

# Classroom Management in the Student-Teachers' Teaching Practicum: Challenges and Recommendations for Teacher Education

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Classroom management has become one of the critical issues which student-teachers face in their teaching experience when entering the teaching practicum. This study explored the concerns of student-teachers regarding challenges and strategies in classroom management. It was part of a larger scope of a study concerning the dilemmas that student-teachers faced during teaching practicum. This study used a sequential explanatory mixed method design consisting of two phases: phase one was a quantitative method and the second phase was a qualitative method. The quantitative data were collected using questionnaires and the qualitative data were collected by means of interviews and reflection journals about their experiences in coping with the students' discipline and compliance. The findings of this study prompt a discussion about the importance of providing the student-teachers with classroom management skills in teacher education, before the teaching practicum. It also highlights the issue of classroom management which involves the shift of focus from managing only the behaviour to both managing the behaviour and learning.

**Keywords:** *Classroom management, Student-teachers, Teaching practicum, Teacher education*



## Introduction

Several researchers have reported that student-teachers struggle emotionally during their teaching practicum (Baecher, 2012; Canh, 2014). This is due to the student-teachers' expectations that the theory they learn in the pre-service teacher education program can guide them in doing their teaching practice at schools, but then realise that it is different from the reality (Canrinus, Bergem, Klette & Hammerness, 2017; Yuan, 2018; Zeichner, 2010). One of the critical situations commonly faced by beginner teachers is making the classroom orderly (Kwok, 2020; Reupert & Woodcock, 2010). Particularly for the student-teachers, classroom management early in their teaching practicum can be very challenging which may affect their teaching performance (Mudra, 2018; Ragawanti, 2015) and can even demotivate them to choose 'teaching' as their future professional career (Cabaroglu, 2014; Farrell, 2016; Moses, Berry, Saab & Admiraal, 2017).

The classroom environment comprises of complex elements that are both physical and non-physical in which students and teachers are engaged to attain instructional purposes (Wolff, Jarodzka & Boshuizen, 2017). The complexity in the classroom represents a condition in which several events and activities take place simultaneously which can change quickly and sometimes unpredictably, and may last for months or even years (Kwok, 2017). These demanding and complex conditions are placed particularly on the teachers when managing their classroom, namely establishing and maintaining the classroom as an orderly environment for students to learn. Content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge are necessary for effective teaching (Shulman, 1987). Classroom management knowledge which is embedded in the pedagogical knowledge, is needed by teachers to put actions from planning, organizing, and monitoring lessons to react to students' behaviours in attaining the desired learning goals (Paramita, Sharma, & Anderson, 2020).

Classroom management is defined as how order (cooperation) is created and sustained in the classroom environment to attain the goals of instruction and learning (Wolff *et al.*, 2017). Further, the ideas of orderliness depends on several aspects: (1) the situations, (2) the teachers in control of classroom management, (3) the settings, (4) the actions of the teacher in creating and maintaining the order ranging from planning and organizing the lessons to distributing the resources, explaining rules, monitoring activities, and reacting to individuals and group



behaviour, and (5) circumstances (e.g. the instructional goals, the learning activities, the participants involved, and the time of doing the activities) (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019).

In the discussion of pre-service teacher education programs, experts advocated that the programs need to be coherent and closely related to the practice in which the student-teachers' teachings take place, particularly in their first teaching experience in the practicum (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). The crucial need of the student-teachers in their beginning practice of teaching is classroom managerial skills (Wolff *et al.*, 2017). Before the student-teachers go to the real field of teaching, which is the teaching practicum, they need at least the basic skills to manage a classroom (Paramita *et al.*, 2020).

Although the concern of language regarding classroom management and students' disruptive behaviours has been explored, undergraduate (student-teachers) students felt that it is necessary to explore more ways to cope with students' misbehaviour and compliance in classrooms (Debreli & Ishanova, 2019). The data on these aspects would provide important information for the teacher education programs to improve the student-teachers' competence in classroom management.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the student-teachers' challenges regarding classroom management in the teaching practicum?
2. What are the causes of these challenges?
3. How do the student-teachers cope with these challenges?

### **Research Methodology**

The issue raised in this article, which is about the English student teachers' classroom management skills, was the part of a larger scope of a study concerning the dilemmas the student-teachers faced during their teaching practicum regarding the gaps between theory and practice.



