

## **The Problems Student - Teachers In Jordan Face During Their Practicum and their Suggestions to Solve them**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present study aimed at investigating the problems student- teachers at Jordanian universities face during their practicum and their suggestions to solve them. The population of the study consisted of all student-teachers who were registered for practicum course at 16 public and private universities in Jordan during the first semester 2008/2009. The sample of the study consisted of 213 student- teachers who were selected randomly from ten universities. A sixty-item questionnaire was used to collect the data of the study. The results of this study showed that student-teachers in Jordan do not face major problems during their practicum. On the other hand, student-teachers ascribe most reasons of classroom problems to external factors, namely pupils, parents, and school administrators. It was recommended that universities, teachers, school administrators, students and parents be involved in developing guidelines of classroom management. It was also recommended that student- teachers be given more time during practicum, so that they could get more insights into essential teaching skills.

**Keywords:** Classroom problems, student- teachers, cooperating schools, practicum, Jordan.

### **Introduction**

#### **Theoretical background**

Teaching is a highly demanding profession because it is a composite of too many responsibilities that need to be accounted for simultaneously. These responsibilities include- but are not limited to-giving instructions, presentation of material, discussion, attending to students' needs, listening to students' comments and suggestions, dealing with unexpected events, and managing students' behaviors.

Effective classroom management is of special significance because it aims at creating a safe learning-teaching environment that helps achieve the goals of schooling. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many traditional classrooms where "students' hearts, souls, and minds are being silently destroyed in the name of good management" (Ayers, 2001: 11).

Classroom management can be a great challenge to novice teachers. For example, students who come to class unprepared, look bored, refuse to participate in class discussions, skip class frequently, come to class unprepared, or monopolize the classroom discussion can test even the best and most experienced teachers. (Luo, et al., 2000). However, there is no consensus among teachers on students' acceptable behaviors and unacceptable ones. For example, some teachers may disapprove of their students' answering questions without raising hands, moving in the seat, nodding a head, or playing with a pencil while other teachers may take these behaviors as natural consequences of learning. (McClendon, 1990)

Student- teachers usually feel that much of the class time is spent on classroom management at the expense of achieving the expected instructional goals and intended learning outcomes. Nevertheless, they feel they are inadequately prepared concerning classroom management, together with an inability to perceive and understand

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Received on 3/8/2019 and Accepted for Publication on 9/11/2019.

classroom events. (Hogan *et al.*, 2003 and Siebert, 2005).

Practicum affords student- teachers opportunities to gain valuable experience and feedback from mentors and peers, but pre-service teacher education should include follow-up programs throughout the first year of teaching to guarantee that smooth transition from theory to practice occurs smoothly. Novice teachers should not be left on their own to sink or swim in complex classroom contexts. (Shannon, Twale, and Moore, 1998).

In an analysis of more than 100 studies Marzano and Marzano (2003) found that, on average, teachers who had high-quality relationships with their students had 31 percent fewer discipline problems, rule violations, and other related problems compared with teachers who did not have high-quality relationships with their students.

Taskin (2006) examined student- teachers ' perceptions about teacher education program in Turkey. Data were obtained through interviewing student- teachers . Results showed that although the current teacher education program put emphasis on effective practical training, in some circumstances student- teachers feel that their chances of gaining real teaching experiences are minimal. It was suggested that school–university partnership in teacher education programs be strengthened.

Ratcliff and Hunt (2008) noted that research supported the position that a strong family-school partnership was an integral part of any program that was based upon best practice research. Results showed that educating children must be studied and assessed in the context of family, school, community, and society. It was concluded that teachers should be keenly aware of the importance of family involvement in the education of all students, especially those students who might be having learning problems.

### **Context of the study**

Pre-service teacher education programs in all Jordanian universities aim at providing student- teachers with different teaching skills such as classroom management, meeting individual differences, promoting classroom interaction, and evaluating students progress. The frustration which student- teachers may suffer from during their practicum is not limited to a certain stage level (elementary, intermediate or advanced), gender (male or female), or type of school (public or private).

There were two courses which students teachers were required to take before they graduate (Practicum 1, which was theoretical, and practicum 2 where students were assigned to cooperating schools). Student- teachers normally practiced teaching for four weeks during their practicum. In the remaining period (i.e.: twelve weeks), student- teachers only observed classes, wrote reports or helped the cooperating teacher with certain tasks.

