

Mathematics and Science Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Classroom Management Practices during Practicum: A Case of Copperbelt University Students

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Abstract A Classroom is a formal interactive environment in which a teacher and pupil engage in the process of teaching and learning. The quality of teaching and learning in the classroom is influenced by the teachers' ability to ensure effective classroom management. The purpose of this study was to investigate the Copperbelt University Mathematics and Science Education student teachers' perception of their classroom management practices. In addition the study sought to investigate student teachers perception of their challenges in classroom management practices and to examine gender differences on the student teachers' perceptions of their classroom management practices during the practicum. The study was undertaken with the students doing practicum in secondary schools in the nine provinces of Zambia. A mixed methods research design was used in the study. The sample comprised 112 Mathematics and Science Education student teachers on practicum. Focus group discussion and a questionnaire were used to collect data. Findings of the study show that student teachers had positive perceptions of their classroom management practices and that the practicum profoundly influenced their classroom management practices. Student teachers discovered that effective classroom management required proper planning and implementation of the plans and to handle pupils as individuals. Secondly student teachers perceived that they had several challenges in their classroom management during the practicum. These challenges included handling large classes, poor infrastructure, pupil indiscipline and lack of teaching and learning materials. However in spite of the challenges they faced they learnt and managed to handle pupils in class, present lessons in a systematic and a coherent manner and ensure effective classroom management. The results further show that there was no significant difference between male and female student teachers' perceptions in the acquisition of classroom management skills.

Keywords: *classroom management, student teachers, mentors, practicum, lecturers*

Cite This Article: Leonard Nkhata, David Chituta, Asiana Banda, Beauty Choobe, and Jack Jumbe, "Mathematics and Science Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Classroom Management Practices during Practicum: A Case of Copperbelt University Students." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 4, no. 15 (2016): 1106-1115. doi: 10.12691/education-4-15-9.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

The practicum is a critical component of the teacher education programme in every country. It grants student teachers experience in the actual teaching and learning environment [8,34,36]. Students are assigned to particular schools to practice their teaching. During practicum, student teachers observe qualified teachers at work so as to learn about teaching skills, strategies and classroom achievements [29]. Later they are given an opportunity to teach. It therefore ensures that student teachers acquire skills needed for teaching before their graduation from training institutions. Marais and Meier [29] assert that the term practicum represents the range of experiences to which student teachers are exposed when they work in classrooms and schools. Kombo and Kira [20] add that the

practicum implies every learning experience student teachers undergo whilst in schools. During the practicum students are given classes in an institution of learning so that they practice how to do things on their own with guidance from mentors and the university lecturers.

Among the many areas that are critical to student teachers on practicum is to manage a classroom. This is known as classroom management. According to Evertson and Weinstein [8] classroom management refers to any action taken by the teacher to create an environment that supports and facilitates both academic and social-emotional learning. Effective classroom management is essential to meaningful and successful teaching and learning. Unfortunately, effective classroom management for many student teachers has continued to elude them [11,16,37,43]. Classroom management which is ineffective can be a source of student teachers frustration. Cases of student teachers struggling to develop classroom management skills and therefore failing to control pupils have been reported [14]. Effective classroom management

focuses on preventive rather than reactive procedures and establishes a positive classroom environment in which the teacher focuses on students who behave appropriately [24]. Pilarski [38] also observes that many student teachers have challenges in managing discipline problems they encounter in classrooms. Marais and Meier [29] add that the challenges student teachers encounter during practicum do not only arise from failure to manage discipline of the pupils in the classroom but also from geographical distances, low and uneven levels of student teachers expertise and lack of resources. Furthermore Classroom management challenges arise from Student teachers themselves, teaching points and materials, and the mentors [32]. According to Matus [30], some of the personal factors that affect classroom management include but are not limited to family problems, home factors, feelings of inadequacy, and financial factors. Specific issues related to classroom management include too-high noise level, being unable to identify the perpetrator of an offence when all deny guilt, a pupil who simply refuses to do what he is told, swearing in the classroom, over-familiarity, pupils who hit others, a class which enters the room or area in an over-excited way and is difficult to settle, pupils who run about wildly out of their seats, persistent disruption of a lesson by a pupil or pupils, and a physical fight in the classroom, seating arrangements, giving instructions, setting up pair and group work, monitoring, using students' names, starting the lesson, finishing the lesson, and the group: its dynamics and the needs of the individuals within it [13,31].

