

**INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCES:  
PERSPECTIVES FROM FILIPINO PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS IN A STATE UNIVERSITY****<sup>1,\*</sup>William D. Magday, Jr and <sup>2</sup>Noble A. Magday**<sup>1</sup>College of Teacher Education, Nueva Vizcaya State University, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines<sup>2</sup>Baresbes Elementary School, Baresbes, Quezon, Schools Division of Nueva Vizcaya, DepEd R02, Philippines**Received 09<sup>th</sup> July 2025; Accepted 12<sup>th</sup> August 2025; Published online 19<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

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**Abstract**

Classroom management experiences of pre-service teachers in internship programs pose significant challenges in establishing authority and managing student behavior. This interpretative phenomenological study explored the classroom management experiences of student teachers reflected in teaching journal entries and interviews. Data were 160 teaching journal entries taken from the internship portfolios produced by 20 Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd)-English graduates from a state university in the Philippines. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Five generated themes from the teaching journals that could provide suggestions for future pre-service teachers and other members of the internship discourse community concerning classroom management were drawn, which are: 1. Implementing Effective Behavior Management Strategies, 2. Establishing Clear Expectations and Routines, 3. Employing Appropriate Interventions to Maintain Classroom Order, 4. Promoting Student Engagement and Active Participation, and 5. Reflecting on Classroom Management Practices. A focus group discussion with 15 participants, which was also analyzed using thematic analysis, was utilized to further discuss the findings. The paper concludes with pedagogical implications for pre-service teachers and the professors of Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs).

**Keywords:** Phenomenological study, Classroom management, Pre-service teachers.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The teaching internship has always been a key component of any teacher education program worldwide, encompassing various aspects of classroom management. It offers practice teachers or interns an opportunity to participate in critical thinking as they construct meaning out of their teaching experiences and attempt to discover effective classroom management methods that will shape them as future teachers (Sieberer-Nagler, 2016). The significance of the teaching internship extends beyond the individual experience, as it serves as a reference point for re-evaluating and enhancing the teacher education curriculum, particularly in the context of addressing the challenges of classroom management (Pianta, 2013; Mansor *et al.*, 2012). The success of the teaching internship serves as a crucial indicator of the quality of teacher education programs, as highlighted by studies such as Portman and Abu Rass (2019), Floden *et al.* (2017), Andrews *et al.* (2017), and Haigh *et al.* (2013). In the Philippine context, the teaching internship is mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) under CMO No. 30 (2004), requiring pre-service teachers to compile portfolios that include teaching journals, lesson plans, and evaluation forms as evidence of their competencies (Magday & Pramoolsook, 2020). Despite this structured framework, pre-service teachers in the Philippines and broader Southeast Asia face unique socio-cultural challenges in classroom management, such as large class sizes, limited resources, and diverse student backgrounds (Mundo & Vinco, 2018; Prabjandee, 2019; Rosero *et al.*, 2025). These contextual factors amplify the complexities of establishing authority and fostering engagement during practicum.

Navigating the complexities of classroom management establishing authority, setting routines, managing diverse behaviors, and fostering engagement represents a core challenge for pre-service teachers during their practicum (Everston & Weinstein, 2006). These experiences are deeply personal and context-bound. This study, therefore, adopts an interpretative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of pre-service teachers specifically concerning classroom management during their internship in a Philippine state university. The central research question guiding this inquiry is: How do student teachers navigate classroom management challenges during their internship and make sense of their practices?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Classroom management is widely recognized as a fundamental skill for effective teaching and a significant predictor of student achievement (Marzano & Marzano, 2003; Hattie, 2009). However, it remains one of the most daunting aspects of teaching for novices (Friedman, 2006; Veenman, 1984). Research consistently highlights the "reality shock" experienced by pre-service teachers when faced with the multifaceted demands of managing a classroom autonomously during practicum (Veenman, 1984; Farrell, 2003). This challenge is exacerbated in Southeast Asian contexts, where studies report that pre-service teachers struggle with student disengagement, disruptive behavior, and inadequate mentorship (Prabjandee, 2019; Kaygisiz & Özmen, 2021). Phenomenological approaches have proven valuable in teacher education research, as they prioritize understanding individuals' subjective experiences and the meanings they attribute to them (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Studies utilizing this approach have shed light on the emotional dimensions of teaching (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014) and the process of

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professional identity formation (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009), areas intrinsically linked to classroom management experiences. In the Philippines, phenomenological studies have explored cooperating teacher dynamics (Salazar, 2017) and lesson-planning challenges (Pramoolsook & Magday, 2019), but few have examined classroom management through reflective journals. Prior research on pre-service teacher practicum experiences emphasizes the role of mentorship (Hobson *et al.*, 2009), the importance of reflection (Schön, 1983; Farrell, 2015), and the development of practical knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Recent studies in Turkey and Thailand further underscore the value of self-regulatory strategies during microteaching (Kaygisiz & Özmen, 2021) and identity negotiation during practicum (Prabjandee, 2019). However, there remains a critical gap in the Philippines regarding in-depth qualitative exploration of classroom management experiences using rich data sources like reflective journals. As Magday and Pramoolsook (2020) note, teaching journals a mandatory component of Philippine internship portfolios remain underexplored despite their potential to reveal authentic struggles and meaning-making processes in classroom management.