### **Research Design**

This study was conducted using a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design, this design where sequentially divided into two phases of data collection methods, i.e. the quantitative data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire, the results of the quantitative phase were decoded and based on these findings interview questions were formulated for the qualitative phase of the study. Based on this design, the quantitative data usually gets more emphasis than the qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). However, the researchers may give priority to the qualitative data collection strategy or make it the principal method for data collection, because the data collected quantitatively, which comes first, would become the input for the principal strategy (Morgan, 1998). Therefore, in the case of this study, the qualitative data became the priority. In the qualitative phase, a multiple case study approach was used (Yin, 2009). In addition, during the quantitative phase, the researchers used a preliminary quantitative survey to as a guideline to select the participants for the qualitative data collection phase (Morgan, 1998).

### **Research Participants**

Participants were purposefully selected for the interview sessions, this means that besides having the willingness to participate, they also met the criteria which enabled the detailed exploration and understanding of particular phenomena to be researched. These criteria comprised of four demographic variables which were part of the quantitative phase of the study, i.e. university (two private universities and one public university), three different levels of schools (i.e. junior high school, senior high school, and vocational high school), gender, and GPA (varied in ranges from 2.00 to 4.00).

As mentioned earlier that a quantitative questionnaire was used to select the respondents for the second phase. Participants used the Likert-scale questionnaire selecting answers ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. Student teachers from three universities were invited to fill out the questionnaires, 5 out of 81 respondents who filled out the questionnaires were selected for the qualitative data collection phase. The respondents were selected regarding the consideration of some criteria, i.e. they agreed to participate in the second phase, they experienced dilemma which the study aimed to investigate, and they represented the respondents who had various backgrounds based on the four demographic variables.

**Table 1: Participants Selected for Case Study Analysis**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Group 1 Pre-Teacher Training Program 1</b>		<b>Group 2 Pre-Teacher Training Program 2</b>		<b>Group 3 Pre-Teacher Training Program 3</b>
<b>Respondents</b>	N=1	N= 1	N = 1	N = 1	N = 1
<b>Placement School</b>	Vocational High School	Junior High School	Senior High School	Vocational High School	Senior High School
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>GPA</b>	3.50 – 4.00	3.50 – 4.00	3.10 – 3.49	2.70 – 3.00	3.50 – 4.00

This study was conducted after the completion of the student-teachers' teaching practicum. The time spent in schools varied, for about four to six weeks, but they had to stay for the whole period. Prior to the teaching practicum, four student-teachers visited schools on two separate occasions for an 'apprenticeship' or 'observation' program; the first visit was done in semester 2 or 3 and the second one was in semester 4 or 5. Two student-teachers visited the same schools as the placement schools for teaching practicum and the other two spent the program at different schools.

### **Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis**

In between the interview sessions, the student-teachers were also asked to write down their stories guided by a narrative framework consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces. The aim is for student teachers to make a coherent story filling in the spaces based on their experiences and reflections (Barkhuizen, 2014, 2015). The data from the student teachers' stories and interviews were analysed in a parallel manner regarding similar categories of themes.

The authenticity procedure also included interviewing the student-teachers several times (4-5 times for each participant) with one interview lasting a duration of approximately 30-90 minutes. A flexible interview guideline was employed. By employing these kinds of interviews, the participants could best voice their perspectives unconstrained (Creswell, 2012). It was flexible interviews, meaning some questions were based on the previous questions, or followed the previous ones or were based on the answers.

## **Findings**

The results of the study depicted unpleasant situations related to classroom management in the school-based teaching practicum that left these student-teachers emotionally shocked. These reality shocks were triggered mainly by two factors that were generally experienced, particularly in the first experience of teaching: (1) the misbehaviours of the students during the class and (2) their reluctance to participate in classroom activities. This study also revealed the causes of those problems and how the student-teachers in this study coped with those unexpected situations.

### ***Student misbehaviours***

The student-teachers who participated in the qualitative phase of this study were Erika, Dilan, Donna, Mila, and Yuan (pseudonym). The respondents reported different kinds of disruptive attitudes in their classrooms during their teaching practicum period, which included bullying students with physical and mental impairment, talking to each other during class time, showing verbal aggression, interrupting and shouting at the teacher improperly, as well as sleeping in the classroom.

Erika was placed in a school with students with special needs, including physical and/or mental impairments. Although these conditions surprised her and left her unsure on how to interact with them, the most worrying situation she had to face was coping with some male students in the classroom who often bullied a student with a physical and mental disorder.

“In my class, there is a student with mental and physical impairment. I found that many times he was bullied physically and mentally by his friends who are males in a majority. Firstly, that made me afraid and worried that I could not handle it properly”  
(Erika, Reflection).

