

Supporting Learners Through Effective Communication: Student Teachers' Communication Strategies to Address Learner Behaviour

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Abstract: Teachers' communication skills are integral to classroom management skills. If teachers implement effective communication skills and appropriate communication strategies, they are more likely to support learner autonomy, engagement, self-concept, well-being, or responsibility and succeed in behaviour management. This study examines student teachers' awareness and use of communication strategies to address common disruptive learner behaviours. Although the participants showed limited ability to support learners through communication, they were more likely to identify effective communication responses than to produce them themselves. The study unveils that student teachers in the last year of a graduate program cannot respond to disruptive behaviour without communication roadblocks. They need to develop communication strategies to address disruptions in the classroom, while supporting learner engagement, motivation, self-concept, and autonomy. These findings correspond with other research studies that show a lack of opportunities to develop communication skills during preservice teacher education.

Introduction

Managing learner behaviour, when disruptive, challenges many teachers despite their professional experience. For novice and pre-service teachers, it is one of the main challenges they encounter in classrooms (Hagger et al., 2011; Hong, 2012; Juhaňák et al., 2018). A survey in the Czech Republic reported that 53.5% of novice teachers labelled learner misbehaviour as an area where they need the most help (Juhaňák et al., 2018). Similar findings have been reported elsewhere (Paramita et al., 2020). In Australia, nearly 40% of teachers from 19 schools reported spending more than 20% of their teaching day managing learner behaviour (Auditor General Western Australia, 2014). Similarly, results in Talis (OECD, 2019) suggest that 29% of teachers reported spending significant time on learner interruptions during lessons.

Classroom management issues are a significant source of stress, anxiety, and frustration for pre-service teachers (Theelen et al., 2019). The more anxiety pre-service teachers experience during their training, the less confident they feel in handling classroom disruptions (Bach & Hagenauer, 2022). This lack of confidence can negatively impact their motivation to complete their teacher training programs and their overall commitment to teaching (Chesnut & Burley, 2015).

These challenges aren't just faced by pre-service teachers. Many studies show that student misbehaviours increase stress for all teachers (Kyriacou, 2011; Paramita et al., 2020) and can harm their well-being, confidence, and job satisfaction (Aldrup et al., 2018; Aloe et al., 2014; Ross et al., 2008). Researchers also point to learner misbehaviour as a major cause for teachers' burnout syndrome (Bakker et al., 2007) and one of the reasons teachers leave the profession (Clunies-Ross et al., 2008; Paramita et al., 2020). Both experienced and novice teachers lack confidence in managing learner behaviour (Hong, 2012; Shank & Santiago, 2022) and express their need for professional learning on behaviour management (Paramita et al., 2020). OECD (2020) reported that 14% of teachers express a high need for professional development in classroom and behaviour management.

Classroom management is a complex concept. It is agreed that teachers' communication skills are integral to classroom management skills (Burden, 2020; Gordon & Burch, 2003; Ming-Tak & Wai-Shing, 2008; Porter, 2014; Roache & Lewis, 2011). Many claim that without effective communication, there is no effective behaviour management (Burden, 2020; Gordon & Burch, 2003; Ming-Tak & Wai-Shing, 2008; Roache & Lewis, 2011). Furthermore, Burden (2020) claims that teachers need to respond to learner misbehaviour with appropriate communication strategies. If mastered by teachers, effective communication skills, among other things, reduce the time spent on learner misbehaviour and increase learning time (Gordon & Burch, 2003; Larrivee, 2009; Porter, 2014).

This article examines the key communication skills for effective behaviour management, focusing on teacher preparation. It is grounded in learner-centred approaches to classroom management that reduce learner misbehaviour (Burden, 2020; Gordon & Burch, 2003; Porter, 2014, Tauber, 2007). These approaches encourage the development of learner responsibility and self-regulation skills, which are crucial for learner cognitive, social, and emotional learning (Talvio et al., 2014). Learners are trusted and given space to build autonomy and take responsibility for their behaviour and learning (Gordon & Burch, 2003, Larrivee, 2009; Ming-Tak & Wai-Shing, 2008; Porter, 2014; Roache & Lewis, 2011). The terms effective communication and learner-centred communication are used interchangeably in this study.

