

Strategies to Enhance Democratic Management Practices in University Classrooms

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Abstract: Although democratic education is widely supported in theory, many instructors find its practical implementation in university classrooms unclear. This lack of clarity undermines the experience of pre-service teachers. The objective of this study is to explore strategies that can improve the practice of democratic classroom management and consequently reshape classroom management in schools. The study employs Participative Management Theory as a framework and is carried out within a transformative paradigm and participatory design. Semi-structured interviews are used to gather data from 15 participants, comprising 10 student teachers and 5 instructors from a selected university in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Thematic analysis is employed to analyse the data. The study identifies four primary strategies for enhancing democratic classroom management: involving students in decision-making, promoting collaborative learning, fostering critical thinking and reflection, and creating inclusive and safe environments. The study proposes the "Democratic Classroom Engagement Model" as a framework to empower students, encourage teamwork, challenge assumptions, and

ensure that every student feels valued. This collective effort aims to foster a democratic and engaging learning atmosphere.

Keywords: University pedagogy, democratic classroom, management strategies, future teachers.

1. Introduction

Over the past few decades, there has been a growing focus on the effectiveness of classroom management strategies. Educational research consistently emphasises the crucial role of classroom management in creating an optimal learning environment that directly impacts student achievement (Marzano et al., 2003). Classroom management goes beyond just discipline; it encompasses how teachers structure their lessons, interact with students, and cultivate a positive and productive atmosphere. However, despite its significance, there is an alarming trend: many teachers seem to struggle with classroom management. Some scholars argue that these challenges stem from the training they received as student teachers during their formative years at university (Oliver & Reschly, 2010). These critical years lay the foundation for teachers' approaches to their profession, shaping their pedagogical knowledge and classroom management strategies. If this foundation is weak, it may lead to less effective practices when they begin their teaching careers.

In line with the democratic values of our larger society, classrooms should serve as microcosms of democracy, encouraging active engagement, participation, mutual respect, and collaboration. According to John Dewey, education is not just preparation for life but is life itself (Sikandar, 2015; Dewey, 1916). If students are to be prepared for life in a democratic society, their formative years in the classroom should expose them to democratic practices, helping them understand and appreciate the values and responsibilities involved. However, many current classroom management models inadvertently promote an authoritarian approach that stifles student voices and hampers active participation (Freire, 1970). This gap between democratic ideals and classroom realities calls for critical reflection on and restructuring of how classroom management is addressed in university

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teacher education programmes. By emphasising democratic classroom management practices in these programmes, future teachers can be better prepared to create classrooms that effectively manage, inspire, and engage students. This perspective aligns with the prevailing belief that the process of teacher education should aim to cultivate highly motivated, conscientious, and effective teachers suitable for all educational levels. This process should provide teachers with both a solid intellectual foundation and a democratic ethos, ensuring adaptability in the face of evolving educational landscapes (Department of Education, 2002; Senturk & Oyman, 2014).

However, many teacher education institutions, particularly those in rural areas, seem to fail to promote democratic principles in teaching and learning processes. This gap is characterised by limited inclusive participation from both lecturers and students in achieving institutional goals. Reinforcing this concern, de Jager (2019) highlighted that students in South African tertiary institutions often lack the necessary skills for immersive, reflective, student-centred learning experiences, such as critical thinking, collaboration, and cooperation.

The challenge of implementing democratic classroom management practices is not limited to South Africa. In the United States, there has long been criticism that teacher education programmes do not adequately prepare teachers for their roles. One recurring concern is the perceived deficiency in promoting democratic principles, particularly in fostering inclusive classrooms that ensure equitable student participation. Such shortcomings can undermine student engagement, impede learning, and dampen teachers' morale (Morrison, 2008; Edwards, 2010). Similarly, Sung (2020) highlights Taiwan's struggle to establish a distinct Taiwanese identity free from the overarching Chinese historical narrative. This internal battle becomes apparent when examining discussions about teachers' democratic consciousness. Turkey also faces challenges in upholding democratic values within university classrooms. The country's increasing societal authoritarianism, coupled with the government's suppression of dissent, has permeated educational spaces. This has led to instances where faculty and students face intimidation for expressing contrary views and where educational materials critical of the government are censored (Yilmaz, 2007; Ochoa-Becker, 2006). As a result, students are often shielded from diverse perspectives, hindering their ability to engage in critical discourse about national issues.

From an African perspective, Agyemang (2012) notes that the history of military dictatorships in West African nations, such as Ghana, Gambia, and Nigeria, has had lasting effects on students' freedom of expression. Enu and Eba (2014) support this claim, emphasising the shortcomings in teaching practices in Nigeria. They argue that student teachers often lack the necessary democratic expertise to cultivate democratic values during teaching practice sessions. The recommendation arising from this observation emphasises the need for a strong democratic classroom pedagogy designed to uplift and empower learners.

