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Pre-Service Teachers’ Classroom Management in Secondary School: Managing for Success in Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore pre-service teachers’ experiences relating to classroom management in secondary school. The accounts took place during the pre-service teachers’ practicum sessions. A semi-structured qualitative interview was conducted with two pre-service teachers to seek their responses relating to the challenges that they faced, how they managed the students in the classroom, and the suggestions they gave for improvement of classroom management. The findings indicated that pre-service teachers’ greatest challenges were from students’ disrespectful attitude towards the pre-service teachers and that students were unmotivated to learn. Among the methods that the pre-service teachers adopted were to create fun activities to attain the students’ attention during lessons, to be friendly with the students and to memorize students’ names. The pre-service teachers also exercised strategies of giving punishment for misbehaviours and giving rewards to positive behaviours. The findings also indicated the need of pre-service teachers to be prepared physically and mentally for the practicum session.

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1. Introduction

Teachers have been regarded as the eminent emancipators of knowledge, values and skills necessary for learners to function and perform effectively in society (Ballantine, 2001). With such high regard given to teachers, they are indispensable assets to a school. However, for schools to keep good overall performance, it is necessary to have a team of teachers who are equipped with professional knowledge and skills in the subject matter, motivated and driven in the profession, committed and able to perform effectively inside and outside the...
classroom (Santrock, 2006). Teachers of the 21st century now face more challenging route to discipline students as the present generation of students are more exposed to various values passed on from peers and the mass media. Students come to school bringing in their personal experiences, anticipation, and values. As a consequence, this pose more challenges to teachers in managing students in classrooms and in schools.

Classroom management skill is among the prime components of efficient classroom instructions and is correlated with students’ learning process in the classroom (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). Disruptions in the classroom will affect students’ focus of attention, and interfere with the learning process if teachers are unable to deal with the students’ misbehaviours accordingly. Students’ understanding, attention span, and willingness to learn are largely influenced by how the teachers control the classroom situation. Subsequently, students’ success in learning is dependent on how teachers manage the classroom as described by Levin and Nolan (2004) that attainment of self-efficacy brings about “improvements in the teaching-learning process and job satisfaction, which ultimately result in gains in student achievement” (pg. 24). Therefore, it is essential that pre-service teachers develop their motivation and find contentment in the career for positive impact of both teaching and learning outcome.

Part of the reasons for students coming to school is to seek knowledge making it indispensable that teachers attain comprehensive content knowledge of subjects that they are teaching. However, despite having comprehensive content knowledge of a subject, there are teachers who fail to deliver their lessons as planned due to poor classroom management. Therefore, to be effective teachers, Hardin (2008) listed three elemental skills that teachers must have. First, teachers must have prepositional knowledge that is knowledge of effective classroom management principles. Second, teachers need to be equipped with procedural knowledge in which teachers must take their classroom management knowledge into practice. Third, teachers must have conditional knowledge of when and where to implement classroom management principle. Effective teachers also utilize various strategies for various types of students, while ineffective teachers make use similar strategies for all students. Such manifestation lead to the conception of teachers as effective classroom managers who are able to get high students involvement in the classroom subsequently reducing or eradicating any sort of defiance among students.

1.2 Theories of Classroom Management

There have been various classroom management theories formulated over the years. Hardin (2008) suggested that these theories can be divided into three broad categories which reflect on the focus and goals of classroom management. First, classroom management is regarded as a discipline. The principles upheld by this category is: “The teacher is responsible for maintaining classroom control, discipline comes before instruction, and consequences must exist for inappropriate behaviour” (Hardin, 2008, p. 4). Among the proponents for this theory are Skinner’s Behavioural Management, Canter’s Assertive Discipline, Jone’s Positive Classroom Discipline, and Albert’s Logical Consequence. For instance, Canter asserted that the important aspect of this model is for teachers to recognize the student who performs good behaviour, support them while behaving accordingly and frequently acknowledge the good behaviour and affirm to the student that the teachers like what the student is doing. According to this model, students obey the rules because they are rewarded for being so, and they also acknowledge the consequence if the rule is broken. The model has been widely practiced in schools and teachers claim it is easy to use and effective (Kizlik, 2009).