Classroom Behaviour Management Communication Strategies

When teachers respond to learner misbehaviour with effective communication skills, they develop a positive and caring relationship with learners, promote learners' self-concept and self-regulation development, and help manage behaviour problems (Gordon & Burch, 2003; Evertson & Weinstein, 2006). These skills are a way of communicating with trust, developing mutual respect, and offering a place for learner responsibility. By using good strategies, teachers acknowledge learners' feelings and needs without any evaluation (Gordon & Burch, 2003, Larrivee, 2009).

For example, when addressing learner behaviour using effective communication techniques, teachers use language to describe a particular behaviour rather than a learner's personality (Porter, 2014). Conflicts are negotiated to meet both teachers' and learners' needs. Teachers use open communication to explain how learner behaviour interferes with their needs and empathy to take learners' perspectives. Active listening, which involves teachers paraphrasing students' words to validate their feelings and show understanding, without judgment, is used to connect to learners and lead them to find solutions to their problems (Karasova & Nehyba, 2023). Such communication techniques improve learner behavior and enhance self-regulation, the ability to manage one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations. This, in turn, promotes deep learning, and social and

emotional development (Gordon & Burch, 2003; Larrivee, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017; Talvio et al., 2014).

Literature on the topic outlines specific learner-centred communication strategies that teachers might employ to manage learner misbehaviour while supporting learner engagement, motivation, self-concept, and autonomy. Among these effective communication strategies are hinting (non-directional, non-judgmental description of behaviour), non-controlling informational language, I-messages, active listening, open communication, providing a rationale, clear expectations, perspective-taking, and accepting learners' negative feelings and empathy (Cheon et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2010; Madden & Senior, 2017; Roache & Lewis, 2011; Wallace et al., 2014).

The positive impact of the effective communication strategies has been explored in various studies. For instance, Lewis (2001) researched over 3500 primary and secondary teachers in Australia; hinting, discussion, recognition, and learner involvement led to less misbehaviour and more learner responsibility. Comparable results have been reported in research carried out in China and Israel (Lewis et al., 2005). Weger (2017) examined the impact of active empathic listening on the level of learner disruptive behaviour in the classroom of 434 participants. The findings suggest that teachers who use active empathic listening skills have learners who misbehave less. These findings correspond with those of Worley et al. (2007), suggesting that teachers' active listening skills promote a safe climate and effective teaching. Wallace et al. (2014) analyzed teacher talk in six public middle school classrooms with positive interpersonal relationships and a high learner autonomy level. They concluded that active listening, taking learner perspectives, accepting learners' negative feelings, questioning, and using open communication provide an autonomy-supportive classroom climate where learners are not controlled; instead, through effective communication, teachers establish and protect learners' opportunities to learn effectively. Madden and Senior (2017) conducted research in Ireland with 274 teachers; in the study, acknowledging learner feelings was perceived as the most effective responsive strategy in managing learner behaviour. In sum, teachers' effective communication skills (strategies) have repeatedly proved to significantly impact learner achievements, teacher-learner relationships, safe learning climate, levels of misbehaviour, and autonomy (Cheon et al., 2019; Roache & Lewis, 2011; Wallace et al., 2014; Weger, 2017).

However, researchers also point to ineffective strategies and their impact on learners' learning, behaviour, and affect (Miller et al., 2000; Roache & Lewis, 2011). Gordon and Burch (2003) term this communication as communication roadblocks, Barbara Larrivee (2009) as inhibiting communication or language of disrespect, and Roache and Lewis (2011) as coercive behaviour. These strategies include judging, manipulating, labelling, commanding, threatening, moralizing, humiliating, blaming, yelling in anger, sarcasm, interrogating, and punishing (Gordon & Burch, 2003; Larrivee, 2009; Roache & Lewis, 2011).

Specifically, teachers' aggressive communication strategies such as yelling, using sarcasm, or imposing punishments negatively impact learner responsibility (Lewis, 2001). Miller et al.'s (2000) data collected through interviews of 20 first-year secondary school learners regarding their misbehaviour indicate that teachers shouting, being rude, blaming, picking on learners, or not listening considerably contributed to learner misbehaviour. These findings align with studies indicating that teachers' ineffective communication is associated with more learner misbehaviour (Lewis et al., 2005; Mainhard et al., 2011; Miller et al., 2000). Teachers' ineffective communication also contributes to low learner responsibility (Roache & Lewis, 2011), damaged teacher-learner relationships (Mainhard et al., 2011), unproductive classroom climates (van Tartwijk et al., 2009), and lack of motivation and engagement (Reeve & Jang, 2006). These aggressive responses also harmed learner self-

concept, for they provoke unpleasant feelings such as guilt, anger, anxiety, or resentment (Mainhard et al., 2011; Porter, 2014).

