

EFFECTS OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT COURSEWORK ON THE PREPAREDNESS OF TURKISH PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS¹

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Abstract

Classroom management is one of the most important skills teachers should gain, as effective classroom management contributes significantly to student learning and development. It is, at the same time, one of the major concerns of pre-service teachers who in many parts of the world have reported lack of confidence in dealing with behavioral problems in class, a problem which over the years was found to lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction. The present study aims to find out the level of preparedness of Turkish pre-service teachers in managing specific problematic student behaviors, and to investigate the impact of two different types of coursework on their level of preparedness.

Keywords: preparedness in managing behavior problems, pre-service education, case-based instruction.

Introduction

Within the preparation of future teachers, great attention is paid to developing content knowledge and pedagogy. However, classroom management actually plays a significant role in a teacher's ability to conduct instruction as the two factors are closely related (Putman, 2009). Classroom management refers to teachers' actions to have order in class as well as to "engage students, or elicit cooperation" (Emmer & Stough 2001, p.103). Burden (2003), focusing on the importance of student-teacher relationships, claims that classroom management needs to encourage "positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation" (p.3). According to Brophy (2006) classroom management includes the arrangement of physical space and resources, creating and maintaining rules, routines, and procedures as well as disciplinary interventions and student socialization actions. Finally, in a more recent definition, Martin and Sass (2010) claim that classroom management includes teacher strategies that oversee student behavior, student interactions and learning. All of these definitions imply that a teacher's success in maintaining an optimal learning environment depends on the ability to coordinate different aspects of the classroom; otherwise, instructional time will be lost for all students.

Learning to be an effective classroom manager is a real challenge (Matus, 1999) and student teachers in general report that they feel underprepared in this area. Giallo and Little (2003)

¹ This paper is part of a project funded by the Marmara University Scientific Research Committee (Project no: EGT-D-15013-0210).

collected data from 54 elementary school teachers and 25 pre-service teachers by means of a survey and found that both groups felt only moderately prepared for effective classroom management. Both groups indicated that they needed additional education in this area. Maskan's (2007) study with 117 pre-service teachers had a similar finding; 81% of the participants believed that classroom management courses they took in their teacher education programs were too theoretical and impractical, being highly disconnected from the real classroom life. In a recent study, O'Neill and Stephenson (2012) investigated whether completing coursework would make a difference on the level of preparedness of Australian pre-service teachers in managing specific problem behaviors and confidence in using management strategies. Data were collected by means of surveys and results revealed that the whole sample of pre-service teachers felt 'somewhat' prepared to manage misbehavior and that completion of coursework significantly increased perceived preparedness and confidence in using strategies and models.

There are only a few studies conducted on the relevant issue in Turkey. In a study with 339 Turkish student teachers, Boz (2008) found out that statements describing participants' self-survival related to classroom management skills in order to provide discipline were among the most commonly mentioned teaching concerns. Like many other researchers (Oliver & Reschly, 2007), Boz suggests insufficient or inadequate preparation for classroom management as a possible cause for this concern and that completion of focused classroom management course during teacher education program might lead to increased confidence and make a difference to how prepared or confident new graduates feel.

PTs' perceived lack of knowledge causes to "doubt their abilities to effectively handle disruptions in the classroom" (Putman, 2009, p. 235) and their belief affected their choice of classroom management strategies. In an effort to provide pre-service teachers with specific knowledge in classroom management, teacher education programs have created coursework focusing on this area. In Turkey, classroom management course was placed in teacher education programs in 1998, as part of the Project initiated by Turkish Higher Education Council which aimed to restructure teacher-training programs. In classroom management courses mostly theoretical information is transmitted to student-teachers through lecturing and opportunities that provide pre-service teachers with practical skills are rare.

The informal talks we had with the pre-service teachers enrolled at different universities in Turkey as well as our observations of pre-service teachers during the student teaching period have also confirmed pre-service teachers' lack of confidence and knowledge regarding classroom management. Hence, for the purposes of the study, we offered a case-based classroom management course in our university instead of the traditional lecture type course. The aim was to help pre-service teachers "traverse gaps between teacher education and classroom context" (Meuwissen, 2005, p. 254) as much as possible. Case-based instruction is considered valuable in teacher education because it enables student teachers to "make connections between theory and practice while examining his or her own beliefs" (Haley, 2004, p. 290).

Thus, in the present study, we aimed to find out the level of preparedness of Turkish pre-service teachers in managing specific problematic student behaviors and to investigate the impact of two types of coursework, i.e., lecture-based and case-based, on their level of preparedness.

Methodology

The Context and the Participants

The participants of the study were 198 pre-service teachers (PTs hereafter) of English enrolled in four-year English Language Teacher Education departments of three state universities in Turkey. All participants were final year students who had already taken a classroom management course in their third year of teacher education program as determined by the Turkish Higher Education Council. The classroom management course offered in three universities was similar in content and focused on the following common issues: the meaning of classroom management; the factors affecting the classroom management; teaching students to cooperate and creating a favorable climate in the classroom; communicating with students and their parents and strategies to deal with off-task behavior in the classroom. While in two of the universities the content was covered by either teacher lectures or PTs' presentations of the chapters, in one university, the lecturers followed a case-based instruction. During the course, PTs worked collaboratively in groups of three and prepared 10-15 minutes long video cases each exemplifying different classroom management problems and possible ways of dealing with the problems. Cases, provided by the instructor, reflected real classroom situations and in each case one specific classroom management problem was demonstrated by PTs. One PT acted as the teacher and applied a specific strategy choosing among the strategies discussed theoretically during the course. PTs were encouraged to adapt the given case to the Turkish context. The video cases created by the PTs were shown to the rest of the class during the course and PTs who watched the videos were asked to reflect on the case and suggest alternative solutions or interpretations. During the term, 30 video cases were created, explored and commented by the PTs.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the study came from the Preparedness in Managing Behavior Problems Scale (PMBPS) (O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012) in order to measure how prepared PTs felt in managing specific problematic student behaviors. The scale included 35 items in three subscales: (1) preparedness in managing behaviors that disrupted learning and non-compliance (15 items); (2) aggressive, anti-social and destructive behaviors (16 items); and (3) disorganization (4 items). The first subscale focusing on the disruptive behaviors included items such as "talking to peers during instruction" and "talking out of turn." Some example items for the second subscale focusing on aggressive and destructive behaviors were "physical aggression to staff" and "bullying or intimidation". The third scale measuring the preparedness to deal with disorganization problem used items such as "forgetfulness" and untidiness."

