm and supportive. The students' responses were categorised into three main themes: Treating students equally, serving as mentor figures and role models, and valuing students' perspectives while offering genuine assistance.

4.1.1 Treating students equally

There is perhaps nothing more disheartening than being instructed by a teacher who exhibits favouritism in the classroom. Students who perceive themselves as less favoured often feel marginalized and undervalued, leading some to consider changing subjects or even withdrawing from school altogether. The findings of this study indicate that effective Consumer Science teachers consistently treat their students equitably, unlike educators in other disciplines who may exhibit bias. This approach fosters an inclusive atmosphere where all students feel valued and welcomed by their teacher, effectively bridging the gap between fast learners and those who may struggle, allowing every student to see themselves as capable and appreciated.

Participant 8, in discussing the importance of equitably treating students, noted that their Consumer Science teacher does not differentiate between high achievers and those who may find learning more challenging; instead, she believes that every student has the potential to excel. Her positive outlook encourages all students to strive for their best, as she does not categorise students as "doomed" or "slow" learners. Participant 3 echoed this sentiment, affirming that their teacher extends equal treatment to all, ensuring no student receives preferential treatment or recognition over another—everyone is regarded as equally important and deserving of kindness.

> "*Our teacher does not even think of a doom student or a slow learner, she believes that we all the same and have equal abilities"* Participant 3 stated.
>
> *"She goes with all of us, she leaves no one behind, she has patience when it comes to teaching"* Participant 8 alluded.

This equitable treatment is vital in cultivating a positive mindset among students, reinforcing the belief that they all possess similar abilities and must exert effort to succeed. According to Adah Miller, Berland, and Campbell (2024), teachers should emphasise equitable treatment within the classroom. They advocate for strategies that include avoiding favouritism by treating each student consistently and addressing the diverse physical, emotional, social, and academic needs of all learners. Tsai (2022) underscores the necessity of treating all students uniformly, noting that it is inherently unfair to hold students with learning disabilities to the same standard as their peers without additional support. Given that students spend more time in school than at home, fostering an environment where they feel cared for and equally valued significantly enhances their educational experience, reducing stress and anxiety.

4.1.2 Mentor, parent, and role model

As children develop, they often aspire to emulate celebrities they encounter on television, social media, or in magazines. However, participants in this study noted a significant divergence from this trend, expressing a desire to emulate their Consumer Science teachers, whom they view as mentors, parental figures, and role models. This finding underscores the profound impact these teachers have on making the subject matter engaging and relevant for their students.

It is often said that fostering loyalty requires building close relationships, and this approach is employed effectively by Consumer Science teachers. By treating students with the same care and guidance they would extend to their own children, these educators instil a passion for both the subject and the overall school experience. They mentor students in various aspects of life, offering

insights into business, discussing life beyond the classroom, and providing guidance on personal well-being. This holistic approach demonstrates that teachers genuinely care not only about academic performance but also about their students' overall futures, thereby nurturing a reciprocal affection between students and their educators. Participant 3 highlighted the unique bond formed between students and their Consumer Science teacher, citing how the teacher refers to them affectionately as "bonana." This endearing term fosters a deep sense of belonging and makes understanding the material feel more accessible and enjoyable.

> "*She always wears a smile while teaching, and we feel like her children*." Participant 3 expressed.

Participant 2 corroborated this sentiment, noting that their teacher transcends the traditional role of instructor. During a lunch break, when the interviewer visited and observed students waiting for food, the teacher discreetly went to the kitchen to request additional servings for her students still in class. The students' joy upon receiving the food illuminated the profound connection they share with their teacher. They expressed,

> *"It goes without saying that our teacher treats us as her own. We can always count on her; she goes out of her way to ensure we are cared for, almost as if we are her real children." – Participant 5.*

The findings emphasise that when teachers adopt a mentoring role akin to that of a sports coach, they can significantly impact their students' development. A compassionate coach recognises each player's strengths and weaknesses, providing tailored advice while offering support and praise (Mabuza & Khoza, 2021). Similarly, teachers who engage with their students in the same manner—by nurturing their strengths, listening to their concerns, and earning their trust—create a supportive environment that encourages growth.