Teacher Preparation Programs

Pre-service teacher programs are crucial in helping teachers develop skills to manage learner behaviour effectively. Nevertheless, as discussed in numerous studies, classroom management courses receive little attention in teacher preparation programs (Evertson & Weinstein, 2006; Juhaňák et al., 2018; Stough et al., 2015). Classroom management is usually integrated in other pedagogical coursework and is rarely taught as a stand-alone course (Oliver & Reschly, 2010; Stough et al., 2015). Compared to the subject content or pedagogy training, 28% of teachers received no initial classroom and behaviour management training (OECD, 2019). Moreover, classroom management content in pre-service teacher programs is widely considered too theoretical and lacking practical value (Stough et al., 2015). Researchers have pointed to pre-service teachers' unpreparedness to manage learner behaviour (Hong, 2012; Stough et al., 2015). Only 53% of teachers across the OECD reported that they felt prepared for behaviour management after completing their education (OECD, 2020).

As for the specific examination of student teachers' classroom management competencies, findings suggest that student teachers use a range of classroom behaviour management strategies to respond to learner behaviour. Although active interventions, proactive strategies, and positive strategies were observed (Atici, 2007; Macias & Sanchez, 2015), the strategies used by pre-service teachers were also corrective or authoritarian, such as using a louder voice, a directive, a verbal reprimand, or a punishment, to control learner behaviour (Atici, 2007; Lojdova, 2020; Macias & Sanchez, 2015).

To date, studies of pre-service teachers' behaviour management practices have mainly been based on student teachers' reflections and beliefs (Reupert & Woodcock, 2010) or focused on more general use of classroom management strategies to support learner behaviour. Little attention has been given to specific classroom communication strategies for managing learner behaviour. To fill this research gap, we designed a study to determine student teachers' awareness of communication strategies to address inappropriate learner behaviours and examine their use of effective communication strategies before entering the profession. Our goal was to collect valuable insights into student teachers' communication practices and learn what effective communication skills pre-service teachers need to master to be more effective in behaviour management. We asked the following research questions:

- (1) What communication responses do student teachers employ when addressing learners' inappropriate behaviour?
- (2) What communication responses do student teachers identify/consider as suitable for particular situations?
- (3) What relationship exists between student teachers' ability to identify and use effective communication responses?

Method

Context & Participants

The study was conducted at a teacher preparation institution in the Czech Republic. The institution offers bachelor's and master's studies focusing on teacher preparation; however, completing a two-year master's program is required for a teaching position in Czech public lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools. Teacher graduates undergo preparation in two school subject content areas of their choice, for instance, geography and

physical education. Throughout both levels of studies, the curriculum comprises three sets of courses: students' primary subject matter, their secondary subject matter, and pedagogical and psychological matter. The ratio between content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge developments changes based on the level of studies. MA studies focus more on developing students' pedagogical content knowledge than their undergraduate counterpart, which primarily addresses the growth of expertise in content areas. This research study involved students in their final year of teacher preparation at the master's level. Eight students (seven females and one male of 23-25 years of age) volunteered to participate in the research. They all majored in teaching English as a foreign language and another subject area such as Geography (1), German (2), Czech (4), or Russian (1). By the time of the research, they had completed most of their key graduate course work and final year practicum. Two of the participants held a part-time teaching position at a lower-secondary school. This paper identifies the research participants as S1, S2, etc.

Instruments

A testing plan including an orientation script, a tasks list, and a feedback interview was developed in a two-step process to provide consistency across individual participants. The first versions of the instruments were piloted with sample subjects, and consequently, original tasks were modified for clarity.

Orientation Script

The script consisted of texts read aloud to all participants before each part of the research process. The initial text informed them about the length and individual stages of the process. Participants were also asked to think aloud throughout the process. Their consent to record the testing was requested as well. The remaining script provided instructions for individual testing tasks and interview questions.

Tasks List

The researchers designed two tasks to examine and measure the students' skills using effective communication strategies with hypothetical learners. Task 1 asked participants to use their communication skills productively, whereas Task 2 asked them to recognize effective communication strategies/statements. This order of tasks prevented participants' production from being influenced by any input. Informed by the literature review, we included the following effective communication strategies in Task 2: Active Listening (including taking learners' perspectives and accepting learners' negative affect), Questioning¹, I-Messages and Hinting (including non-controlling informational language).