Teacher education programs in Jordan have recently been witnessing successive changes regarding teachers' responsibilities towards students' classroom behaviors. Teachers are not allowed any more to punish misbehavers, but only negotiate the reasons for those misbehaviors. However, in a pilot study of 580 in-service teachers in Jordan, the researchers found that (77 %) of those teachers believe that students are now growing more careless, de-motivated, less attentive, and less respectful to school regulations. Being supervisors of student- teachers for more than 5 years, the researchers also noticed that the types of problems that student- teachers faced during their practicum were typical of those of in-service teachers.

### **Purposes and questions of the study**

The main purpose of the present study was to investigate the classroom problems that student-teachers at Jordanian universities face during practicum. It also aimed at exploring the reasons which student- teachers ascribe those problems to, and their suggestions to solve those problems. More specifically, the study aimed at answering the following questions:

- 1- "What were the classroom problems that student- teachers at Jordanian universities faced during their practicum?"
- 2- What were the reasons behind these problems according to student- teachers ?
- 3- What suggestions did student- teachers offer to solve these classroom problems?

The results of the present study are expected to give student- teachers insights into the most common classroom problems so that they can prepare themselves to deal with these problems when they go into teaching. Designers of pre service teacher education programs may also find the results this study important to give more emphases to classroom management issues while developing teacher education programs. The results are also expected to give students and their parents insights into their roles as participants in developing and sustaining effective school regulations.

#### **Definitions of terms**

The following terms were operationally defined to serve the purposes of the present study:

**Classroom problems:** all students' verbal and non-verbal behaviors in the classroom, which might hinder learning or teaching activities such as chatting, leaving seats, answering questions without permission, hurting others, carelessness, or refusing to cooperate with others.

**Student teachers:** students who were enrolled in classroom teacher program for teacher education at the public and private universities in Jordan during the first semester 2008-2009. Those student- teachers were doing their practicum (3-5 days a week) at public schools and private schools during the last semester at the university.

**Practicum:** the pre-service teaching practice which student- teachers should go through in their last semester in their teacher education program at the university under the supervision of school and university mentors. To this end, student- teachers spent 3-5 school days per week depending on the requirements of the teacher education program at the university.

**Cooperating schools:** public and private elementary schools which signed a contract to train classroom student- teachers during their practicum under the supervision of cooperative teachers at school and university mentors..

#### **Method and procedure**

This was a descriptive study which aimed at exploring student- teachers' perspectives of the problems they face during their practicum, the reasons behind these problems, and their suggestions to overcome them.

The population of the present study consisted of three hundred and eighty-eight (388) student- teachers who were taking their practicum course at the schools of educational sciences in sixteen public and private universities in Jordan during the first semester 2008-2009. The sample of the study consisted of 213 student- teachers (representing 55% of the population) who were randomly selected from ten universities as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1.

<b>Public universities</b>	<b>No. of student- teachers</b>	<b>Private universities</b>	<b>No. of student- teachers</b>
The University of Jordan	60	Isra University	7
Yarmouk University	30	Zarqa University	20
Hashemite University	25	Al-Zaytoonah University	10
Al al-Bayt University	20	Jerash University	11
Al-Balqa' Applied University	20	Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts /UNRWA	10
Sub-Total	155		58
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>		

To collect data of the study, a sixty- item questionnaire was developed by the researchers based on related literature. These items fell into three parts: part one (items 1-13) was about classroom problems that student- teachers face during their practicum; part two (items 14-40) explored the reasons behind those problems; and part three (items 41-60) elicited student- teachers' suggestions for overcoming these problems.

Eight university professors and two supervisors validated the questionnaire. Most of the comments and suggestions of those referees centered round merging certain items within others, rephrasing certain items, and shifting some items from one field to another. Accordingly, the final version of the questionnaire consisted of 60 items (See Appendix 1).

The reliability of the items in each field of the questionnaire was established by using Cronbach Alpha as a measure

of internal consistency. The correlation coefficient of part one was 0.88; part two was 0.93; and part three was 0.75. Therefore, these values were considered sufficient to use the questionnaire to collect the data of this study. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were used to answer the questions of the study. Using the five- point Likert scale, “Strongly agree” was given a score of (5), “Agree” a score of (4), “agree to a certain extent” a score of (3), “Disagree” a score of (2) and “Strongly disagree” a score of (1). Therefore, High, Medium, and Low mean scores are determined based on the following:

Length of class=  $(5-1)/3= 1.33$

The Low-level ranges from 1 to 2.33

The Moderate level ranges from 2.34 to 3.67

The High level ranges from 3.68 to 5

Results and discussion

**Results related to the first question** “What were the classroom problems that student- teachers at Jordanian universities faced during their practicum?”

