

Implementation of Democratic Classroom Management at a University: Practices and Perceptions

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Abstract: In South Africa, the translation of democratic principles into actionable classroom management strategies presents a significant challenge, particularly within teacher-educator training programmes. This study explores the practices and perceptions of student-teachers and lecturers regarding democratic classroom management practices at a university in South Africa. The research is framed by critical theory as its theoretical foundation and adopts a transformative research paradigm within a qualitative research approach. A participatory research design is utilised, with data collected through observation and semi-structured interviews involving 10 student-teachers and 5 lecturers at a selected university in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Thematic analysis indicates that some classrooms predominantly employ traditional lecture-based approaches, characterised by limited student engagement and minimal use of participatory methods, while others exhibit efforts to cultivate a more inclusive and interactive learning environment. The findings reveal that students place a high value on feeling heard and respected, advocating for active participation in decision-making processes. Conversely, lecturers underscore the empowering nature of democratic management in fostering student ownership of education and collaborative learning environments. The research identifies challenges in translating theory into practical techniques

due to student reluctance and highlights the positive effects of providing students with opportunities for decision-making in class activities. Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the implementation of democratic practices. In conclusion, the research posits that effective democratic management is contingent upon nurturing a collaborative environment in which students feel empowered, while also ensuring alignment with educational objectives.

Keywords: Democratic practices, democratic classroom, classroom management, teacher training.

1. Introduction

The contemporary educational landscape recognises the importance of democratic classroom management in creating inclusive, participatory, and diverse learning environments. However, challenges remain in translating democratic principles into tangible strategies for managing classrooms, particularly within teacher-educator training programmes (Chauke, 2021; Chitsamatanga & Rembe, 2020). Democratic education emphasises the significance of student participation, choice, and exposure to diverse perspectives in promoting holistic development and critical thinking (Mafhala, 2015). Nonetheless, there exists a noticeable gap in the implementation of these democratic paradigms, as many lecturers continue to rely on traditional and potentially anti-democratic management practices. This gap has considerable implications, potentially resulting in a generation of teachers ill-equipped to foster democratic values and adversely affecting inclusivity and diversity in education (Uleanya, 2020, 2022). Concerns are mounting that disparities in the incorporation of democratic classroom management practices may compromise student performance and erode trust in democratic ideals. As the emphasis on inclusivity and diverse voices in education intensifies, it is imperative to clarify perceptions and implementations of democratic management practices in university classrooms. This study examines the practices and perceptions of student-

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teachers and lecturers regarding democratic classroom management practices at a university and underscores the necessity to reshape teacher education to align with democratic and inclusive pedagogical frameworks.

A study conducted by Demirtas (2005) investigated the attitudes and behaviours associated with democratic classroom management among university students in Turkey. The survey comprised 1,023 students from various departments at Inonu University in Malatya, Turkey. The research findings were categorised into two sections: students' personal information and the findings and evaluations of the Democratic Classroom Management Scale. The study revealed that a majority of students within the faculties were male, with the largest group situated in the faculty of education. Furthermore, significant differences were identified in students' opinions on democratic classroom management based on gender, faculty, and academic year. In conclusion, the study emphasised the critical importance of educating students about democratic values to uphold and advance democratic management practices, with educational institutions assuming a pivotal role in this endeavour.

Another significant study conducted by Izawa (2022) examined the concept of classroom democracy and its potential to promote social justice in education. The study employed a methodology that involved critically analysing existing literature on classroom management and educational philosophy, as well as conducting a case study of a successful implementation of democratic practices in a Japanese elementary school. The findings indicated that classroom democracy can effectively foster social justice in education by cultivating a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. However, the implementation of classroom democracy requires a thorough reassessment of current educational practices and policies, as well as a commitment to ongoing collaboration and communication among teachers, students, and parents.

The discourse surrounding teacher education acknowledges both positive advancements and persistent gaps that perpetuate the development of undemocratic management skills among prospective educators. A body of literature from various global and local perspectives substantiates this claim. International research studies, for instance, pinpoint the disparity between the advocated theoretical models of democratic education and their practical implementation, revealing a lack of genuine democratic classroom management skills. Empirical investigations conducted outside of Africa further highlight this paradox. The work of scholars such as John Dewey and Alfie Kohn has drawn attention to the disconnect between professed democratic educational ideals and their actual manifestation in teaching practices (Dewey, 1916; Kohn, 2006). These findings underscore the challenges associated with translating theoretical knowledge into effective classroom management strategies.