### Theoretical Underpinning

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis* (IPA), which emphasizes the exploration of lived experiences and the meaning-making processes of individuals within specific contexts (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is particularly suited to educational research that seeks to understand how pre-service teachers interpret and respond to complex phenomena such as classroom management during their internship. The approach acknowledges the dual role of the researcher as both interpreter and co-creator of meaning, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the subjective realities of student teachers.

The study also draws on *Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory* (1986), which posits that learning occurs in a social context through observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory is relevant to classroom management as it highlights the importance of self-efficacy, reflective practice, and the influence of mentor teachers and peer interactions during the practicum. Pre-service teachers' ability to manage classrooms effectively is shaped not only by their personal beliefs and experiences but also by the behavioral models they encounter in real teaching environments.

Additionally, *Schön's Reflective Practice Theory* (1983) provides a foundational lens for understanding how student teachers engage in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Teaching journals serve as a medium through which pre-service teachers articulate their reflections, confront challenges, and refine their classroom management strategies. This reflective process is essential for developing professional competence and adaptive expertise in managing diverse classroom scenarios.

The concept of *Situated Learning* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) further supports the study's focus on the internship as a community of practice. Within this framework, learning is viewed as a process of participation in social and cultural contexts. Pre-service teachers, through their engagement in authentic teaching tasks and interactions with mentors and

students, gradually move from peripheral participation toward fuller involvement in the teaching profession. Classroom management, therefore, is not merely a technical skill but a socially constructed practice shaped by contextual factors and relational dynamics. Together, these theoretical perspectives IPA, Social Cognitive Theory, Reflective Practice, and Situated Learning provide a robust foundation for interpreting the classroom management experiences of pre-service teachers. They illuminate the interplay between personal agency, social context, and reflective engagement, offering deeper insights into how student teachers navigate the complexities of classroom authority, behavior regulation, and student engagement during their practicum.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach (Smith *et al.*, 2009). IPA is concerned with understanding how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. It is particularly suited to exploring complex, subjective phenomena like the challenges and sense-making associated with classroom management during internship.

### Participants and Setting

Participants were 20 recent graduates of the Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSEd) major in English program at a state university in the Philippines. All participants had completed their mandated teaching internship within the preceding academic year. The study utilized data from their internship portfolios. Additionally, a subset of 15 participants from this group volunteered for a Focus Group Discussion (FGD).

### Data Sources

#### 1. Teaching Journals

A total of 160 journal entries were systematically extracted from the participants' final internship portfolios. These entries, authored by the participants during their practicum, served as primary reflections on their daily teaching experiences, with a specific focus on classroom management occurrences as they unfolded.

#### 2. Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

One semi-structured FGD was conducted with 15 participants to delve deeper into the themes emerging from the journal analysis and explore shared and divergent experiences related to classroom management sense-making. The FGD was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

### Data Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to analyze both datasets. For the journals, analysis involved iterative reading, initial coding, searching for themes across the dataset, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the analysis. The five major themes identified were: Implementing Effective Behavior Management Strategies; Establishing Clear Expectations and Routines; Employing Appropriate Interventions to Maintain Classroom Order;

Promoting Student Engagement and Active Participation; and Reflecting on Classroom Management Practices. The FGD transcript was similarly analyzed thematically, with findings used to elaborate upon, confirm, and nuance the insights derived from the journals. Rigor was enhanced through researcher reflexivity, peer debriefing on emerging themes, and thick description of the findings.

## RESULTS

The thematic analysis of the 160 journal entries revealed five core themes capturing the essence of the pre-service teachers' classroom management experiences and their attempts to make sense of them:

### 1. Implementing Effective Behavior Management Strategies

Participants extensively documented their trials and errors in managing student behavior. Journals reflected attempts at proactive strategies (like positive reinforcement, clear praise) and reactive measures (addressing disruptions, enforcing consequences). A common thread was the challenge of finding strategies perceived as both effective and respectful, moving beyond punitive approaches learned vicariously. The FGD highlighted the anxiety associated with "getting it wrong" and the search for strategies that fostered a positive climate.

### 2. Establishing Clear Expectations and Routines

The importance of setting clear rules, procedures, and expectations from the outset emerged strongly. Participants described the difficulty in consistently enforcing these, particularly at the beginning of their placement. Journals revealed a growing awareness that clarity and predictability significantly reduced management challenges. The FGD participants emphasized how observing their cooperating teachers' routines was crucial, but adapting them authentically was a struggle.