These challenges affect the performance of student teachers and to a greater extent make them to view practicum as a hellish experience culminating in their having constant feelings of failure and frustration. Reed [40] and Doebler and Roberson [7] reported that student teachers had problems in classroom control, class monitoring, maintaining on-task behaviour, organizational skills, interacting with pupils, management of groups and time management. Broadbent [2] sums it by stating that practicum is the most challenging experience for student teachers in their training to become teachers. However, Major and Tuo [27] found out that student teachers had several challenges in classroom management but if given more time for teaching, they could gain more experience on it and be able to manage these challenges.

The determinants of effective classroom management are multifaceted. According to Loizou [26] and Sempowicz and Hudson [44] the student teacher-mentor relationship is directly correlated to the student teachers ability to effectively manage the classroom, set appropriate teaching objectives and effectively deliver their lessons. Several studies have revealed that mentors greatly influence the development of student teachers' orientation, disposition, conceptions and classroom practice [45]. The mentor and mentee (student teacher) relationships is not devoid of conflict. The causal factors of conflicts between student teachers and mentors are usually due to the mentors' inability to match their mentorship style to the students' capacity to perform instructional tasks [39], asymmetrical power relationships in which mentors look down on student teachers or over use them without giving them due recognition [23,46]. According to Lindhard [25] such kinds of hidden tensions between student teacher and the mentors have the

potential to inhibit effective mentoring of student teachers and subsequently lead to student teachers poor performance and acquisition of negative attitudes of classroom management and practicum as a whole. The findings of Ngwaru [35] in her research on Pre-Service Student Teacher Practices in the Teaching of English as a Second Language: where results show that some mentors were not very helpful to student teachers affirms this fact. On the contrary good qualities of a mentor should lead to fruitful student teachers' experiences such as the development of self-confidence (Lantz in Rushton, [42]). Mentors are therefore supposed to be open and honest, able to inspire trust and offer constructive criticism to student teachers. Good mentor – student teacher relationships enables student teachers to develop their classroom management skills through observing their mentors instructions and having conversations with them regarding their experiences [4].

Another critical facet of effective classroom management is that student teachers acquire and develop the ability to care and establish supportive relationships with and among learners. They also organize and implement instruction in ways that optimize learners' access to learning which encourage them to be engaged in academic tasks. Furthermore they promote the development of learner's social skills and self-regulation and use appropriate interventions to assist pupils with behaviour problems [8]. Practicum should therefore enable student teachers to take actions to create and maintain a learning environment conducive to successful instruction [3]. In a survey of graduates of various specializations with regard to the importance of teaching skills and the extent to which they acquired them in the practicum exercise at Mu'tah University, Alnaji [1] found that the extent to which student teachers acquired teaching skills was moderate irrespective of area of specialization. These findings agree with those of Mostafa [33] who found that the practicum programme at Alsowas Canal University was effective in developing student teachers' classroom performance.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Classroom management is a critical component of effective delivery of lessons. All student teachers are expected to ensure that that they create environments that will promote effective learning and teaching. This however is not usually the case because many student teachers have failed to do so [19]. It is for this reason that this study was undertaken to investigate mathematics and science student teachers' perceptions of their classroom management practices during practicum.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were threefold;

- 1) To investigate student teachers' perceptions of their classroom management practices during practicum.
- 2) To investigate student teachers' perception of their challenges in classroom management practices
- 3) To examine gender differences on student teachers' perceptions of their classroom management practices while on practicum.