Focusing on the African context, noteworthy research conducted by esteemed academics in Kenya and Nigeria provides additional support for this observation. Kubow's research in Kenya (2005) and Adeyemo's research in Nigeria (2012) unveil a concerning trend across diverse educational settings – the difficulty of translating theoretical democratic frameworks into practical classroom management techniques. These findings underscore the critical need for comprehensive reforms in teacher education that prioritise bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications in order to cultivate effective and democratic educational practices.

Now, directing attention towards South Africa, De Jager's (2019) research highlights the evident disparities within the teacher education system. There is a distinct contrast between the desired principles of democracy and the actual implementation of classroom management practices. This fundamental incongruity underscores the significance of investigating and rectifying the discrepancies within the teacher education process. Consequently, this study aims to bridge the existing research gap by examining the perspectives and applications of democratic classroom management in university-based teacher training programmes in South Africa. By doing so, this study seeks to provide new insights and perspectives that have the potential to ameliorate the current

discrepancies within the teacher education process and foster a comprehensive approach towards cultivating democratic classroom management skills.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the practices and perceptions of student-teachers and lecturers regarding democratic classroom management practices at a university. This examination is warranted by the manifesto on values, education, and democracy released by the Department of Education (2001), which outlines the values that should serve as the foundation of the South African education system, including democracy, social justice, and equity. This policy framework advocates for the implementation of democratic classroom management practices by promoting values that encourage active participation, critical thinking, and respect for diversity. To guide the study, the following research objectives were formulated based on the identified gap:

- The study explores how democratic management practices unfold in university classrooms.
- The study investigates the perceptions of student teachers and lecturers on democratic management practices in university classrooms.

1.1 Research questions

In order to actualise the objectives of the study stated above, the following research questions were raised and answered:

- How do democratic management practices unfold in university classrooms?
- What are the perceptions of student teachers and lecturers on democratic management practices in university classrooms?

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is rooted in the principles of critical theory, which serves as its theoretical framework. Critical theory originated from the ideas of German Marxist intellectuals in the early 20th century and has since expanded to encompass various social and political phenomena, including education. It critiques existing societal structures and aims to bring about transformative change (Bronner, 2013; Friesen, 2008). The term "critical theory" was coined by Max Horkheimer, a prominent figure in the Frankfurt School, a group of intellectuals who examined authority, obedience, and social justice (Landmann, 2011; Johnson, 2005). This theory combines Marxist analysis with Freudian psychoanalytical insights and is based on the belief that there are inherent dysfunctions in society that require interventions to establish fair and just frameworks (Brand, 2016). The Frankfurt School sought to understand the paradox of obedience to unjust authority and to develop strategies for creating a more equitable society.

Critical theory examines power dynamics within established systems of knowledge and control, making it a valuable tool for challenging oppressive and exclusionary educational models (Giroux, 2004). With its transformative approach, critical theory rejects traditional hierarchical education and advocates for a participatory and inclusive learning environment. It highlights collaboration and dialogue as alternatives to the competitive and individualistic focus often found in education. Proponents of critical theory argue that education should be a liberating experience that dismantles traditional power structures and values the perspectives of all participants.

Critical theory is relevant to this study because it strives to democratise classroom management and promote participatory and inclusive approaches. It provides a framework for analysing classroom interactions, curriculum planning, and student-lecturer relationships. By utilising critical theory, I can investigate whether university classrooms facilitate democratic practices, inclusivity, and unbiased learning environments. This theory encourages lecturers to be conscious of their biases and create a collaborative atmosphere that fosters equality and mutual respect among students. It also helps us understand the lack of democracy in classroom management practices and guides the integration of transformative, democratic practices in teacher education programmes.

To establish the connection between theory and the study's objectives, critical theory serves as a transformative and analytical lens. It is crucial to examine the implementation of democratic management practices in university classrooms and explore student teachers' and lecturers' perceptions of these practices. This theory enables us to comprehend the complex interplay of power structures, knowledge systems, and interactive dynamics in educational settings. It also aids in examining the presence of democratic elements and operational inclusivity in classroom management. Critical theory allows us to scrutinise and interpret the biases, assumptions, and prevailing ideologies that influence student teachers and lecturers, providing insights into their understanding and experiences of democratic practices in university classrooms. Therefore, by employing this approach, one can comprehensively understand the discrepancies and commonalities between theoretical democratic concepts and their practical applications, thereby promoting a more inclusive and participatory educational paradigm.