Based on the preceding discussion, one can argue that democratic classroom management practices are crucial because they promote student participation, expose learners to diverse perspectives, and provide multiple avenues for engagement. However, it is disconcerting to note that teacher education training programmes still adhere to traditional classroom management methods, which have been identified as anti-democratic by Chauke (2021), Chitsamatanga & Rembe (2020), and Mafhala (2015). Omodan (2019) emphasises that while democratic practices can enhance student choice and collaboration, many student teachers lack the knowledge to implement them. This deficit can result in a generation of teachers ill-equipped to instil democratic principles in their classrooms. Uleanya (2020, 2022) traces this challenge to undemocratic teacher training at universities, where power dynamics often sideline student voices in curriculum planning and execution (Makhanya & Zibane, 2020). This disconnect appears to hinder secondary schools' ability to manage inclusivity and diversity. The crux of the matter is that while democratic education may be widely endorsed in theory, its practical adoption within university classrooms remains unclear to many lecturers, thus

weakening the pre-service teacher experience. Therefore, if left unaddressed, this lack of democratic classroom management practices could hinder student performance and erode their trust in democratic systems.

However, scholars have proposed strategies and approaches to enhance democratic management practices in university classrooms. In the Philippines, Obispo et al. (2021) conducted a study using Indiana University as a case study and found that a combination of democratic and authoritative classroom management styles can lead to more positive outcomes for students. Additionally, a study conducted in middle schools in America showed that adopting democratic classroom practices, such as morning advisory sessions, student voice and choice in content-specific classes, and student-centred discipline, can positively influence student outcomes, particularly in civic and school engagement (Guillaume et al., 2015). Moreover, a study conducted at Gassia College Preparatory Academy among African-American students in America showed that other strategies to foster a democratic classroom community involve promoting social and dialogic interactions, transferring meanings about democracy from the collective group to individual members, and enhancing students' participation and responsibility within the classroom culture (Klockow, 2008). Based on this, one can argue that classroom discussions play a vital role in democratic practices, encompassing conflict resolution, equity, student involvement in decision-making, and fostering a culture of conversation. Furthermore, creating a classroom environment aligned with democratic, humane, and inclusive principles through pedagogy is another suggestion that can address various issues within educational settings (Duncan, 2003).

A study conducted in East Nigeria (Biamba et al., 2021) revealed that the adoption of democratic practices in the classroom is marginal. While teachers have made some effort to incorporate democratic elements, there is still room for improvement in fully implementing student-centred and participatory teaching methods. The study emphasises the importance of enhancing democratic management practices in classrooms to develop students' critical thinking abilities, prepare them for active civic engagement, and reduce negative behaviours among youths.

In South African universities, there is a growing recognition of the need to equip teachers with the skills to promote democratic citizenship among students (Dlamini, 2022). Studies highlight the importance of revising teacher education curricula to empower teachers to instil democratic values and practices in classrooms. However, challenges persist in South African educational environments, with issues like poor acoustics in urban schools impacting the learning atmosphere (van Reenen & Plessis, 2021). Additionally, cadre deployment in South Africa has been identified as hindering democratic governance and impeding service delivery improvement, diverting resources from their intended purposes (Makole, 2022). The need for inclusive pedagogy in multilingual higher education classrooms underscores the significance of creating environments that cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds and promote inclusivity (Wunseh, 2023).

The status of democratic management practices in South African educational settings is characterised by a shift towards participative leadership, the integration of democratic values in teacher preparation, and the acknowledgement of the importance of inclusive pedagogy. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, political influences on governance, and the necessity for curriculum transformation persist, emphasising the ongoing efforts required to enhance democratic practices in South African educational contexts.

Therefore, this study aims to address this critical gap and provide a comprehensive blueprint for university lecturers, illustrating how democratic management practices can be seamlessly integrated into teacher education processes. Such an approach would cultivate an inclusive, participatory learning environment, strengthen democratic values, enhance student engagement, and foster trust in the pedagogical process. However, transitioning towards more democratic classroom management practices in university settings requires a multifaceted approach. This approach

involves exploring various strategies to instil these values in aspiring teachers. The aim of this study is to conceptualise strategies that can enhance democratic management practices and, consequently, reshape the landscape of classroom management in schools.

1.1 Research question

Based on the above, the following research question was raised to guide the study:

- Which strategies can be used to enhance democratic management practices in university classrooms?

