

MANAGEMENT OF DISCIPLINARY PROBLEMS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the management of disciplinary problems among public secondary schools. The study also aimed to examine the forms of disciplinary management styles and their effectiveness. The findings revealed various forms of indiscipline which include: disorderliness in the classrooms, disrespect for teacher's truancy, fighting among students, theft, and many others. The findings also revealed that student disciplinary management systems have positive/negative effects on the management of students' discipline especially when teachers and school managers are involved. The study recommended that all stakeholders in education should

always be involved in disciplinary issues. It also recommended that government should provide adequate and effective teacher development skills. Government should ensure proper supervision and inspection of private secondary schools for effective productivity. The study further recommended that stakeholders in education should find ways of creating conducive learning/teaching environment for students and teachers.

Keys words: Discipline, Disciplinary Problems, Public Secondary School Students and Secondary Education.

Introduction

Students challenging behaviour is a constant index in disciplinary related issues. The traditional methods of managing these challenging behaviours have in recent time given way to other approaches ranging from the hands-off model which aims at children's development into responsible people to get tough and 'zero tolerance' approaches that primarily intend to exclude children and youth who engage in challenging behaviour from the school environment. However, most scholars are of the view that these two strategies are not effective enough to bring the required improved behavior in students. (Bandits 1986).

The council for children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD) (2002) affirmed that most approaches linked with 'zero tolerance' recorded negative collateral effects which include school dropouts, increased rates of disruption, and high-level favouritism. School disciplinary management is a herculean task. Discipline in the view of Akubue (2001) is a functional product of awesomeness, self-control, self-restrain, self-respect of oneself and

others, perseverance, tolerance, and recognition of human dignity. It may be described as the art of moulding or conditioning behaviours through rewards and punishment.

Discipline/management can be seen as training that moulds, corrects, strengthens or perfects an individual. In the view of Brophy (2003) sound leadership and positive motivation are crucial in effective management. Kindiki (2009) also opined that managing students' disciplinary acts should be done with all reasonableness, objectivity as well as practicality that the activity deserves. Therefore, a good school manager is expected to focus on sound training of the mind and character of pupils and students. Such training should be hinged on constructive policies, rules, and principles. It has been rightly observed that poor or absence of disciplinary management skills among school managers might lead to the violation of one or more of the fundamental rights of students. This in turn may result in student unrest.

Aristotle's Virtue Theory (1997) also known as character Theory though conservative has been widely adopted by many school managers. It is hinged on the idea that "the good life is the virtuous life". In essence, the rightness and wrongness of an action may be determined by what appeals to a virtuous person. "Virtuous in this light refers to the possession of admirable and accepted character traits. This

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approach is relevant to this study as it is directly related to students' moral character development and therefore apt in studying the management of students' disciplinary issues in schools.

Everson & Emmer (2002) disclosed that it is reasonable as well as necessary to manage students' disciplinary issues. Management entails the training of the mind and character based on sound and constructive policies, rules and regulations as well as virtues. Observations have shown that lack of disciplinary management skills among private secondary school managers has led to unwanted violation of the fundamental rights of students. This ultimately led to cases of student unrest in public secondary schools.

One major problem among students in public secondary school is indiscipline (Njoroge & Bennars, 2000) for example; exhibiting disruptive behavior has been a source of concern to school authorities, parents, and all education stakeholders. Therefore, school authorities cannot afford to ignore these kinds of behaviours. School authorities thus need to ensure well-understood sound behaviours and put in place acceptable disciplinary policies. Against this background, the management of disciplinary problems should be given the needed urgent attention. The study therefore aimed at identifying some basic factors associated with the management of disciplinary problems among secondary school students in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Indiscipline in Nigerian secondary schools is on the increase and has remained a major problem in the educational sector. Act of indiscipline among secondary school students in Nigeria include the use of verbal abuse or offensive language against teachers and other students, sexual harassment of female teachers and students by male students, threat and intimidation of teachers and students possession of offensive weapons, supplying or using illegal drugs, and intrusions into the classrooms by students with the intention of confronting teachers. Secondary school students often flout school rules and regulations with impunity. They have little or no respect for their teachers and the school authority.

As a result of the act of indiscipline among secondary school students, teachers experience more difficulties in the task of educating, socializing, and

empowering secondary school students (Olaitan, Nayaya & Lukman, 2013). Students' act of indiscipline is also contributes to the cases of school dropout, social vices, teachers' stress and attrition, all of which jeopardizes the administration of secondary school and students' poor academic performance.

In lieu of the above, this study seeks to examine the management of disciplinary problems in Nigerian secondary schools, with special emphasis on the causes of disciplinary problems in secondary school, how to prevent disciplinary problem and the appropriate techniques of managing indiscipline in Nigeria secondary school.