1.4. Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would provide information to teacher educators to place more emphasis on the need for student teachers to use appropriate and acceptable classroom management styles that enhance conducive teaching and learning environments. Furthermore, the results of this study may reveal several challenges student teachers face in classroom management. This might lead to revision of teacher education curricula to reduce the negative classroom management challenges student teachers face and ensure the effective attainment of goals of practicum. Additionally the findings would add to existing literature and be the basis for further research in the field.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study used a mixed methods research design. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie ([18], p.17), mixed methods research design is “the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts and language into a single study”. There are four types of mixed methods research design [6]. These are Triangulation Design, the Embedded Design, the Exploratory Design, and the Explanatory Design. This study employed the Triangulation Design whose purpose is to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic to best understand the research problem [6]. Both the quantitative and the qualitative phases were given equal weight and were conducted simultaneously [10].

2.2. Participants

A sample of 112 student teachers was drawn from a population of the 2013 – 2014 and 2014 - 2015 cohorts of Mathematics and Science Education student teachers. From the sample 100 student teachers responded to the questionnaire and 12 of them participated in the focus group discussion. Student teachers were randomly selected from 63 secondary schools in the 22 districts of nine provinces of Zambia.

2.3. Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data while the focus group discussion and student teachers’

practicum reflective reports were used to collect qualitative data. Researchers formulated student teachers’ questionnaires and tested for validity and reliability in a pilot study. With respect to the student teachers reports, student teachers were asked as part of their assessment to write reports on their experiences and lesson learnt during practicum. The focus group discussions designed by researchers involving student teachers were conducted to ascertain and triangulate the data gathered through questionnaires, and student teachers’ reports

2.4. Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse quantitative data gathered through the questionnaires. It was used to generate frequencies, percentages and to calculate t – tests for independent samples. The focus group discussion was transcribed by Express Scribe. MAXQDA was used in analysing the qualitative data from transcribed focus group discussion, student teachers’ practicum reflective reports to come up with themes respectively. The data was then triangulated to gain a deeper understanding of emerging themes.

3. Presentation of Research Findings

3.1. The Perception of Practicum on the Student Teachers Classroom Management Practices

3.1.1. Support Provided by Lecturers

There were 75 (78.1%) male and 21 (21.9%) female respondents to the question on whether the lecturers provided sufficient assistance to the student teachers. The results reveal that 85.8 % (18) of the female student teachers were provided with sufficient assistance while 14.3 % of them did not receive adequate information from the lecturers. On the other hand 77.2% and 12.3% of males were sufficiently and insufficiently assisted by lecturers respectively. In general findings show that lecturers provided sufficient assistance (79.1%) to their student teachers as indicated in Table 1.

When asked whether lecturers helped students to improve their classroom management practices, 86 (88.7%) of the student teachers indicated that lecturers helped them to improve their classroom management skills. Of those that affirmed that they had been helped by the lecturers to improve their classroom management practices 89.4 % of them were males and 85.7% females.

Table 1. Student teachers response by gender on whether lecturers provided them assistance

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	19	39	7	6	4	75
	Percent (%)	25.3	52.0	9.3	8.0	5.3	100.0
Female	Frequency	1	17	3	0	0	21
	Percent (%)	4.8	81.0	14.3	0	0	100.0
Total	Frequency	20	56	10	6	4	96
	Percent (%)	20.8	58.3	10.4	6.2	4.2	100.0

The student teachers’ practicum reflective reports also revealed that lecturers visited the student teachers too early when student teachers had not settled down. One student teacher lamented that “*the time my lecturer came*

to observe me in the fourth week I was still struggling with classroom management”. Student teachers do their practicum for a period of six weeks within which they are visited by lecturers.

3.1.2. Acquisition of Classroom Management Skills

As an overall response, the findings revealed that 91 (95.8%) of student teachers acquired management skills, 3 (3.2%) were not sure if they did while 1 (1.1 %) claimed

they did not acquire the classroom management skills. In addition the results showed that 72 (97.3%) of the males and 19 (90.4%) of the females acquired classroom management skills as indicated in [Table 2](#).

Table 2. Student teachers response by gender on whether practicum enabled them to acquire classroom management skills

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	44	28	2	0	74
	Percent (%)	59.5	37.8	2.7	.0	100.0
Female	Frequency	7	12	1	1	21
	Percent (%)	33.3	57.1	4.8	4.8	100.0
Total	Frequency	51	40	3	1	95
	Percent (%)	53.7	42.1	3.2	1.1	100.0

There were 94.8% of the respondents who indicated that they learnt how to manage the class well and (3) 3.1% were of the view that they had not learnt how to manage classes well during the practicum. In fact there were almost an equal percentage of males (94.5%) and females (95.0%) that indicated that they had learnt to manage their classes.

