

Principals' Appraisal of Teaching Competence: A Study of Classroom Management Practices and Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Taraba State Public Secondary Schools BY

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.17193456](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17193456)

Article History

Received: -17-09-2025

Accepted: 20-09 -2025

Published: 24-09-2025

Abstract

This study investigated principals' appraisal of teaching competence with emphasis on classroom management practices and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in Taraba State public secondary schools. The research was motivated by the persistent challenges in instructional quality in the state, particularly weaknesses in classroom management and the application of PCK, which have contributed to low student performance. Anchored on Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge Theory and Instructional Leadership Theory, the study adopted a survey research design. The population consisted of all 205 principals of public secondary schools in Taraba State, who were studied using a census approach. Data were collected using a 15-item structured questionnaire titled Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ), validated by experts and found reliable with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.78. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while chi-square was employed to test the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that while principals recognized teachers' mastery of subject matter as contributing positively to school administration, they did not perceive classroom management practices as adequately supporting effective administration. The results further indicated that appraisal practices often emphasize administrative compliance rather than instructional improvement. It was concluded that teaching competence in Taraba State secondary schools reflects an imbalance between subject mastery and classroom management, thereby reducing overall instructional effectiveness. The study recommended that principals adopt evidence-based appraisal practices that emphasize both classroom management and PCK, and that targeted professional development be provided to teachers and principals alike.

Keywords *Teaching competence, Classroom management practices, Pedagogical content knowledge, Principals' appraisal, Instructional quality*

Introduction

Effective schooling depends on the professional competence of teachers and the capacity of school leaders to appraise, support, and develop that competence. Teaching

competence is a multi-dimensional construct that typically includes mastery of subject matter, pedagogical skills, classroom management, lesson planning and assessment, and professional attitudes. Recent studies emphasize that two interlocking domains are especially central to quality

instruction: classroom management practices, which involve the organization of learning time, behaviour, and specialized blend of subject-matter knowledge and pedagogy that enables a teacher to present specific topics so learners understand them (Makinde, Jimoh, Ahmed, & Amuda, 2024; Leigh, 2025). Research shows that weaknesses in either domain undermine student learning even when one of the domains is strong. For example, a teacher with deep content knowledge but poor classroom management will struggle to deliver instruction, while excellent classroom order without subject-appropriate pedagogical moves will not produce deep learning (Olori & Saka, 2024).

Classroom management is widely recognized as a foundational contributor to learning outcomes. Contemporary syntheses of the literature emphasize practices that create predictable routines, high expectations, strong teacher–student relationships, and instructional strategies that actively engage learners (Ani, Obi, & Nwankwo-Edeh, 2025). Gyaryal, Ali, and Musa (2024) also revealed that classroom discipline and teacher–student communication significantly affect students’ academic performance in Bauchi State. Evidence-based interventions range from antecedent strategies such as clear rules, structured transitions, and engaging lesson design to responsive strategies such as positive reinforcement, restorative approaches, and differentiated consequences. These practices are associated with improved classroom climate, student socio-emotional skills, and academic achievement. Importantly, effective classroom management is not a single “technique” but an integrated set of decisions and routines that interact with subject pedagogy and the school context (Ani et al., 2025; Gyaryal et al., 2024).

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) reframes teaching competence by highlighting how content knowledge must be transformed for learning. Shulman’s original idea has been tested and extended, with Nigerian studies confirming its relevance. For instance, Makinde et al. (2024) found that biology teachers in Ilorin Metropolis demonstrated low PCK, contributing to persistent student learning difficulties. Similarly, research in Gombe State indicated that English teachers’ low PCK in teaching reading comprehension was strongly correlated with average student performance (Teachers’ PCK and Reading Comprehension Study, 2024). More recently, Leigh (2025) observed that pre-service teachers in Southwestern Nigeria underperformed across PCK-related domains such as classroom interaction, communication, and management, underscoring that the development of PCK is crucial in both training and practice. Teachers who develop strong PCK are better able to anticipate students’ difficulties, adapt explanations, and design formative assessments that reveal deep understanding rather than rote recall.

