

## Learner Indiscipline in Schools

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### Abstract

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Discipline in schools is an essential element in the socialization of children, in the formation of their character and in the process of education. Learners are entitled to an education free from frequent disruptions in a safe and secure environment. Most prevalent forms of learner indiscipline include talking without permission, teasing other learners, truancy, non completion of given work, verbal attacks on other learners and teachers, graffiti on classroom and toilets walls, and use of drugs. Many learners with disruptive behavior come from troubled homes where there is erosion of nurturing family structure. Teacher's code of conduct such as relationship with learner, and lack of commitment lead to learner indiscipline.

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### Introduction

One of the most common complaints of teachers all over the world is that of disciplinary issues. The topic of how to manage student behavior has been around as long as there have been schools. Maphosa and Mammen (2011) assert that the issue of learner indiscipline has taken centre stage for a long time both internationally and nationally. According to these authors in the United Kingdom for example, there are many cases of classroom disorders. A lesson depends on many factors to reach an acceptable level of success one of which is discipline in the classroom. Discipline in the classroom is a prerequisite if any meaningful learning is to take place.

Nakpodia (2010) defines discipline as methods of modeling character and of teaching self control and acceptable behavior. It implies self control, restraint, and respect for self and for others.

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Indiscipline on the other hand, is misbehavior in any or all of the following areas; respect for school authority, obedience of rules and regulations, and maintenance of established standards of behavior. School discipline can be described as all the strategies that can be used to coordinate regulate and organize individuals and their activities in the school (Thornberg, 2008:37) and put in place provision and procedures necessary to establish and maintain an environment in which teaching and learning can take place. The aim of discipline is to help the individual to be well adjusted and happy (Nakpedia, 2010). In the classroom, to maintain an academically focused environment for teaching and learning some standard of behavior must be encouraged. Zubaida (2009) asserts that one purpose of discipline is to provide conditions which promote learning. Discipline is meant to discourage disorderly conduct that may threaten safety in the classroom.

Most common behavior problem among learners include truancy, fighting, shouting, snatching other learners' property, bullying, cheating, viewing pornographic materials, threatening teachers among others (Zubaida, 2009, <http://www.dharamajournals.in>). Onyechi and Okere (2007) identify the following as deviant behaviors exhibited frequently in classroom; walking out on the teacher, noise making, sleeping in class, immorality, use of drugs. No one can deny that little to no learning takes place in a chaotic class with the mentioned activities above.

The prevalence of violence is rife in most schools the world over. Maphosa and Mammen (2011) point out that in the United Kingdom learners are generally noisy, rowdy and disrespectful to educators. The use of foul language, and disrespect towards teachers are also confirmed in United States of America. In the Caribbean, the problem of school indiscipline seems to be no different. Thompson cited in Lochan (2010) states that administrators, teachers and parents have been struggling to find solutions to the problem. In Nigerian schools, according to Okoson (2010) acts of indiscipline which include truancy hooliganism, disrespect for school authority, cheating in examinations and drunkenness were on the increase. Sinbair (1999) conducted a study in Botswana among 200 high schools pupils and it was reported that absenteeism, stealing and smoking were most frequently committed offences. A study conducted by Moseki (2004) reported that truancy was rampant among high schools pupils in South Africa.

In Zimbabwean schools many cases of indiscipline abound. Eveline High School in Harare has turned into a lawless institution as pupils went on unpunished for drinking and smoking at school (<http://www.thezimmail.co.zw>). Teachers are failing to control pupils as their authority has been undermined.

Disruptive classroom behaviors cause harm in classroom. Finn, Fish and Scott (2008) and Oliver 2011 are of the view that when students misbehave they learn less and keep their peers from learning. Teaching contact time is reduced as more time is devoted to managing misbehavior rather than teaching. Finn et al 2009 assert that this creates stress for teachers when they are detracted from academic time. Finn et al 2009 cite a survey of 805 members of the American Federation of Teachers Union and report that 17% of teachers lost over 4 hours a week to disruptive behavior, while an additional 19% of teachers lost between 2 and 3 hours a week to disruptive behavior. This time and energy needed to cope with some descriptive students can be physically draining and emotionally exhausting.

It is important to note that indiscipline in schools affects the learner more than anybody else. It is the learner who is most displaced and consequently his behavior affects the community directly and indirectly politically, economically and socially (Donga, 1998:62). Politically the government will be bound to hire skilled people to come and feel the posts of children who have run away from school. Economically government spends money funding education, for example, BEAM if children leave school that money will be wasted as a result of indiscipline because government educates the nation in order to provide country with professionals who will boost the economy in future. Socially crime rate will be uncontrollable because they will commit whatever crime to satisfy their basic needs for example food, and clothing.

Indiscipline in the classroom is a phenomenon which owing to its extend and its social resonance, requires the attention of all those who are involved in teaching and as alluded to by Zubaida (2009) there is need to get at the root causes of indiscipline amongst learners with a view to finding a solution. This paper hence seeks to explore the contributing factors of indiscipline in schools. Different factors including home factors and school factors will be discussed.