¹ Questioning (labeled as effective strategy) is not directive. It provides learners with support, offers help, promotes independent thinking, and seeks to find answers to learners' questions, e.g. What do you need to stay focused during the group work? It is also frequently used to encourage learners to start talking: Do you want to talk about the issue? (Larrivee, 2009). Interrogating (labeled as ineffective) does not aim to support learners. It is highly directive and acts as a communication roadblock. It is often used in the form of Sarcasm: Are you done yet?, Preaching: How many

Communication Roadblocks used were as follows: Ordering, Threatening, Preaching, Advising, Lecturing, Blaming, Labeling, Interpreting, Praising, Reassuring, Interrogating, and Humoring. Table 1 (in appendix, Tab. 1) presents an overview of the study's effective and ineffective communication strategies (roadblocks).

Task 1

Each participant was given five brief descriptions of common school/classroom situations in writing, but the descriptions were also read aloud by one of the researchers. Each situation addressed a slightly different disruptive behaviour. For example, one description said: You have just asked learners to open their workbooks, and you see that Peter pushed all his things off the desk and leaned back in his chair. Participants were told to create their response to the problem: a specific sentence they would say to the learner/learners to address the behaviour.

Task 2

Each participant was provided with nine brief descriptions of school/classroom-based situations in writing, each reflecting the most frequent problem situations teachers commonly face. These scenarios were carefully chosen based on empirical evidence and literature to represent the challenges teachers encounter daily (Sun & Shek, 2012; Tanase, 2023). Examples include students not following rules, talking out of turn, coming late to the classroom, arguing with classmates, and other disruptions that can hinder the teaching and learning process. While we aimed to capture the essence of these challenges, we couldn't list overly complex situations. The study's design required us to provide responses with specific communication strategies for each situation from which the participants could choose, finding a balance between scenario complexity and response clarity. For each situation, four possible responses were given. Among them, three presented communication roadblocks, while one illustrated an effective communication response. The task assigned to the participants involved selecting the response they viewed as most appropriate for each individual scenario. Situations were designed to present each type of effective communication skill a minimum of two times. There were three Active Listening and two I-Message responses; Questioning and Hinting were used twice. While the selection of communication roadblocks was done randomly, each type was used at least once across the situations.

A sample situation and four possible responses looked like this: Monika argued with David. She's lying on the desk, crying, "I hate David. I hate him, I hate him, I hate him."

- (1) You shouldn't hate People, Monika (Preaching: ineffective)
- (2) It sounds like you're hurt by what David did. (Active listening: effective)
- (3) Why? What did he do? (Interrogating: ineffective)
- (4) That's not true, is it? (Avoiding: ineffective)

Similarly to Task 1, each situation and the individual responses were read aloud one by one to the participants by the researcher. The participants were asked to think out loud when choosing one of the responses. This way, we obtained insights into how they perceived effective communication responses and roadblocks in particular situations.

times do I have to tell you this?, Command: Isn't it time to start working? or Advise: Shouldn't you start studying for the test? (Gordon & Burch, 2003).

Feedback Interview

A semi-structured interview of five questions was designed to gather additional information about each participant's experience with the tasks, perception of effective communication, and needs in communication with learners.

Data Collection

The research was realized through online video conferences (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) in participants' native language Czech. The research process lasted about fifty to sixty minutes with each participant. One interaction between one of the researchers and a participant was done without a video element due to technical issues. Each interaction was recorded for later analysis. After each participant was introduced to the process, they were led to complete the tasks. Consequently, a brief interview took place to better understand the participants' thinking throughout the tasks and their needs to communicate with learners.