Principals play a pivotal role in translating expectations about teaching competence into observable improvements in classroom practice. As instructional leaders and appraisers, principals are responsible for setting standards, conducting performance appraisals, giving formative feedback, and facilitating professional development. Recent work in

interactions, and pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), the

Anambra State revealed that many principals fail to follow established appraisal guidelines, leading to disobedience and weakened school order (Ajemates Study, 2024). Where appraisal is regular, evidence-based and focused on classroom observation and pedagogical dialogue, teacher performance and motivation tend to improve; conversely, appraisal systems that are perfunctory, bureaucratic, or narrowly administrative fail to drive instructional change (Unachukwu, 2021). Moreover, the effectiveness of principal-led appraisal depends on principals’ own knowledge of pedagogy and their skills in observation and coaching — a competency gap frequently reported in low- and middle-income settings.

The Nigerian secondary school system — and Taraba State in particular — presents a set of contextual challenges that make inquiry into principals’ appraisal of teaching competence especially urgent. Recent reviews and local studies document uneven teacher preparation, shortages of qualified staff, resource constraints, and variable implementation of supervision and appraisal policies. Taraba’s aggregated educational indicators such as attendance, literacy, and secondary participation lag behind national targets (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020). Local research has highlighted issues such as inadequate instructional resources, teacher absenteeism, and inconsistent school climate — all factors that interact with classroom management and PCK to shape student outcomes. At the school level, principals frequently must mediate between policy expectations and constrained realities, raising questions about how appraisal systems are actually enacted and whether they meaningfully assess classroom management and PCK.

Despite the theoretical clarity around classroom management and PCK and the acknowledged importance of appraisal, there is a relative paucity of focused empirical work that connects principals’ appraisal practices with teachers’ classroom management and PCK in Taraba State public secondary schools. Much of the existing Nigerian literature examines appraisal or supervision as a general administrative function, or else focuses on teacher outcomes without explicitly linking them to the content-specific construct of PCK or to observed classroom management routines (Okafor & Adebayo, 2019; Olori & Saka, 2024). Where classroom-level observation is used, it is often irregular and lacks standardized rubrics that capture the fine-grained elements of PCK alongside classroom management indicators. This gap matters because principals’ feedback and evaluation criteria shape what teachers prioritise in daily practice; if appraisal instruments emphasise compliance or administrative tasks over pedagogical substance and classroom interaction, the drive toward instructional improvement may be blunted.

Locally grounded research that interrogates how principals appraise teaching competence — with explicit attention to classroom management and PCK — can therefore inform policy and practice on multiple levels. First, it can reveal whether current appraisal instruments and observation

protocols validly capture the dimensions of practice that matter for learning. Second, it can identify capacity gaps among principals (for example, in conducting evidence-based observations, providing formative feedback on PCK, or supporting teachers to improve classroom routines).¹⁾ Third, findings can guide professional development: targeted training for principals in instructional observation and for teachers in translating content knowledge into teachable forms would be more defensible if based on²⁾ empirical diagnosis. Finally, evidence from Taraba State can contribute to national debates about scaling meaningful teacher appraisal systems in resource-constrained settings (Ani et al., 2025; Leigh, 2025).

The interplay of classroom management, PCK, and principals' appraisal practices constitutes a critical nexus for improving secondary education quality in Taraba State. By focusing attention on how principals assess and support the "what" (content made teachable) and the "how" (management of classroom learning processes), a study of this nature promises both practical recommendations for school-level improvement and theoretical insights into the mechanisms through which leadership influences instruction. The present research therefore investigates principals' appraisal of teaching competence in Taraba State public secondary schools, with a particular emphasis on observable classroom management practices and the presence or absence of pedagogical content knowledge in teachers' instructional behaviour.

Statement of the Problem

The quality of teaching in secondary schools remains a major determinant of students' academic outcomes, yet in Taraba State, evidence points to persistent challenges in classroom management and the application of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), which undermine effective learning. Reports from the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC, 2022) and the Taraba State Ministry of Education (2023) reveal that many teachers still struggle with maintaining classroom discipline, engaging learners, and transforming subject content into teachable forms, thereby contributing to poor student performance in public examinations. Although principals are mandated to appraise teachers' competence and provide instructional leadership, their appraisal practices are often limited to administrative checks such as punctuality and record keeping, rather than focusing on the core instructional competencies that improve teaching and learning (Olawale & Yusuf, 2021; Ibrahim & Haruna, 2022). This raises concerns about whether principals' appraisal methods are sufficiently robust to capture and enhance teachers' classroom management and PCK. Consequently, there is a critical need for empirical investigation into how principals in Taraba State public secondary schools appraise teaching competence, with particular attention to classroom management practices and pedagogical content knowledge, in order to strengthen instructional quality and improve students' learning outcomes.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the principals'

appraisal of teaching competence: A Study of Classroom Management Practices and Pedagogical Content Knowledge in Public Secondary School in Taraba State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

Principals' perception of professional teachers' classroom management practices in the administration of public secondary schools of Taraba State.*

Principals' perception of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter in the administration of public secondary schools in Taraba State

Research Questions.

