

Exploring Preservice Teachers' Classroom Management Skills during Teaching Practice: Perspectives of University Supervisors

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Abstract

South African universities have been under tremendous pressure to improve preservice teachers' quality and implement the Minimum Requirement for Teacher Education (MRTEC) as a direct response to the outcry of poor training of teachers. Preservice teachers face classroom management challenges during their teaching practice. Therefore, this study aims to identify the gap in the training programme and propose alternative pathways that might improve classroom practice to enable preservice teachers to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This study draws on classroom observation by university supervisors during teaching practice. Six university supervisors were purposively and conveniently sampled to participate in this study. Online narrative reflections, Zoom group meetings, and WhatsApp one-on-one semi-structured interviews were used to generate data as part of qualitative inquiry. Findings identify weak coordination between fundamental modules and co-modules as the hindrance to effective classroom management. Yet, university supervisors are critical of the poor implementation of classroom management skills as though they are immune from the training process. Therefore, this study recommends that the Teaching Practice Unit introduce a compulsory practical demonstration centre that will use nearby schools before practice teaching officially commences.

Keywords: Classroom Management Skills; Preservice Teachers; Student Teachers, University Supervisors (US)

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Introduction

Primarily, the purpose of classroom management goes beyond preventing interruptions during the teaching and learning process but ensures that behaviour is minimised (Sivri & Balci, 2015). Jansen (2004) argues that preservice teachers should be exposed to classroom management dynamics as envisaged in their teaching practice programme. Exposure to the real classroom environment empowers them with the requisite skills to manage crises that disrupt the teaching and learning process. However, this does not suggest that the skills they have acquired as teacher trainees are good enough for them to manage classes. That said, exposure to basic classroom management skills suggests that some might be well-equipped whereas others may not be well conversant with managing classes as they present their lessons (Sethusa, 2020). In essence, preservice teachers are supposed to have acquired an ability to control and maintain order in the classroom environment during the teaching and learning process. Thus, if preservice teachers can manage classrooms effectively, there is a great hope that they can ensure effective teaching and learning toward achieving learning outcomes. This may be so because classroom management skills encapsulate the use of behavioural and instructional strategies that increase classroom-wide on-task behaviour and address learner misbehaviour as it rises (Greenberg et al., 2013).

For teachers to manage classroom discipline efficiently, they need proper and requisite skills, and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are expected to equip them with these skills. Preservice teachers must master classroom management skills, which is an essential component of effective teaching (Freeman et al., 2014). Therefore, professional teacher competence (König, 2015) is a critical element of a highly qualified teacher with a repertoire of skills (Flower et al., 2014). Hence, the success of any teacher can also be measured by an ability to manage the classroom during the teaching and learning process, and so are preservice teachers during teaching practice. For clarity's

sake, preservice teachers are those HEIs students studying to attain their professional teaching degrees called Bachelor of Education (BEd) (Dube et al., 2021). They are equipped with classroom management skills to prepare them for the actual school situation during teaching practice, where they are expected to face learner misbehaviour head-on and control classroom activities.

This study attempts to understand theory and practice that defines how pre-service teachers implement classroom management skills during practice teaching. This study indeed researches the new approach and implication of such practices towards improving the quality of skills for preservice teachers.

The Conceptualisation of Classroom Management

In this study, the term classroom management means the management of the classroom for learning by both experienced and preservice teachers (Mkhasibe et al., 2020). At the heart of this process is motivating and empowering learners about the consequences of bad behaviour while maintaining an orderly and peaceful learning environment. Preservice teachers always want to achieve an excellent repertoire for successfully managing classes; however, elements of misbehaviour always raise questions (Francis & Oluwatoyin, 2019). Misbehaviour arises when a learner's actions and interactions disrupt and distract the flow of the learning process (Dibapile, 2012).

The literature suggests a strong relationship between an instructional approach to teaching and classroom management, which is the field of teaching (Henaku & Pobbi, 2017; Kavrayici, 2020). Classrooms are sacred spaces where learners and teachers converge under the disguise of knowledge construction, sharing, and cognitive growth. Hence, classroom management represents the much-needed space of endless opportunities for learners. They access learning material, time, physical conditions, and motivational factors as core principles that enable them to learn all things

needed for professional development (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). Researchers, such as Henaku and Pobbi (2017) argue that a learner's learning depends on the ability of the teacher to manage the classroom beyond his or her presence. In Ghana, such teachers are indicators of quality teachers because of their ability to manage the classroom towards learning and achievement of learning outcomes (Kurtkut, 2017).