Another respondent, Dilan, who studied at the same university as Erika, also discovered tension at first when he observed the school in the apprenticeship of observation program (prior to teaching practicum). He found that some students showed verbal aggression towards the teacher. This situation appeared to be emotionally disruptive and had an impact on his motivation to teach. He reported that:



“It was so surprising that some students repeatedly talked over the talk of the teacher and shouted at the teacher. I also noticed that one female student was not only reluctant to come forward to do a task but also shouted and mocked at the teacher. I know that they made it for fun but it made me fear to become a teacher if I also find such a bad experience” (Dilan, Interview 1).

Dilan had his own experience regarding the students’ disruptive attitude when he was assigned to teach a class. He said that ‘to get their attention was very difficult and they showed inattentive behaviours. This situation overwhelmed him with emotion and anger (Dilan, Reflection). Such a situation also happened to Yuan. He depicted it in the following quote.

“Some students were naughty and difficult to be controlled and talked to each other during the class. It might be because I am still a trainee teacher so that I was often ignored by the students” (Yuan, Interview 1).

Mila in the teaching practicum had to face students who had an annoying habit of sleeping in the classroom. This not only happened in her class but also in her mentor teacher’s class while she had to replace her to teach there.

“In Class XI Science 1 I discovered a student sleeping during the lesson. After coming to him to make him wake up, he then continued doing the tasks. I was proving that this way was successful in the class but not in Class XII. Although repeatedly I reminded him to wake up, he/she disobeyed me and kept sleeping” (Mila, Interview 2).

In Donna’s case, the undisciplined attitude usually occurred during the afternoon lessons where her students were unwilling to pay attention to her. She felt annoyed when her students were busy on their mobile phones, using it for their own business. This continued to happen, and with no idea on how to stop it, she felt confused and feared offending the students if she reprimanded them. As she said:

“Teaching students at noon could be difficult particularly to get their attention. They did not focus on the lesson anymore. Most of them never stopped using their mobile phone during class, and some talked to each other” (Donna, Interview 1).

### ***Student’s reluctance to do the tasks***

Not only the unwillingness of giving attention to the teacher, but also refusing to perform tasks, had made some student-teachers (Dilan, Donna, and Mila) disappointed and confused. For instance, Donna explained that although she felt she had a loud voice, some students could not hear her. She blamed the class for being so noisy (Interview 1). On another occasion, she also found that only the same students every time were willing to respond to her request for doing the tasks.

“To make the students motivated to learn in the class is difficult that when I, for example, asked them to give examples or write sentences on the whiteboard, only some students, the same students, were voluntarily to participate. The others just took notes and looked at their friends. When they were asked to do so, they said ‘I can’t do this and still try to understand it’” (Donna, Interview 2).

In an interview, Mila also stated the similar situation as she reported that:

“Once I replaced my mentor teacher to teach in Class XII that I found that some of the students were naughty. Furthermore, they showed their reluctance to do the task” (Mila, Interview 1).

### ***Factors that influenced classroom management constraints***

The student-teachers were divergent in describing the reasons of why unpleasant situations related to the students’ disruptive attitudes might occur. Dilan, for example, exclaimed that the students’ reluctance to pay attention and respect to him as their teacher during the practicum was due to his lack of pedagogical knowledge and skill in managing and teaching the students. As Dilan said:



“It was very difficult for me to get the students’ attention. Moreover, they did not respect me as the teacher candidate. This made me overcome with emotion and become angry. Firstly, I thought that it was because of the students but then I would say that it might happen because there were some mistakes from me in teaching them and getting their attention” (Dilan, Reflection).

It is also mentioned in Dilan’s reflection above that besides the lack of knowledge and skill in classroom management, he also believed that the students’ disruptive attitudes were due to their status as ‘practicing teachers’ or ‘teacher trainees’ so they felt that they had less power or authority in the classroom. Underestimating the status as the practicing teacher also happened to Yuan. He felt that the students were difficult to manage since they knew that he was not a ‘real teacher’, so they ignored him (Yuan, Interview).

Donna tried to identify the causes of the students’ reluctance and lack of motivation to participate in class and to perform the given tasks. She tended to blame herself of the inability to make the lesson interactive and to behave more sternly while the students were not paying attention:

“It (referring to the students’ reluctance to participate) might be caused by the way I taught them that it was probably monotonous and less stern” (Donna, Interview 1).