Secondly, classroom management is identified as a system. This category of classroom management emphasizes the importance of classroom management that is systematic. Teachers are expected to "plan and organize engaging activities for their students keeping in mind to minimize any kinds of disruptions and defiance during these activities" (Hardin, 2008, p. 5). This model focuses at preventing problem from occurring rather than reacting to the problem. The proponents of this model are Curwin and Mendlor’s Discipline and Dignity, Evertson’s Classroom Organization and Management Program (COMP), Kohn’s Building Community, and Marshall’s Discipline without Stress. As an example, Marshall’s model emphasizes two important elements require for a desirable classroom behaviour which are: “(1) promoting responsibility in students rather than
obedience and (2) articulating expectations and then empowering students to reach those expectations (Charles, 2008, p.149). He also emphasized the importance to project or to utilize positivism crucially on the words that teachers’ speak to students. Punishment on the other hand should be avoided.

Thirdly, classroom management is identified as instructions. It focuses on “to teach appropriate behaviour and social skills, with the focus being on helping students to develop positive interactions throughout their lifetime rather than on behaviour at a particular moment” (Hardin, 2008, p.7). The models fall under this category are Coloroso’s Inner Discipline, Lickona’s Character Education, Bodine and Crawford’s Conflict Resolutions and Peer Mediation, and Gathercoal’s Judicious Discipline. For instance, a strategy that Lickona adopted consists of six steps which she called as “fairness conference” (Landau, 2004, p. 114). The steps are as follows:

i. State the problem: Using an ‘I’ message, the teacher tells the student what he or she sees happening.
ii. Ask for the student’s perspective of the problem. Listen carefully and without judgment to what the student says in response.
iii. Listen actively: Active listening means teachers nonjudgmentally restate the explanation offered by the student.
iv. Problem solve: What possible solutions fit within a teacher’s professional responsibilities and, at the same time, meet the student’s educational needs.
v. Agree to the terms. Agreeing to the terms applies to both teacher and student.
vi. Follow up. Teachers can check in with students later and ask how their solutions are working.

(Landau, 2004, p. 114 -115)

With regard to Research Question 2 that investigates the strategies used by the pre-service teachers, the model which is frequently practiced by the pre-service teachers will be analysed.

1.3 Problem Statement

Researches have shown that students’ emotional and behavioural problems have become major concerns for educators, administrators, and the public (Wyss, Siebert, & Dowling, 2012). Among discipline-related classroom problems students commit include disturbing friends, speaking rudely to teachers, eating in the classroom, disobeying instructions, and failing to hand in homework. As trivial as it may seem, these offences can truly disrupt the teaching-learning processes which result to greater students’ misconduct in school and public setting because the classroom is a significant place where students learn the norms of socialization, and ways of disciplining oneself. It was reported that 2% (equivalent to approximately 100, 000) of five million school students in Malaysia are involved in serious school discipline problems and crime (Zainuddin, 2007). Therefore, resolute actions are critical in getting to the core of the so called trivial disciplinary misconducts before they perpetuated students’ behaviour.

Teachers learn about disciplinary techniques and classroom management through formal trainings and from their personal experiences. Varner (1996) suggested that teachers develop effective classroom management from the duration of service in the related job. Therefore, it could be assumed that teachers would have better classroom discipline management over the period of being in the teaching profession. It is undoubtedly, experience play a significant role in exercising discipline management in the classroom. Nevertheless, it is also important to study the student teachers, being novice and less experienced in the field, the kinds of challenges they encounter in disciplining the students, and ways of managing students discipline in the classroom. Zuckerman (1997) reminded that managing students discipline is one of the prime component evaluated by principals, supervisors and also the public. Therefore, Zuckerman concerned that it could get difficult for pre-service to control and manage discipline related problems in their beginning of work experience particularly during the development of lessons as they must ensure that students are engaged in learning.
1.4 Purpose of Study

Based on the literature, there are many researches being carried out on classroom management, and models and theories are generated with the purpose of to assist pre-service teachers or in-service teachers to manage their classrooms. However, to what extent teachers, significantly pre-service teachers employ the classroom models into classroom especially in this culture which is still not well investigated in contrast to research on the types of disciplinary problem created by students in schools. As earlier mentioned, students’ successes also imply success to their thinking and behaviour. Being novice and less experienced require the student teachers to be more equipped with classroom management strategies to overcome situations in the classroom. Therefore, this preliminary study is undertaken to study the pre-service teachers’ implementation of classroom management during teaching practicum.