Of the respondents 84 (87.5%) stated that they did acquire effective management skills from practicum while 1 (1%) did not. From the females that responded only 19 (85%) acquired effective management skills while the remaining were either not sure or did not acquire the skills. On the other hand, 88.2% of males responded affirmatively to the question.

Student teachers’ practicum reflective reports also revealed that student teachers learnt to put into practice the theory they learnt at the university concerning classroom management, which included creating a good interaction with the learners – *“I learnt how to implement what we learnt from the university into the classroom environment”*.

Student teachers’ practicum reflective reports also revealed that student teachers observed mentors (practicing teachers) teach and that through the observations they realised that teachers used different classroom management styles. They reported that most *“mentors’ classroom management practices were very good because pupils were active and participated in the learning process”*. However, it was observed also that some mentors had difficulties in managing classrooms because they concentrated more on the gifted pupils and ignored slow learners.

3.1.3. Student Teachers’ Levels of Competence in Classroom Management

The responses to question on whether student teachers had achieved higher level of competence in classroom management after practicum was 91% and (88.4%) of males and females respectively indicated that practicum enabled them to become competent in classroom management. The results are shown in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. Student teachers s response by gender on whether they became competent in classroom management after the practicum

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	29	39	5	2	0	75
	Percent (%)	38.7	52.0	6.7	2.7	.0	100.0
Female	Frequency	7	9	3	0	1	20
	Percent (%)	35.0	45.0	15.0	.0	5.0	100.0
Total	Frequency	36	48	8	2	1	95
	Percent (%)	37.9	50.5	8.4	2.1	1.1	100.0

In addition information from the focus group discussion revealed that student teachers had gained confidence. For instance one of the student teachers stated that *“I gained the experience I needed in terms of standing in front of the pupils. I got the courage to stand in front of the pupils. I can now face the crowd and deliver accordingly”*. The focus group discussion also revealed that student teachers had been adequately prepared during the time they were doing peer teaching before they left for practicum.

3.1.4. Pupil Discipline

The findings indicate that 85 (86.6%) of student teachers learnt to discipline the pupils from the practicum and 8 (8.3%) did not. In fact 6 (8%) of the males and 2 (9.5%) of the females did not acquire skills of disciplining pupils during the practicum. The results are shown in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. Student teachers response by gender on whether they learnt how to discipline pupils after practicum

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	29	37	3	5	1	75
	Percent (%)	38.7	49.3	4.0	6.7	1.3	100.0
Female	Frequency	4	15	0	2	0	21
	Percent (%)	19.0	71.4	.0	9.5	.0	100.0
Total	Frequency	33	52	3	7	1	96
	Percent (%)	34.4	54.2	3.1	7.3	1.0%	100.0

Another aspect of discipline dealt with whether Student teachers allowed late comers to enter the class. There were 41 (59.9%) and 30 (39.5%) of the males who allowed and did not allow the pupils to enter the class when they came late. On the other hand 8 (38.1%) and 11 (52.4%) of the female respectively allowed in and did not allow in class late comers respectively. The findings show that of all the respondents, 50.5% allowed late comers in class and 42.2% did not allow them to enter the classroom.

There were 6 (6.3%) and 78 (91.6%) males and females respectively who stated they allowed pupils to leave classrooms to answer phone calls and did not allow pupils to leave class and answer phone calls respectively. The males that responded to the question 69 (90.8%) indicated that they did not allow pupils to answer phone calls when lessons were going on. On other hand 95% of the females indicated that they did not allow pupils to answer phone calls when they were in class learning.

The focus group discussion also revealed that among the strategies student teachers used in class discipline included chasing pupils out of class and warning them. Further, student teachers also indicated that while they handled minor disciplinary cases, serious cases were reported to the Deputy Head teacher. Student teachers also indicated that effective disciplinary strategies resulted in cooperation between student teachers and the pupils. It was also found out that with the passage of time into their

practicum student *teachers'* ability to handle disciplinary cases improved.