Different from Donna and Dilan, Erika believed that the attitude of the student who did the bullying was influenced negatively by some others who persuaded him to violate the rules, for example making noise during class and bullying the students with special needs. Another aspect was the lack of love and attention from the students’ families and teachers.

“I think that situation might be caused by several aspects like one student influenced the others to become unruly students and their joking was uncontrolled. The lack of love and attention from parents, teachers, and school authority also may cause such an unexpected situation to happen” (Erika, Interview 1).

### *Strategies to cope with classroom management constraints*

The respondents also varied in responding and adjusting the real conditions they found during the teaching practicum and what they expected before they were sent to the placement school regarding the students' misbehaviours during the class. For example, Donna talked about feeling helpless in motivating the students to participate particularly in attracting the students who were busy playing on their mobile phones:

“I am still not sure about how to make the students interested and want to listen to me during the class” (Donna, Interview 1).

In addition, she was worried to offend the students if she reprimanded them to stop playing with the mobile phone during the lesson. This situation was also faced by Mila she just ignored her student's inappropriate behaviour and continued to discuss the tasks with other students after she tried to reprimand the student who was sleeping during the lesson several times (Mila, Interview 2).

However, Donna still attempted to invest some strategies like she explained that:

“I recalled the way my lecturer attracted a student's attention chatting inappropriately in a class by pointing at her/him and asking him/her to pay attention” (Donna, Interview 1).

Similarly, Yuan tried to replicate his mentor teacher's way on dealing with the 'unruly students' by coming closer to the intended students and reprimanding them. He said

“I did like what my mentor teacher reacted to such a disruptive student that was by reprimanding the students. Or, I came closer to the student and asked him/her why she/he made noise during class” (Yuan, Interview 1).

This strategy went well in managing the misbehaviours shown by some students but did not work when it was applied to other students.

Researcher: Did they keep silent after you did it?

Yuan: Yes, the mature students did, but those who haven't been (mature) didn't, even they tried to persuade their friends sitting next to them to be noisy again (Yuan, Interview 1).

In a very frustrating, even probably intimidating situation, people may do something that seems to help or look attractive, but it might not bring positive values and good examples for school-aged students particularly. Some respondents also experienced this situation in that they made a 'shortcut' strategy to cope with classroom management problems. One interesting fact was found when the researcher interviewed a respondent, Erika. She said:

"I was trying to give him (the *difable*/different ability) the answers to the questions in the worksheet. It aimed at preventing the mocking voice from the other students occurred. Why? Once I have seen my friend teaching him, I saw that 'Putra' (the name of the *difable*) answered the questions wrongly and some of his classmates shouted at him 'Wow if you can't do it, just say it or don't answer the questions'. Then, he looked bursting into tears. He might be very ashamed, I think. That is why I gave him the correct answers. But surprisingly, he was good in English and could answer the questions without my help" (Erika, Interview 2).

Dilan, on the other hand, tried to solve the problem in motivating his students to enact tasks by giving some rewards to the students. Two kinds of rewards were given to the students, i.e. an amount of money and some snacks.

"I tried to control the students' misbehaviour and motivate them to participate in the classroom activities by giving them some rewards if they tried to perform the task in front of the class like giving money or snack. I noticed that the students, although their grammar was still wrong, made the effort to come forward and appeared confident" (Dilan, Interview 1).

Emotional challenges faced by the student-teachers regarding classroom management could bring some positive values for them and opportunities for developing their pedagogical skills, like material development competence. For instance, Erika found that the bullying phenomenon



happening in her class led her to select the materials which might be able to anticipate the bullying or at least reduce the students' bullying actions.

- Me (researcher): Why did you choose this topic, bullying?
- Erika: It is suitable, isn't it ma'am? Because before my mentor teacher told me what I had to teach, I knew that the challenge I would find when teaching here in this SMK (vocational school) was that there were many bullying incidents. So that I was thinking of how to make the materials related to this. (Erika, Interview 2)

## Discussion

The findings of this study support the results of previous studies, that issues on classroom management become the salient concern of beginner- or student-teachers, particularly during the teaching practicum, (Bromfield, 2006; Gan, 2013; Reupert & Woodcock, 2010) and that disruptive behaviour and motivation to enact tasks remain the major challenges that student-teachers face (Bromfield, 2006; Gan, 2013; Wolff *et al.*, 2017).