To answer the first question, means and standard deviations were calculated. The results are presented in Table 2

**Table 2: Means and standard deviations -in rank order- regarding the classroom problems that student-teachers face during their practicum.**

Item	M	SD	N
- Students leave their seats with no obvious reason	3.40	1.27	213
-Students chat with one another during the class time.	3.36	1.13	210
-Students answer questions orally without waiting their turn.	3.27	1.20	212
-Students do not listen to my instructions.	2.96	1.05	212
-Students monopolize class discussion.	2.76	1.22	213
-Students are bored and unfocused during the class time	2.71	1.08	210
-Students show off and seek attention during my class	2.66	1.20	209
-Students make noise and distract others.	2.62	1.26	209
-Students complain about doing tasks.	2.49	1.17	209
-Students eat or drink during class time.	2.44	1.26	211
-Students study other subjects during the class period.	2.41	1.16	211
-Students refuse to cooperate with peers	2.41	1.14	212
-Students make negative comments on peers' participation.	1.91	1.19	202

Results in Table 2 show that student- teachers rated items such as “Students leave their seats with no obvious reason” “Students chat with one another during the class time” and “Students answer questions orally without waiting their turn” much higher than other classroom problems such as “Students refuse to cooperate with peers.”, “Students study other subjects during the class period” and “Students eat or drink during class time”.

These results indicate that student- teachers were mainly worried about students' behaviors that may prevent the teacher from keeping classroom discipline more than students' attempts to learn collaboratively. This sounds surprising because students' behaviors may indicate that learners were more hyperactive than misbehaving. Learners generally, fidget, leave seat frequently, answer chorally as a natural consequence of learning and not lack of it. (Canter & Canter,1992; Kyriacou ,1994, and Wheldall & Merrett 1988).

The results also imply that student- teachers preferred teacher- dominated classrooms where students sit quietly and listen attentively to the teacher to get information. This might explain why some students may sometimes look bored, demotivated, or they may seek to distract the attention of others in the class.

**Results related to the second question “What were the reasons behind classroom problems according to student-teachers?”**

To answer the second question, means and standard deviations were calculated. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Means and standard deviations -in rank order- regarding the reasons behind classroom problems according to student- teachers**

Item	M	SD	N
-Classrooms are overcrowded with students.	3.85	1.24	211
-Some students like to monopolize class discussion.	3.64	1.06	213
-Students are unnecessarily hyperactive.	3.64	1.07	212
-Students are indifferent and careless.	3.36	1.42	212
-Parents are not committed to participating in school meetings.	209	3.34	1.25
-Parents defend all their children’s behavior	209	3.33	1.33
-Students are negatively affected by family problems.	3.28	1.24	209
-Students rely on private tutors and so they do not listen teachers.	206	3.24	3.37
-Students come to class unprepared.	3.20	1.09	213
-Students have unfulfilled needs.	3.11	1.16	211
-There are many distracters in the school environment	3.06	1.37	209
-School administrators do not take students’ misbehaviors seriously.	3 .05	1.30	210

-Teachers use uninteresting methods of teaching.	3.00	1.34	211
-Students have negative competitive attitudes towards each other	2.98	1.21	212
-Learning tasks are too demanding for students.	2.90	1.22	211
- Sometimes classes are left unattended by teachers.	2.87	1.30	211
-There are no extra- curricular activities to support learning.	2.81	1.33	211
-Students are asked to do too many assignments at class.	2.76	1.15	210
-School regulations are not firm enough to reduce classroom problems.	2 .65	1.17	208
-Classrooms are entirely teacher -dominated.	2.59	1.25	213
-Teachers are not firm in applying classroom regulations.	2.59	1.23	212
-School administrators do not explain regulations to students.	2 .55	1.22	209
-Teachers use punishment to maintain discipline in the classroom.	2.52	1.27	213
-School principals do not cooperate with teachers to maintain discipline.	2 .48	1.25	210
-Teachers do not listen to questions or suggestions.	2.42	1.29	211
-Teachers do not have good relationships with students	2.37	1.29	210
-Teachers come to class unprepared.	2.08	1.28	209

Table 3 shows that the reasons to which student- teachers ascribed most classroom problems were: “Classrooms are overcrowded with students.” (3.85); “Some students like to monopolize class discussion.” (3.64); Students are unnecessarily hyperactive.” (3.64), whereas the reasons to which they ascribed classroom problems the least were:

“Teachers come to class unprepared.” (2.08); “Teachers do not have good relationships with students.” (2, 37); “Teachers do not listen to questions or suggestions.” (2.42); and “School principals do not cooperate with teachers to maintain discipline.” (2.48).