Furthermore, the focus group discussion revealed that student teachers exercised authority and were in control of classes irrespective of their age and stature. This according to them created rapport with the pupils and helped them to establish healthy professional teacher – pupil relationships with learners. The student teachers also indicated that pupils became respectful over a period of time and became free to ask questions and engage student teachers into discussions on various issues including what they learnt.

Some student teachers in the reflective reports revealed that “noise makers were sent out and others were punished for misbehaving during the lesson” and that “each lesson should be interactive to create conducive learning environments”. Student teachers reflective reports also revealed that there was need for student teachers to be flexible, friendly and accommodative with the pupils.

3.1.5. Nature of Classes Taught

With regard to the nature of the classes allocated to student teachers, the findings reveal that that 39 (41.1%) of the student teachers were given problematic classes (classes with high levels of indiscipline) while 48 (50.5%) were not given problematic classes. In fact 10 (47.6%) of the females and only 27 (39.5%) of the males indicated they were given problematic classes as reflected in [Table 5](#) below.

Table 5. Student teachers response by gender on whether they were given a problematic class

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	12	17	8	26	11	74
	Percent (%)	16.2	23.0	10.8	35.1	14.9	100.0
Female	Frequency	3	7	0	6	5	21
	Percent (%)	14.3	33.3	0	28.6	23.8	100.0
Total	Frequency	15	24	8	32	16	95
	Percent (%)	15.8	25.3	8.4	33.7	16.8	100.0

In addition to the findings above, the focus group discussion revealed that some student teachers were given problematic classes. According to student teachers there was high pupil indiscipline in some classes. This according to the discussion was evidenced by pupils attending class in drunken state or on drugs. To support the assertion, one student teacher stated “*Okay, in my case [silence] you know boys, [Ooh!] Some could come in class, maybe drunk, [Ooh!]; one can tell that this one has smoked dagga*”. Problematic classes had naughty pupils in class who made noise and agitated to leave for home early on Fridays. In fact it was expressed that pupils

misbehaved to test teachers’ ability to handle classes and see their reaction to indiscipline. It was also revealed from the student teachers’ written reports that some student teachers were given problematic classes.

3.1.6. Development of Interest in Teaching

There were 78 (80.4%) and 13 (13.4%) respondents who indicated that practicum increased and did not increase their interest in teaching respectively. There were 12 (15.8%) of the males and 1 (4.8%) of the females who indicated that practicum did not increase their interest in teaching as indicated in [Table 6](#).

Table 6. Student teachers’ response by gender on whether practicum increased their interest in teaching

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	39	20	5	6	6	76
	Percent (%)	51.3	26.3	6.6	7.9	7.9	100.0
Female	Frequency	6	13	1	1	0	21
	Percent (%)	28.6	61.9	4.8	4.8	.0	100.0
Total	Frequency	45	33	6	7	6	97
	Percent (%)	46.4	34.0	6.2	7.2	6.2	100.0

Students teachers’ responses by field of study on practicum increasing their interest supported the above findings since 37 (80.4%) doing mathematics, 15 (88.2%) doing Biology, 19 (82.6%) doing Chemistry and 4 (80.0%)

doing Physics indicated that their interest to teach increased. However 17.4 %, 5.9%, 8.6% and 20% doing mathematics, Biology, chemistry and physics respectively indicated their interest in teaching never increase.

3.1.7. Teaching Requires Proper Planning and Research

There were 93 (95.9%) student teachers who said that teaching was not easy and it required proper planning and

conducting research in the subject content they taught. Only 2 (2.0%) of the respondents did not find teaching difficult and that there was no need for engaging in research to come up with what to teach. [Table 7](#) represents these findings.