Data Analysis

Using Qualitative Content Analysis (Schreier, 2014), the responses from Task 1 and Task 2 were transcribed and segmented into distinct units of analysis. Each segment captured one situation with a verbal response to the situation. Unit analysis was considered anything ranging from a word or sentence which could be considered a communication strategy. Given that many participants utilized multiple strategies in their responses (see Task 1 in Tab. 2), several units of analysis were assigned multiple codes. As for answers in Task 2, we recorded whether the participant chose an effective strategy. In case an ineffective strategy was chosen, we also noted the strategy the answer reflected. A manual was developed to guide the segmentation and assignment of units of analysis. Deductive coding, based on pre-established categories was primarily employed. However, an inductive approach was also integrated when new themes emerged directly from the data, allowing for the adaptation or addition of categories. A coding scheme was then created and piloted through a trial coding on 10% of data, encompassing two dimensions and categories with subcategories (as seen in Tab.1 and Tab. 2). Both authors coded the data individually and then discussed them to reach a consensus of 90%. The coding scheme was finalized and applied to the main data. Three responses were uncategorized as they did not match the coding scheme, combined elements from multiple categories without clearly fitting into one, and highlighted specific communication nuances not covered by the existing framework. Absolute frequencies were calculated to determine the prevalence of each theme, providing a quantifiable understanding of theme distribution within the dataset (Schreier, 2014).

Findings

The findings are presented in three steps. First, the participants' output in Task 1 is outlined following the dichotomy of effective and ineffective communication strategies (Tab. 2). Second, the participants' choice of strategies is summarized and supplemented with participants' views and comments provided either during Task 2 or the interview part of the study. Then the participants' performance in both tasks is compared.

Student Teachers' Responses to Address Inappropriate Behaviour

The sampled population of student teachers employed a much larger number of ineffective than effective communication strategies in Task 1. In fact, out of the total number of 40 responses, only six could be classified as effective responses. In three other instances, we could not clearly label the response. Each of the six effective communication responses falls in the questioning category of strategies (e.g., Do you need anything? David, this is the second time it happened. Is there something wrong? Something serious? If so, you can come to me after the lesson and we can talk). Two of these also included non-controlling informational statements (e.g., Peter, what are you doing? You pushed everything off the desk. Is something wrong?). Four out of eight student teachers did not employ any effective strategy. Participants frequently employed more than one non-effective strategy in their particular response. The most frequent strategies were Interrogating (22 instances, e.g. Why did you do that? Do you think that this kind of behaviour is normal? How is it possible that all learners are silently working, and you are playing games on your phone instead?); and Ordering (12 instances, e.g., Get your things back and start working. Put the phone on the desk or give it to me and do what you are supposed to do. Phone on my desk.)

Participants' responses involved effective and ineffective question format (Questioning and Interrogating) though each question response was in a different form with a different aim. While some questions were open-ended, offering learners support in the situation (e.g., What do you need?) or aiming at clarifying the situation (e.g., Is there something wrong?), other questions were sarcastic (e.g., Ondra, are you bored in this class? Peter, are you tired of working?). Some sought what the learner did wrong (e.g., Can you tell me what you are doing?). In some cases, the participants wanted to find an explanation for the learner misbehaviour (e.g., Pavel, can you tell me why you are doing that?). In the interview part, participants further commented on their choices, stating that they primarily wanted to understand what caused the behaviour (e.g. I want to know why he [the learner] behaves like that). One participant mentioned the intention to make the learner feel embarrassed to stop the behaviour (e.g. When he [learner] feels embarrassed, he is more likely to remember he shouldn't do it anymore.)

Student Teachers' Choice of Responses to Address Disruptive Behaviour

Student teachers identified 3-7 effective communication responses out of 9 scenarios in Task 2. Hinting (e.g., David, you have a phone in your hands; we have agreed on the rule that during the lesson, the phone remains in a backpack) was a strategy with the highest identification rate (75%), followed by Questioning (69%) (e.g., I wonder what kind of solution you could come up with?) Active listening (41%) (e.g., You are angry that you are doing something you are struggling with) came third, and I-message strategy (e.g., When there are books scattered around, it is difficult to walk around the class, I am worried that someone might get hurt.) was the least identified one (20%). When students could choose Active listening as an effective response, they chose Reassuring (e.g., You will be all right; you are a good learner, and you can do it.) in all instances (13). Similarly, Interrogating (e.g., Why didn't you take the textbook? Last lesson I told you that you will need it.) was chosen instead of Questioning (5) (e.g., We will be working with the textbook today. I wonder what kind of solution you could come up with?). In the case of Hinting and I-message, various roadblocks were chosen, though the I-message strategy had the most extensive range of roadblocks being used instead (5).