3. Methodology

The transformative paradigm is essential for this research because it emphasises the need to understand and address the various structures, perceptions, and practices within the educational sector that may limit the development of democratic and participatory classroom management practices. This paradigm is particularly relevant to the study's objectives, which are to explore democratic management practices and examine the perspectives of student teachers and lecturers on these practices in university classrooms. The transformative paradigm recognises that research is influenced by values and highlights the importance of approaching inquiry with a commitment to social justice and emancipation (Mertens, 2007; Romm, 2015). By adopting this paradigm, the study acknowledges the potential inequalities and power imbalances in educational settings and provides a framework to navigate, understand, and address issues of inequality, marginalisation, power dynamics, and exclusivity in the learning environment. This approach promotes active engagement with democratic principles (Omodan, 2024) and situates the study within the broader discourse on democratisation in education. Moreover, it facilitates the exploration of complex, contextual interactions and contributes to the development of more equitable and inclusive classroom spaces.

This study employs a qualitative research approach to align with its objectives of investigating democratic management practices and examining different perspectives within university classrooms. The use of a qualitative approach allows for a more thorough exploration of the complex dynamics, experiences, and viewpoints (Petty et al., 2012) related to democratic classroom management. Unlike quantitative approaches that focus on numerical data and generalised findings (Sukamolson, 2007), qualitative research delves into the intricacies of human behaviour, offering a comprehensive understanding of the various interpretations, beliefs, and interactions that occur in educational settings. By utilising a qualitative approach, the study effectively captures the valuable insights of student teachers and lecturers regarding democratic practices, providing a holistic perspective on the underlying values, motivations, and challenges that influence the implementation of democratic management principles in university classrooms. This in-depth exploration, facilitated by the qualitative approach, is crucial for understanding the subtleties of classroom dynamics, contributing to the discussion on inclusive, participatory education, and offering practical insights for nurturing democratic classroom environments.

The study strategically adopts Participatory Research (PR) as its research design due to its relevance in promoting active and democratic participation among individuals directly experiencing the problems under investigation. This design is particularly suitable as it aligns with the goal of democratising classroom environments, enabling student teachers and lecturers to actively engage in identifying and addressing the challenges associated with implementing democratic management practices in university classrooms (Liamputtong & Higginbottom, 2015). The use of PR facilitates a collaborative exploration of experiences, perceptions, and potential solutions, fostering a sense of

ownership and mutual respect among participants (Marinkovic-Chavez et al., 2022; Omodan & Skosana, 2023; Omodan et al., 2024). By placing the individuals facing the challenges at the centre of the inquiry process, PR ensures a more authentic, contextually rich understanding of the dynamics of democratic classroom management, thereby contributing to the development of comprehensive, inclusive, and practical strategies to enhance participatory learning environments and democratic engagement in the educational sector.

3.1 Data collection methods

This study employs observation and interview data collection methods to obtain relevant information from participants. Observations focus on the first objective, which pertains to democratic management practices. The use of observation as a data collection method offers a unique advantage in capturing nuanced dynamics and unspoken social cues (Sudipa et al., 2018). Observational data collection can provide insights into social cues that individuals may not be consciously aware of or may not express through verbal communication (Omodan, 2024). This method allows for the validation of the extent and degree of implementation, or lack thereof, of democratic practices in selected university classrooms. The researcher specifically observed four active classrooms within the chosen university to gain concrete insights into the real-world application of democratic practices. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are utilised to address the second objective and create an environment conducive to candid discussions. This approach allows both students and lecturers to express their perspectives on issues related to the study's central problem (Baumbusch, 2010). Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for extracting in-depth information from participants and align with participatory research principles, promoting participant collaboration in identifying institutional problems and co-constructing solutions. By employing these two methods, the study ensures a comprehensive exploration of the topics at hand, integrating theoretical insights with practical realities.

3.2 Participants and selection of participants

To achieve the first objective, the study involves the participation of student-teachers and lecturers from four distinct active classrooms. For the second objective, the participants consist of 10 student-teachers and 5 lecturers, making a total of 15 individuals. The selected student-teachers are third-year university students in the Faculty of Education, while the lecturers have a minimum of two years of teaching experience at the chosen university in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The study employs the Convenient Participant Selection Technique to select participants, offering both efficiency and accessibility (Etikan et al., 2016; Alvi, 2016). This technique is advantageous due to its time-efficient nature, enabling a prompt and seamless approach to subjects and facilitating the exploration of the study's focal points.

3.3 Method of data analysis

Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data gathered from observations and interviews in this study. This method is a fundamental component of qualitative analysis as it aids in the identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns or "themes" present in the data. It enables a thorough understanding of the underlying dynamics, behaviours, and perspectives (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Terry et al., 2017). By employing thematic analysis, the study was able to investigate and comprehend the various perceptions, interactions, and implementations associated with democratic management practices in university classrooms, as expressed by the participants. This method was vital in elucidating the diverse and intricate experiences and opinions of student teachers and lecturers, providing a comprehensive and contextualised insight into the prevailing practices and attitudes regarding democratic classroom management. Therefore, thematic analysis played a pivotal role in enhancing the depth, coherence, and relevance of the study's findings, ensuring a well-rounded and substantiated exploration of the research themes.