Table 7. Teaching requires proper planning and research in content

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	53	21	1	1	0	76
	Percent (%)	69.7	27.6	1.3	1.3	.0	100.0
Female	Frequency	14	5	1	0	1	21
	Percent (%)	66.7	23.8	4.8	.0	4.8	100.0
Total	Frequency	67	26	2	1	1	97
	Percent (%)	69.1	26.8	2.1	1.0	1.0	100.0

3.1.8. Classroom Time Management

The overall response of those that had learnt the importance of time keeping during practicum was 93 (95.6%). When asked whether practicum had improved

their classroom time management 74 (97.4 %) of the males and 19 (90.2%) of the females that responded to the question indicated that they had learnt the importance of time management during practicum. The information is represented in [Table 8](#).

Table 8. Student teachers response by gender on the importance of time management during practicum

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	50	24	0	1	1	76
	Percent (%)	65.8	31.6	.0	1.3	1.3	100.0
Female	Frequency	13	6	1	1	0	21
	Percent (%)	61.9	28.6	4.8	4.8	0	100.0
Total	Frequency	63	30	1	2	1	97
	Percent (%)	64.9	30.9	1.0	2.1	1.0	100.0

Student teachers’ practicum reflective reports written after practicum revealed that student learnt the aspect of time management within and outside the classroom. They were able to manage time prepare lesson plans and organise teaching and learning materials to ensure well-coordinated classroom activities were undertaken which enhanced effective classroom management.

respondents, 13 (61.9%) and 7 (33.4%) received adequate help and did not receive adequate help in classroom management respectively. On the other hand only 53 (69.7%) of the males acknowledged having received adequate help in classroom management strategies as indicated in [Table 9](#).

3.1.9. Student Teachers Perception of Mentors help

With regard to whether mentors provided adequate help to students in classroom management strategies 66 (68.1%) of the 97 (100%) respondents indicated that they received adequate help in classroom management strategies while 21 (23.7%) stated that they did not. Of the females

The findings from the questionnaire were supported by the findings from the focus group discussion which revealed that mentors observed students and provided guidance to ensure that they were adequately prepared for teaching. Furthermore it was stated that mentors encouraged student teachers to be firm, inflexible and decisive but also friendly with the pupils.

Table 9. Student teachers response by gender on help provided by mentors

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Male	Frequency	19	34	7	13	3	76
	Percent (%)	25.0	44.7	9.2	17.1	3.9	100.0
Female	Frequency	3	10	1	6	1	21
	Percent (%)	14.3	47.6	4.8	28.6	4.8	100.0
Total	Frequency	22	44	8	19	4	97
	Percent (%)	22.7	45.4	8.2	19.6	4.1	100.0

Another finding from the student teachers’ reports revealed that mentors were helpful in ensuring that student teachers effectively managed the classroom environment. One student teacher put it as follows: - *“They helped me in lesson preparations and they advised me on how to handle my classes whenever I had problems”*.

3.2. Student Teachers Perception of Their Challenges in Classroom Management Practices

The focus group discussion revealed that student teachers’ encounters a number of challenges during their

practicum. The challenges they faced were in the following areas:

3.2.1. Large Classes

The student teachers reports also showed that effective classroom management was compromised by the large number of pupils in a class. The student teachers found it challenging in relation to classroom management to teach classes that were too large. For example, one student said that he had a class with as many as 130 pupils. Such large numbers of pupils in class was a source of classroom management challenges to student teachers.

3.2.2. Inadequate Infrastructure

Another challenge, according to the student teachers' reflective reports, was the poor state of the infrastructure. This affected their classroom management as some appropriate teaching methods were not used such as practical activities. According to one student teacher *"although we had a lot of wonderful experiences during the practicum, we also had some challenges such as lack of laboratory facilities"* implying that since practical subjects were allocated more time it was difficult for the student teachers to arouse and maintain pupils' interest and concentration because they could not use appropriate teaching techniques such as experimental and demonstration methods. It was revealed that some chalk boards were too small and some schools had no apparatus and reagents for students to conduct lessons that were pupil centred.

3.2.3. Lack of Resources

Another challenge that the student teachers faced during their practicum was lack of resources. The laboratories lacked the resources they needed to perform experiment. For example, one student teacher said *"the science laboratories did not have equipment to conduct the experiments and the chemistry laboratory was even*

used as a kitchen as a result it was not a conducive environment to conduct experiments". This negatively affected the way the student teachers delivered the lesson content to the pupils.

