

STUDENT-TEACHER EXPERIENCE WITH DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE ALBANIAN SCHOOLS, 7th TO 9th GRADE

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LENIDA LEKLI

University of Elbasan “Aleksandër Xhuvani”

English and German Languages Department, ALBANIA.

E-mail(s): lenida.lekli@uniel.edu.al, lenidagode@yahoo.com

Mob: +355697347490

ABSTRACT

The emblem of a well organized classroom where the teaching process smoothly goes through quiet transitions without encountering disruption seems to have dimmed in teachers' memories over the past years. 7th to 9th grade students are spending more and more off task time which consequently leads to behavior troubles not easily managed by the teachers, sometimes even deviating to unpleasant situations inside the classroom environment. This research paper aims at focusing on student-teachers' experiences in managing disruptive behaviors caused by the pupils in the classroom. Observations have been carried out in different classes, 7th to 9th grade, considered to be the most troublesome ones. There have been identified a variety of problematic outbursts of disruption corresponding to this students' age such as: lack of attention during the lesson, bullying versus student-teachers and their classmates often reflected in the vocabulary used during communicating, lack of respect towards the student-teachers often generating from the students' pre teenage years, student teachers' difficulty in organizing the lesson as a result of not being fully aware of the students' learning styles and their personalities, etc. Beyond a mere identification of such difficulties of the student-teachers, suggestions need to be made in order to help this novice category teachers in their early teaching experience overcome the difficulties. Providing more weeks of teaching practice to the student teachers, establishing a closer relationship to their mentors, organizing mini round tables among students-teachers in order to discuss and negotiate solutions to problems they encounter during the teaching process, offering more classroom management information at university courses, etc. could be effective suggestions in order to reduce the problems student teachers encounter during their early teaching experience.

Key words: student teachers, disruption, behavior, age, management.

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Introduction

“Teaching is the profession that creates all others” (Sedgwick, Fred. 2008)

Sceptical or not on this expression, it is to be admitted that the denotation it bears holds the undisputable truth on the teaching profession and its importance. Teachers teach doctors, judges, other teachers-to-be, engineers, journalists, etc. all tied up to the teaching performance in the classroom.

“Performing” as a teacher in the art of teaching, like an actor/actress does on stage is often considered to be one of the most strenuous, yet stunning challenges teachers often encounter in life. Experienced professional teachers have surpassed such difficulties through experience over time, but for the student-teachers, the framework of teaching seems to be displayed through a series of complications concerning administrative tasks, teaching responsibilities as well as classroom students’ behavior management. The necessity of expanding teaching practice, adding one more year of teacher internship, besides university teaching practice has been accepted broadly due to the bulk of difficulties student-teachers often face when applying their teaching abilities in the classroom. Therefore, through this paper it is aimed to:

- ✚ Point out some of the basic problems most student-teachers face during their teaching practice
- ✚ Generate useful data on student-teachers’ reaction versus teaching practice and managing difficulties
- ✚ Find out to what extend do outbursts of behavior problems influence the teaching process?
- ✚ Identify strategies that can help student-teachers avoid as much as possible behavior problems in order to do their best during their teaching practice

Literature Review

Analysis and discussion of the impact of students’ disruptive behaviors on student-teachers’ practice cannot be conducted without providing an explanation of the concept “disruptive behavior”. When we discuss about disruptive behaviors of the students in the classroom, we tend to refer to behaviors which are sufficiently challenging for the educators and the continuation of the teaching process (Lewis, Ramon. 2009). They vary from unimportant irritating disturbances to severe threatening ones. Carefully managing disruptive behaviors, mainly on teachers’ side can undoubtedly guarantee a successful teaching process. The concept of disruptive behaviors includes a range of undesired, disturbing and problematic students’ attitudes some of which can be summarized in the following Figure 1 (Adapted from Cummings, Carol. 2000):

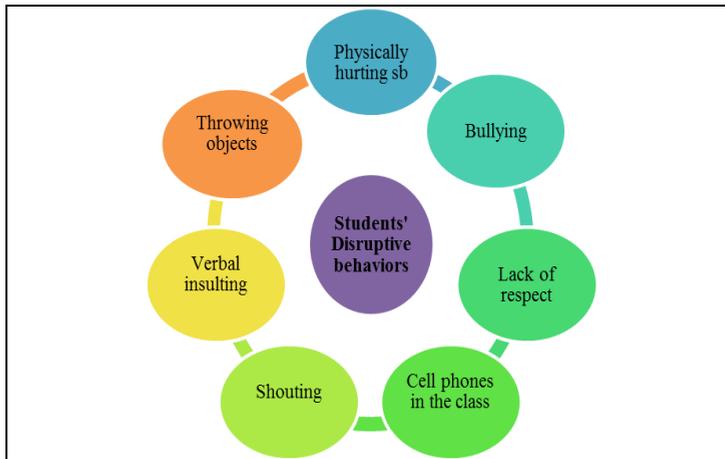


Figure. 1. Students' disruptive behaviors

Attached to the above brainstorming diagram it is necessary to add a classification of these behaviors based on the students who cause them. On one side we do have problematic students who trigger problematic attitudes which severely damage the classroom environment and the teaching process; but on the other side we also have distracted students otherwise known as “disconnected students” (Shindler, John. 2010), whose behaviors may not sound as troublesome as the ones of the above students, but yet their impact is evident in the classroom, especially during the teaching practice of the student-teachers.