Concept of Discipline

Discipline derived from a Latin word "Discipulus" which means to learn. Literally, discipline is a mode of life in accordance with certain rules and regulations. School discipline is an essential element in school administration. This is because discipline is a mode of life following laid down rules of the society to which all members must conform, and the violation which is questionable. It has been seen as a process of training and learning that fosters growth and development (Ayalew, 1996). Therefore, discipline aims to help the individual to be well adjusted, happy, and useful to the society. The doctrine of school discipline according to Nolte (1980) is based on the concept of "loco" parentis which allows school authorities full responsibility for children's upbringing, the right of discipline, and control. Therefore, teachers have the right to punish students who contravene school laws. According to Josph (2010), discipline means: training to ensure proper behavior or the practices or methods of teaching and enforcing acceptable patterns of the behaviour order and control especially in the class. It is the conscious control over lifestyle mental self-control used in directing or changing. It has to do with learning something or training something as well as punishment designed to teach somebody to be obedient. There are many reasons given why discipline problems frequently arise either in the school or classroom. Although some discipline problems may be caused by outside factors such as disruptive home environment, probably the majority of the discipline problems originate from difficulties within the school environment. Thus teacher-related problems, student-related problems, and home-environment-related problems are common. To accomplish the related

problems effectively there should be discipline in the classroom, and the school. Otherwise whatever is done it may be difficult to reach the destination. Student's disciplinary problems manifest in different ways and it is experienced in learners of all ages. The author added that learners' misconduct is more common amongst secondary school students than in primary school learners. The author further stated that boys are more frequently involved in misconduct than girls. According to him juvenile delinquency, violence and criminal activities are manifestations of adolescents rejecting authority within the community.

From the above explanations, we can confidently explain that discipline means a state of orderly conduct of an individual which is gained through training in self-control and in habits of a obedience to socially approved standards of thought and action. As a matter of fact, discipline helps to create regularity in conduct. In the education sector, students are expected to obey their respectfully as expected of them by their school rules and regulations. Discipline enables students to develop the necessary and required qualities for successful life.

The Concept of Secondary Education

Achuonye (2007) defined secondary education, as the education children receive after primary education and before the tertiary stage. To Agim (2009) secondary school is the bridge between the primary and tertiary levels. It is the spring board from where all the students of higher education take off and all primary school leavers must pass through it to become useful to themselves and society. According to IGI Global (2022), secondary education means education beyond an elementary level provided by a high school or similar institution. From the above definitions, what seem obviously is that, secondary education is the second level of the three-tier system of education in Nigeria Federal Republic Nigeria. The general aims of secondary education are preparation of individuals who passed out from secondary school for; (i). useful living within the society, and (i) for higher education (Agim, 2009).

Secondary education is of six-year duration and given in two stages, junior and senior levels of three years each. Secondary education completes the provision of basic education that began at the primary level, and aims at laying the foundations for lifelong learning and human development, by offering more

subject- or skill-oriented instruction (Garba, 2012). Secondary education is aimed at developing a child better than the primary level, because primary education is insufficient for children to acquire literacy, numeracy, and communication skills (Ige, 2011; Yusuf, 2009). The missionaries exposed Nigeria to secondary education and it actually started in the late 1850s (Agim, 2009).

Causes of Disciplinary Problems in Secondary Schools

Nelson (1997) identified many forms of indiscipline among students of secondary schools. They include disorderliness in classrooms, absenteeism, stealing, and many others. Observations also revealed that due to financial inadequacy, many private school owners tend to lower standards of admission and retention of students. In most cases, academic and social standards are lowered to attract a high population of students expelled from government and mission schools.

The dirge of instructional resources is another major cause of indiscipline in private secondary schools. In most schools, human and non-human resources like teachers and support staff, classrooms, workshops, laboratories, and libraries are grossly in short supply (Kohlberg 1971). Kaufman (2006) was of the view that approaches to students' discipline are another crucial factor as far as the surge in indiscipline is concerned. He argued that traditional approaches to discipline appear to be based on theories that apply only to a group of students. Many of them seem not to be applicable in cases where students exhibit very chronic behavioural problems.

Also, Jankowski (2002) said most private school managers apply stringent rules and regulations that make the approaches used in students' discipline grossly inadequate. Scholars believe that if, acceptable approaches are employed cases of indiscipline may be better managed. For example, Martin Pear (2007) suggested an approach where students are encouraged to participate in discussions on pertinent social and moral issues. This may help to stimulate individual student's moral behavior. The argument is that the fewer children feel pressured to conform to rules and regulations, the more voluntarily they can settle their differences and develop their moral values.