Participants' think alouds provided insights into how participants perceived the strategies and why they chose them as effective. Seven participants preferred Reassuring (used 13 times) to Active listening, for they considered the strategy motivating, calming, and supporting the learner. Participants considered Interrogating (used eight times) suitable because it helps the teacher find reasons for the learner problem behaviour. However, they also valued Questioning, suggesting that it helps teachers clarify the situation (e.g., The teacher asks for more information and wants to know what the learner has a problem with.) and supports learner autonomy (e.g., You let the learners come up with their solution. The learners themselves say what they are supposed to do). Participants also considered questions less likely to hurt the learners than other responses (e.g., The statement [question] does not attack or hurt the learner.) Sometimes, the participants neglected active listening (taking learners' perspectives). They noted that it hurts learners (e.g., The teacher confirms learners' feelings. That's inappropriate. Saying this I confirm that the learner has a problem.) Paradoxically in another situation, they all considered it the most appropriate answer. Hinting, the most frequently used effective strategy was commented on as being informational and non-judgmental (e.g., It's natural and objective. You do not judge the learners. I only describe the reality. This doesn't blame the learners) and providing space for learner autonomy (e.g., The learners themselves solve their problems.)

Some students considered using I-messages inappropriate in the classroom (e.g., I am quite manipulating the learners. I don't think it is appropriate to speak about my emotions in front of the children.) Similarly, accepting learners' negative affect (part of the Active listening response) was considered inappropriate in seven out of eight cases. No participant explicitly valued the importance of accepting learners' feelings. One student teacher claimed that accepting a learner's negative affect does not help the learner; rather, it confirms that the learner has a problem. A similar situation was with the use of I-messages. Six out of eight participants perceived talking about emotions to learners as improper (e.g., The teacher should keep her personal feelings private; learners don't want to hear them. Teachers don't have to describe their feelings explicitly.)

Relationship Between Student Teachers' Ability to Employ and Identify Effective Communication Responses

The data do not indicate any apparent relationship between student teachers' ability to employ and identify effective communication responses. S3 shows the highest success rate in both tasks: Task 1 – 2 effective strategies; Task 2 – 7 effective strategies. S5 also provides two effective responses in Task 1 yet only 3 correct identification in Task 2. It follows that there is no observable trend suggesting that the higher the ability to recognize learner supportive strategies, the more likely they are to be employed by that person or vice versa. However, there are some recurring patterns of strategies. In both tasks, there is a high level of question type occurrences. As already stated, they either support learners or create roadblocks. Furthermore, the ineffective strategies of ordering, threatening, preaching, advising, and lecturing, all from the same category of roadblocks according to Gordon & Burch (2003), have high levels of occurrence in Task 1, where they often complement Interrogating. These roadblocks direct learner behaviour, offer solutions, imply potential consequences, and influence learners with facts and logic. In contrast, roadblocks of Labelling (used instead of I-message) and Reassuring (used instead of Active Listening) communicate evaluation or judgment to learners. Praising, Reassuring that could be mistaken for learner supportive responses (Larrivee, 2009) do not occur at all in Task 1. Humoring responses, on the other hand, were used four times. S6 uses Humoring three times in Task 1 and selects it

one time in Task 2. Preferences for this strategy might be caused by a personality-related trait (Ding et al., 2022; Hornstra et al., 2015)

The participants were more likely to choose the effective response when given 4 choices than they were to produce an effective response when considering a scenario. In Task 2, the participants' interview comments emphasized the negative impact of statements using communication roadblocks, although they used them in their responses in Task 1. For instance, S4 used Threatening in Task 1 (e.g., This is the second warning. Third warning, and I will tell your parents) while disapproving threatening in Task 2 (This threatens the learners, and that's not good). Moreover, some student teachers reflected on their responses in Task 1 while completing Task 2 or during the interview, saying, for example: Now as I can see the possibilities, I can see that my responses were inappropriate. Some proclaimed that when they see the ineffective statements among the effective ones, they can see the negative impact these statements could have on learners (e.g., Now as I have more possibilities and time, I would solve the situations differently [in Task 1]). While participants chose effective and ineffective strategies throughout Task 2, their ability to choose effective responses was higher than their ability to employ them by themselves.

During the interview part of the research, participants also stated that they lack the competence or knowledge needed to manage learner behaviour effectively and feel unprepared to deal with learner misbehaviour in the classroom (e.g., I should know the principles, but I don't know them. I'm not prepared to deal with learners' misbehaviour.) They also acknowledged the value of teacher-learner communication in the classroom, expressed the need to learn communication skills to manage learners' behaviour and articulated regret over the lack of focus on effective communication during their teacher preparation studies (e.g., The teacher-learner communication is the basic principle of successful cooperation in the classroom. We didn't have any courses at the university to teach us how to communicate with learners. Now I need to read a book or somehow learn about communication.)