2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted Participative Management Theory, which is rooted in the broader context of human relations and organisational behaviour, and gained prominence in the mid-20th century as a response to the limitations of traditional authoritarian management models. This theory emphasises the importance of involving employees at all levels in the decision-making process, arguing that such involvement leads to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and overall organisational effectiveness (Likert, 1961; Lawler, 1992). Early proponents like Rensis Likert and Douglas McGregor challenged the prevailing top-down approaches, highlighting the value of participative techniques in fostering a more engaged and productive workforce (Likert, 1967; McGregor, 1960). Likert's System 4 management model, in particular, advocates for a participative group system where decision-making is decentralised, and employees are empowered to contribute ideas and feedback, leading to enhanced organisational performance (Likert, 1961).

Central to Participative Management Theory are several key assumptions about human behaviour and organisational dynamics. First, it assumes that employees are motivated not solely by financial incentives but also by intrinsic factors such as recognition, a sense of achievement, and the opportunity to contribute to organisational goals (Herzberg, 1968; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This contrasts with traditional management theories, which often view employees primarily as economic beings motivated by extrinsic rewards. Second, the theory posits that employees have valuable insights and capabilities that can significantly contribute to problem-solving and innovation when allowed to participate in decision-making (Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Cotton, 1993). This assumption is based on the belief that collaborative decision-making processes can harness the collective intelligence and creativity of the workforce, leading to better outcomes and a more adaptive organisation (Bennis, 1966; Lawler, 1992).

Furthermore, Participative Management Theory assumes that involving employees in decision-making processes enhances their commitment to the organisation and its goals, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability (Kanter, 1983; Spreitzer, 1996). This participatory approach is believed to reduce resistance to change, as employees who are involved in shaping decisions are more likely to support and implement them effectively (Lines, 2004). Additionally, the theory suggests that open communication and transparency, which are integral to participative management, can lead to improved trust and collaboration within the organisation (Denison, 1990). In the educational context, applying participative management principles can create a more democratic and inclusive classroom environment where students are actively engaged in their learning processes and feel valued and respected (Freire, 1970). This aligns with contemporary educational theories that emphasise student-centred learning and the importance of fostering critical thinking and active participation in the classroom (Brookfield, 2017).

Participative Management Theory is highly relevant to the study because it offers a robust framework for integrating democratic principles into classroom management practices. That is, by emphasising the involvement of all members in decision-making processes, this theory aligns with the study's goal of fostering an inclusive and engaging learning environment where student voices are valued and heard. Participative management encourages collaborative learning and teamwork,

which can help create a democratic classroom atmosphere that empowers students and promotes active engagement. Furthermore, the theory's focus on open communication and transparency supports the development of critical thinking and reflection among students, essential components of effective democratic education. Therefore, by adopting participative management strategies, lecturers can create a classroom environment that not only enhances student participation and engagement but also prepares future teachers to implement these democratic management practices in their classrooms, thereby contributing to a more equitable and effective educational system. This alignment with the study's objectives highlights the potential of participative management to transform university pedagogy and address the identified gaps in current teacher education programmes.

3. Methodology

The study adopts the transformative paradigm, which is deeply committed to rectifying social inequalities through research (Mertens, 2007). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), this paradigm prioritises the perspectives of marginalised or oppressed groups, aiming to produce research outcomes that promote social justice, equity, and empowerment. Therefore, the transformative paradigm is not solely a choice of paradigm but also a statement about the purpose and ethos of the research. In terms of the study's goal to enhance democratic classroom management in teacher education training processes, the transformative paradigm ensures a critical examination of existing power dynamics and democratic management strategies that may marginalise certain voices or perspectives (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). This alignment underscores the study's commitment to understanding educational practices and fostering more inclusive, just, and democratic learning environments.

The study employs a qualitative research approach, which focuses on understanding phenomena in their natural settings and aims to interpret these phenomena in terms of the meanings people attribute to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach values depth over breadth, exploring individual experiences, perceptions, and the complexities inherent in human behaviour and society. Given the study's objective to enhance democratic classroom management in teacher education training, a qualitative approach is particularly appropriate. It allows for a nuanced exploration of lecturers' and students' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes toward classroom management. It facilitates a deeper understanding of the underlying reasons for existing practices and the challenges associated with promoting democratic principles. Through this qualitative lens, the study can extract rich, detailed insights that are crucial to formulating strategies and interventions tailored to the real-world intricacies of the educational landscape.

The study employs participatory research (PR) as its research design, a method grounded in the belief that research should be a collaborative and democratic process that directly involves those affected by the issue being studied (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). PR democratises knowledge production and ensures that the research outcomes are directly relevant and actionable for the community involved. Given the study's emphasis on identifying strategies that can be used to enhance democratic management practices in university classrooms, the choice of PR is particularly fitting. Thus, by actively involving lecturers and students in the research process, the study captures authentic voices, experiences, and perspectives, ensuring that the resulting recommendations and interventions are grounded in the lived realities of those in the educational field. Furthermore, the democratic ethos of PR strongly resonates with the study's core objectives, making it not just a methodological choice but also a clear alignment of research practice with the study's overarching goals.