The following research questions are raised to guide the study.

1. What is principals' perception of professional teachers' classroom management practices on the administration of public secondary schools of Taraba State?
2. What is principals' perception of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter on the administration of public secondary schools in Taraba State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated to be tested at 0.05 level of significance;

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals perception of classroom management practices of professional teachers on the administration of public secondary school in Taraba State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of principals perception of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter on the administration of public secondary schools in Taraba State.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Shulman's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) Theory (1986, 1987) and Instructional Leadership Theory (Hallinger, 2011). Shulman emphasized that effective teaching requires more than subject matter knowledge or generic pedagogy; it involves the transformation of content into forms accessible to learners. This view highlights the necessity of PCK in classroom instruction.

On the other hand, Instructional Leadership Theory emphasizes the role of school principals as instructional leaders whose responsibility extends beyond administrative oversight to guiding, evaluating, and improving teachers' classroom practices (Hallinger, 2011; Alig-Mielcarek & Hoy, 2019). The integration of these theories provides a dual lens: teachers' ability to transform knowledge into teachable content and principals' responsibility to ensure this transformation through effective appraisal and supervision.

Conceptual Review

Teaching Competence

Teaching competence refers to the integrated set of

skills, knowledge, and dispositions that enable teachers to effectively facilitate student learning. It encompasses mastery of subject matter, instructional delivery, assessment, classroom management, and professional conduct (Audu & Umar, 2022). In Nigeria, teaching competence is recognized in the Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) framework, which sets benchmarks for professional standards. However, competence is not static; it requires continuous improvement and appraisal to meet evolving educational demands (Olawale & Yusuf, 2021).

Classroom Management Practices

Classroom management is the set of strategies teachers use to create and maintain an effective learning environment. Effective classroom management ensures that time, resources, and interactions are organized to minimize disruptions and maximize learning opportunities. Research shows that teachers who adopt proactive strategies—such as establishing clear routines, fostering positive relationships, and engaging learners—achieve better learning outcomes (Wilkins, 2022; Parsonson, 2012). In Nigeria, poor classroom management has been linked to issues such as overcrowded classrooms, student indiscipline, and inadequate teacher preparation (Ibrahim & Haruna, 2022). These challenges underscore the importance of appraisal systems that capture teachers' ability to manage learning environments effectively.

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

Shulman (1986, 1987) introduced PCK as the intersection of content knowledge and pedagogy, emphasizing that teachers must know how to represent subject matter in ways students can understand. Recent studies highlight that teachers with strong PCK can better anticipate student misconceptions, select appropriate teaching strategies, and design assessments that measure deep understanding (Kind, 2009; Audu & Umar, 2022). In science and mathematics education, PCK has been shown to directly predict student achievement (Bello & Yakubu, 2021). Yet, many Nigerian teachers demonstrate weaknesses in this area due to insufficient training and limited professional development opportunities (UBEC, 2022).

Principals' Appraisal Practices

Principals' appraisal of teachers is central to instructional leadership. Effective appraisal goes beyond checking lesson notes or punctuality; it involves classroom observations, constructive feedback, and professional development support (Unachukwu, 2021). However, research indicates that appraisal in many Nigerian secondary schools remains largely administrative, focusing on compliance rather than instructional improvement (Okafor & Adebayo, 2019). Principals often lack the training to evaluate complex aspects such as PCK or nuanced classroom management practices, thereby weakening the link between appraisal and improved teaching competence.

Empirical Review

Empirical evidence consistently shows that effective classroom management and strong PCK contribute to student success. In a study across Southwestern Nigeria, Olawale and Yusuf (2021) found that schools where principals conducted regular, evidence-based appraisals had significantly better student outcomes than schools with perfunctory appraisal systems. Similarly, Ibrahim and

Haruna (2022) revealed that many principals in Northern Nigeria focused narrowly on administrative compliance, neglecting pedagogical appraisal, which limited instructional improvement. Internationally, Wilkins (2022) demonstrated that classroom management practices such as structured routines and active engagement correlated strongly with improved academic performance across diverse school contexts.