Researchers have recommended that teachers possess minimum classroom management skills such as authority, patience, knowledge, and time management (Sibiya et al., 2019; Sethusa, 2020). The suggestion made by Ferrier-Kerr (2009) is that techniques involving patience, setting classroom rules, keeping to the set schedule, being aware of the causes of behaviour and being consistent in the practice of these classroom management techniques are mandatory. The application of these techniques has a long-lasting solution to curbing student behaviour like shouting out, refusing, task avoidance, not paying attention, and engaging in a turf war with teachers, which take away the attention from teaching and promotes a chaotic learning environment (Kurtkut, 2017). The involvement of all stakeholders in the classroom management process is an absolute necessity to send a strong signal to those purporting chaos during teaching and learning. However, some studies suggest that some preservice teachers often lack strategies for regulating and managing classroom interaction (Claessens et al., 2016; de Jong et al., 2013; Eisenman et al., 2015), and this manifests itself when they struggle with managing classrooms during the teaching practice period.

The study undertaken in Australia reported that preservice teachers perceive classroom management as a serious challenge (Peters, 2012). This notion may suggest that even though preservice teachers are equipped with classroom management skills, there are still some challenges. Some of the solutions for this challenge include but are not limited to organising the classroom's physical layout, organising teaching learning support material (LTSM), engaging instruction, matching learners'

ability levels, routinising procedures, applying positive behaviour supports and behavioural interventions, teacher monitoring and delivering highly prepared lesson (Brophy, 2006). This argument was supported by Christofferson and Sullivan (2015) that preservice teachers should establish classroom rules, facilitate smooth transitions between teaching and learning activities, monitor learner performance, and communicate an awareness of classroom behaviour. These are strategies that preservice teachers should be equipped with before they attend their teaching practice. If preservice teachers fail to initiate and implement the above strategies for effective classroom management, they may find it challenging to manage their classrooms during teaching practice.

Teaching practice is a 6 to 8 weeks period where preservice teachers get the opportunity to experience and 'experiment' their knowledge and skills in a real teaching and learning environment (Goh & Matthews, 2011). They display and demonstrate their teaching competencies and are evaluated by university supervisors to check if they have secured requisite pedagogical content knowledge and skills. Amongst other aspects, preservice teachers are evaluated on classroom management; hence university supervisors are expected to report back on what they observed during evaluation. Therefore, teaching practice can be viewed as the most influential component of teacher education, and some preservice teachers have regarded it as one of the most challenging, difficult, and frustrating aspects of a teacher education programme (Ferrier-Kerr, 2009). Teaching practice aims to enhance confidence in speaking and communication, teaching confidence and skills, interpersonal skills, new world views of education and culture, and adapting to new working cultures (Kabilan, 2013). The evaluation of preservice teachers is aimed at establishing if preservice teachers are ready to be teachers after the intensive training, they acquired at HEIs.

Gasser's Choice Theory

This study identified Choice Theory developed by Glasser, famously called the Control Theory, proven to solve classroom management problems. The theory is underpinned by several principles derived from human needs. Glasser (1998) identified survival, belonging, freedom, power, and fun as essential human needs that promote desirable or undesirable behaviour inside the classroom. It has been proven that teachers cannot control behaviour by dictating to them without basic needs, but human needs must be satisfied to gain their attention leading to positive behavioural changes (Glasser, 2001). Studies suggest that human needs, such as food, shelter, physical comfort, etc., are means for survival likely to supersede other fundamental needs for human functioning. Learners need security in the classroom; otherwise, uncertainty creeps up to threaten survival. This view was supported by Gabriel & Matthews (2011) that teachers are responsible for improving learners' welfare by encouraging healthy eating, a healthy lifestyle, and adequate sleep, among others. In South Africa, a large number of learners come from abusive homes, poor households, and unsafe environments. However, Glasser (2001) argues that better classroom management, arranging sitting, and air circulation, among others, are essential, which will be conducive to classroom learning.

The need for love and belonging is vital to a student's satisfaction. This is perhaps one of the most essential needs in the Choice Theory. Glasser (1998) argues that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that students are loved and cared for. The way to fulfil these needs is by allowing students to share their knowledge with their friends. The students must feel that they are accepted and respected by classmates and adults (Frey & Wilhite, 2005). The need for freedom further helps in making choices. Here making choices for the students is vital. This gives a feeling of independence and autonomy. To achieve this, students must be given time to create, think, and have sufficient space and independence, thus giving the students a sense that they have made a choice (Frey & Wilhite,

2005). This will further enhance their confidence in participating in classroom activities. Frey & Wilhite (2005) believe that knowledge is the power that defines the capability of the child to critically engage in real-life issues and it is not about dominance over the other therefore it must be discouraged in the classroom environment.