4.1.3 Accepting students' perspectives and providing genuine assistance

There is nothing more gratifying than being acknowledged when presenting an idea. According to the findings of this study, participants indicated that their Consumer Science teachers are receptive to their viewpoints, which enhances the learning experience by demonstrating the students' significance as contributors to the educational process. In contrast to other educators who adhere to the philosophy of "I cannot be instructed by a student," Consumer Science teachers actively solicit student input regarding how they prefer to approach their work.

For instance, Participant 9 remarked that their teacher attentively considers every student's perspective, allowing them to decide how they wish to conduct their practical assignments. While the teacher encourages autonomy, she also makes it clear that students must respect established boundaries in order to maintain a productive learning environment. She noted:

> *"She respects our ideas; for example, during practical sessions, we form groups based on our preferences. She seeks our input while reminding us not to overstep her kindness."* Participant 9 noted.

The significance of being heard cannot be understated. According to Hoferichter, Kulakow and Raufelder (2022), students attend school seeking academic support from their teachers; if they find themselves without the help they need, they may be tempted to disengage from their education. Consequently, it is imperative for educators to provide genuine academic assistance, ensuring that students have compelling reasons to remain in school rather than opting to learn independently at home.

Students arrive at school eager to learn, and it is the teacher's responsibility to nurture that enthusiasm. By offering authentic support, educators can motivate students and cultivate a love for both the subject matter and the school environment. Hennessy, Calcagni, Leung and Mercer (2023) noted that she encourages class participation by sharing her own thoughts and inviting students to

express their views before reaching a consensus. When students present ideas that she had not previously considered, she integrates those concepts into her teaching and later informs the class of their implementation, encouraging students to celebrate their contributions. This acknowledgement often results in visible expressions of joy among students, prompting increased participation in future discussions.

4.2 Positivity

Consumer Science teachers were asked to assess their perspectives on the role of positivity in making the subject matter engaging. The findings presented in Table 3 indicate a general consensus among teachers, with a mean score of 5.29, reflecting their agreement on the importance of maintaining a positive attitude to enhance engagement in the subject. Specifically, the data reveal that teachers strongly believe in their ability to motivate students to put forth their best efforts, achieving a mean score of 5.54. Furthermore, teachers expressed agreement on several key points: they maintain a positive attitude daily ($\bar{x}$=5.30), accept students' feedback and perspectives ($\bar{x}$=5.36), and show genuine interest in students' thoughts, feelings, and actions ($\bar{x}$=5.18). They also affirm their commitment to guiding students toward personal growth in a positive manner ($\bar{x}$=5.28), allowing students the freedom to explore, make mistakes, and learn from those experiences ($\bar{x}$=4.94), and demonstrating processes before engaging in practical activities ($\bar{x}$=5.48). The overall standard deviation of 0.77 suggests a consistent level of evaluation among the Consumer Science teachers, indicating minimal variation in their responses regarding this assessment.

Table 3: *Teacher positivity as a way of making the subject matter interesting in CS (n=50)*

Teacher's Positivity	$\bar{x}$	STD	DE
I have a positive attitude on a daily basis	5.33	0.86	A
I motivate my students to bring their best effort	5.54	0.64	SA
I accept students' feedback and views.	5.36	0.66	A
I am interested in what my students think, feel and what they do.	5.18	0.72	A
I guide students in a positive direction for their personal growth	5.28	0.78	A
I allow them to explore and make mistakes and learn from them.	4.94	0.52	A
I demonstrate before they do their practical	5.48	0.70	A
Averages	5.29	0.77	A

The quantitative data indicates that Consumer Science educators are perceived as dedicated to fostering a positive atmosphere for learners, with the aim of creating a conducive classroom environment for effective learning. This positive environment is cultivated through several key practices: motivating students to exert their best efforts, accepting feedback and perspectives from students, showing interest in their thoughts, feelings, and actions, providing guidance that promotes personal growth, allowing opportunities for exploration and learning from mistakes, and demonstrating procedures prior to engaging in practical activities. Similarly, students interviewed expressed that their Consumer Science teachers actively strive to maintain a positive classroom climate. Their feedback was categorised into several themes, including the significance of the subject and its attainability, the ability to adjust the pace of instruction to align with learners' capabilities, the use of personal experiences to inspire students, and attributes such as compassion and humility.