Teaching practice has already become one of the most essential aspects of teacher education at universities worldwide. Therefore, more and more attention is being paid to developing practical managing skills on the side of the student-teachers (future teachers) versus problematic students' behaviors in the classroom. Only in this way can they embrace positive results of their first teaching experience. Although it is to be admitted that certain undesired students' attitudes are difficult to be managed not only by student-teachers during their practice but even by experienced teachers. In the case of student-teachers, the situation becomes more complicated due to certain reasons such as:

- first time teaching
- lack of experience
- teacher's stress in the classroom
- not being aware of the students' learning styles
- temporary position as a teacher, etc.

However it is to be highlighted that in spite of the difficulties in managing students' actions and behaviors in the classroom, the benefits of the teaching practice overpass the problems. It provides student-teachers with the possibility of trying the art of teaching, of managing physical, spatial and social spaces in the classroom between students, before reaching the status of a full-time permanent teacher.

Methodology

The accomplishment of this paper was realized by conducting questionnaires, observation forms and interviews with the student-teachers during their teaching practice. This helped in gathering qualitative and quantitative data which were further used to generate analysis and conclusions on the topic. A *questionnaire* was prepared consisting of five questions delivered to a group of thirty five master students in their second year at "Aleksander Xhuvani" University. The questionnaire was to be completed at the end of the teaching practice so that student-teachers had a clearer view of their experience in teaching. The questions were open ones, with the purpose of providing room to the students offering various alternatives, suggestions and recommendations on this topic.

Furthermore, during the five weeks of the teaching practice, *observation forms* were used to assemble real situation records, which could be used during analysis for further illustrations. The selected target group of students taken into consideration for this study was 7th to 9th grade (7th, 8th, and 9th). The selection of these classes was mainly based on the level of problems these students displayed. The thirty five student-teachers were appointed in different schools in Elbasan, offering in this way a diverse gathering of responses, not being restricted to one or two institutions.

Topic: Student-teacher experience with disruptive behavior in the Albanian schools, 7th to 9th grade	
Questionnaire for the student-teachers	Lenida Lekli, Phd "Aleksandër Xhuvani" University
Introduction The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify some of the main problems English language student-teachers encounter during their teaching practice, focusing mainly on behaviour disruption. For this reason there has been made a selection of classes, 7 th to 9 th grade considered to be the most problematic ones, even due to their age. The questionnaire is delivered to the master students, second year, after they have finished their teaching practice, in order to generate concrete data observed during teaching by this target group.	

1. What do you feel about being a student-teacher for the first time? What were some of the major problems you faced up with?
2. Were behaviour disruptions a challenge for you during teaching, as a young teacher?
3. What were the most problematic behaviour disruptions you faced with during your teaching practice?
4. What it easy for you to organise the classroom as a student-teacher, during different activities?
5. What do you suggest needs to be improved during teaching practice so that student-teachers can profit as much as possible during their 5-week-practice?

Figure 2. Questionnaire prepared for the student-teachers

Discussions and Results

Literature review comprises a fundamental element in understanding the concept of disruptive behaviors and their impact in the classroom environment and teaching process too, for the student-teachers. In the previous years, managing the classroom and students' behaviors, during authoritative and teacher oriented classes was not as complicated and problematic as it is today. "Assertive discipline" (Canter, Lee. 2009) of that time, reflected through an authoritative role of the teacher, seemed to successfully display a well managed and organized lesson for both the educators and students.

Nowadays, in the 21st century schools the more student-centered the classes become, the more problematic and more difficult behavior management is.

Consequently, the elaboration of the answers of the questionnaires completed by the student-teachers have pointed out interesting aspects which student-teachers find difficult to manage due to disruptive behaviors of the students.

✚ Time management in the classroom

"Students were continuously asking me questions when I started explaining the lesson. Some of them kept interrupting me even for the most unimportant things. They made fun at one another, changed their seats, etc. I lost my lesson, and I needed time to put them to work again."(Anonymous, Master student, second year)

As it can be understood from the answer of one of the students of the Master program, one of the primary difficulties student-teachers faced with during their teaching

practice due to the disruptive behaviors was that of *time management*. Shouting at one another, whispering, insulting classmates, using cell phones, showing little respect versus the student-teachers, asking to leave the classroom for no specific reason etc, often made student-teachers spend more physical time on dealing with such issues rather than being engaged in the explanation of the lesson. "Such misbehaviors tend to increase student-teachers' stress too, making them feel unable to maintain an atmosphere in which pupils can get on with the work and the classroom on-going process runs smoothly." (Douglas S. Alaster. 2014), Furthermore, certain interruptions by students' misbehaviors are not only time consuming, approved by nearly 73% of the answers in the questionnaire, but they make it difficult for the student-teachers to organize transitions, that is "to match one session of the teaching process to the other one" (Woolfolk, Anita. 2011) often leading to a non-accomplishment of the teaching objectives, negatively influencing this start of their professional career as a young teacher.