These results also show that the mean score of students' related factors was (3.32), parents' related factors (3.31), school administrators' related factors (2.96), and teachers' related factors (2.57). These results indicate that student- teachers ascribed responsibility of classroom problems to external factors more than to internal factors.

These results were congruent with the results of many other studies (e.g. Maxwell, 1987; Galvin, Mercer & Costa, 1993; Stephens, 1993; Gregg, 1995; Brophy & Rohekemper, 1996; and Miller, 1996).

During their teacher preparation, student- teachers were instructed to consider all the factors that might cause classroom problems. They were advised to assume the roles of the counselor, the parent, and school principal to deal

with any potential classroom problems. However, in service teachers at cooperating schools were sometimes skeptical about "the smart" theories of education. They felt that were losing the traditional power of manipulating students' classroom behavior. It seems that student- teachers have simply adopted the classroom management styles and beliefs of those more experienced teachers.

Another reason for those classroom problems could be due to unattractive teaching methods student- teachers used. Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between the teaching methods and students' motivation and attentiveness at class (Smith, 1990; Jones and Jones, 1981)

**Results related to the third question** *"What suggestions did student- teachers offer to solve classroom problems?"*

To answer the third question, means and standard deviations were calculated. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Means and standard deviations -in rank order- regarding student- teachers ' suggestions for the solving classroom problems**

Item	Means	SD	N
-Giving rewards and incentives to best behaviors.	4.73	0.55	212
-Motivating students to learn by using Multimedia.	4.72	0.55	213
-Involving all learners in classroom activities.	4.71	0.55	213
- Requiring teachers to come to class well-prepared.	4.70	0.60	213
-Establishing good relationships among school administrators, teachers, and students.	4.67	0.60	212
-Encouraging students to come to class well-prepared.	4.64	0.59	213
-Varying teaching styles and learning activities.	4.63	0.57	213
-Decreasing the number of students in the classroom.	4.62	0.61	213
-Holding more workshops for student -teachers on classroom management.	4.59	0.73	212
-Focusing on the reasons behind classroom problems more than on solutions.	4.59	0.66	212
-Informing parents about their children's behaviors on regular basis.	4.46	0.89	211
-Applying the school regulations effectively.	4.38	0.76	210

-Involving representatives of the local community in all school activities.	4.17	0.75	212
-Involving students in developing and negotiating school regulations.	4.16	0.91	211
-Encouraging teachers to exchange visits and share experiences.	4.16	0.97	212
-Making regular classroom visits by school administrators.	3.75	0.98	212
--Arranging regular meeting with students' parliament.	3.62	1.18	212
-Sending misbehavers to the school principals or counselors.	2.95	1.25.	211
-Reducing marks for misbehaviors.	2.84	1.26	212
-Applying physical punishment to maintain discipline at class.	2.16	1.21	212

Table 4 shows that student- teachers gained high mean scores (4.73-3.62) regarding almost all suggestions in this table. It can also be concluded from Table 3 that most suggestions required teachers themselves to take action. For example: "*Giving rewards and incentives to best behavers.*" ( $M= 4.73$ ), "*Motivating students to learn by using Multimedia*" ( $M=4.72$ ), "*Involving all learners in classroom activities.*" ( $M= 4.71$ ), and "*Requiring teachers to come to class well-prepared.*" ( $M=4.70$ ). This result is consistent with the results of other researchers like Evertson and Emmer, 1982; Mayer, 1995; and Taskin, 2006.

These results imply that student- teachers were willing to share the responsibility of creating a non-threatening learning environment and helped students learn, although they did not consider themselves mainly responsible of classroom problems. For example, they suggested that teachers, administrators, students and parents should develop, negotiate, and review classroom rules of effective learning and teaching. When relationships with families are built on a foundation of positive, healthy communication, problems that may arise throughout the year are more likely to be resolved in a positive way. (Baum & Swick, 2007).