3.1 Method of data collection

The study employed semi-structured interviews as a method for data collection from participants. This approach facilitated open discussions between students and university lecturers, enabling an

exploration of issues pertinent to the study's focus. Semi-structured interviews balance the provision of predetermined questions with the opportunity for participants to articulate their perspectives in their own words. This method aligns well with the principles of Participatory Research (PR), which emphasise collaboration among participants. Hence, creating an environment in which participants can elucidate the challenges they encounter within institutions and work collectively towards finding solutions, this approach ensures that the insights and recommendations are grounded in the authentic experiences of those directly affected by the problem. Consequently, the study's credibility and relevance are reinforced.

3.2 Participants and selection of participants

This research study involved a cohort of 15 participants, consisting of 10 student-teachers and 5 lecturers affiliated with a specific university in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The student-teachers possessed foundational experience, having successfully completed a minimum of three years of study at the university, specifically in their third year. Conversely, the lecturers contributed their expertise, having accumulated a minimum of two years of teaching experience at the tertiary level. The Convenient Participant Selection Technique was employed as the recruitment strategy. As argued by Emerson (2021), this technique is highly regarded for its efficiency and accessibility, enabling researchers to swiftly and directly engage with potential participants, thereby reducing the time-consuming nature of the process and optimising the research timeline.

3.3 Method of data analysis

Thematic analysis, a widely recognised method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), was employed in this study for data analysis. This method encompasses six rigorous steps, ranging from familiarisation with the data to defining and naming themes. Given the study's focus on comprehending participants' experiences and perceptions regarding democratic classroom management, thematic analysis is particularly pertinent. It facilitates a thorough exploration of the rich qualitative data obtained, ensuring that the emerging themes accurately represent the voices of the participants. The systematic approach of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework provides a robust structure for the analysis, guaranteeing that the findings are both comprehensive and nuanced, thereby making it highly suitable for analysing the data from this study.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set by the University of the Free State. Comprehensive safeguards were implemented to protect the rights and well-being of participants. Participation was voluntary, allowing participants to join, pause, or withdraw without any constraints. A detailed consent form was distributed and signed, outlining the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and participant rights. The importance of informed consent in ethical research was emphasised. Maintaining confidentiality was a crucial aspect of these safeguards. Participants' identities and responses were kept anonymous in accordance with the ethical standards established by Okeke, Omodan, and Dube (2022). Furthermore, the study obtained the necessary permissions from the selected university to validate its research efforts. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms such as L1 and L2 for lecturers and S1 and S2 for students were consistently used, protecting participants' identities throughout the research and reporting phases.

4. Presentation of Results

This section provides answers to the research question of the study, which focuses on strategies that can be employed to improve democratic classroom management practices in university classrooms. Through the collection and analysis of data using thematic analysis, four themes emerged as strategies to enhance democratic management among student teachers as they transition into the

professional world. These themes include involving students in decision-making, promoting collaborative learning, fostering critical thinking and reflection, and creating inclusive and safe learning environments.

4.1 Theme 1: Encouraging the involvement of students in decision-making

The data collected from the participants indicate that involving students in decision-making within the classroom serves as a strategy to equip student teachers with democratic classroom management skills for their future careers. This assertion is supported by the following statements from the participants:

S1: "I feel really empowered when we get to suggest topics for our projects together with the lecturers."

S3: "I appreciated when our lecturer asked us to help set the class rules. It made me feel respected and even controlled me not to break the rules because it gave me some kind of guilty mind when I broke the rules I set by myself."

L1: "I have found that student involvement in course design significantly enhances their engagement and ownership of the learning process."

S6: "Leading a class discussion was a bit scary to me sometimes but really made me feel like my voice matters here."

S7: "Choosing our assignment topics helped me dive deeper into what I'm passionate about."

L3: "Asking students to contribute to setting classroom norms creates a more respectful and collaborative environment for us as lecturers and even for themselves as students."

The testimony from students and lecturers vividly illustrates the significant role that democratic strategies play in enhancing democratic management practices. These strategies embody the principles discussed in the literature on university pedagogy and classroom management. The student narratives (S1, S3, S6, S7) about feeling empowered, respected, and more engaged when involved in decision-making processes, such as suggesting project topics, setting class rules, and choosing assignment topics, testify to the effectiveness of democratic classroom management strategies. This approach aligns with the findings of Reinke et al. (2012), who highlight the critical role of classroom-level positive behaviour supports in creating conducive learning environments that impact students' social-emotional and behavioural outcomes. Similarly, the reflections shared by the lecturers (L1, L3) about the benefits of student involvement in course design and classroom norms underscore the importance of fostering a collaborative and respectful environment, as advocated by Moore et al. (2016). They point out the need for better preparation of student teachers in classroom management through active participation and engagement during their university education.