Methodology

Due to the nature of this exploratory case study design, this research was approached qualitatively because it studied social phenomena about how people experience aspects of their lives, how they behave, and how interactions shape their relationships (Barbeau et al., 2013; Teherani et al., 2015). A qualitative method was employed to collect in-depth information from university supervisors' classroom management skills of preservice teachers. For data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 university supervisors (US) who were purposively sampled, whereas random sampling was used for selecting schools. Semi-structured interviews were adopted because they are characterised by a dialogue between researcher and participant, guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes, and comments (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Purposive sampling was used to frame this research because it allows a researcher to choose participants based on the characteristics participants hold. To analyse the data, thematic analysis was viewed as apt because it enabled the researcher to go through the responses repeatedly for in-depth understanding, categorised data into a theme and sub-themes, and then analysed the data for meaning-making.

Findings and Discussion

The study's finding is presented below, following the participants' responses. The responses are presented guided by the research question of the study. The study focused on exploring preservice teachers' classroom management skills during teaching practice following the view of their university supervisors. The report of the interviews conducted for the selected university supervisors on the subject matter is presented

following different identified themes. The participants were identified using the acronym “US” to mean ‘University Supervisor’ and a subset number. For instance, US₁ stands for University Supervisor 1. This is for ethical reasons to avoid the use of names of participants and to ensure anonymity.

Theme: Classroom Management Skills

The finding from the participants of the study shows that while many preservice teachers tend to have good classroom management skills, few are still defaulting in this area. Meanwhile, the report from the preservice teachers also indicates that the good classroom management skills displayed by preservice teachers depend on certain factors such as prior notice of the supervision exercise or the influence of subject mentors and/or other full-time teachers as well as the culture of the school. Some of the reports of the university supervisors on the management skills of the preservice teachers are presented below:

US₁: student teachers displayed good management skills. They ensured that the classrooms were well organised.

Similar to the view of US₁, US₇: holds the view about the cleanliness of the classroom with regards to good management skills by stating:

US₇: Classroom management skills start with classroom management, such as cleanliness and arrangement of desks. And our students put a lot of effort into this. This shows that they have good classroom management skills.

Additionally, another university supervisor considers student teachers’ abilities to ensure and maintain discipline amongst their learners as good classroom management skills. One of the university supervisors holds this view:

US₇: Some student teachers were good at controlling their classes and maintaining discipline. With others, it was just a disaster.

This means that while some student teachers can be identified as possessing good classroom management skills, others are poor at this.

The findings following the comments of the USs as identified above on the theme: of classroom management skills imply that the ability of student teachers to be able to ensure good organisation of both their learners and the classroom amounts to the possession and display of good classroom management skills. According to Greenberg et al. (2013), this may be because classroom management skills encapsulate the use of behavioural and instructional strategies that increase classroom-wide on-task behaviour and address student misbehaviour as it rises. Sequel to the study’s findings, it can be argued that well-organised classrooms were counted as a positive display of good classroom management skills for the student teachers. This finding corroborates the works of Sibiya et al. (2019) and Sethusa (2020), who hold the view that good classroom management skills entail the ability of teachers to affirm authority where necessary, be patient with learners, display good knowledge of lessons, appropriate time management, ensure orderliness and neatness in class, amongst others.

Furthermore, two sub-themes were established and used as yardsticks to measure the supervisors’ comments on the classroom management skills of the preservice teachers. These sub-themes are indicators of good or poor classroom management skills and factors influencing classroom management skills.

Sub-theme 1: Indicators of Good or Poor Classroom Management Skills

From the review of participants’ responses (USs), the indicators of classroom management skills include student teachers’ abilities to call learners to order, classroom arrangement for learning purposes and ability to involve passive learners in their teachings. The report of some university supervisors on the identified sub-theme is presented and explained below under different captions.

Indicator 1: Ability to call learners to order— the report of some of the study participants showed that while some student teachers were able to call learners to order, others failed in this regard.

Reports of some identified participants (USs) are presented below:

US₉: Some student teachers were able to call their erring learners to order, but some did not even attempt to stop learners from misbehaving.

US₁₂: All student teachers I supervised were generally prepared and could call their learners to order, except for one female student teacher who had challenges maintaining order in her class. She was too soft and too soft-spoken.