4.2.1 The importance of the subject matter and its achievability

Emphasising the significance of the subject matter and demonstrating its attainability are effective strategies employed by teachers to engage learners and enrich content delivery, as indicated by the study's findings. Participant 6 noted that their teacher highlights the relevance of each topic, citing the example of food preservation. The teacher illustrated how preserving food, such as canning

guavas, could lead to entrepreneurial opportunities, suggesting that students could eventually expand their enterprises after graduating. Similarly, Participants 9 and 10 expressed agreement with this perspective.

> "*In each topic she will explain its importance and how it will help us in life. For example, in the topic on families she explained that it will help us to be able to choose the kind of family we would love to have since in each we looked at the advantages and disadvantages, there is no topic she delivers without her relating it with life in general*" Participant 6 noted
>
> "*My teacher tells us the important of every topic we learn about for example on the topic on food preservation she told us that we can get money from preserving food like canning guavas and sell them, can even extend the business and make it big after finishing school.*" Participant 9 narrated.

Teachers facilitate engagement by highlighting the importance of the subject matter, thereby making the lessons more appealing to students. Participant 9 elaborated that their teacher consistently explains how the material will be beneficial in their lives, reiterating the practical applications of each topic. For instance, during discussions on family structures, the teacher elucidates the advantages and disadvantages, helping students understand how this knowledge will assist them in making informed decisions about the type of family they aspire to have.

The findings align with Cattaneo, Oggenfuss and Wolter (2017), who argued that elucidating the importance of the subject and affirming its achievability fosters a genuine interest in learning among students. They posited that this approach serves as a powerful motivational catalyst, steering academic and career paths and significantly contributing to academic success as students begin to recognise both the relevance and attainability of the subject matter. Similarly, Awang-Hashim, Kaur and Valdez (2019) emphasised that when students comprehend the value of the subject and perceive it as achievable, they are more likely to attend classes regularly, remain attentive, engage actively, undertake additional work, process information effectively, and ultimately excel in the subject.

4.2.2 Adjusting teaching pace to match learners' capabilities

To enhance student engagement in Consumer Science, teachers intentionally adjust their teaching pace, taking the necessary time to ensure that learners fully master the content. This finding emerged from the study, distinguishing the approach of Consumer Science educators from that of teachers in other subjects, who often prioritise completing the syllabus over ensuring comprehension. Interview participants noted that their Consumer Science teachers adopt a deliberate, measured pace, ensuring that no student is left behind. They are committed to explaining content thoroughly until every student understands.

Participant 1 emphasised this approach, stating that their teacher spends extensive time on each topic until it resonates with all learners. "*We revisit the same topic repeatedly until we grasp the content,*" they explained. "*We do not advance to the next topic until we fully understand the current one.*" Participant 3 confirmed this, noting that their teacher does not hastily transition to subsequent topics and does not favour advanced learners over others. This method fosters an inclusive classroom environment, allowing all students, including those who may struggle, to easily grasp the material. "She takes her time, explaining word by word, which enhances our understanding," they remarked.

Consumer Science educators clarify that their approach of slowing the pace accommodates slower learners, who may not have chosen this learning style. They encourage faster learners to quietly attempt end-of-chapter questions to self-assess their understanding while the teacher provides support to those who require additional help. According to Meng (2023), adjusting the teaching pace to align with learners' capabilities contributes significantly to students' academic achievement, irrespective of their initial performance levels. Even students who may initially score lower on tests can, through this tailored approach, achieve better understanding and improvement in subsequent

assessments, fostering a deeper appreciation for the subject. Cattaneo et al. (2017) also noted that varying teaching speed benefits students of all abilities, as learners naturally understand material at different rates. By reducing the pace, slower learners can grasp the content similarly to their faster peers, effectively bridging the gap between different learning capacities.

4.2.3 Utilising personal experience to inspire learners

In exploring the methods teachers use to motivate students, participants in the study highlighted the practice of sharing personal experiences—both positive and negative—from their own educational journeys. Students often perceive their teachers as individuals who have successfully navigated their education without facing the challenges and setbacks that learners currently encounter, including failures and personal issues. When a teacher recounts their own struggles, particularly the difficult moments, it resonates with students and reassures them that others have experienced similar challenges and ultimately succeeded. This connection can be particularly empowering for students at risk of giving up, instilling in them the courage to persevere. Participant 4 echoed this sentiment, noting that their Consumer Science teacher differs from educators in other subjects by not dwelling on students' mistakes. Instead, she approaches errors constructively, helping students learn and progress positively.

