Management of Disciplinary Problems in Primary and Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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Abstract

The school as an agent of socialization is among other functions which model the behaviour of people who pass through it. But a cursory look at the school today shows that there is a downward trend with respect to the way its products acts, most especially the misbehaviour of primary and secondary school students. The mis-behaviour stems from the management of disciplinary problems in public primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. As society changes, educators are faced with the task of coping with various forms of indiscipline including truancy, fighting, damaging school property, disrespect for teachers , extortion, cultism and sexual harassment This paper therefore, identified the various forms of indiscipline and factors responsible for it, the effects and the various management styles and their effectiveness.

Key words: Discipline, indiscipline, behaviour, disciplinary problems, management styles

Introduction

The school as an agent of socialization has been bedeviled with various forms of social vices which come about because students do not practise discipline in school. A cursory look at schools today at whatever level shows that there is more indiscipline than ever before as students now frequently get involved in cultism and other anti-social vices. Due regard to constituted authorities is regularly violated at will. For the efficient functioning of the school its management reserves the power to control the conduct of students through reasonable rules and regulations. Once the rules and regulations are made, they must be enforced by the school management, but this no longer happens in most schools. Discipline problems dominate in large and small schools, both in towns and villages. Students disobey school rules and regulations with impunity. They have little or no respect for their teachers and even the school authorities. Therefore, the school remains a preparatory ground to empower and certify the requirement for human development. Most of the time, the teacher is faced with the challenges of educating, socializing, empowering and certifying students, but with the help of a good teaching atmosphere, the teacher is able to surmount the challenges. By implication, the task of a teacher, which includes sustaining the educational system does not rest on his professional competency alone, but on the entire features of the school climate.

The percentage of students who drop out of school in most urban and rural areas of the Nigeria society is on the increase. Many students cultivate and demonstrate deviant behaviours and may never fulfill their potential. They become huge burdens on the families, communities, societies and themselves. There is an outcry by teachers, administrators and parents against the increasing rate of indiscipline in our schools. This observation unsettles the mind of patriotic Nigerians since students are

considered the future leaders of the country. As a result, any attempt to curb students indiscipline in schools would be highly welcomed by the government, parents, community leaders and teachers.

Discipline can be seen as the training that moulds, corrects, strengthens or perfects an individual. Kindiki (2009) opined that managing students' disciplinary acts should be done with all the reasonable objectivity that it deserves. Therefore, a good school manager is expected to focus on the sound training of the mind and character of the 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 students' unrest. Uka in Owenvbiugie (2010) stated that in modern classrooms management was a provision of a suitable environment for students to develop self- control, orderliness, good conduct, cooperation and the habit of getting the best out of themselves during and after school life. He further stated that discipline was self-control, the control of conduct including habits, actions, desires, emotion, impulses and general behaviour. From the foregoing, discipline can be seen as the ability and willingness to do what one ought to do without external control. Hence, discipline is internally motivated within and depends on the state of mind of an individual.

Discipline may be induced in individuals who do not succumb to established rules and regulations not out of personal volition but out of the fear of punishment or sanction. It is discipline that entails training, develops self-control, character, orderliness or efficiency and strict control to enforce obedience enforces treatment that controls or punishes and a system of rules.

In spite of the guiding principles in schools, students exhibit different types of indiscipline. Not a single day passes without a report of an act of indiscipline perpetrated by teenagers of primary and secondary schools. The types of indiscipline include armed robbery, abortion, boycotting lessons, watching and practising pornography, lie telling, violence, dishonesty, disobedience to teachers, prefects and school administration, rampart destruction of school property and poor relationships among the students, among others.

One major problem among students in primary and secondary schools is indiscipline (Njoroge & Bennars, 2000). This is usually seen in exhibiting disruptive behaviour which has been a source of concern to school authorities. School authorities thus need to put in place acceptable disciplinary measures. Indiscipline in schools became a recurring decimal ever since corporal punishment was abolished. Since then, it appears that indiscipline among students in the primary and secondary school systems increased exponentially without a recourse to school rules and regulations. Against this background, the management of disciplinary problems should be given the needed urgent attention.