Discussion and Conclusion

The current study examined what responses learner teachers would use to address inappropriate learner behaviour and what strategies they would select from a list of options as the most appropriate. We also explored the relationship between their ability to employ and identify effective responses. Although very limited in the number of surveyed student teachers, the research offers valuable qualitative insights into student teachers' communication practices to manage learners' behaviour.

The literature emphasizes the importance of effective classroom management strategies when addressing learner behaviour (Burden, 2020; Larrivee, 2009), and the impact of these strategies on learner behaviour, autonomy, engagement, self-concept, well-being, or responsibility is supported by various studies (Cheon et al., 2019; Roache & Lewis, 2011). However, in this study, pre-service master's level teachers frequently employed authoritative directive strategies, which show little or negative impact on learner behaviour, engagement, responsibility, and well-being (Lewis et al., 2005; Miller et al., 2000). Overall, these pre-service teachers' communication strategies are interrogative in the first instance, to find reasons for learner misbehaviour, and in the second instance directive to have things under control and get learners to behave. This finding corresponds with observations of Gordon and Burch (2003), ranking Interrogating the most frequently used roadblock. Teachers use Interrogating as they feel they need more information from learners to identify the best solution to a problem. The findings are also in line with the findings of Broomfield (2006),

Macias and Sanchez (2015), and others who suggest that student teachers consider authoritative strategies effective and frequently use them to manage learner behaviour.

In Task 2, when identifying an effective response among ineffective ones, there were differences in the frequency of specific communication strategies used. While Hinting and Questioning were frequently employed, Active listening and I-messages were the least frequently chosen strategies. Interestingly, while Hinting or Questioning has been explored in educational contexts, recent studies overlook the application of I-messages. This limited emphasis on certain communication strategies, like I-messages, may reflect broader concerns about the scope of classroom management training within teacher preparation programs. Evertson and Weinstein (2006) highlighted that many teacher education programs might not comprehensively focus on classroom management and effective communication skills. Recent findings by Shank and Santiago (2022) indicate that these challenges persist, with many teacher preparation programs adopting a predominantly theoretical approach to classroom management. Consequently, novice teachers often feel unprepared, wishing to have gained more practical tools and experiences during their studies. Furthermore, our study found that seven out of eight student teachers considered accepting learners' negative affect or discussing their emotions in the classroom inappropriate. Instead of acknowledging their feelings, they opted to reassure the learners. These findings point to the need further to develop teachers' classroom management and effective communication competencies (Paramita et al., 2020).

Although the surveyed student teachers showed limited ability to support learners' responsibility and autonomy through communication, their ability to choose appropriate responses was much higher than their ability to produce effective responses. Even though pre-service teachers used communication roadblocks in Task 1, in some cases, they rejected these strategies in Task 2, reflecting on them as ineffective and emphasizing their potential negative impact on learners. Moreover, student teachers reflected on the importance of building relationships with learners and creating a safe environment where learners can effectively learn. A similar difference between the use and perception of various behaviour management strategies was found in Reupert and Woodcock's (2010) study. While pre-service teachers in their study reported using various behaviour management strategies relatively frequently, they did not consider them effective or appropriate. Our study extended these findings; besides examining teachers' reflection and perception of strategies from a pool of options, it allowed participants to produce response statements individually. It's possible that while pre-service teachers are willing to support their learners respectfully and safely, they might not have sufficient communication strategies to do so.

The participants' stated in the interviews that they lack the competence or knowledge to manage learner behaviour effectively. They acknowledged the value of teacher-learner communication in the classroom, expressed their need to develop communication skills to manage learners' behaviour and regretted that they had no opportunity to learn about effective communication during their studies. The findings of this study align with existing research, which indicates that teachers often lack opportunities to gain communication skills during their preservice teacher education programs (Dicke et al., 2015; Stough et al., 2015), and they express their need for professional development on behaviour management (OECD, 2019).

This study provides several interesting findings, yet we recognize that the results' generalizability is limited due to the small number of participants. Moreover, the methodological choices were constrained by the online setting of the research and the hypothetical classroom situations. The non-classroom environment might have impacted participants' responses, and their responses may thus vary from their responses in the classroom. Future research is needed to observe student teachers in a classroom environment

during their teaching practicum. It might also consider a larger research sample, possibly including student teachers from different fields of study. A larger sample could reveal additional issues and insights into the studied phenomenon. Given the study's emphasis on the need for teachers' classroom management communication courses, future research might explore equipping pre-service teachers with the skills to manage learner behaviour effectively.