The following research questions were the guide for the research being carried out:
1. What are the challenges faced by the student teachers in managing students in the classroom?
2. How do the student teachers manage the students in the classroom?
3. What are the student teachers’ suggestions or recommendations in improving classroom management?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The nature of this study follows the Qualitative Research Approach. Qualitative research is described as “research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials…greater emphasis on holistic description – that is, on describing in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 430). This research fits into a case study design for the purpose to investigate classroom management portray by pre-service teachers. Data were collected using semi-structured interview questions. The interview questions were formulated by the researcher with reference to the research questions. A pilot study was carried out to look for any limitations of the questions. Some changes were made especially to questions that were vague.

2.2 Subjects

This study was conducted on two pre-determined pre-service teachers who agreed to become the subjects of the research. The pre-service teachers were students of Bachelor Degree in Education from one of the local universities and their specializations were in teaching chemistry. The participants’ ages were 23 and 25 years old respectively and both of them were female student teachers. Both of them were in their seventh semester and they have only another one semester to complete their degree of four years study. The participants have taken relevant compulsory and elective courses from the faculty. They also have to spend teaching twelve weeks in the appointed secondary schools. The pre-service teachers had no opportunity to choose the schools given by the committee of Teaching Practicum from the faculty neither they have the objection to the teaching assignments given by the school being appointed. Some pre-service teachers may get students from good classes and some may get from the poor performers. On the last or eighth semester of the program, pre-service teachers were left with a few more courses to take before graduating. The teaching practicum (EDU666) was conducted while the student teachers were in their seventh semester. Prior to going for their teaching assignments, the pre-service teachers had to take a pre-practicum course in the university and also a school orientation program in the
appointed school that they would be teaching. The purpose of the pre-practicum session and the school orientation program were to prepare the pre-service teachers with the teaching practice. Closing event for the teaching practice was a post-practicum session where the students would share their experiences with the other pre-service teachers who had undergone the teaching practice.

2.3 Procedure and data analysis

The participants were called via telephone to determine their agreement on becoming the subject to the research and most importantly they were informed that their identity would be kept secret and they would only be identified using pseudonym, Jas and RY, in the report. Besides that the objective of the interview was also being described to the pre-service teacher so that they were well informed what would be the research concerned about. After certain discussions made, meeting for the interviews were carried out in a room booked in one library of a college and the interviews were done separately. Both interviews lasted about 35 to 45 minutes each. The interviews were tape-recorded using MP4 and later transcribed using Express Scribe software.

The transcriptions were later coded using a coding template. In order to determine the reliability, inter-rater reliability was carried out. The two raters were asked to rate the coding template. The ratings were compared to the researcher’s score and an average score was obtained. One rater had a score of 90% and the other was 60% and the percentage of agreement score was 75% which was considered acceptable. The final step of the analysis was to identify the themes from the coding template.

3. Result

The participants were 2 female pre-service teachers who were undergoing their training in schools for 12 weeks. Being novice, a lot of challenges they had to face especially from teenage students who resided in urban area. Both of the pre-service teachers taught students from form 4 classes which majority of them were 16 years old. Each pre-service teacher was given the responsibilities of managing about 70 students (each class was about 35 students) and 53 students (one class was 35 and the other was 18) respectively. Both of the pre-service teachers taught in different schools. One teacher was given a pseudonym RY and the other was Jas. Both of the teachers taught Science subjects and their classes were normally held in the laboratory. One teacher, RY, had students from among the last classes and the other pre-service teacher, Jas, had student from various academic achievements. According to both of them, some of their students were problematic students but other students were well disciplined.