The data collected from the participants indicated that involving students in decision-making in the classroom is one of the strategies that could equip student teachers with democratic classroom management skills when they enter the workforce. The participants' statements reveal how such involvement not only enhances the immediate learning environment but also prepares students for future roles as teachers, where they will be required to foster similar democratic and participatory spaces. Drawing from the works of Reinke et al. (2014) and Moon et al. (2020), who emphasise the importance of individualised behaviour support and movement integration, it is evident that the participants' experiences reflect a pedagogical shift towards more democratic and inclusive practices. This shift is crucial for cultivating teachers who are not only knowledgeable in their subject matter but are also skilled in creating classrooms that are microcosms of the democratic society they will serve, thereby reinforcing the connection between democratic classroom practices and the preparation of future teachers for the challenges of the professional world.

From the perspective of Participative Management Theory, these findings underscore the importance of involving all members of an organisation—or, in this case, the classroom—in decision-making processes to enhance democratic management practices (Likert, 1961; Lawler, 1992). The theory posits that when students are actively involved in shaping their educational experience, they are more likely to feel empowered and committed, reflecting the experiences shared by the students and lecturers. This approach aligns with the idea that open communication and collaborative decision-making lead to better outcomes, as it taps into the collective intelligence and creativity of the group (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). By implementing evidence-based strategies such as positive behaviour supports, coaching, preventive interventions, and movement integration, as discussed by Reinke et al. (2012) and Moore et al. (2016), lecturers can create a more inclusive and democratic classroom environment. This not only enhances democratic classroom management but also prepares future teachers to implement these democratic principles in their classrooms, thereby contributing to a more equitable and effective educational system (Sibbett, 2022).

4.2 Theme 2: Promoting collaborative learning

Collaborative teaching and learning emerge as a key strategy to foster democratic classroom management, as highlighted by participant statements during data collection. This approach reflects a shared belief in the power of group work, peer learning, and roundtable discussions to exemplify real-world democratic practices and problem-solving, thereby enhancing student participation and engagement. The following statement further justifies this:

L3: "I believe that using collaborative learning tasks mirrors the complexities of real-world problem-solving, preparing students for democratic participation outside the classroom."

S2: "I believe that working in groups teaches so many skills. I mean, working in groups on projects taught me to work with different opinions and personalities."

S4: "I love group work because learning from my peers during group sessions was as valuable as learning from the lecturer."

S9: "Roundtable discussions made the class feel more like a dialogue than a monologue; it is social and participative. In my opinion, this is more of a democratic thing."

S3: "When we solve problems as a group, it helped me see the value in working together."

L4: "I integrate peer teaching and group projects to encourage students to value and learn from each other's insights."

S6: "I still believe that collaborative tasks is one of the best ways to teach us how to be democratic. Being in diverse teams was challenging but taught me a lot about understanding others."

S1: "In another way, debating current events helped me learn how to argue points respectfully and listen to others."

The emphasis on collaborative learning and teaching, as highlighted by both students (S2, S4, S9, S3, S6, S1) and lecturers (L3, L4) in their statements, significantly aligns with the theoretical framework of Participative Management Theory. This theory emphasises the importance of involving all members of an organisation in decision-making processes and fostering a culture of collaboration and mutual respect (Likert, 1961; Lawler, 1992). Participative Management Theory suggests that individuals are more likely to be engaged and committed when they are actively involved in shaping their environment. This aligns with the students' and lecturers' experiences of feeling more empowered and respected through collaborative learning and teaching practices. These practices, such as group projects, peer teaching, and roundtable discussions, mirror the democratic process by valuing diverse perspectives and fostering mutual understanding. Ultimately, they prepare students for real-world challenges by simulating complex problem-solving situations (Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

Furthermore, the participants' experiences with collaborative learning echo the principles of Participative Management Theory by highlighting the importance of engaging with diverse viewpoints and developing a democratic ethos among students. As noted by Cotton (1993), participative management strategies help to tap into the collective intelligence and creativity of the group, leading to better decision-making and more innovative solutions. Through collaborative learning, students acquire not only academic knowledge but also essential skills such as empathy, respect for differing opinions, and the ability to engage in constructive dialogue. These qualities are indispensable for democratic participation and align with the goals of participative management, which seeks to create more inclusive and effective organisations by involving all members in the decision-making process (Denison, 1990). The shared reflections from the participants demonstrate that collaborative teaching and learning practices do not merely enhance academic performance but also contribute significantly to the development of individuals who are capable of contributing to a democratic society (Kanter, 1983).