3.4 Ethical considerations

In accordance with research integrity standards, this study obtained approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of the Free State. One of the most important considerations was obtaining informed consent from all participants. They were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, ensuring that they had the autonomy to make informed decisions regarding their involvement. To protect the participants' privacy and the sensitive nature of the information shared, anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained. Pseudonyms such as S1, S2, and S3 were used for student participants, while L1, L2, and L3 were used for lecturer participants to ensure that personal information was not disclosed. This layer of protection allowed participants to openly express their views, experiences, and perceptions without fear of reprisal or harm. As a result, the collected data was rich and authentic. These ethical safeguards not only enhanced the study's moral character but also increased its trustworthiness.

3.5 Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured through various measures addressing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved by utilising multiple data collection methods, such as observations and semi-structured interviews, yielding comprehensive, triangulated insights into democratic management practices. Furthermore, member checking was employed to allow participants to review and validate the findings, thus ensuring an accurate capture of their perspectives. Dependability was upheld by extensively documenting the research process, including the research design, data collection, and analysis procedures, which created an audit trail that can be examined by other researchers. Transferability was supported by providing a detailed description of the research context, participants, and findings, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the results to other settings. Confirmability was maintained through the use of a reflexive journal, where the researchers recorded their reflections and potential biases throughout the study. Additionally, direct quotes from participants were utilised to substantiate the findings. These combined efforts enhance the study's reliability and the validity of its conclusions.

4. Presentation of Data

This section presents data collected through a combination of observation and interviews. The purpose of this data collection was to address the following research questions: How do democratic management practices unfold in university classrooms? What are the perceptions of student teachers and lecturers on democratic management practices in university classrooms?

4.1 Democratic management practices unfold in the classrooms

To answer question number one, data was collected through observations in four different classrooms with various lecturers. We took notes on several categories, including class details, instructor behaviour, student engagement, participatory methods, and management of disruptions. The details are provided in the table below.

Table 1: Observational checklist for the study

CLASSROOM 1	
Categories	Observations
Class Details:	The undergraduate lecture was held in a classroom with limited seating arrangements.
Instructor Behaviour:	The instructor primarily adopts a lecture-based approach, delivering content using PowerPoint slides. Limited interaction with students was observed; the instructor maintains control over the classroom but does not actively engage with students.

Student Engagement	Students appear attentive but passively engaged. Limited opportunities for student interaction or participation were observed during the session.
Participatory Methods	There is no evident use of participatory methods such as group discussions or collaborative activities. Instruction remains primarily one-way, with minimal student involvement.
Management of Disruptions	No disruptions were noted during the observation; the instructor maintained a calm and orderly classroom environment throughout the session.

CLASSROOM 2

Categories	Observations
Class Details:	Undergraduate lectures are conducted in a smaller classroom setting without circular tables for group discussions.
Instructor Behaviour:	The instructor adopts a discussion-based approach, encouraging active participation and dialogue among students. It provides opportunities for students to share their perspectives and engage in critical analysis, but the classroom seating arrangement was a challenge for the students as they could not engage as they wanted. The seating arrangement was in a traditional setting where students sat as the audience while the lecturers stood in front of the class delivering the lecture.
Student Engagement	A high level of student engagement with lecture was observed; students actively participated in questions and answers, asked questions, and offered insights.
Participatory Methods	Utilises participatory methods such as group discussions, case studies, and peer presentations to facilitate collaborative learning experiences, but the group discussion, as recommended by the lecturer, was not active because the student can only work in a group outside the classroom hour, as a result of the uncondusive classroom seating arrangement.
Management of Disruptions	Minimal disruptions were observed; the lecturer effectively manages discussions and redirects focus when necessary, maintaining a respectful and inclusive atmosphere.

CLASSROOM 3

Categories	Observations
Class Details:	Undergraduate laboratory classroom sessions were conducted in a well-equipped laboratory space with designated workstations.
Instructor Behaviour:	The instructor adopts a hands-on approach, guiding students through practical experiments and demonstrations. Provides clear instructions and support to ensure student safety and understanding.
Student Engagement	Students actively engage in hands-on activities, following instructions and enthusiastically conducting technical work. The instructor encourages questions and discussions during the session.
Participatory Methods	In this session, the lecturer's activities promote active participation and collaboration among students, fostering a cooperative learning environment.
Management of Disruptions	No significant disruptions were noted; the lecturer controls the laboratory environment and promptly addresses any safety concerns.