With reference to Research Question 1, we shall look at the challenges faced by both the pre-service teachers. Majority of the students who created problems concerned with their bad attitude. These students liked to talk a lot in class, were not motivated to come to class, they even slept under the table in the laboratory, refused to listen to teacher, did not submit their assignments, and did not concentrate while the teacher was teaching. Besides attitude problems given by students there were also some other challenges faced by the pre-service teachers. According to Jas, she was disturbed by the announcement projected through the central microphone from the office because she had to stop teaching to allow her students listen to the announcement. Another challenge that Jas had encountered even though not directly, was that she needed to prepare herself for parents who would challenge the teachers’ decisions and interfere with the school discipline.

Research Question 2 seeks for answers as to how pre-service teachers manage their classroom or what classroom strategies they adopted. Being novice, young, and vibrant, the pre-service teachers liked to create fun activities in order to attract the students’ attention. Some of the fun activities were performing chicken dance (as for RY, chicken dance was a way for the students to do body movement and not as a punishment) and also turned on funny videos. These fun activities were able to attract the students back to the lesson. Some other types of strategies that were carried out were being friendly with students. This method also was a successful one for Jas because she had tried being firm and strict at early stage of the practicum and the students did not favoured her until she changed her strategy into becoming a more friendly teacher. Other important strategy that was
implemented by the pre-service teachers was remembering students’ names because as a teacher this strategy must not be neglected because by knowing students’ names, it will become easier for teachers to take necessary steps onto the students. Teacher also must be bold to face students who maybe bigger in terms of the size than the teacher and by doing this, teacher may earn the respect from students. Other strategies used were giving punishment to the students who committed misbehaviours, and giving rewards for positive behaviour. Giving punishment was to deter the students from repeating the negative behaviour meanwhile giving rewards such as RY had given muffin to her student was intended to motivate the students to do the good behaviour. Some other types of strategies were to have good loud voice, being active in class like moving from student table to the other, and also the need to be strict. Being strict means a student teacher can be friendly with their students at certain situation but at the same time the teacher must be strict towards achieving the goal of the class. Being novice, the strategies the pre-service teachers adopted were learnt from their supervisors, mentors, and also through discussion with other student teachers. These were very important support systems in assisting the student teacher in their training.

Finally Research Question 3 seeks to find suggestions or recommendation from the pre-service teachers as how to improve the practicum. Jas said, a pre-service teacher needs to be kind to the students, whereas RY said that pre-service teacher must be well competent in the content subject because that what a teacher should be, and student teacher must have positive personality. As for suggestions to the faculty, the pre-service teacher suggested that there should be one course on classroom management and more in-service observation in schools should be carried more frequently so that pre-service teacher are better equipped physically and mentally to undergo the real practicum.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Classroom management is very important to all teachers from novice to experienced teachers because teacher who are able to manage their students effectively show great joy and confident in teaching and hence may contribute to better students achievement. Nevertheless, to choose the best classroom management strategies that fit certain class requires knowledge and experience because no one strategy fits all. Therefore, teachers need to educate themselves often time regarding classroom management, and many researches have been carried out to improve the learning process. With regards to this research, the pre-service teachers often times used the models promoted by Canter’s Assertive Discipline such as giving rewards for the good behaviours and punishment for the wrong deeds. Examples of rewards given by student teachers were muffin, watching video, and praise of the good behaviour. Meanwhile punishments were in the form of writing the students names in the Teacher Control Book, and change sitting location. Canter asserted that the important aspect of this model is for teachers to recognize the student who perform good behaviour, support them while behaving accordingly and frequently acknowledge them that the teacher like what the student is doing (Kizlik, 2009).

For future research a comparative study can be made between pre-service teachers who are studying in universities and pre-service teachers who are studying in teacher training institute. Both may have their strengths and weaknesses, therefore both institutions can learn from each other. Besides that a study on how experienced teachers compared to new teachers implement classroom management would also be beneficial to be studied. Finally, skilful classroom management could help teachers create conducive setting for an unswerving teaching and learning process. Classroom management is not only about disciplining students, but it encompasses almost everything in the class itself including how teachers manipulate the physical components in the classroom and how teachers react to fast occurring events in the class. As Burden (2003) stated that “teacher acts to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation” (p. 3). Thus, being a teacher means also the need to be wise, not only in the context of content subject but also in managing the classroom.
References