### 3. Employing Appropriate Interventions to Maintain Classroom Order

This theme encompassed the immediate actions taken to address disruptions. Entries detailed a range of interventions, from non-verbal cues and proximity control to redirecting questions, private conversations, and involving the cooperating teacher or school administration. The data showed a progression in confidence regarding choosing interventions deemed situationally appropriate. The FGD revealed the significant role of the cooperating teacher's support (or lack thereof) in validating intervention choices.

### 4. Promoting Student Engagement and Active Participation

Participants strongly linked student engagement to reduced management issues. Journals described efforts to plan engaging activities, use varied teaching methods, build rapport, and cater to diverse learning needs. Successes in engagement were often correlated with entries noting fewer behavioral problems. The FGD underscored the realization that engagement was not just a pedagogical goal but a fundamental management strategy.

### 5. Reflecting on Classroom Management Practices

Reflection was a pervasive element. Journals were filled with self-analysis of management successes and failures, questioning their own actions ("What could I have done differently?"), analyzing student reactions, and considering the impact of their personal style and demeanor. The FGD confirmed that this reflective process, though sometimes painful, was central to their sense-making and perceived growth. Participants valued opportunities, like journaling and the FGD itself, to articulate and process these reflections. The FGD provided depth to these themes, confirming their prevalence while adding nuances regarding the emotional toll of management challenges, the critical influence of the mentor relationship, and the importance of peer support among interns.

## DISCUSSION

This study, using an interpretative phenomenological lens, provides rich insights into how pre-service teachers experience and make sense of classroom management during their crucial internship phase. The five emergent themes align with established classroom management theory (e.g., Everston & Weinstein, 2006; Marzano *et al.*, 2003) but ground these concepts firmly in the lived, often emotionally charged, reality of the novice. The findings underscore the centrality of reflection (Theme 5) as identified in the data and emphasized by Schön (1983) and Farrell (2015). The journals and FGD were not merely records but active tools for sense-making, allowing pre-service teachers to process complex interactions, evaluate strategies, and begin constructing their professional identity as managers of the learning environment. The struggle to implement effective behavior strategies (Theme 1) and appropriate interventions (Theme 3) echoes the "reality shock" described by Veenman (1984), highlighting the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application under pressure. The emphasis on establishing routines and expectations (Theme 2) reinforces the well-documented importance of structure and predictability (Wong & Wong, 2009). However, the phenomenological approach reveals the interns' *process* of learning this – the difficulty of initial consistency and the dawning realization of its impact. Similarly, the link between engagement and management (Theme 4) is theoretically established (Marzano, 2003), but the data vividly portrays the interns' experiential discovery of this connection: that proactive engagement is often the most effective management tool. The study highlights the profound influence of the mentoring relationship (as discussed in the FGD findings), supporting Hobson *et al.*'s (2009) research on effective mentoring. The availability, guidance, and feedback (or lack thereof) from the cooperating teacher significantly shaped the interns' confidence, strategy choices, and reflective insights.

### Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This interpretative phenomenological study illuminated the complex and multifaceted nature of pre-service teachers' classroom management experiences during internship. Through their reflective journals and group discussions, participants revealed the significant challenges in establishing authority, implementing strategies, and maintaining order, while simultaneously engaging in crucial sense-making processes centered on reflection, strategy adaptation, and understanding the link between engagement and management.

These findings offer significant implications for Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) and stakeholders involved in the practicum experience:

### 1. Enhanced Pre-Internship Preparation

TEI curricula may intensify practical, scenario-based training in specific classroom management strategies *before* internship. This includes not just theory but simulated practice of establishing routines, delivering clear instructions, deploying non-verbal cues, and implementing tiered interventions. Role-playing challenging behaviors and reflecting on potential responses is crucial.

### 2. Structured Reflective Practice

The power of reflection evident in the journals must be systematically harnessed. Professors and supervisors may provide structured reflective frameworks specifically targeting classroom management experiences. Guiding questions should push beyond description to analysis of cause-effect, consideration of alternatives, and linking actions to educational principles. Integrating reflective discussions throughout the internship, not just at the end, is vital.

### 3. Focus on Engagement as Management

Teacher education programs may explicitly teach and model the direct connection between lesson design, active learning strategies, student engagement, and preventative classroom management. Interns need support in planning lessons that inherently minimize off-task behavior through relevance, variety, and student-centeredness.

### 4. Strengthened Mentorship Programs

Careful selection, training, and ongoing support for cooperating teachers are paramount. Mentors need clear guidance on supporting interns specifically in classroom management, including providing structured feedback, co-teaching strategies, gradual release of responsibility, and creating a safe space for interns to discuss challenges and vulnerabilities without judgment. Regular communication between university supervisors and cooperating teachers is essential.

### 5. Peer Support Networks

Facilitating opportunities for peer support among interns (e.g., structured cohort meetings, online forums) can provide a valuable space for sharing challenges, strategies, and reflections, reducing isolation and fostering collaborative sense-making. By addressing these implications, TEIs can better equip pre-service teachers to navigate the complex realities of classroom management, transforming challenging experiences into powerful opportunities for professional growth and identity formation, ultimately enhancing the quality of future teachers entering the profession.

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