This paper therefore, was aimed at examining the management of disciplinary problems in public primary and secondary schools, how to prevent disciplinary problems and the appropriate techniques of managing indiscipline in Nigeria primary and secondary school. To address those issues, the paper was discussed under the following subheadings:

- Concept of Discipline
- Causes of Disciplinary Problems in Primary and Secondary School
- Management of Disciplinary Problems in Primary and Secondary Schools.
- Types / Form of Indiscipline Acts in Schools

- Techniques of Managing School Discipline in Primary and Secondary School
- Conclusion /Recommendations

Concept of Discipline

School discipline is an essential element in school administration. This is because discipline is a mode of life by following laid down rules of society to which all members must conform, and any violation is expected to be followed by a sanction or punishment. It is 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 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. In the recent past, there had been an increase in public attention to the problem of discipline in the Nigerian school system. In fact, there is the tendency to think that the problem of pupils' unrest does happen quite often these days in our institutions of leaning in Nigeria. In our primary and secondary institutions, for example, rules and regulations are not obeyed. It means that most students do not listen to their school heads. The teachers themselves also violate the rules and regulations of the schools. They eventually take laws into their hands.

Discipline was explained by various writers from different perspectives and, as such, cannot be given a specific acceptable definition. But its acceptability depends on the level of usage and popularity in the conceptual framework. According to Adesina (1990), there is the need for school authorities to ensure that school rules and regulations and obeyed. Discipline with a specific reference to the school system could involve such characteristics as sacrifice, diligence, cooperation, integrity, truthfulness, and self- constraints with regard to respect for oneself others.

According to Joseph (2010), discipline means training to ensure proper behaviour or the practices or methods of teaching and enforcing acceptable patterns of the behaviour and control, especially in the class. It is the conscious control over lifestyle and mental self-control. It has to do with learning something or training something as well as the punishment designed to teach somebody to be obedient. There are many reasons why discipline problems frequently arise either in the school or in the classroom. They could be caused by factors such as a disruptive home environment or difficulty within the school environment. It could also be teacher-related problems, student-related problems, and home-environment-related problems. To combat the related problems effectively, there should be discipline in the classroom and the school, otherwise, it may be difficult to reach the desired destination. Students' disciplinary problems manifest in different ways in learners of all ages. Montgomery (n.d.), said that learners' misconduct was more common among secondary school students than primary and secondary school learners. He further said that boys were 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.

Causes of Disciplinary Problems in Schools

Nelson (1997) identified many forms of indiscipline among students in 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 who were expelled from government and mission schools. One may assume that many students who were expelled from government and mission schools as a result of disciplinary issues are given unrestricted admission in some private primary and secondary schools.

The dearth 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 were another crucial factors as far as the surge in indiscipline was concerned. He argued that traditional approaches to discipline appeared to be based on theories that applied only to a group of students. Many of them seemed not to be applicable in cases where students exhibited very chronic behavioural problems. Also, Jankowski (2002) said that most private school managers applied stringent rules and regulations that made the approaches used in students' discipline grossly inadequate. Scholars believe that if acceptable approaches are employed, the cases of indiscipline may be better managed. For example, Martin and Pear (2007) suggested an approach where students were encouraged to participate in discussions on pertinent social and moral issues. This may help to stimulate individual pupil's moral behaviour. The argument is that the less 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 that so many factors cause disciplinary problems among public primary and secondary school students. Some of these factors are:

Parental/Home Factor. Most authors regard parents as the greatest importance in creating a conducive teaching and learning atmosphere. It seems that lack of parental involvement is the major cause of disciplinary problems in schools. Alidzulwi (2000), pointed out that many parents were 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 was identified as the greatest contributory factor to disciplinary problems in schools. Louw and Barnes (2003) affirmed that they had never seen a problem child, only problem parents. In his study, Varma (1993) also pointed out that the learners who behaved badly in school did not receive proper discipline at home. When analysing the inability of parents to take care of their children in all socio-economic levels and racial groups, Rossouw (2003) regarded the decline in discipline in most schools as originating from the communities rather than from schools. He stressed that parents showed a lack of tolerance and respect for government authorities as well as for educators. Also, some had laissez-faire approach towards their children's welfare.