It can be asserted from literature that there are so many factors that have caused disciplinary problems among public secondary school students they include;

- a) Parental/Home Factor; Most authors regard parents as of the greatest importance in creating a conducive teaching and learning atmosphere. It seems that the lack of parental involvement is the major cause of disciplinary problems in secondary schools. Alidzulwi (2000), pointed out that many parents are not involved in the education of their children. This has caused poor results, high dropout rates, and the absence of discipline in schools. Bowman (2004) believed that parents' failure to teach their children discipline is identified as the greatest contributory factor to disciplinary problems in schools. Louw and Barnes (2003) affirmed that they have never seen a problem child, only problem parents. In his study, Varma (1993) also pointed out that those learners who behave badly at school do not receive proper discipline at home. When analyzing the inability of parents to take care of their children in all socio-economic levels and in all racial groups, Rossouw (2003) regarded the decline in the discipline in most schools as originating from the communities rather than schools. Rossouw (2003) stressed that parents show a lack of tolerance and respect towards government authorities as well as towards educators. Also some have laissez-faire approach towards their children welfare.
- b) Political, Social and Economic Factors; Rossouw (2003) claimed that educators have reported that they are uncertain, confused, and afraid of infringing on learners' rights, and of being accused of misconduct. He opined that the over-emphasis placed on learners' rights may cause an "don't-care attitude" and lack of regard for the educators' role in the classroom. This make some learners not to strive to excel. Instead, they try to influence their classmates negatively to exhibit the same lack of discipline.

Children who experience social alienation from others are often misbehaved. The political situation in Nigeria may also be responsible for children's misbehavior. Moloi (in Rossouw 2003) stated that the involvement of youth in the politics particularly in 1999 seemed to have made many of them swollen headed. Many show a lot of disrespect for parents and teachers. Maree (in Rossouw 2003) also blamed the political situation in Nigeria to politically issues

- c) School Environment; Every school manager is

committed to ensuring that the school provides a safe and orderly environment in which teaching and learning take place each day. Bazemore (1997) posited that safe and supportive school environments depend on students, staff, and parents demonstrating mutual respect. In other words, all members of the school community (students, staff, and parents) must know and understand the standards of behaviour which all students are expected to live up to. They must also be aware of the consequences if these standards are not met. Every student has the right to a learning environment free from bullying and intimidation. All students should also feel safe and happy in school. Students have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity (Terry, 2001). Also, every organization has rules the school community is no exception. A school makes reasonable rules for the orderliness in the school. Schools have the power to enforce these rules. According to Rowne (2005) "The school priorities are designed to ensure that all students are provided with a harmonious environment where they can learn and thrive. Therefore discipline in a school is required to ensure that the school can provide quality education for all students and guarantee the care and safety of the school community. A harmonious work environment at school increases the chance of students realizing their full educational potential". However, a lawless school raises unproductive members for the society. Also In, a lawless school environment promotes disciplinary challenges for the school managers and teachers. Students in such school disrespect their fellow students, teachers, and community members most of the time they engage in protest which may result in violence, discrimination, harassment, bullying, and intimidation (Mitchell, 1996).

- d) The Curriculum; The relevance of the curriculum to learners' needs also influences discipline in school a research done by Raven (in Besag 1991), it was ascertained that learners engage in several forms of deviant behaviour if the curriculum is not able to offer them opportunities for self-development and a sense of personal worth, and do not address the aims that are promoted by society. The author further maintained that learners resort to taking matters into their own

hands if they believe that the curriculum is irrelevant and boring. Accordingly, Doveton (1991) indicated that deviant behaviour is always experienced if the curriculum that is offered to learners is irrelevant to their interests and the needs of their communities

- e) **Peer Group Influence;** The peer group influences what the child values, knows, wears, eats, and learns. The extent of this influence however depends on other situational constraints, such as the age and personality of children and the nature of the group (Harris, 1998; Hartup, 1983). There is no doubt that considerable evidence supports the statement that peer relationships influence the growth of problematic behaviours in youth. The peer group can demand blind obedience to a group's norm, which can result in socially alienated gangs with pathological outlooks (Perry, 1987). Douge (1993) indicated that poor peer relationships were closely associated with social cognitive skill deficits. According to Seita, Mitchell, and Tobin (1996) "When the family has been unable to fully meet a child's needs, other adults who play a significant role in the child's life have extraordinary potential for influencing the child in taking charge of his or her life". It is worth noting that peer influence can lead to discipline problems and delinquent behaviours both inside and outside school. It is also clear that one of the major ways that deviant youths become even more deviant is through unrestricted interaction with deviant peers. Hartung (1965) posited that criminality is socio-culturally learned in the process of interacting with family members and peers in small intimate groups. This process includes learning the techniques to commit delinquent acts and developing the rationalizations to protect one's self-concept