Results in Table 3 also show that student- teachers were interested in the humanistic view of dealing with classroom problems more than the behavioristic view. For example, they rated "*Applying physical punishment to maintain discipline at class*", "*Reducing marks for misbehaviors*", and "*Sending misbehavers to the school principals or counselors*" as the least effective practices of dealing with misbehavers. Such teacher practices may suppress misbehaviors for a transit period, but they result in false classroom discipline because they would not convince misbehavers that they are wrong, especially if they are not given the chance to defend themselves. This result is congruent with the other results reviewed by as Muijs and Reynolds (2001) who concluded that among the main factors influencing pupils' performance is establishing clear rules and negotiating them with students instead of merely imposing these rules on them. This usually enables pupils to make informed choices about how to behave based on the consequences of unacceptable behavior.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The results of the present study revealed that student- teachers at Jordanian universities considered themselves the



least responsible for students' misbehaviors at school. They believed that parents and school principals bear the responsibility of many classroom problems in one way or another. Nevertheless, student- teachers seem to have a sense of responsibility towards creating a safe learning environment if all those parties are involved in developing and sustaining school instructions. Therefore, developers of teacher education programs in Jordan are recommended to provide student- teachers with a number of techniques for creating communication between schools and families rather than waiting for parents to communicate with school on special occasions.

Feedback from colleagues, mentors and hiring institutions about teachers' performance seems to be lacking. For example, public schools are not allowed to assess novice teachers to ensure relevance of their teaching skills. Therefore, student- teachers programs should include more necessary courses such classroom management, educational psychology, methods of teaching, counseling and special education in addition to micro-teaching. Student- teachers should be trained to pose questions, challenges, problems, and real cases that are likely to deal with in at class. This could be incorporated in courses student- teachers take such as classroom management, educational psychology, methods of teaching, counseling and special education in addition to microteaching. Student- teachers should be trained to pose questions, challenges, problems, and real cases that are likely to deal with in at class.

Teacher education programs should also help student- teachers to develop pupils' awareness of school regulations and how to be ethically committed to them. Pupils should be involved in developing school regulations, so that they become aware of their rights and duties as responsible learners. Only through this involvement, students can understand why some of their behaviors are acceptable while others are not. (Ratcliff and Hunt, 2008).

It is also recommended that student- teachers stay in the field for a longer period during practicum, so that they feel reality, reflect on their teaching practices, and develop mutual understanding of their students. Research shows that teachers with more teaching experience reported higher levels of self-efficacy toward teaching and were rated as more effective by students. (Brophy and Rohrkemper;1996; DiGiulio, 1995; and Jones and Jones, 1990).

Many researchers argued that teachers who consider themselves mainly responsible for their students' learning put more effort into teaching and creating a supportive learning environment (Guskey, 1988 and Ross, 1992). Therefore, teacher education programs should provide student- teachers with problematic classroom situations, so that they can reflect on them; discuss their potential reasons and the most appropriate ways of dealing with them. After all, effective classroom management is not the result of solving classroom problems, but rather trying to stop them-if possible.

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## المشكلات الصفية التي يواجهها الطلبة المعلمون في الأردن في أثناء التدريب الميداني واقترحاتهم لحلها

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### ملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن المشكلات الصفية التي يواجهها الطلبة المعلمون في الجامعات الأردنية في أثناء التدريب الميداني واقترحاتهم لحلها. وتكون مجتمع الدراسة من جميع الطلبة المعلمين المسجلين للتدريب الميداني في ست عشرة جامعة حكومية وخاصة في الفصل الدراسي الأول للعام الدراسي 2008/2009، في حين اشتملت عينة الدراسة على 213 طالباً وطالبة تم اختيارهم من عشر جامعات بطريقة عشوائية. وتم جمع بيانات الدراسة من خلال استبانة تحوي 60 فقرة. وبينت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلبة المعلمين لا يواجهون مشاكل صفية رئيسية. ومن جهة أخرى، بينت نتائج الدراسة أن الطلبة المعلمين يعززون معظم المشكلات الصفية إلى أسباب لا تتعلق بهم هم، وإنما لأسباب تعود للطلبة وأولياء أمورهم وإلى إدارة المدارس. وبناء على تلك النتائج، اقترح الباحثون أن تعمل كل من الجامعات وإدارة المدارس والمعلمون وأولياء أمور الطلبة على تطوير الخطوط العريضة للإدارة الصفية في المدارس، وأن يعطى الطلبة المعلمون وقتاً أطول للتدريب على مهارات التدريس الأساسية في أثناء مدة التدريب الميداني.

**الكلمات الدالة:** المشكلات الصفية، الطلبة المعلمون، المدارس المتعاونة، التدريب الميداني، الأردن.

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تاريخ استلام البحث: 2019/8/3، وتاريخ قبوله: 2019/11/9.