3.2.4. Discipline

Handling discipline problems was another challenge that the student teachers faced. Examples of discipline problems they faced were late coming, answering phone calls in class etc.

3.2.5. Disruption of Classes

Disruption of classes was another challenge that the student teachers faced. Some student teachers had a number of their classes disrupted several times by authorities beyond them mentors and school administrators. For example, 28.0% of the student teachers indicated that their classes were regularly disrupted during the period of their practicum. Classes could be disrupted for activities such as sports, cleaning the school surroundings, etc.

3.3. Gender Differences on Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Classroom Management

Responses from student teachers on questions related to classroom management skills were scored. This was a Likert Scale instrument and it was scored as follows: Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Neutral = 3, Agree = 4 and Strongly Agree = 5. The scores for each participant were summed up. To determine if there was any statistical difference in acquisition of classroom management skills between male and female student teachers, independent samples *t*-tests were performed on the scores obtained. Table 10 below shows that there was no statistical difference between the mean for males ($M = 37.76$, $SD = 7.73$) and that for female student teachers ($M = 38.14$, $SD = 4.06$) in the acquisition of class management skills, $t(62.48) = -0.31$, $p = 0.76$.

Table 10. Gender differences in acquisition of classroom management skills

Variable	Group	N	M	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Mean Difference	<i>p</i>
Gender	Male	78	37.76	7.73	-0.31	62.48	-0.39	0.76
	Female	21	38.14	4.07				

4. Discussions and Conclusions

4.1. Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Classroom Management Practices

This section discusses the student teachers' perceptions of their classroom management practices during practicum. Student teachers had both positive and negative perceptions of the practicum. One of the perceptions was that they acquired classroom management skills from the practicum. Findings indicate that student teachers had benefited from the practicum because they developed proper interactive and communicative teaching skills that enabled them to effectively manage classrooms. Student teachers who effectively managed classrooms also develop interest in their content knowledge as stated by the Physics and Chemistry student teachers. This is supported by Kunter et.al [22] who stated that effective

classroom management is related to the development of subject-related interest. This was also in line with findings of Conway [5] who emphasised the importance of the practicum in developing classroom management skills in student teachers.

The results indicated that student teachers learnt that time management was critical in proper classroom management. It was revealed that they had learnt the importance of time keeping and acquired time management skills which made them to properly plan for their teaching. An effective use of time to prepare for lessons sets a predictable school and classroom environment in which pupils are given responsibilities and held accountable for their actions thereby reducing the amount of time spent on handling pupils' indiscipline and disruptive behaviours [17]. Effective and efficient management of time ensures proper classroom management since among others it helps teachers to give assignments to pupils at the right time. However findings of this study contrasted the findings of

Reed [40] and Doebler and Roberson [17] who reported that student teachers had problems in time management.

The study revealed that both male and female student teachers acquired classroom management skills after teaching practice. Furthermore, Chien [4] claimed that student teachers were able to develop their classroom management skills during the practicum through adhering to their mentor's instructions and having conversations with them regarding their experiences.

It was also revealed that student teachers had positive perceptions on the level of support they received from the mentors they found in schools during the practicum. It was revealed that 68.1% of the 97 respondents indicated that they received adequate help in classroom management strategies from the mentors. However there were some mentors who were unsupportive and in one case it was reported that male mentors made sexual advances to female student teachers.

4.2. Student Teachers Perceptions of Their Challenges in Classroom Management

Student teachers found classroom management at the beginning of their practicum challenging but as time went on things improved. One student teacher put it as follows; - *"Okay personally, classroom management was in my first week of teaching a little bit challenging"*. Marais and Meier [29] seem to support this when they state that practicum is a challenging but important part of teacher training. Another challenge student teachers faced was the regular disruption of classes. They stated that lessons were disrupted by authorities above them. Large classes were another challenge students faced. During focus group discussion and from the students' practicum reflective reports students lamented at the high numbers of pupils in classes. Some classes had as high as 130 pupils. The challenge of large class sizes negatively affected student teachers' classroom management practices because it was stated that they *"couldn't manage to pay attention to each and every pupil in class."* Furthermore overcrowding negated any meaningful classroom interaction with pupils during lessons. Student teachers could not easily move around in the classroom resulting in a breakdown in communication between them and the pupils. In addition it hampered the use of certain teaching techniques such as experimental and demonstration methods that were effective in ensuring effective classroom management in laboratories.