CLASSROOM 4

Categories	Observations
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Class Details:	The undergraduate classroom is held in a medium-sized classroom with tables arranged in a normal face-me-and-face-you classroom section where the lecturer stays at the front and faces the students.
Instructor Behaviour:	The lecturer facilitates problem-solving exercises and provides individualised assistance to students as needed. Encourages students to work together and share their approaches.
Student Engagement	Students could not actively participate in solving problems and discussing concepts because of the difficulty in movement, as some students seem to prefer to work with other students who are not closely seated with them. The lecturer, however, seems to lack the ability to create a supportive atmosphere where students feel comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification.
Participatory Methods	The lecturer emphasises interactive problem-solving activities and peer learning strategies to engage students in learning. However, this seems to be abstract, as the students are too handicapped to implement such an atmosphere.
Management of Disruptions	Minimal disruptions were observed; the instructor maintained a structured yet flexible teaching session, managing student interactions and inquiries but not as effectively as it should, as students asked questions even when they were not pointed at.

The observations from the four classrooms illustrate a wide range of classroom management practices and levels of student engagement. Classroom 1 follows a traditional lecture-based approach characterised by limited interaction between the instructor and students. Although disruption was minimal due to the small number of students, student engagement appears passive, with few opportunities for active participation or collaborative learning. This observation aligns with existing literature that emphasises the persistence of traditional teaching methods (Chauke, 2021), which can hinder the integration of democratic principles into classroom management practices. In contrast, Classroom 2 adopts a more participatory approach, with the instructor encouraging discussion and promoting active student engagement. However, there are challenges arising from the physical layout of the classroom, which hampers effective group discussions as recommended by the instructor. This discrepancy between theoretical ideals and practical constraints echoes the findings of Dewey (1916) and Kohn (2006), who emphasise the gap between espoused democratic values and their implementation in educational settings.

Classroom 3 demonstrates a hands-on teaching style, where students actively participate in practical experiments and collaborative learning activities. The instructor creates a cooperative learning environment that promotes engagement and interaction among students. This observation aligns with literature that highlights the importance of participatory methods in fostering inclusive and engaging learning environments (Mafhala, 2015). However, Classroom 4 faces challenges related to its physical layout, which affects student mobility and peer interaction. Despite the lecturer's efforts to facilitate interactive problem-solving activities, students encounter difficulties engaging in classroom activities due to the constrained seating arrangement. This highlights the significance of aligning classroom infrastructure with pedagogical goals to facilitate democratic classroom management practices, as noted by Demirtas (2005) and Izawa (2022).

4.2 Students and lecturers' perceptions on democratic classroom management practices

This section addresses research question two, which generated three sub-themes as indicated below: student and lecturer perspectives on democratic classroom management, benefits and challenges of democratic classroom management, and strategies for implementing democratic classroom management.

4.2.1 Theme 1: Student and Lecturer Perspectives on Democratic Classroom Management

In exploring the perceptions of both students and lecturers regarding democratic management practices in university classrooms, it is crucial to understand their perspectives on student involvement, decision-making processes, and the balance between autonomy and order. This introduction sets the stage for the transcript below, which presents diverse viewpoints on democratic management from both stakeholders – students and lecturers:

S1: "I feel like democratic management means lecturers listening to students and letting us have a say in class activities."

L1: "In my opinion, democratic management empowers students and fosters a sense of ownership over their education. However, we need to balance this, and this is where the challenge is: balancing student autonomy with maintaining order in the classroom is a challenge when implementing democratic management practices."

S2: "It's when everyone in the class feels like they're part of the decision-making process and their opinions matter. As for me, I believe this is it."

L2: "I believe democratic management is about creating a collaborative learning environment where students feel valued and heard. However, it can be challenging to implement when students have varying levels of participation or disagreement."

S3: "In my opinion, democratic management is about giving students choices and making us feel involved in our learning."

L3: "While democratic management is valuable for student empowerment, it's important for students to understand the boundaries and responsibilities that come with it. Respect for each other's opinions and the teacher's authority is essential for a harmonious classroom."

S4: "Big classes make it hard to have democratic management since there's not enough time for everyone to talk."

L4: "I've found that democratic management fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among students, leading to increased engagement and motivation. However, it's crucial to provide clear guidelines and expectations to maintain order in the classroom."

S5: "I enjoy classes where teachers use democratic management because it makes learning feel more interactive and engaging."

L5: "While democratic management may require more planning and flexibility, the benefits of increased student involvement and empowerment outweigh the challenges. This is why I encourage this time to time."