PTs responded to the scale items on a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from "unprepared" to "very confident". The scale was piloted with 39 PTs and the reliability coefficient was .82. For the analysis, descriptive statistics were conducted in order to see the overall preparedness level of all participating PTs. Independent samples t-test was used to compare PTs who received the lecture-based classroom management course to PTs who received case-based instruction.

Results

Preparedness of PTs

Descriptive statistics applied to the data coming from 198 PTs of three universities reflected that the pre-service teachers felt “somewhat confident” ($M= 3.02$, $SD= .60$) for dealing with the given particular behavior problems in the classroom. When the mean scores for three subscales were analyzed, it was seen that PTs felt most prepared for the behavior problems related to being disorganized, followed by disruptive behaviors and aggressive and destructive behaviors (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Preparedness in managing specific problematic student behaviors

Scale	N	M	SD
(1) Disruptive behaviors	198	3.07	.62
(2) Aggressive and destructive behaviors	198	2.65	.81
(3) Disorganization	198	3.42	.78
Total	198	3.02	.60

N= number of the PTs

The items which received the highest and lowest mean scores were also analyzed for each subscale. For the first subscale measuring the preparedness in managing disruptive behavior and non-compliance, the item with the highest mean score was “talking out of turn/calling out” ($M= 3.65$, $SD= .93$) while the item with the lowest mean score was “whining, pulling faces” ($M= 2.57$, $SD= 1.05$). For the second subscale focusing on the aggressive, antisocial and destructive behaviors, the item with the highest mean score was “student-student conflicts” ($M= 3.11$, $SD= 1.00$) and the lowest mean score was “sexually explicit actions” ($M= 2.06$, $SD= 1.09$). The third subscale measuring the preparedness in relation to students’ disorganization revealed that PTs felt most prepared for the item “late to class” ($M= 3.59$, $SD= .96$) and least prepared for dealing with the problem of untidiness ($M= 3.34$, $SD= .96$).

Impact of different types of coursework on PTs’ level of preparedness

In order to answer the second research question, PTs receiving lecture-based instruction ($N= 133$) and PTs receiving case-based instruction ($N= 65$) were considered as two different groups. Independent samples t-test applied to the data revealed that there was no significant difference between these two groups of PTs in terms of their overall preparedness level to deal with classroom management problems. When their responses for each subscale were analyzed, it was observed that PTs receiving case-based instruction felt more prepared than PTs receiving lecture-based instruction in all categories. In other words, they felt more prepared to deal with disruptive and destructive behavior problems and students’ disorganization, though not at a significant level. The following table illustrates these points.

Table 2: Two different types of coursework and PTs' level of preparedness

Scale	Groups**	N	M	SD	df	t	p*
Overall preparedness	A	133	3.00	.60	196	-.431	.667
	B	65	3.05	.61			
(1)Disruptive behaviors	A	133	3.06	.63	196	-.415	.679
	B	65	3.10	.62			
(2)Aggressive and destructive behaviors	A	133	2.64	.82	196	-.144	.886
	B	65	2.67	.82			
(3)Disorganization	A	133	3.32	.75	196	-.519	.60
	B	65	3.38	.82			

*p<0.05

**A= PTs receiving lecture-based coursework

B= PTs receiving case-based coursework

Discussion and conclusion

The present study was conducted to find out the preparedness level of Turkish pre-service teachers of English in dealing with certain student behavior and to compare the effects of two different coursework on their level of preparedness. The findings of the study revealed that PTs felt “somewhat confident” in managing behavior problems of their future students. When the preparedness levels of PTs receiving two different coursework, i.e., lecture-based and case-based, were compared, it was seen that PTs in the case-based group felt more prepared, though not at a significant level, in managing all types of student problem behavior: disruptive, destructive and disorganization. The higher preparedness level of PTs receiving case-based instruction can be attributed to the nature of such instruction. Case-based instruction is believed to provide students with opportunities to think like a teacher and to come up with alternative ways of practice. During the course, PTs were encouraged to make meaning of the world of the classroom, by developing their own ideas, evaluating situations and making decisions using both their knowledge and experiences. Presenting a case, interpreting it and offering some strategies as a solution provided PTs with a context to prepare for realities of teaching (Butler, Lee & Tippins, 2006).

Although PTs receiving the case-based instruction reported to be more prepared, the difference was not statistically significant and, on the scale, close to “somewhat confident”. Overall the results of the study indicates that classroom management instruction as coursework is not sufficient to fill the gap between theory and practice and Turkish PTs seem to need more practical experiences in real classrooms and longer field placements to feel better prepared to deal with the complex classroom management issues. Deciding how to create opportunities for PTs to further develop theories discussed in class and how to apply

these in their future classes has been a real challenge for most of the teacher education programs. Using enactive experiences with university supervision would increase the likelihood PTs will feel better prepared to retain and make use of behaviors consistent with successful classroom management.

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