How to Prevent Disciplinary Problem in Secondary Schools

There are many ways to ensure this. Scholars have identified some way to prevent disciplinary problems in schools which include:

1. **Be organized;** Disorganization leads to lulls in class which leads to kids getting bored and misbehaving. Teachers should Plan their lessons well, have supplies ready, and be as organized as possible. Furthermore they should think right

about what items seem to be constantly coming up and figure out a system to help you keep track of them.

2. **Deal with problems while they are still small;** Teachers are advised not to wait to deal with issues until they are big. Instead, they ought to address every small issue that comes up in the class. The problem should be with while they are small as this will help to keep them from growing into bigger and more overwhelming problems.
3. **Have good control procedures;** intentionally develop procedures that prevent problems. For example, requiring students to use a cover sheet will prevent cheating. These types of procedures should make it as easy as possible for students to choose to do the right thing and as difficult as possible for them to misbehave or make poor decisions.
4. **Teach the procedures well;** it is not enough to just think of good procedures; one has to teach the students. And teaching them requires four basic steps: clearly explain the procedure, practice it with them, correct any parts that was done incorrectly, and have them redo the procedure until they have it right. If take time is not taken properly to teach your procedures, one end up being frustrated the whole year when students just do not seem to following them.
5. **Keep the students engaged;** The more engaged the students are in learning, the less they will cause problems. So let the passion for teaching show and make the subject come alive. Also, remember that the one who is working is the one, who is learning, so do not just lecture all day. Get the students involved. One great way to do that is with writing-to-learn.
6. **Move around the classroom;** Do not be stuck at the front of the room. Feel free to walk around as teaching goes on. Not only does this provide some variety, but it also helps one keep a better eye on what the students are doing.
7. **Develop a rapport with the students;** If we want our students to follow us, they need to respect us and know that we care about them. So teachers are encouraged to invest in students' lives. Be genuine and admit the mistakes. Be kind and approachable. Compliment them, write them kind notes, and attend their extracurricular events when possible.

8. **Be professional;** If the goal is for the students to like the teachers such teachers is, going to set himself/ herself up for a host of problems. Instead of viewing oneself as the students' friends. The teacher needs to see himself/ or herself as their mentor. That means the interactions with them should be friendly but not familiar.
9. **Require students to clear their desks;** Require students to only have out on their desks what they need for the current activity. Everything else must be put away or on the floor. When their desks are mostly clear, the teacher can easily see exactly what they are doing, and it makes it much harder for them to be off-task.
10. **Establish structure first;** There may be a whole list of exciting activities that one wants to do with the students, but the advice is to save the less structured activities until the students are used to the expectations and are doing well with a more structured environment. Then, once they understand the structure, student's teacher should be able to enjoy a less structured activity while still maintaining control.

Techniques of Managing School Discipline

It has been observed by education stakeholders in Nigeria that the educational system at all levels is riddled with series of discipline problems. Unfortunately, when these problems go on unabated in secondary schools, the principals are blamed for non-performance of their duties and their failure to exhibit appropriate leadership behaviors to solve these perennial problems besieging the education system. A significant challenge for principals today is to identify the situations of the school, such as discipline problems, their effect on teaching and learning, and strategies to be employed to mitigate them. Most principals set up some sort of rules and measures at the commencement of the academic year. They also try to implement those rules and measures. It will be expected that positive results would be achieved whenever the rules are implemented, and whereas if the rules are breached may create harmful repercussion. the following considerations may be useful to principals.

- I. The authoritarian approach to discipline: In a research study conducted by Mtsweni (2008), the authoritarian style of leadership has been linked to autocratic communication, excessive control of

learners' domination as well as the compulsive exercise of power that may undermine the learners' feelings of freedom and security. The authoritarian approach to discipline suggests that the administration of punishment cannot be ruled out in the control and discipline of students. The right and authority of a principal to inflict punishment on students for offences, for students who breach school rules and regulations, is enhanced by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) which specifies people's right to personal liberty. There have been instances in which a person who has not attained the age of eighteen may be deprived of his right to personal liberty specifically, for educative and welfare purposes. Sequel to the above constitutional provision, a principal has the authority to corporally punish a pupil even when his parents object to that type of punishment unless the parent proffers convincing reason. Principals' authority stems from any of the following: Parental delegation, necessity, preservation of discipline, government's duty, and public duty. In a state where corporal punishment is statutorily prohibited, a principal's authority to inflict corporal punishment is at an end (Zindi, 1995).