Most student-teachers in this study felt insecure about their ability to manage the students' misbehaviours and motivation to perform the class tasks. This lack of pedagogical knowledge with special reference and strategies to classroom management specifically, Kumaravadivelu (2012), describes it as procedural knowledge, might be what the student-teachers felt was the cause of their unpreparedness to teach. Therefore, one aspect that has been highlighted in this study is the need of the student-teachers to be equipped with classroom management skills to solve students' unruly behaviours and motivate them to perform tasks, because the competence in managing the class is important to make the student-teachers ready to teach (Cabaroglu, 2014). The lack of these skills might be caused by insufficient practices for improving those skills given before the teaching practicum by the teaching training programs (He & Lin, 2013). One study reported that providing the student-teachers with a coursework unit in classroom management affected the increase of the student-teachers' perceptions of their preparedness and confidence in handling the students' misbehaviours and willingness to participate in the classroom activities (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012).



Another aspect that contributes to the stressful situation regarding classroom management is related to their social and emotional competencies (Kuswandono, 2017), like feeling unconfident (e.g. Donna's case), powerless (e.g. Yuan and Dilan's case), and less emphatic (e.g. Erika's case) in this study. Their views to deal with classroom management problems are in line with the argument of Jones, Bouffard & Weissbourd (2013) that "social and emotional competencies influence everything from teacher-student relationships to classroom management to effective instruction to teacher burnout".

Regarding the solutions of coping with classroom management challenges, providing models of classroom management is one of the techniques applied in teaching classroom management. It was also used by the student-teachers in this study, Yuan and Donna adapted senior teachers' techniques in handling the students' unexpected behaviours. The problem for many teachers who use this method is that the student-teachers tended to copy these models for addressing behavioural issues rather than learning to analyse the problems before deciding to take any strategies for coping with it (Bromfield, 2006; Reupert & Woodcock, 2010). Accordingly, critically reflecting on what is happening in the classroom should be encouraged in the teacher training program (Bromfield, 2006; Farrell, 2016).

One of the issues raised by scholars is the shift of focus regarding classroom management, from focusing on managing the behaviours to managing the learning (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010). This idea is underlying the two approaches to classroom management, i.e. behavioural and ecological (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Influenced by behaviourism, teachers focused narrowly on monitoring and managing students with behavioural problems and on taking strategies for the problems. In this study, most student-teachers also emphasized using strategies called low level or initial corrective strategies (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010) for addressing behavioural issues, such as rewards, reprimands, physical proximity, pointing, or calling the student's name as a warning. Recognition is given that classroom management is far more complex than just controlling behaviours because focusing on this aspect often appears ineffective. As a student-teacher expressed:

- Researcher: Did they keep silent after you did it?
- Yuan: Yes, the mature students did but those who haven't been (mature) didn't, even they tried to persuade their friends sitting next to them to be noisy again (Yuan, Interview 2).

The process of classroom management then turned in to an ecological approach that put special attention on the importance of 'context-specific community building (Kumaravadivelu, 2012) in which there is a shift in focus, i.e. from generic teacher traits to classroom-specific management models, from interactions with individual students to management of the class as a group, and from managing behaviour to managing learning. Kumaravadivelu (2012) found two main aspects of managing classroom learning: talk management and topic management. The talk management involves managing the structure of information exchange, for example, in using the types of questions being asked to the students that asking more open or referential questions rather than display questions allowing the students and teachers to give a closed set of responses. The topic management relates to a certain theme or topic of the talk based on the students' profiles or needs for example. In this study, a student teacher, Erika selected her teaching materials based on the problem regarding the disruptive attitude which some of her students had toward a student with mental and physical impairment. The topic of the lesson she chose was about 'bullying' because she found this phenomenon happening in her classroom very upsetting. It was also one of the prevention strategies regarded as essential to preclude the misbehaviour problem (Zuckerman, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

For the student-teachers in this study, the teaching experience in the teaching practicum at schools became a challenging moment. The problems regarding classroom management made them shocked and frustrated. The findings of this study reveal that the challenges the student-teachers encountered regarding classroom management during the teaching practicum were about handling the students' inappropriate and disruptive behaviours and reluctance to engage in the tasks. The student-teachers felt that the causes of the problems were mainly about the lack of classroom management knowledge and skills, lack of power, and lack of confidence. Also, the strategies which student-teachers used to cope with classroom management mostly responded to



the students' misbehaviours 'on the spot' (e.g. reprimanding, physical proximity, and pointing to the students) and not preventing the disruptive behaviours.

Therefore, there is a need to provide the student-teachers with adequate skills regarding classroom management through either an additional course or a course unit in the teacher education. It is also important to emphasize that the skills and knowledge of classroom management are not only focused on coping with students' behaviours, but also providing the students' opportunities for learning.



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