By incorporating evidence-based strategies such as positive behaviour supports, coaching, preventive interventions, and movement integration, as discussed by Reinke et al. (2012) and Moore et al. (2016), lecturers can create a more inclusive and democratic classroom environment. This not only enhances classroom management but also prepares future teachers to implement these democratic principles in their own classrooms, thereby contributing to a more equitable and effective educational system (Sibbett, 2022). The application of Participative Management Theory in this context reinforces the idea that education should go beyond the acquisition of knowledge to include the fostering of social and civic competencies, preparing students not just for exams but for the complexities of democratic life (Lawler, 1992; Likert, 1961).

4.2 Theme 3: Enhancing critical thinking and reflection

Another strategy that can be employed to enhance democratic classroom management is to design classrooms that foster critical thinking and reflection. This is supported by the statements provided by the participants during the data collection process. The statements are:

S7: "I think when we are engaged in activities that make us think, such as writing reflection essays, it makes me more aware of my own biases and how they affect my views."

L4: "Incorporating case studies that question societal norms provokes critical discussion, pushing students to think beyond the textbook."

S5: "Also, some case studies that challenge norms made me think critically about our society."

L2: "No doubt, I know that critical thinking is the cornerstone of democratic education. I use a variety of pedagogical strategies to challenge students' assumptions and encourage deep reflection."

S2: "You know, it is good for lecturers to allow us to question them; this is because questioning the lecturer's assumptions encouraged me to think for myself and not to rely only on the lecturer."

L3: "The questioning method is another tool I use to foster a culture of inquiry, promoting critical thinking and active learning."

S3: "Some kind of question and answer session in the classroom forced me to ask questions, making me more engaged in learning."

S8: "Also, asking us to keep a reflective journal made me more conscious of my learning progress and personal growth."

The focus on fostering critical thinking and reflection in democratic classroom management is illustrated by both students (S7, S5, S2, S3, S8) and lecturers (L4, L2, L3), aligning seamlessly with the principles outlined in Participative Management Theory. According to this theory, involving individuals in decision-making processes enhances their engagement, critical thinking, and commitment (Likert, 1961; Lawler, 1992). In the context of classroom management, this means that students who are encouraged to participate in reflective activities, such as reflection essays and case studies, develop a deeper understanding of the subject matter and become more aware of their biases and the complexities of their societal contexts (Cotton, 1993). This approach is evident in the participants' experiences, where lecturers actively encourage questioning assumptions and promote a culture of inquiry and independent thinking, which are essential components of effective democratic classroom management (Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

The dialogues between students and lecturers, highlighted through methods such as questioning and discussions, embody the essence of participative management, where critical thinking and active learning are prioritised. This participatory approach to learning is crucial for the development of students' critical consciousness, enabling them to analyse and challenge the status quo and preparing them for active and informed participation in democratic life (Denison, 1990). These practices not only align with the aims of Participative Management Theory but also reinforce the democratic values of mutual respect, collaboration, and shared authority within the learning environment (Lawler, 1992). By creating spaces where students are encouraged to question, reflect, and engage in critical discussions, lecturers are not just transmitting knowledge but are actively contributing to the formation of critically aware and democratic citizens ready to navigate and transform their societal landscapes (Kanter, 1983).

Incorporating evidence-based strategies such as positive behaviour supports, coaching, preventive interventions, and movement integration, as discussed by Reinke et al. (2012) and Moore et al. (2016), can significantly enhance democratic classroom management practices by fostering critical thinking and reflection. These strategies ensure that students are not only engaged in their learning but also empowered to actively contribute to their educational environment. This participative approach aligns with the principles of Participative Management Theory, which advocates for involving all members in decision-making processes to enhance organisational effectiveness and individual satisfaction (Likert, 1961; Lawler, 1992). By applying these strategies, lecturers can create inclusive and supportive learning environments that prepare students for the complexities of democratic life, thereby contributing to a more equitable and effective educational system (Sibbett, 2022).

4.4 Theme 4: Creating inclusive and safe learning environments

Participants emphasised the importance of creating inclusive and safe classroom environments to enhance democratic classroom management practices. Their statements highlighted the need for spaces that make students feel comfortable and motivated to actively participate in classroom activities. This is evident in the following participants' comments:

S10: "Anything that will make me feel that I am valued; feeling my background was valued in class discussions made me more comfortable sharing my opinions further."

L1: "We need to create inclusive classrooms. Creating an inclusive environment means ensuring every student feels their voice is heard and valued, regardless of background."

L2: "In my classrooms, I used to make a concerted effort to use materials that reflect a diversity of perspectives, making all students feel represented."

S9: "Our classroom's safe space made me feel supported and respected by my peers."

L3: "Safe space agreements are vital in maintaining a supportive classroom where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without any fear whatsoever."

S4: "Having equal access to resources ensured everyone had the same chance to succeed."

L5: "Accessibility to learning resources and accommodations for all students is non-negotiable for truly democratic education, hence I recommend it."