Political, Social and Economic Factors: Rossouw (2003) claimed that educators had reported that they were uncertain and confused about, and afraid of infringing on learners' rights, and of being accused of misconduct. He opined that the over-emphasis on learners' rights could cause an l "don't-care attitude" and lack of regard for the educators' role in the classroom. These 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 often misbehave. The political situation in Nigeria is also blamed for children's misbehaviour. Moloi in Rossouw (2003) stated that "the involvement of the youth in the political stability and national elections in 1999 caused them to develop arrogance towards adults, that is, both educators and parents". Accordingly, Maree in Rossouw

(2003) also blamed the political situation of the nineties in Nigeria where the causes of violence in schools were politically motivated.

School Environment; Every school manager is committed to ensuring that the school provides a safe and an orderly environment where teaching and learning can take place each day. Bazemore (1997) posited that safe and supportive school environments depended 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 and the consequences if these standards are not met. Every student has the right to a learning environment which is free from bullying and intimidation, and safe and happy. They have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity (Terry, 2001). Also, every private school has rules. The school community is no exception. A school makes reasonable rules for the good of the school and the discipline of students. Schools have the power to enforce these rules by using discipline or punishment. 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, good 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 private school raises unproductive members for society. In the same vein, a lawless school environment poses disciplinary challenges to the school manager and teachers. Students in such schools disrespect their fellow students, teachers and community members, and engage in protests which herald violence, discrimination, harassment, bullying and intimidation, and use of weapons, drugs, alcohol and tobacco (Mitchell, 1996).

The Curriculum. The relevance of the curriculum to learners' needs also influences discipline in schools. In a study by Raven in Besag (1991), it was revealed that learners engaged in several forms of deviant behaviour if the curriculum was not able to offer them opportunities for self-development and a sense of personal worth, and did not address the aims that were promoted by society. Besag (1991) further maintained that learners would resort to taking matters into their own hands if they believed that the curriculum was irrelevant and boring. Accordingly, Doveton (1991) explained that deviant behaviour could always be experienced if the curriculum that was offered to learners was irrelevant to their interests and the needs of their communities

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 problem behaviour in youth. The peer group can demand blind obedience to a group 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 deficit. According to Seita et al (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

interactions with deviant peers. Hartung (1965) posited that criminality was socio-culturally learned in the process of interacting with family members and peers in small intimate groups. The process includes learning the techniques to commit delinquent acts and developing the rationalizations to protect one's self-concept

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

Be organized; Disorganization leads to lulls in class which leads to students 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 constantly come up and figure out a system to help keep track of them.

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.

Have good control procedures: Intentionally, teachers should develop procedures that prevent problems. For example, requiring students to use a cover sheet will prevent cheating. These types of procedures should make it easy for students to choose to do the right thing and difficult for them to misbehave or make poor decisions.

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 practise it with them, correct any part that was done incorrectly, and have them redo the procedure until they have it right. If one does not diligently teach the procedures, one would end up frustrated when students do not seem to adjust to the teaching.

Keep the students engaged; The more engaged the students are when 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 works is the one who learns, so, do not just lecture all day. Get the students involved. One great way to do that is with writing-to-learn.

 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 do.

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 your 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 would set themselves up for a host of problems. Instead of viewing oneself as the students' friends, the teacher needs to see himself as their mentor. It means that the interactions with them should be friendly but not familiar.

Require students to clear their desks; Require students to only put on their desks what they need for the current activity. Everything else must be put away or on the bookshelf. When their desks are mostly clear, the teacher can easily see exactly what they do, and it also makes it more difficult for them not to pay attention.

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 do well with a more structured

environment. Then, once they understand the structure, the teacher should be able to enjoy a less structured activity while still maintaining control.