> "*She shares her positive and negative experiences to motivate us,*" Participant 4 stated.
>
> "*Even if we make mistakes, she corrects us gently and encourages us to do better.*" Participant 2 noted

The study references Jakonen and Evnitskaya (2020), who noted that at appropriate moments, he recounts personal experiences from his own schooling and has received considerable feedback from students testifying that his stories inspired them to persist in their studies. Some students reported being on the verge of dropping out but found motivation in his narratives. Similarly, Mundia (2001) emphasised the significance of personal storytelling in the classroom. He described how he shares his life experiences, including his failures and the lessons learned that contributed to his achievements. Mundia sometimes invites students to inquire about his personal journey, fostering a sense of relatability that enhances their motivation and instils a belief that they, too, can succeed despite adversities.

4.3 Closeness

Consumer Science teachers were surveyed to assess their perspectives on the role of positivity in making the subject matter engaging. The results presented in Table 4 indicate a general consensus among teachers, who rated their efforts positively with a mean score of 5.3, reflecting their commitment to fostering close relationships with students to enhance interest in the subject. Notably, the data reveal that teachers strongly believe in their capacity to lead effectively, as evidenced by a mean score of 5.52.

Additionally, the findings show that teachers support student autonomy in the classroom, indicated by a mean score of 4.9. They also expressed openness to providing assistance whenever needed, with a mean score of 5.36. Teachers reported that they actively listen to students and offer emotional support during difficult times (mean=5.4), and they identify as mentors, parental figures, and coaches in addition to their role as educators (mean=5.34). The level of trust bestowed upon students was also affirmed, with a mean score of 5.02, while the sentiment that mistakes do not lead to alienation from teachers was reflected in a mean score of 5.3. Furthermore, teachers reported sharing aspects of their personal lives with students (mean=4.58), which contributes to building trust (mean=4.98), with students feeling comfortable sharing their own social and personal issues with teachers, even beyond classroom settings (mean=4.98).

The overall standard deviation of 0.89 indicates minimal variability in the responses among Consumer Science teachers regarding their evaluations, suggesting a cohesive perception of the importance of positivity in the learning environment.

Table 4: *Teacher closeness as a way of making the subject matter interesting in CS (n=50)*

Teacher's Closeness	Mean	Std	DE
I allow my students to decide things in class.	4.92	0.52	A
I strive to be a good leader	5.52	0.61	SA
Allow my students to ask for any help anytime.	5.36	0.66	A
I listen to my students and give them care during sour days	5.41	0.75	A
More than being a teacher to my students, I am a mentor, parent, and coach	5.34	0.71	A
I trust my students	5.02	0.89	A
I don't push away a student because of a mistake he or she once committed.	5.30	0.78	A
I share my personal life with my students	4.58	0.83	A
My students have trust in me	4.98	0.86	A
My students will come and share their social and personal lives with me even outside class	4.98	0.98	A
Averages	5.13	0.89	A

The quantitative data indicates that teachers are actively seeking to foster close relationships with learners as a means of cultivating a conducive learning environment. This is achieved by striving to be effective leaders, allowing students to have input in classroom decisions, being available for assistance at any time, listening attentively to students, and providing support during challenging days. Beyond their role as educators, teachers also function as mentors, parental figures, and coaches. They exhibit trust in their students and refrain from alienating them due to past mistakes. In interviews, students affirmed that their Consumer Science teachers genuinely endeavour to connect with them, thereby facilitating a positive classroom climate that enhances learning outcomes. The students' responses were categorised into several themes, which include:

4.3.1 Students feel a strong rapport with their teacher

The findings of the study clearly indicate that Consumer Science students have established a significant bond with their instructor, which serves as a key strategy for making the subject matter more engaging. When individuals form strong connections with one another, they are motivated to uphold those relationships and make efforts to sustain their mutual interests. Similarly, when students develop a close relationship with a teacher who genuinely cares for them, they cultivate a deep appreciation for the subject and are motivated to meet or exceed their teacher's expectations, both academically and otherwise. This dynamic enhances student engagement and facilitates a better understanding of course content.