## Theoretical Framework

This paper employs Dreikurs' social discipline model in its discussion of the causes of indiscipline. In his frame of reference Dreikurs asserts that man is recognized as a social being, his actions as purposive, directed toward a goal, and his personality as a unique and invisible entity ( Dreikurs, 1968). All behavior including misbehaving is orderly, purposeful and directed towards achieving social approval. Human beings have a need to belong and be accepted. People do not act according to reality that surrounds them but according to their own subjective assessment of it (<http://www.metu.edu.tr>). Unfortunately, when situations are open to personal interpretations, individuals make unavoidable mistakes in perception. Dreikurs asserts that all behavior is the result of a child's mistaken assumption about how to find a place and gain access. Thus when a learner is unsuccessful in obtaining acceptance, a pattern of misbehaving begins.

Dreikurs identified four types of goals that motivate children's misbehavior. The four main goals or purposes of the child misbehaving include

### i) Attention Getting.

Learners do almost anything to be noticed from being argumentative to being funny. When this fails learner moves on to more problematic goal seeking behavior such as power.

### (ii) Power and Control

Wanting to be in charge or control provides motivation for some learners to misbehave. The learners simply want their way and are often confrontational in reaching their goal.

### (iii) Revenge

Lashing out is how some students compensate for real or imagined hurt feelings to teachers, and peers.

#### (iv) Displaying Inadequacy

Some students falsely believe they cannot live up to expectations. They do not attempt anything that might lead to failure. In class they do not pay attention, are dishonesty and this is described as learned helplessness by psychologists. This is rightly asserted by Dreikurs 1968 if a child is misbehaving the main purpose like the well adjusted child will be social acceptance. Essentially, every action is grounded in the idea that child is seeking his/her place in the group.

### **Contributing Factors to Learner Indiscipline**

In order to deal with a problem effectively it is essential to have a clear understanding of the underlying reasons behind the problem (Lochan, 2010). No amount of teaching or respect will make discipline effective unless reasons why the behavior occurred are understood. This section will discuss home factors, school factors and learner factors which contribute to indiscipline in schools. A fundamental issue when attempting to probe indiscipline amongst learners is to understand its causes. Factors that cause indiscipline are as diverse as the individuals involved. The causes could be social, economic, psychological, peer influence, and child environment.

#### **Home Factors**

Felix (2011:15) asserts that many school problems cannot be dealt with in isolation. Various family circumstances may exert more powerful influences over learner's behavior than anything that happens in school. Lack of discipline among learners is largely a reflection of attributes, values and practices of their society. If there is no social order in society learners will be indisciplined in school (Grossinckle, 1990). Discipline problems reflect problems in the home. Schools are microcosm of society, as problems like drug abuse, crime and physical abuse increase in society, so will the discipline problems in schools (Lochan, 2010). Thus, since schools exist as societal institutions they are bound to be influenced by whatever transpires outside them. A variety of family factors mediate classroom disruptive behavior.

Permissive home environments contribute to learner misbehavior. Edwards (2004) points out that if parents spend little time at home, children may seek unsuitable social experiences elsewhere that have devastating affects on their lives. In Zimbabwe, as an example many parents have migrated to neighboring countries or overseas, leaving their children under the guardianship of relatives or children to take care of themselves thus creating permissive environments for acts of misconduct. Evans and Miguel (2007) found out that Kenyan students who do not have the guardianship of biological parents had higher rates of misbehavior in schools.

Also due to high rates of HIV and AIDS many children are growing up without biological parents. Children from child headed homes as alluded to by Evans and Miguel have a tendency of being more rebellious and non compliant at school.

Disorganized families where there is lack of leadership, guidance and control can also lead to disruptive behavior problems in schools. In these families parents attempt to discipline children by constantly threatening them with violence (Donga, 1998). Children from such homes can be abused, experience and witness domestic violence. Learners from these homes often develop anti-social and criminal behavior. They have low level of tolerance and believe that physical violence is the only means of resolving one's problems. Felix (2011) in line with this says chaotic family life is linked to aggression and descriptive behavior problem. The children exhibit hostile attribution biases, access aggression behavioral responses and view aggression favorably. Thus, at school these children face adjustment problems because they have been deprived of attention, and love.

Donga (1998) maintains such as single parent home may play a dominant part in enhancing discipline in school. This is also in line with Felix (2011) view that single parent homes are more likely to rear children with higher level of emotional, psychological and behavioral problems. The single parent is the sole breadwinner and as such cannot supervise children adequately. Most of the children as echoed by Donga (1998) are attracted to join gangs where they will enjoy the attention and protection that they have to do without at home.

Poverty is also perceived as a major cause of some forms of misbehavior in school (Evans and Miguel, 2001).When parents fail to meet learner's basic needs as stipulated by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Physiological needs include clothing, food, and shelter.

Unless these basic needs are satisfied to the required extent, other needs do not motivate children to learn and as a result the child resorts to abuse behavior. Students may be involved in theft and prostitution in order to meet daily needs. Others may skip classes to engage in informal jobs as vendors (Mangovo, Whitney & Chareka, 2011).

### **School Factors**

Disruptive behavior in schools has been a source of concern for school systems for many years.