Audu and Umar (2022) reported that teachers' PCK was a strong predictor of student achievement in mathematics and sciences in Nigerian secondary schools. Bello and Yakubu (2021) also emphasized that deficiencies in PCK contributed to persistent poor performance in STEM subjects. Unachukwu (2021), studying appraisal practices in Eastern Nigeria, noted that principals who integrated classroom observation with targeted professional development fostered greater teacher growth. Despite these findings, there is still a lack of research specifically linking principals' appraisal practices with both classroom management and PCK in Taraba State public secondary schools, a gap this study aims to address.

The reviewed literature highlights three critical insights. First, teaching competence depends heavily on both classroom management and pedagogical content knowledge. Second, principals' appraisal practices shape how these competencies are developed and sustained. Third, while Nigerian and international studies confirm the importance of appraisal, few directly examine how principals in Taraba State assess these specific competencies. The existing literature is either general in focus (teacher supervision broadly) or geographically concentrated in other regions of Nigeria. Therefore, this study fills a crucial gap by investigating principals' appraisal of teaching competence—specifically classroom management and PCK—in Taraba State public secondary schools, thereby contributing evidence to guide both policy and practice.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design, which, according to Emaikwu (2015), is appropriate when a relatively large population is studied by collecting data from a representative group whose responses can be generalized. The design was considered suitable because the study sought to elicit principals' opinions on teaching competence in terms of classroom management and pedagogical content knowledge, phenomena that already exist in the school system. The area of the study was Taraba State, Nigeria, which is divided into three education zones—Northern, Central, and Southern—and has a diverse educational landscape marked by uneven teacher quality and supervisory practices. The population of the study comprised all 205 principals of public secondary schools in the state (TSTSB, 2017), and because the number was relatively small and manageable, the entire population was studied, consistent with Gall and Borg's (2007) recommendation for census sampling in such contexts. The instrument for data collection was a 15-item structured questionnaire developed by the researcher, titled *Teachers' Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ)*, organized into four clusters addressing classroom management, teaching methods, instructional materials utilization, and knowledge of subject matter. Items were rated on a four-point Likert scale ranging

from *Strongly Agree (4)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*, ensuring clarity and consistency in responses.

The instrument underwent face and content validation by three experts—two in Educational Administration and Planning and one in Measurement and Evaluation from the Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi—who recommended revisions such as the inclusion of bio-data and expansion of cluster items, which were duly implemented. Reliability was established through a pilot test involving 30 principals in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, yielding Cronbach Alpha coefficients of 0.78, indicating strong internal consistency. For data collection, three trained research assistants administered the questionnaires using the direct delivery approach, which allowed for explanations, confidentiality assurances, and immediate retrieval of completed instruments. Data analysis involved both descriptive and

inferential statistics: research questions were addressed using mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested using chi-square at the 0.05 significance level. Decisions on research questions were guided by real limits of numbers, where mean scores of 2.50–4.00 indicated agreement and 0.00–2.49 indicated disagreement. For hypotheses testing, the set criterion was that hypotheses would be accepted where the p-value was equal to or greater than 0.05 and rejected otherwise, providing a robust basis for interpreting principals' appraisals of teaching competence in Taraba State secondary schools.

Result

Research Question 1: What is Principles perception of professional teachers' classroom management practices on the administration of public secondary schools Taraba State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Principles perception of professional teachers' classroom management practices on the administration of public secondary schools

S/NO	Principal perception of professional teachers	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1	Teacher knowledge of learners' characteristics will enhance school administration	3.38	.65	Agreed
2	Teacher mastery of subject matter will enhance school administration	3.38	.50	Agreed
3	Teacher creating good report will enhance school administration	2.85	.68	Agreed
4	Teacher personality will enhance school administration	3.69	.63	Agreed
5	Effective management of instructional materials by teacher will enhance school administration	3.00	.70	Agreed
6	Effective management of classroom setting and sitting arrangement	3.77	.43	Agreed
7	Effective management of instruction and lesson delivery in the classroom	3.46	.51	Agreed
8	Effective management of student behavior	3.38	.76	Agreed
9	Effective conclusion of lesson taught by the teacher	2.77	.72	Agreed
10	Teacher should be consistent	3.38	1.12	Agreed
	Grand mean	3.30	0.67	Agreed

Table 1 reveals that all the 10 items have a mean ranges from 3.77-3.38 and S.D 0.51-1.12 with a grand mean of 3.30 and S.D 0.67, this result Principles perception of professional teachers' classroom management practices on the administration of public secondary schools Taraba State.