- ii. In secondary schools, the range of permissible punishment is at present very broad, ranging from expulsion, suspension, and exclusion, to corporal punishment. Corporal punishment refers to any kind of bodily chastisement on a person by another. It is here taken to include bodily chastisement and all forms of punishment which subjects the child to fatigue and perhaps to the derision of his schoolmates. Schools have regulations which prescribe rules on who may inflict corporal punishment, the number of licks that may be administered, the need to keep a record of it in a register, and perhaps a requirement that the pupils' parent should be informed promptly. A corporal punishment book which shall be entered by the principal or teacher authorized by the principal, the date of all such punishment awarded, the nature of the offence and punishment, the name of the teacher administering the punishment, and the name of the pupil. Such corporal punishment shall be kept to the minimum and shall be administered only by

- the principal, or teacher authorized by the principal, such authorization is to be entered in the logbook: provided that no female pupil shall receive corporal punishment from a male teacher.
- iii. Suspension and expulsion of students: A student may be suspended or expelled where he infracts a grievous school rule. The student is probably to be given a fair hearing before suspension or expulsion. It is recommended that parents are invited to the disciplinary committee hearing if the sanction of expulsion is contemplated. Parents have the right to appeal to a higher person or body. A principal is at liberty to inform the entire students of the reason for the suspension or expulsion if it will have a deterrent effect on them. Without attempting an exhaustive list, the following may result in suspension or expulsion: truancy, tardiness, insubordination, and disobedience to a teacher, insulting a teacher, hitting a teacher, fighting with another student, leaving the school premises without permission, substance use, and refusal to rules and regulations
 - iv. Exclusion: By exclusion, a pupil who infracts school rules may be asked to have limited contact with other pupils in the school. He may be permitted to enter the school premises solely to write an internal or external examination while he remains barred from receiving lessons or participating in other school activities.
 - v. Educative and corrective approach: In its guide for educators on how to deal with discipline, the Department of Education (2000) advises educators to adopt alternatives to corporal punishment for effective discipline, other suggested alternative are present possible alternatives that focus on positive behavior; focus on rewarding learners for their effort, as well as for good behavior; discuss rules with learners and reach an agreement on these rules --learners will attempt to keep these rules because they have been consulted in their design; make use of measures that are respectful and dignified, as well as physically and verbally non-violent punishment others are ; disciplinary measures in such a way that the consequences of breaking the rules are directly related to the learners behavior; use time-out that is open-ended and managed by the learners, who determines his/her readiness to gain self-control Rogers (1995) came up with a school

discipline policy which provides a framework that corresponds with what a school will seek to practice. The framework aims at achieving the following, namely to: establish a stable social learning environment; encourage students to be responsible for their behaviour, develop self-discipline, and enhance their self-worth, and respect the rights and feelings of others, such as their fellow students and teachers; set out the school's expectations and rights, and enhance positive behavior as well as establish a set of preferred practices and due processes, whereby the staff may address unacceptable student behavior

- vi. The bio-physical theory and alternative discipline: According to Henly (2010), the bio-physical theory explains human behaviour through an analysis of metabolic, genetic, and neurological factors. This theory indicates that lead poisoning, allergies, and neurological impairments are the three widely accepted bio-physical causes of poor student behaviour. Henly (2010) further indicate that infections, alack of sleep, poor diet, and vision problems are other biophysical explanations for attention problems in children.

Conclusion /Recommendations

It was concluded based on the findings of this study that the major obstacles that the education system faces these days are students' disciplinary problems. It is serious problem in secondary schools such problems include Fighting with each other and with teachers, damaging school properties, theft, coming to school Late, cheating during test and examination, disobedience, absenteeism, and truancy are adequate and proper management strategies employed by school principals and teachers may likely lead to an outstanding decrease in acts of indiscipline.

The following recommendations were made:

- a. School administrators, teachers, and parents should be committed to monitoring students' activities in and outside the school setting.
- b. Government should provide avenues for adequate skills. This can be done through regular training of teachers on how to manage student's disciplinary problems.
- c. The government needs to ensure effective inspection and supervision of all activities in public secondary schools.

- d. Parents should cooperate with schools by attending school meetings and by making school visits when necessary. This is because the behaviors of the students are rooted in the home and partially in the schools as well as in the environments. Therefore, genuine home-school cooperation can produce fruitful information.
- e. Government and school administrators should ensure the adequacy and appropriateness of human and material resources. This can be achieved by employed qualified staff in the guidance and counseling department, and the provision of current instructional materials.

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