The data reveals a range of perspectives on democratic classroom management from students and lecturers. Students, such as S1 and S2, emphasise the importance of feeling heard and valued in the classroom. They stress the need to have a say in class activities and be part of the decision-making process. On the other hand, lecturers like L1 and L2 highlight how democratic classroom management practices empower students and foster a sense of ownership over their education. They also mention the creation of a collaborative learning environment. However, they do acknowledge the challenges of implementing democratic practices, particularly in finding a balance between student autonomy and maintaining order in the classroom, as articulated by L1 and L3. Furthermore, the data shows that both students and lecturers recognise the benefits of democratic management, including increased engagement, motivation, and student involvement, as noted by S4 and L5.

Additionally, the data argues for the need for clear guidelines and expectations to ensure the effectiveness of democratic management, a point raised by L4. This sentiment aligns with the literature, as Dewey (1916) advocates for structured environments that still allow for student autonomy. He emphasises the importance of finding a balance between freedom and order in democratic classrooms. Furthermore, the challenges highlighted by students and lecturers regarding the practical implementation of democratic management align with the findings of Kubow (2005) and Adeyemo (2012). These researchers emphasise the difficulties of translating theoretical

frameworks into practical classroom techniques, especially in diverse educational environments. Therefore, while perspectives may vary, the data suggests a shared recognition of the potential benefits and challenges associated with democratic management. This highlights the importance of further exploration and refinement of strategies to foster inclusive and participatory learning environments.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Challenges of Democratic Management

In exploring the perceptions of both students and lecturers regarding the challenges of democratic management practices in university classrooms, this theme presents diverse viewpoints from both stakeholders. See the statements below:

S6: *"Sometimes it's tough to implement democratic management because even when I was teaching in my practice school, not all students wanted to participate in the activities."*

S7: *"While democratic management is beneficial, it can be frustrating if not everyone agrees on decisions, leading to conflicts. For example, we tend to disrupt the classrooms when we are all allowed to talk on all issues."*

S8: *"I think it is challenging for our lecturers to use democratic management when they have to cover a lot of material in a short amount of time."*

The data reveal several challenges associated with the implementation of democratic management practices in university classrooms, as perceived by both students and lecturers. Student S6 discusses the difficulty of engaging all students in democratic activities based on their experience in a practice school. This challenge aligns with Adeyemo's (2012) findings, which emphasise the struggle of translating theory into practical classroom techniques due to student reluctance or disinterest. Student S7 acknowledges the potential for frustration and conflict when consensus is not reached, leading to disruptions when all voices are given equal weight. This reflects the challenges highlighted by Kubow (2005), who emphasises the difficulty of balancing student autonomy with maintaining order in diverse classroom settings. The issue of conflict and disruption underscores the need for structured guidelines and effective facilitation to manage democratic processes in the classroom.

Additionally, Student S8 points out the challenges lecturers face in employing democratic management practices while needing to cover extensive material within limited time frames. This time constraint complicates the implementation of democratic practices, as it requires additional time for discussion and consensus-building, potentially hindering the ability to cover the full curriculum effectively. One can then argue that while democratic management practices offer significant benefits, the data highlight the practical challenges of student engagement, managing conflicts, and balancing curriculum coverage within time constraints. Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, structured guidelines, and effective facilitation to ensure that democratic principles can be implemented successfully without compromising educational goals.

4.2.3 Theme 3: Benefits of Democratic Management

"In exploring the perceptions of both students and lecturers regarding the benefits of democratic management practices in university classrooms, this theme presents diverse viewpoints surrounding democratic management from both stakeholders. See the statements below.:

L1: *"As a lecturer, it's crucial for me to find ways to incorporate democratic management while still meeting curriculum requirements. Students seem to be more engaged and motivated when they feel like they have a say in their learning."*

L2: *"It is essential for lecturers to create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions. Yes, it is good."*

L3: *"From my experience, democratic management encourages student autonomy and critical thinking skills. Nevertheless, it's essential to strike a balance between student input and maintaining classroom discipline."*

The data reveals the benefits of democratic management practices in university classrooms, as highlighted by both students and lecturers. Lecturer L1 emphasises the importance of incorporating democratic management while still meeting curriculum requirements. They suggest that student engagement and motivation increase when students feel empowered in their learning processes. This perspective aligns with Dewey's (1916) advocacy for structured yet participatory environments where students have a say in their learning while adhering to academic standards.

Lecturer L2 underscores the necessity of creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions. They highlight the positive impact of democratic management on student engagement and participation. Similarly, Lecturer L3 emphasises the positive outcomes of democratic management, such as fostering student autonomy and critical thinking skills. However, L3 also points out the importance of striking a balance between student input and maintaining classroom discipline. This echoes the notion that effective democratic management requires structured guidelines and expectations (Dewey, 1916).