The collective insights from both students (S10, S9, S4) and lecturers (L1, L2, L3, L5) highlight the importance of inclusivity and safety in classroom environments. These factors play a significant role in fostering meaningful student engagement and academic success. This approach aligns with the principles of Participative Management Theory, which advocates for involving all members of the organisation in decision-making processes and creating a supportive environment where diverse voices are respected and valued (Likert, 1961; Lawler, 1992). As suggested by L1 and L3, creating inclusive and safe spaces is essential to ensure that every student feels heard and valued. This sentiment is echoed by Reinke et al. (2012), who emphasise the role of positive behaviour supports in fostering a conducive learning environment. Furthermore, L2's effort to incorporate diverse materials and L5's emphasis on accessibility highlight practical steps lecturers can take to actualise these inclusive principles. These steps resonate with Cotton (1993), who underscores the importance of participative management in creating inclusive and empowering educational environments.

As mentioned by S9 and L3, the emphasis on safe spaces and equitable access to resources, as advocated by S4 and L5, is crucial in dismantling barriers to participation and success in the classroom. These strategies not only enhance the learning experience by making students feel supported and respected but also contribute to levelling the educational playing field. Every student is given the same opportunity to thrive, reflecting an equitable approach foundational to Participative Management Theory (Lawler, 1992; Vroom & Yetton, 1973). This approach aims to prepare students not only academically but also as engaged citizens capable of contributing to a diverse and inclusive society. Such educational practices are instrumental in fostering a sense of belonging and community among students, furthering the goal of participative management to transform education into a tool for equity and inclusion (Denison, 1990; Kanter, 1983). Therefore, by integrating these inclusive and safe practices, one can create a classroom environment that respects and values diversity and actively contributes to the holistic development of students as democratic participants in their communities.

Incorporating evidence-based strategies such as positive behaviour supports, coaching, preventive interventions, and movement integration, as discussed by Reinke et al. (2012) and Moore et al. (2016), can significantly enhance democratic classroom management practices by ensuring inclusivity and safety. These strategies ensure that students are not only engaged in their learning but also empowered to actively contribute to their educational environment. This participative approach aligns with the principles of Participative Management Theory, which advocates for involving all members in decision-making processes to enhance organisational effectiveness and individual satisfaction (Likert, 1961; Lawler, 1992). Hence, applying these strategies can create inclusive and supportive learning environments that prepare students for the complexities of democratic life, thereby contributing to a more equitable and effective educational system (Sibbett, 2022).

5. Major Findings as a Model to Promote Democratic Management Classrooms

Below are the highlights of major findings and how they inform the model that could be adopted by lecturers to install democratic practices in student teachers:

Encouraging the involvement of students in decision-making: The research emphasises the crucial role of engaging students in decision-making within the classroom. This is seen as a foundational strategy for equipping them with democratic classroom management skills. By actively participating in setting class rules, choosing project topics, and contributing to the curriculum, students take ownership of their learning process and develop skills essential for democratic engagement in their professional futures. This approach fosters a sense of responsibility, encourages active participation, and prepares students for real-world challenges by mirroring the democratic processes they will encounter in the workplace.

Promoting collaborative teaching and learning: The study highlights collaborative teaching and learning as a pivotal strategy for nurturing democratic classroom management. This method, which includes group projects, peer teaching, and collaborative problem-solving, serves as both an academic exercise and a practical application of democratic principles. It equips student teachers with the ability to facilitate an environment that values diverse perspectives, promotes mutual respect, and encourages teamwork. These experiences are instrumental in developing the facilitation skills necessary for promoting democratic practices in their future classrooms and professional environments.

Critical thinking and reflection: Emphasising critical thinking and reflection as key components of democratic classroom management, the study reveals how these strategies can deepen students' understanding and appreciation of democratic values. Through activities such as reflection essays, critical analysis of societal norms, and questioning of assumptions, students are encouraged to examine their biases and consider diverse viewpoints critically. This approach not only enhances their problem-solving and analytical skills but also prepares them to navigate and contribute to a democratic society with a more informed and reflective perspective.

Inclusive and safe classroom environments: The research identifies the creation of inclusive and safe classroom environments as essential for maximising student engagement and success. This supports the development of democratic practices. Ensuring every student feels valued, heard, and safe to express themselves without fear fosters a sense of belonging and community. This inclusive approach is fundamental in teaching future teachers about building classrooms that respect and celebrate diversity. It lays the groundwork for a more democratic educational system where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