Discipline problems reflect problems in the home. As problems like drug abuse, crime, physical abuse increase in society, so will the discipline problems in schools (Lochan, 2010).

Undisciplined behavior from students may also be the result of normal reactions to deficiencies in the school and to teachers as directors of the educational enterprise. Thornberg (2007) asserts that appropriate and descriptive behavior among students are socially constructed within a complex pattern of interactions in which both teachers and learners play an active role, influencing each other with their actions and interpretations.

Learners themselves are a source of indiscipline in schools. According to Cheinyane 2008 in (Mammen 2011) and Donga (1999) drugs taken by students are a contributing factor to indiscipline. Some students attend school while drunk. They assert that students form groups and take drugs or smoke dagga. They can for instance, take their juices laced with intoxicants in front of unsuspecting teachers. In this state Mammen (2011:191) says these learners are to prone to commit other forms of indiscipline. Mammen goes further to say that some of these learners carry dangerous weapons to threaten teachers who will try to discipline them. As has also pointed out, learners who come from permissive environments cause indiscipline in schools. They are arrogant, and lack respect of both elders and property in the school (Donga, 1998:67) Challenging behavior for example repeated and involuntary body movement and obsessive behavior may be due to an underlying cause or reason such as pain, illness or sensory difficulties.

Thornberg (2007) asserts that to understand student behavior it is also important to consider teacher behavior, how they organize and manage classroom activities and their efforts to establish and uphold roles.

Children have an inherent need for a safe and secure environment. Learners may react negatively to noise, heat, and cold or to invasion of their space. Carr(2004) points out that some children particularly with autistic spectrum disorders may be over sensitive to certain stimuli such as noise, and may therefore react by displaying challenging behavior. Carr (2004) is of the view that the classroom in many instances can be the only stable element in the life of a child not experiencing such security in other parts of his/her life.

Tamara 2009 in (Mammen 2011) argues on what he terms teacher caused indiscipline, situations where teachers cause indiscipline. Teachers sometimes perpetuate indiscipline by being unprepared that is lack of commitment (Danga, 1998:61 and Felix,2011). An ill-prepared lesson has a tendency of and causing misbehavior. Donga asserts that if teacher comes unprepared self confidence will be lost. Learners will doubt teacher's capabilities. Lochan (2010) also posit that when lessons are not interesting discipline crumbles, causing boredom which will lead to disruptions such as truancy, and talking during lessons without permission. Lack of commitment also takes place when teacher is not catering for individual learning styles of learners (Felix, 2011). If teachers fail to use a variety of methods to reach every learner, the learners become bored, disinterested and reckless. Marzano and Marzano (2003) also allude to the fact that ineffective teachers treat all students the same. They are not sensitive to the diverse needs of students and this leads to misbehavior in class.

Some behaviors exhibited by teachers lead to student indiscipline (Donga,1998 & Ozegwu 2009 in Mammen, 2011: 192). Teacher's treatment of learners can lead to indiscipline. Truancy, school phobia, or school refusal may be products of an aversive environment where teacher imposes rules on learners, uses punishment demeans student in front of peers (Yarason, 2004). Donga asserts that adolescents are very sensitive and trying to demean them or force them into doing something they do not like could result in direct confrontation. Thus, teachers by using their position to humiliate and intimidate the learners cause indiscipline. The relationships teachers establish with their students have an influence on the development of self concept which in turn affects discipline in class. Learners with poor self concept are more likely to display unacceptable behavior (Felix, 2011).



Teachers who are often absent from school for no good reasons and who do not respond promptly to the bell for example, after break contribute to indiscipline (Donga, 1998). If students are not under teacher's supervision this often causes chaos which range from noise making to fighting, vandalizing school property and sometimes to death of learner.

According to Kilonzo (2009) teachers are supposed to be role models behaving in *loco parents* all the times. Teachers who come to school drunk and improperly dressed, learners will imitate them and the discipline of the school suffers. Rono and Gichana 2006 cited in (kilonzo, 2009) report of an incident where at a secondary school in Ndanai School Bomet, students went on rampage accusing some of their teachers of being habitual drunkards.

## **Conclusion**

Indiscipline leads to ineffective teaching and learning and production of unacceptable members of society. The school and the family are the two institutions most concerned with the growth, socialization and education of the child. These institutions need a sound relationship based on mutual understanding and cooperation. Teachers play a vital role in curbing indiscipline at school. It is the school's duty to improve discipline by taking steps to remove the causes. They should strive to develop self disciplined children by helping them to become responsible.

## **Recommendations**

- Cordial relationships should exist between parents and school authorities so that they work together in trying to reduce indiscipline. Both the home and school environment should be made exciting and conducive for learning to children.
- There should be reward for good conduct and punishment for bad conduct at home, school and society.
- Schools to have competent professional counselors who will help indiscipline students stop misbehaving by clearly discussing with them the consequences of indiscipline and benefits of being disciplined.
- Teachers to be wary of different forms of indiscipline in schools in an attempt to create safe and conducive learning environment. Schools to have constant staff development workshops that focus on indiscipline; causes, types and preventative approaches to management of discipline.

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