These diverse viewpoints illustrate that while democratic management practices can significantly enhance student engagement, motivation, autonomy, and critical thinking, they must be implemented within a framework that upholds academic standards and classroom discipline. This balance is essential for creating an educational environment that is both democratic and effective in achieving learning outcomes.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Strategies for Implementing Democratic Management

To better understand the perceptions of students and lecturers regarding democratic management practices in university classrooms, it is important to examine their experiences and perspectives. This introduction serves as a prelude to the transcripts from the participants, which will explore the various viewpoints on the implementation strategies of democratic classroom management.

S9: "I remember a time when our lecturer asked us to choose topics for group projects, and it made me feel more invested in the class."

L4: "Implementing democratic management requires flexibility and adaptability from the lecturers. That is why I try as much as possible to create a good atmosphere for my students. It's important to create opportunities for student participation while ensuring that learning goals are still met."

L5: "From my experience, democratic management encourages student autonomy and critical thinking skills. Nevertheless, it's essential to strike a balance between student input and maintaining classroom discipline."

The data reveals divergent viewpoints on the implementation and outcomes of democratic management practices in university classrooms. S9 students recount instances where their involvement in decision-making processes, such as choosing group project topics, increased their commitment to the class. This aligns with Dewey's (1916) emphasis on engaging students in activities that cultivate a sense of ownership and responsibility in their learning. On the other hand, lecturer L5 underscores the positive outcomes of democratic management, such as student autonomy and the development of critical thinking skills. However, L5 also highlights the importance of striking a balance between student input and maintaining classroom discipline, in accordance with the notion that effective democratic management requires clear guidelines and expectations.

Moreover, the focus on specific strategies, such as topic selection, creating a positive learning environment, and providing opportunities for student participation, is crucial for the successful implementation of democratic management practices. Choosing topics that interest students can significantly enhance their engagement and sense of responsibility towards their learning. Establishing a positive learning environment where students feel safe and respected encourages active participation and collaboration. Offering opportunities for student participation in decision-

making processes fosters a sense of ownership and investment in their educational experience. As emphasised by various studies (Kubow, 2005; Dewey, 1916), these strategies are essential in laying the foundation for democratic classroom management.

Furthermore, conflicting perspectives arise regarding the strategies for implementing democratic management. While employing democratic practices, lecturer L4 underscores the importance of flexibility and adaptability in creating opportunities for student participation. This dichotomy reflects the challenges highlighted by Kubow (2005), who noted the difficulties in balancing student autonomy with maintaining order in diverse classroom settings. Despite these challenges, the data suggests a shared recognition of the potential of democratic management in enhancing student engagement and investment in their learning experiences.

5. Discussion of Findings

Based on observations conducted to address research question one, the study found significant variation in democratic classroom management practices across the observed university classrooms. Some classrooms primarily employ traditional lecture-based approaches with limited student engagement and minimal use of participatory methods, while others demonstrate efforts towards a more inclusive and interactive learning environment. This diversity in classroom management aligns with existing literature, which highlights the impact of different management strategies on student outcomes. These strategies have been shown to positively influence academic, behavioural, emotional, and motivational outcomes for students (Korpershoek et al., 2016). Additionally, the study's findings resonate with research emphasising the importance of teacher-classroom management practices in influencing student behaviour (Oliver et al., 2011). The relationship between classroom management and learning has been extensively studied, emphasising the impact of various management dimensions on creating a positive learning environment, managing instructional activities, and enhancing student motivation and engagement (Kucukakin & Demir, 2021). However, challenges related to physical classroom layout, instructional strategies, and the integration of participatory methods persist, hindering the full realisation of democratic classroom management principles. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive reforms in teacher education and the alignment of classroom infrastructure with pedagogical goals to foster inclusive and engaging learning environments that accommodate diverse student needs.

The study also reveals a variety of perspectives on democratic management within university classrooms. These perspectives reflect both the aspirations and challenges associated with implementing such practices. Students emphasise the importance of feeling heard and valued, advocating for active involvement in decision-making processes. Meanwhile, lecturers highlight the empowering nature of democratic management in fostering a sense of student ownership of education and collaborative learning environments. However, there is a consensus among both students and lecturers that challenges exist, particularly in balancing student autonomy with maintaining classroom order. This finding is consistent with the literature, specifically the insights of Dewey (1916), who emphasises the need for structured yet autonomous learning environments.