For instance, one participant noted that their relationship with the teacher transcends typical teacher-student interactions, likening it to a deep friendship rather than a mere academic connection. They indicated that the teacher is adept at recognising personal challenges, for example, by addressing students' romantic relationships in a caring and supportive manner, which illustrates her genuine concern for their well-being.

Agyekum (2019) asserts that positive teacher-student relationships contribute significantly to students' interest in the subject matter. Zainullah, Mahfud, and Riniati (2023) emphasise the importance of fostering a supportive pedagogical environment where students and teachers openly

communicate and share experiences, which promotes engaged learning. Conversely, tension and misunderstandings can hinder teaching effectiveness, highlighting the need for teachers to cultivate positive rapport with their students. Additionally, Agyekum (2019) notes that a solid rapport encourages students to actively participate in hands-on activities, reinforcing their learning and facilitating skill development.

4.3.2 Ever-smiling teachers

It is common to perceive individuals as benevolent or approachable based purely on their smiles, regardless of their underlying nature. A smile often conveys warmth and openness, making it easier for others to engage and communicate. Similarly, students find it easier to grasp content when presented by an instructor who is smiling, rather than one who maintains a serious expression. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that Consumer Science teachers intentionally adopt a smiling demeanour to enhance the learning experience in their classrooms.

> "*She always wears a smile to us. Ever laughing- she always laughs with us, she will throw a joke and the whole class will laugh including her, even if one of us throws a joke she will join us and laugh her lungs out*." Participant 6 noted.

Students are naturally attuned to the facial expressions of their teachers; they may express concern when a teacher appears unhappy, often deducing this from nonverbal cues rather than verbal communication (Hoferichter et al., 2022). Similarly, Jakonen and Evnitskaya (2020) emphasise the impact of a teacher's smile, noting that it encourages students to feel comfortable asking questions. A warm smile creates an atmosphere of safety, helping to transform students' moods and fostering a welcoming environment for learning. One participant noted that their teacher consistently wears a smile during lessons and actively engages the class by sharing jokes. This playful interaction not only invites laughter but also reinforces a sense of community within the classroom. Such positivity contributes significantly to the educational process, as it encourages active participation and interaction.

4.3.3 Friendly teachers

According to the findings of the study, Consumer Science teachers foster friendly relationships with their students to enhance engagement and interest in the subject matter. Interacting with a friendly individual facilitates open communication, making it easier to share even sensitive experiences. This dynamic, when applied in a classroom setting, encourages students to express themselves freely, alleviating any fear of participating, even when they are unsure of the answers. Such an atmosphere contributes to a lively and enjoyable learning environment. Participant 3 noted that their teacher's friendly demeanour is evident in her soft tone and polite communication style. She avoids raising her voice and often uses personalised, affectionate names for her students, fostering a sense of belonging. When assessing students' understanding, she does so gently, inviting feedback and creating an environment where they feel comfortable expressing confusion if needed.

> "*She is encouraging and does not raise her voice; she speaks to us sweetly.*" Participant 3 noted

Tsai (2022) posits that a teacher's friendliness significantly encourages student participation and academic self-challenge. The relationship established between students and teachers is crucial for a child's academic success and social development, fostering a comfortable and safe classroom environment. Hennessy, Calcagni, Leung, and Mercer (2023) further elaborate that a friendly teacher can transform learning from monotonous lectures into an engaging and enjoyable experience. They suggest that when students are encouraged and feel safe to interact with a friendly teacher, their academic performance improves significantly.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrates how teacher warmth, positivity, and closeness are essential in motivating students to learn Consumer Science. Both teacher questionnaires and student interviews confirm that these qualities significantly enhance the learning environment. Teachers are portrayed as caring mentors who believe in fair treatment, thus making their classrooms welcoming. They show interest in the well-being of students beyond the traditional methods of teaching. Positive attitudes of the teachers, such as frequent displays of positivity, openness to criticism, and active listening, also play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment. Sharing personal experiences encourages students by demonstrating that issues can be resolved. Establishing close relationships through accessibility and trust increases student engagement. Smiling and light-heartedness further enhance student involvement.

Recommendations include prioritising teacher training in interpersonal skills, implementing positive classroom practices, and fostering a school culture that values strong teacher-student relationships. Curriculum design should prioritise collaborative activities and practical applications. By foregrounding warmth, positivity, and closeness, teachers can create a learning community where students feel valued, engaged, and empowered to learn.

6. Declarations

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