Types / Forms of Indiscipline Acts in Schools

School and students' indiscipline is a burning problem and an issue of great concern to teachers and policy makers. It is a behavioural disorder like stealing, abusive language, dishonesty and lying which can cause physical damage to school or home property. It can also cause mental and emotional stress.

Several forms of indiscipline acts pervade every corner in secondary schools. Some occurr within the classroom, some within the school premises, while some others are carried out outside the school premises. Lewis (1991) as quoted by Morongwa (2010) observed that three types of misbehaviour which were regarded as disciplinary problems for the educator in the classroom included misbehaviours that inhibited the learner's own learning, misbehaviours by one learner which was destructive to the learning of another and misbehaviours which were disrespectful, defiant or abusive to the educator. He added that, those misbehaviours could be committed intentionally or unintentionally. He further stated in clear terms some of those behaviours could impact negatively on the morale of the students. A learner: consistently comes to class late and disrupts the flow of the class; learner talks while the teacher addresses the class; continuously calls out in class; defies the teacher and refuses to follow instructions; moves around in the class to the point of becoming a distraction; defies school authorities; cause some destruction; plays truancy; fights; uses profanity; damages school property; violates the school dress code; steals; and leaves the school without permission.

Techniques for Managing School Discipline in Primary and Secondary School

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 primary and secondary schools, the principals and headmasters/ headmistress are blamed for non-performance of their duties and failure to exhibit appropriate leadership behaviours to solve these perennial problems which besiege the education system. A significant challenge for principals and headmasters/ headmistress today is to identify the difficult situations in the school such as discipline problems, their effect on teaching and learning, and the 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 is expected that positive results would be achieved whenever the rules are implemented, because if the rules are breached, problems surfaces. To effectively curb the menace of indiscipline in schools, the following procedures were recommended.

The authoritarian approach to discipline: In a research conducted by Mtsweni (2008), the authoritarian style of leadership was linked to autocratic communication, excessive 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 headmaster/principal to punish students who breach school rules and regulations are enhanced by the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) which specified people's right to personal liberty. There have been instances where persons who had not attained the age of eighteen were deprived of their right to personal liberty specifically, for

educative and welfare purposes. Sequel to the above constitutional provision, a principal/headmaster has the authority to corporally punish a pupil/student even when his parents object to that type of punishment unless the parent proffers convincing reasons. Principals' authority sterns 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 headmaster/principal has no authority to inflict corporal punishment (Zindi, 1995).

In secondary schools, the range of permissible punishment is at present very broad. It ranges 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 subject 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 students' parent should be informed promptly. A corporal punishment book which should be entered by the principal or the teacher authorized by the principal, the date of such punishment given, the nature of the offence and punishment, the name of the teacher administering the punishment, and the name of the pupil should be kept in a school.

Suspension and expulsion of students: A student may be suspended or expelled where he infracts a grievous school rule. The students should be given a fair hearing before being suspended or expelled. 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 pupil, leaving the school premises without permission, substance use, and refusal to abide by rules and regulations

Exclusion: By exclusion, a pupil who infracts school rules may be asked to have limited contact with other students 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.

Conclusion /Recommendations

It was concluded that the major obstacles that the education system faced were students' disciplinary problems. It is a serious problem in primary and secondary schools. Some of these problems include fighting with one other and with teachers, damaging school property, theft, coming to school late, cheating during tests and examinations, disobedience, absenteeism and truancy. To curb these excesses, adequate and proper management strategies such as the authoritarian approach to discipline and suspension and expulsion of students should be employed by the school principal and headmaster/ headmistress. Some of the strategies, measures and procedures for managing students acts' of indiscipline in schools should start with the identification of the type of pupils who are enrolled in the schools; parents / guardians are also encouraged not to leave their children / wards in the hands of other people without appropriate feedback of their wellbeing; there should be teacher – student positive relationships in the schools; and government and school

administrators should ensure the adequacy and appropriateness of human and material resources.

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