Furthermore, there is recognition of the benefits of democratic classroom management, such as increased engagement and motivation, which aligns with the broader discourse on inclusive pedagogical practices. However, the study argues that clear guidelines and expectations are crucial to ensuring the effectiveness of democratic management. This echoes previous research by Kubow (2005) and Adeyemo (2012) on the challenges of translating theoretical knowledge into practical classroom techniques. Therefore, while acknowledging the potential benefits, the findings emphasise the importance of refining strategies to cultivate inclusive and participatory learning environments in higher education.

The study explores a range of perspectives on the benefits and challenges of democratic management practices in university classrooms. Participants highlight the challenge of getting students fully engaged, supporting Adeyemo's (2012) observation that it can be difficult to apply theory to practice due to student reluctance. However, participants also recognise the value of incorporating democratic management to boost student involvement and motivation, which aligns with Dewey's (1916) call for structured yet participatory learning environments. Magwa and Mohangi (2022) further emphasise the importance of fostering democratic student-teacher relationships and providing opportunities for autonomous learning to enhance student participation, motivation, and academic performance. This underscores the significance of creating a collaborative and inclusive environment that empowers students and involves them in their own learning process. Iqbal et al. (2021) discuss the influence of teachers' classroom management styles on student-teacher connectedness and anxiety, suggesting that a blend of democratic and authoritative approaches leads to more positive student outcomes. Conflicting viewpoints arise as student S7 acknowledges the potential for frustration and conflict when consensus is absent, echoing Kubow's (2005) emphasis on finding a balance between student autonomy and maintaining order. On the other hand, lecturer L3 highlights the positive results of democratic management, such as student autonomy and the development of critical thinking skills, while also recognising the need for structured guidelines and expectations consistent with Dewey's ideas. Therefore, the analysis demonstrates an understanding of democratic management, revealing its potential benefits for empowering students and its challenges when implemented in academic settings.

The study examines the implementation and outcomes of democratic management practices in university classrooms. Students' memories of feeling more invested in class activities when given decision-making opportunities, such as choosing group project topics, align with Dewey's (1916) emphasis on fostering student ownership in learning. Dewey suggests that classrooms that embrace democracy and encourage active student participation in decision-making promote deeper engagement and intrinsic motivation. However, instructors also highlight the importance of flexibility and adaptability when implementing democratic practices and meeting curriculum requirements, which is consistent with Pak et al.'s (2020) findings. Pak et al. stress the need for lecturers to strike a balance between student autonomy and maintaining academic standards and instructional goals. This aligns with the concept of "flexible specificity," introduced by Stornaiuolo et al. (2023), which aims to provide specific and useful guidance on curriculum and professional learning based on stakeholder needs. Conflicting viewpoints arise regarding the challenges faced by lecturers, with some recognising the difficulty of covering a large amount of material within limited time frames. This challenge echoes Kubow's (2005) concerns about maintaining order in diverse classroom settings while allowing for student autonomy. Despite these challenges, there is a shared recognition of the potential benefits of democratic management in enhancing student engagement and autonomy in their learning processes, as advocated by Freire (1970). Freire argues that democratic classrooms cultivate critical thinking skills and empower students, leading to more meaningful learning experiences.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The culmination of the diverse perspectives uncovered in the study on democratic management practices in university classrooms relies on the research findings. These findings emphasise the complexity involved in implementing such practices. Students highlight the importance of feeling invested in their learning through decision-making opportunities, while lecturers emphasise the need to balance student autonomy with academic requirements. These insights suggest that successful democratic management depends on creating a collaborative environment where students feel empowered while also aligning with educational objectives. However, challenges remain, particularly in maintaining order when conflicting viewpoints arise and in covering extensive material within limited timeframes. Nevertheless, the study reveals a shared recognition of the

potential benefits of democratic management in enhancing student engagement and critical thinking skills, echoing the sentiments of educational theorists like Dewey and Freire.

In light of these findings, several recommendations emerge for classroom practices and further research:

- Firstly, lecturers should prioritise creating structured yet participatory environments that foster student ownership and responsibility in their learning processes. This may involve integrating decision-making opportunities into lesson planning and providing clear guidelines for student involvement.
- Secondly, ongoing professional development programmes should be offered to lecturers to enhance their pedagogical skills in effectively implementing democratic management practices. These programmes could include workshops on facilitation techniques, conflict resolution strategies, and methods for balancing student autonomy with academic requirements.
- Additionally, further studies are warranted to explore the long-term effects of democratic management on student outcomes, including academic achievement, motivation, and social-emotional development.
- Future research could also investigate the role of contextual factors, such as class size, student demographics, and institutional culture, in shaping the implementation and impact of democratic management practices.

7. Declarations

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