✚ Lack of information on students' learning styles

Most of the student-teachers when entering the classroom for the first time, they lack information on the students' learning styles, that is being able to identify their learning abilities and preferences (Wrench, Jason S., Virginia Peck Richmond, & Joan Gorhan., 2009).

Not being offered initial background on this aspect by the school teachers where they are supposed to conduct their teaching practice, often leads room to students' misbehaviors. Based on the data gathered from the questionnaires nearly most of the student-teachers have mentioned this issue in their completion of the questions. Considering the target group selected for this study, 7th to 9th grade it is fundamental to have some previous knowledge on this issue so that the student-teachers can plan activities which fit their interests, avoiding as much as possible misbehaviors during the lesson.

✚ Teaching big classes (concerning the number of students)

Another problematic issue viewed from the feedback of the questionnaires, often leading to students' misbehaviors was that of teaching big classes in number. Nearly 17 student-teachers out of 35 admitted to have taught in classes consisting of more than 25-30 students. Teaching big classes in foreign language learning often creates chaos for them even due to language diversity, making it difficult for the student-teachers to coordinate activities during the lesson, providing room for the troublesome students to cause misbehaviors, especially the 9th grade which is closer to teenage years. Use of cell phones during the lesson in large classes was another

disturbance most student-teachers faced with during their teaching practice. Not only did it provide difficulty in managing students who used cell phones, but they even made fun at one another by sending messages to their classmates during the lesson, causing distraction and lack of attention which frequently resulted in undesired attitudes.

Conclusion

Years and efforts spent as a student getting into the teaching profession does not always guarantee you can master the universal art of teaching. The deeper you go into the secrets of the classroom, the more you realize how difficult being a teacher is. "Teachers' world and students' world highly depend on a kind of human interaction between the two which sets the scene for the actors (both teachers and student) to rehearse and act accordingly guaranteeing a successful teaching process." (Sedgwick, Fred. 2008). When teachers' world successfully coordinates students' world, the occurrence of students' disruptive behaviors is less frequent, making the lesson run smoothly from one part to another. Otherwise the opposite is likely to happen, spoiling the teaching process, making lesson objectives less feasible to be achieved. Student-teachers usually find it more difficult to establish such a successful human interaction between them and the students in the classroom due to many reasons, such as lack of previous experience, short period of time of the teaching practice (five weeks), lack of practical information taken at university courses that can be of use during their practice etc. In many cases, failure of establishment of successful interaction between the two increases the probability of disruptive behaviors. As it was mentioned above, based on the data gathered from the questionnaires, observation forms and interviews, students-teachers encountered difficulties especially in the following aspects:

✚ Time management

(Students' misbehaviors and continuous intentional interruptions during the lesson made it difficult for the student-teachers to achieve a successful management of time and transitions during the teaching process.)

✚ Lack of information on students' learning styles

(Lack of previous knowledge on students' learning styles increases the frequency of misbehaviors during the lesson.)

✚ Teaching big classes

(Lack of previous experience in teaching makes it difficult for the student-teacher to successfully manage classes consisting of many students)

The data gathered through the research conducted in this study provide interesting information referring to the difficulties student-teachers encounter during their teaching practice. The study was conducted in some of the 9th grade schools in

Elbasan, from 7th to 9th grade; therefore these results cannot be generalized. On the contrary further more elaborated studies are required in order to draw conclusions that can lead to helpful suggestions and recommendations for the student-teachers.

Suggestions

- ✚ Expanding the period of the teaching practice for the student-teachers, from 5 weeks to 1 entire semester, could help them overpass some of the difficulties they encounter. Longer weeks of the teaching practice for the student-teachers implies more time to get to know the students, their daily routines in the classroom, their characters and learning styles increasing in this way the probability of avoiding disruptive behaviors.
- ✚ Organizing mini round tables with the student-teachers during their teaching practice could be of significant help in learning how to treat undesired behaviors and situations in the classroom without distorting the teaching process.
- ✚ Offering more practical university courses on classroom management and students' behavior management could be of crucial importance. It is often believed that academic courses are too theoretical to match the practical side of the teaching practice. Hence, lecturing practical strategies and techniques could provide the context for the students in understanding how to effectively manage misbehaviors.
- ✚ Establishing a closer relationship between students-teachers, mentors, and colleagues could positively help student-teachers in their early steps of career.

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