Although communication skills are a critical pedagogical skill for the teaching and learning process (Gordon & Burch, 2003; Larrivee, 2009; Porter, 2014), our initial small scale study suggests student teachers in the last year of master's studies are less likely to respond to behaviour situations without communication roadblocks. They need to develop learner-centred communication strategies to deal with learner misbehaviour while supporting learner engagement, motivation, self-concept, and autonomy. We believe that teacher education programs should offer opportunities to build this competence. This can be done in effective classroom behaviour management courses that connect theory with real-world practice and include culturally responsive techniques. They can also incorporate hands-on training, virtual simulations, and classroom observations of effective behaviour management strategies. Moreover, research studies suggest that teacher education programs should have stand-alone classroom management courses, rather than just integrating these principles into broader subjects. (For more detailed recommendations and examples, see Cliff et al., 2013; Freeman et al., 2014; Hudson et al., 2018; Jackson et al., 2013; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2011; O'Neill & Stephenson, 2012; Stevenson et al., 2020). Consequently, student teachers would feel more prepared to manage learner behaviour, or at least be aware of the communication skills needed to respond to learner behaviour effectively they would encounter in their future classrooms. They would become better managers of behaviour issues that disrupt the flow of the teaching and learning process and impact the quality of instruction. These competencies would then positively impact their feelings, well-being, job satisfaction (Aldrup et al., 2018; Aloe et al., 2014), and ultimately their learners.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Strategy	Reference	Examples
Effective		
Hinting	Lewis et al. 2005; Roache and Lewis 2011	I hear a lot of noise in the classroom.
I-messages	Gordon and Burch 2003; Larrivee 2009; Roache and Lewis 2011	When you come late, I have to stop what I'm doing and repeat the instructions. I feel then tired and angry.
Active Listening	Cheon et al. 2019; Gordon and Burch 2003; Larrivee, 2009; Wallace et al. 2014; Weger 2017; Worley et al. 2007;	I hear you are feeling really upset about the homework.
Taking students' perspectives	Cheon et al. 2019; Wallace et al. 2014	It might be difficult to stay focused for such a long time.
Accepting students' negative affect	Cheon et al. 2019; Goodboy and Myers 2008; Jang et al. 2010; Madden and Senior 2017; Wallace et al. 2014	It sounds like you are feeling some very strong emotions now.
Questioning	Larrivee 2009; Wallace et al. 2014	What do you need to stay focused today? What's wrong? / Is there something wrong?
Non-controlling informational language	Jang et al. 2010	You are talking while I am giving the instructions. The rule is that one person speaks at a time.
Ineffective		
Sarcasm	Gordon and Burch 2003; Larrivee 2009; Miller, Ferguson and Byrne 2000; Roache and Lewis 2011	Don't you think that's enough? Should I do the homework for you?
Communication roadblocks (Ordering, Threatening, Preaching, Advising, Lecturing, Blaming, Labeling, Interpreting, Praising, Reassuring, Interrogating, Humoring)	Gordon and Burch 2003; Larrivee 2009; Ming-tak and Wai shing 2008; Porter 2014	I suggest you get back to work. Stop complaining and start working. You'd better start working. Why don't you stay quiet when I am speaking? Stop being upset; you are acting like a child.

Table 1. Communication strategies used in the research

+ Strategy	Situation	Participant								+ Choice
		S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	
Active Listening	1	Reassuring	Reassuring	+	Reassuring	Reassuring	Reassuring	Reassuring	+	41%
	3	Reassuring	Reassuring	+	Reassuring	Reassuring	Reassuring	Reassuring	Reassuring	
	6	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	
Questioning	2	Interrogating	Interrogating	+	+	+	+	+	+	69%
	9	+	+	Interrogating	+	Interrogating	+	Interrogating	+	
Hinting	4	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	Interpreting	75%
	8	+	+	+	+	Interrogating	+	Interrogating	Interrogating	
I-message	5	Preaching	Labeling	Preaching	Preaching	Humoring	Humoring	Humoring	Labeling	20%
	7	+	Interpreting	+	Labeling	Labeling	Interpreting	+	Labeling	
Total of effective strategies		5	4	7	5	3	5	4	4	

Table 2. Responses in Task 2