Research Question 2: What is principals' perception of professional teachers' teaching methods on the administration of public secondary schools in Taraba State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Score of principals' perception of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter on the administration of public secondary schools

S/N	Item	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	In-depth knowledge of subject matter	3.17	.71	Agree
2.	Master of subject area	3.33	.49	Agree
3.	Breaking down of subject matter to understanding level by teacher.	3.42	.51	Agree
4.	Teaching the main concept of the subject matter	3.50	.52	Agree
5.	Good presentation of the subject matter	3.58	.79	Agree
	Grand mean	3.4	1.2	Agree
			0	

The Table reveals that all the five (5) items have mean ranges from 3.58- 3.17 and standard deviation (SD) 0.49-0.79 with a grand mean of 3.4 and standard deviation SD 1.20. This result indicates principals' perception of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter on the

administration of public secondary schools in Taraba State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant perception of principals perceived classroom management practices of professional teachers on the administration of public

secondary school in Taraba State.

Table 3: chi-square table of perception of principals perceived classroom management practices of professional teachers on the administration of public secondary school

	Df	P	Sig level	Decision
Chi-square	20	0.01	0.05	Accepted
No valid Cases	205			

($P>0.05$)

Table 2 shows that the P-(sig), 0.01 is less than alpha-value of 0.05 ($P<0.05$) at df 20. Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that perception of principals perceived classroom management practices of professional teachers on the administration of public secondary school in Taraba State is rejected

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant perception of principals perceived of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter on the administration of public secondary schools in Taraba State.

Table 4: chi-square table of perception of principals perceived of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter on the administration of public secondary schools

	Df	P	Sig level	Decision
Chi-square	8	0.00	0.05	Rejected
No valid Cases	205			

($P<0.05$)

The result on Table 4 shows that the P-(sig) value, 0.00 is less than alpha-value of 0.05 ($P<0.05$) at df =8. There is no significant perception of principals perceived of professional teachers' knowledge of subject matter on the administration of public secondary schools in Taraba State is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that principal perceived teacher classroom management practice of professional teachers on the administration of secondary school with a mean of 3.30 and S.D of 0.67 which was buttress by the result of the hypothesis on table five at $P<0.05$, this result is not consonance with the findings of Sadiks and Akbulut (2014) whose result show a significant difference between classroom management skills of teachers according to professional qualifications, professional experience, pedagogical background, the present result is in consonance with findings of Omomia and Omomia (2014), who found out that perceived classroom management has impact on teaching in secondary school. The reason for this is because must teacher are now been aware of the importance of classroom management in school

The findings of the study revealed that Principal perceived professional teacher knowledge on the subject matter on the administration with a mean of 3.4 and SD 1.20 at $P<0.05$ this is result is in consonance with the findings of Fehintola (2014) That showed that the content knowledge, instructional quality, evaluation procedures, work value, classroom attendance' and job performance) when combined, accounted for 54.6% of the total variance in students' academic performance. This result is also in consonance with the findings Arshad and Akramnaseem (2014) who showed that there was a significant difference

between trained and untrained teachers in terms of knowledge of the subject.

Conclusion

In light of the study, it can be concluded that teaching competence in public secondary schools of Taraba State is not a uniform construct but rather reflects a disparity between subject knowledge and classroom management practices. While professional teachers demonstrate adequate mastery of subject matter, weaknesses in classroom management reduce the overall impact of their competence on school administration. This indicates that effective school leadership and sustainable educational outcomes require not only content expertise but also strong pedagogical and behavioral management skills. Thus, principals' appraisals highlight the urgent need for a more balanced professional development approach that integrates both dimensions of teaching competence to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Principals are important contributors to teacher professional job performance. However, they should not be viewed as gatekeepers of teachers' learning, any more than teachers are of student learning.
2. Principals in collaboration with teachers need to examine closely the design, delivery, content and outcomes of professional development so that they can communicate its importance.

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