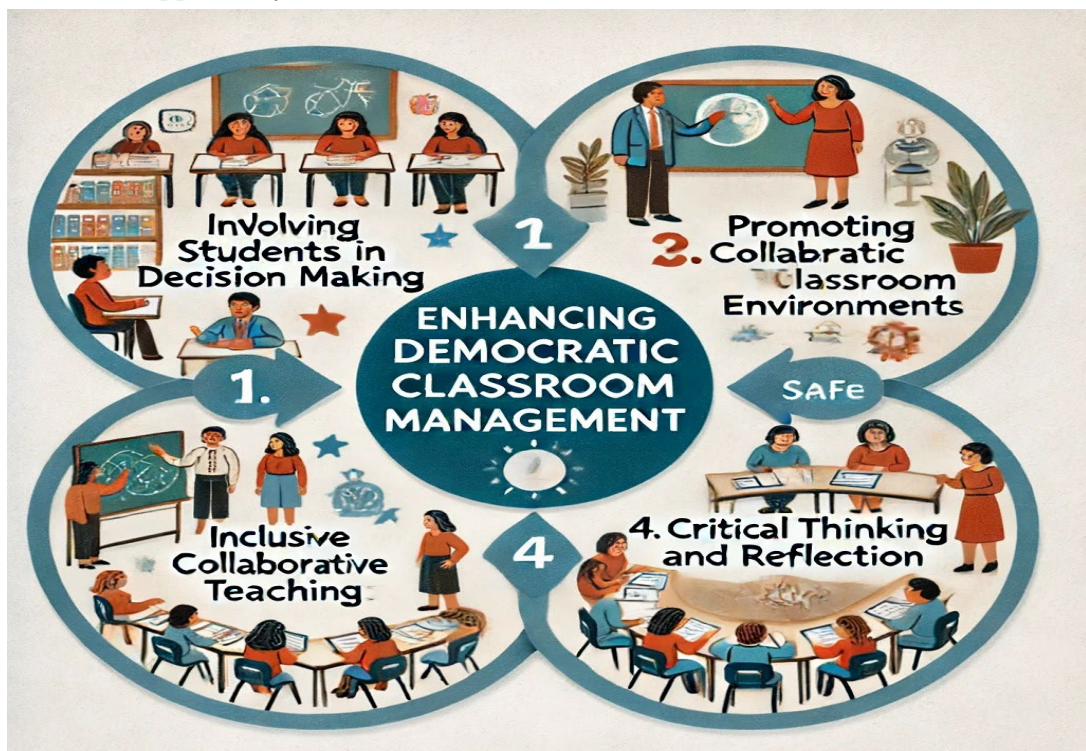


Figure 1: Democratic classroom management model

The visual model effectively captures the essence of a holistic approach needed to promote democratic values in educational settings, particularly in student-teacher preparation. Involving students in decision-making empowers them and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility for

their learning journey, laying the groundwork for democratic engagement. The focus on collaborative teaching and learning further enriches this framework by encouraging peer interaction and teamwork, which are vital skills for navigating the complexities of modern democratic societies. Critical thinking and reflection are presented as essential components that challenge both students and teachers to question assumptions, engage with diverse perspectives, and critically evaluate societal norms, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of democracy itself. Including inclusive and safe classroom environments as a core element underscores the importance of creating spaces where all students feel valued and secure, which is essential for the free exchange of ideas and nurturing a truly democratic spirit. Together, these interconnected components form a robust cycle that not only enhances the pedagogical skills of student teachers but also prepares them to create classroom environments that reflect democratic ideals, ensuring that the next generation is better equipped to engage with and contribute to democratic processes both within and beyond the classroom.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The "Democratic Classroom Management Model (DCMM)" emphasises the importance of taking a multifaceted approach in creating democratic classrooms. This approach is crucial in preparing student teachers to participate in and contribute to a democratic society. By involving students in decision-making, promoting collaborative teaching and learning, encouraging critical thinking and reflection, and establishing inclusive and safe environments, this model highlights the necessary components for enhancing student engagement and academic success. This comprehensive approach not only equips student teachers with effective classroom management skills but also instils democratic values that extend beyond the classroom. It shapes future teachers who can promote democratic principles in their teaching practices.

Based on the findings of the DCMM Model, educational institutions should prioritise the integration of democratic practices into their curricula and pedagogical strategies. Firstly, teacher education programmes should provide structured opportunities for student teachers to practice decision-making and leadership within a classroom setting. This strengthens their ability to engage students in a democratic manner. Secondly, fostering an environment that values collaborative learning experiences can further enhance the development of democratic skills among student teachers. Additionally, curricula should place emphasis on critical thinking and reflective practices, enabling student teachers to constructively challenge societal norms and biases. Finally, it is crucial for teacher education programmes to advocate for and model inclusive and safe learning environments. By implementing these strategies, student teachers' learning experiences will be enriched while also preparing them to create classrooms that embody democratic values, promoting a more engaged and inclusive educational landscape.

7. Declarations

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Data Availability: The data are not publicly available due to confidentiality agreements with participants and ethical restrictions imposed by the Institutional Review Board. However, de-identified data can be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to approval by the ethics committee.

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