These findings indicate that many preservice teachers had good classroom management skills in calling their learners to order. The findings also imply that classroom management skills also entail the use of words and the strength teacher's voice. For instance, the report of US₁₂:

... except for one female student teacher who had a challenge with maintaining order in her class. She was too soft and too soft-spoken.

The student teacher's inability to maintain order in her class or poor classroom management skill was attributed to her soft nature and soft voice. This finding contrasts with the Glasser choice theory, which advocates that making sure that learners are loved and cared for is the teacher's responsibility, and it aids in good classroom management (Glasser, 1998). Meanwhile, this finding corroborates the work of Sibiya et al. (2019), who opines that learners tend to perceive female teachers as weak, consequently misbehaving towards them due to their nature. At the same time, the Glasser choice theory tends to favour female folks considering that the identified qualities of good teachers reflect their personality.

Indicator 2: Arrangement of the classroom for learning purposes—Student teachers' abilities to ensure that their classrooms are properly arranged for learning purposes are considered part of good classroom management skills indicators. Some of the reports of the university supervisors on student teachers' arrangement of classrooms for learning purposes are presented below:

US₈: Some student teachers were aware of what a conducive classroom environment looks like. For instance, I expect that they should have ensured that the classrooms were properly cleaned, desks were well arranged, the chalkboards were cleaned and if possible or necessary, they should be washed. From my observation, many of the students met my expectation.

US₁₈: The classroom environments of the majority of the student teachers who supervised me were conducive to teaching and learning. I was quite impressed.

The findings suggest that many university supervisors reported positively on this theme. This implies that many student teachers could ensure that their classrooms were properly arranged for teaching and learning to occur. This finding resonates with Glasser's choice theory, which states that for better classroom management, the first thing to be done is to certify that desks are properly arranged for good sitting arrangement and air circulation, amongst others (Glasser, 2001). Glasser further state that such practice would, in turn, create a conducive classroom for teaching and learning activities. Conversely, one of the findings of the work of Sibiya et al. (2019) showed that lack of resources such as desks is one of the major challenges teachers in South African schools face in their attempt to ensure good classroom management. On several occasions, more learners share one desk meant for two pupils and are unable to write well; some others have to write on their knees, while some choose to stand or sit down, crossing their legs to create space for other learners (Sibiya et al., 2019; Mkhasibe., 2020). This indicates that the arrangement of the classroom for teaching and learning activities is the pivot and could be problematic for student teachers. Thus, the abilities of the majority of the supervised student teachers to ensure that such is well handled following the reports of the university supervisors becomes a stride achievement.

Indicator 3: Ability to involve passive learners—in classroom situations, it is common to find passive learners while others are active. The reason for learners' passive and active nature can be attributed to various factors. However, student teachers' ability to involve passive learners while handling active learners is considered an indicator of good classroom management skills. One of the university supervisors reported concerning the supervised student teachers stating:

US₃: The student teachers did not have strategies for involving the passive learners. In most cases, passive learners remained as such throughout the lesson. This does not show good control of the class.

This finding suggests that many student teachers fail to involve passive learners. They instead focus on active learners, whereas good classroom management includes a teacher's ability to carry along all the learners in the classroom regardless of their nature: passive or active. Judging by the Glasser choice theory, all kinds of learners are to be cared for in the classroom by the teacher during teaching and learning activities.

Another participant reported that:

Some of the student teachers were able to manage group learners for learning purposes. This is a sign of a good display of classroom management skills (US₅).

This finding validates the observation of Bean (2021), who holds the view that a teacher's ability to manage group learners in small or large classroom situations indicates good classroom management skills.

Sub-theme 2: Factors Influencing Classroom Management Skills

Sequel to the analysis of the responses of participants (US₅), some of the identified factors influencing classroom management skills include the following: the safe nature of the school environment, the influence of members of the school like the teachers and the principals, and community members, knowing and calling

learners by their names, class grade taught, as well as class size. The report of some university supervisors on the identified sub-theme 2 is as presented and explained below under various sub-headings.

- Safe nature of the school: Safety is always expected to be considered first in any given situation. The school's safe nature influences student teachers' classroom management skills. For instance, the safe nature of the school goes a long way in determining the facilities that would be put in place, and this, in turn, would determine what is at the disposal of the student teachers during teaching and learning exercises. Regarding the safe nature of the school influencing classroom management, one of the university supervisors reported saying:

US₁₆: Many supervised student teachers displayed good classroom management skills, except in two of the high schools that were visited. However, I believe it was because the school atmosphere did not appear safe.