In addition some of the challenges they had were due to pupils' unruly behaviour. This came out strongly in the focus group discussion and in the students' practicum reflective reports. These findings were in agreement with Goh and Matthews (2011) who in their study listening to the concerns of student teachers in Malaysia during practicum found classroom management was negatively affected by pupils' indiscipline and related pupils behavioural problems.

It was also observed that some mentors negatively affected student teachers classroom management practices. These mentors did not provide guidance to ensure student teachers were prepared for the lessons. Some student teachers indicated that they were demeaned because these mentors entered into classrooms being taught by student teachers and made announcements without conferring

with the student teachers first. This disoriented them and became ineffective in managing classrooms. In some cases female student teachers went into classes disillusioned because some male mentors proposed love to them instead of providing them assistance in classroom management. The findings were in conformity with those of Hamaidi, et.al [15] who found that among the challenges student teachers faced were the lack of support from the mentors and the difficulty in communication with the mentors.

The other challenge highlighted by the student teachers was the lack of teaching and learning materials. This affected their preparation for lessons and they could not get the desired information. According to one student teacher *"lack of test books in Physics, Chemistry and Biology and laboratory materials made it difficult for me to prepare lesson which greatly affected the classroom management because I was not adequately prepared."* These findings are in line with Youn (2000) who found that the challenges during practicum ranged from classroom discipline, motivation of students, and insufficient teaching material. She warned that the challenges student teachers faced were a reality and should not be ignore and therefore needed to be addressed.

In spite of the challenges they faced in the earlier part of the practicum, lecturers and mentors were available to assist them improve the skills. The assistance that they got from the lecturers was very helpful and improved their classroom management skills. This made them to describe mentors as being very supportive. Student teachers affirmed this fact not only in the answers to the questionnaires but also in the focus group discussion as well as in the reports they wrote after the practicum was over. The findings were in line with Mapolisa and Tshabalala [28] who found that the most outstanding positive experience of the student teachers during practicum was the support system offered to them by their mentors.

4.3. Gender Differences in Student Teachers' Perceptions of Their Classroom Management

From the results above it was clear that there was no significant difference between male and female student teachers perception on the acquisition of classroom management skills. Even in the other aspects of teaching there were no significant differences that constituted classroom management such as time management, assistance received from mentors and lecturers on classroom management, teaching problematic classes, disciplining problematic pupils in class and acquiring effective classroom management. The research therefore suggests that both male and female student teachers perceived that the practicum equally impacted them

5. Conclusion

Findings of the study showed that student teachers had positive perceptions of their classroom management practices during practicum. Student teachers were well received by the school authorities, supported by mentors and respected by pupils that positively influenced their classroom management practices. However whilst they perceived the relationship between student teachers and

mentors as either good to very good they encountered a few cases of unsupportive mentors and unruly pupils. These were easily handled by the student teachers. Secondly it was found student teachers perceived that they had several challenges in their classroom management practices during the practicum. However in spite the challenges they had they learnt how to handle pupils in class, and to present lessons in a systematic and a coherent manner. Student teachers discovered that effective classroom management required proper planning and implementation of the plans and that pupils differed one from the other and had to be handled as individuals. Thirdly it was clear that there was no significant difference between male and female student teachers perception on the acquisition of classroom management skills and in the other aspects that constituted classroom management practices such as time management, assistance received from mentors and lecturers on classroom management, handling problematic classes and disciplining problematic pupils in class. The study revealed both the male and female student teachers had similar perceptions of classroom management practices during the practicum.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research it is recommended that

- A country wide research should be done to investigate student teachers' perception of practicum from all institutions offering teacher education training.
- During the theory part of learning methodology course, student teachers should be made aware of the possible obstacles they are likely to face. This can be done by establishing demonstration schools to provide student teachers with necessary skills.
- A further study must be done to investigate the perceptions of mentors, lecturers and pupils on student teachers classroom management practices.

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