This observation validates Glasser's theory of choice, which supports that the environment for learning is expected to be conducive. This includes being safe for teaching and learning exercises (Glasser, 2001). Meanwhile, in the opinion of Gabriel and Matthews (2011), teachers are to look out for the health and well-being of learners. Suffice it to state that where the teaching and learning environment is unsafe, there is little or nothing a teacher can do to ensure good teaching and learning activities, rather, the focus would be on how learners can be protected and kept safe.

- Influence of Members of the School and Community: Members of the school, such as the teachers and the principals, and the community influence activities that take place during the teaching practice. Moreover, according to Uleanya et al. (2020), members of the

schools and communities are considered stakeholders. One of the university supervisors reported that students tend to misbehave when they know their teachers are not around (US₁₀). In order words, the main teachers teaching the learners influence what happens during the period of teaching practice and how the learners would behave towards the student teachers.

Another participant reported that:

Discipline emanates from rural communities and a disciplined environment (US₁₅).

This implies that in communities where discipline was experienced, student teachers seemed not to have experienced challenges in displaying good classroom management skills.

- **Knowing and Calling Learners by Their Names:** Another identified factor which influences classroom management is the teacher's ability to know, identify and call learners by their names. This tends to make them feel a sense of belonging and tries to comport themselves knowing that the teacher knows them.
- **Class Grade Taught:** The grade taught by student teachers also influences their display of classroom management skills. Analysis of the data collected from participants indicated that student teachers who taught lower grades had more challenges displaying classroom management skills compared to those who taught higher grades. For instance, one of the participants (US₂) reported that:

SU₂: Most of the student teachers had a challenge when it came to managing and teaching Grade R Class. It was so challenging to such an extent that some of the student teachers had tears in their eyes

This finding indicates that the class grade that student teachers are made to teach affects their classroom management skills. Meanwhile, a review of the work of Marzano et al. (2003)

suggests that the level of a class taught by teachers affects their delivery. This implies that the grade student teachers teach influences their display of classroom management skills.

- **Class Size:** The class size of teachers goes a long way in determining the strategies to be adopted as well as the skills to be used. However, in some instances, it takes teaching experience to handle large class-size situations. Similarly, this tends to affect and influence the classroom management skills of students and teachers. The analysed data from interviews with study participants (university supervisors) show that class sizes contribute to the effectiveness of displaying student teachers' classroom management skills. One of the participants reported this saying:

The number of learners in each class and school varies.the large class size affects the performance of student teachers in their classroom management (US₂).

This finding implies that student teachers with large class sizes are likely to perform poorly in their display of classroom management skills compared to their counterparts with small class sizes. This finding corroborates the work of Osborne (2018) and Uleanya (2021) that teachers are affected by large class sizes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study explored the perspectives of university supervisors on student teachers' display of classroom management skills during teaching practice exercises. A qualitative method was adopted for data collection. The study's findings, amongst others, show that many of the supervised student teachers had good management skills. Further findings demonstrate that there are indicators of good or poor classroom management skills. Some of the indicators include student teachers' abilities to call learners to order, arrangement of the classroom for learning purposes and ability to

involve passive learners in their teachings. Also, the study showed that the safe nature of the school environment, the influence of members of the school like the teachers and the principals, and community members, knowing and calling learners by their names, class grade taught, and class size are influences of classroom management skills displayed by student teachers. The study unfolds that student teachers, when exposed to teaching lower grades and large class sizes, are likely to experience challenges with a good display of classroom management skills. Meanwhile, student teachers are expected to be exposed to various experiences that depict the true experience of the teaching profession. Based on these findings, the following we make the following recommendation

- The Teaching Practice Unit of higher institutions of learning should introduce compulsory practical demonstrations using nearby schools before exposing preservice teachers to engage with teaching practice which serves as their assessment. This would give the student teachers a first-hand experience of what to experience during their teaching practice and in the real world of teaching.

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Ethical Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was not funded by any organisation. So, the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest. But for this research, consent forms were obtained from each eligible participant who volunteered to participate.

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Author Contribution Statement

Mbusiseni Dube, Dumsani Mncube and Chinaza Uleanya: conceptualisation, methodology, and software contribution; curation of data, developing the first draft; Conducting empirical research and visualisation of data; re-writing the final draft.

Mbusiseni Dube: Conceptualisation and methodology revising; initial reviewing and cross-checking for references; final reviewing of the draft and final editing.

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