

Pupil Indiscipline in the ‘No Corporal Punishment Era’ in Zambia: Trends and Implications for Management in Schools

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Abstract

The article highlights contemporary issues in pupil indiscipline, trends and implications on management in Zambian schools under the no-corporal punishment policy. Using a mixed methods approach, a sample of a hundred and ten respondents was purposively and randomly sampled and differentiated into school administrators, teachers, pupils and parents. Data collected through interviews and questionnaires was analysed by descriptive statistics and themes. The study revealed that pupil indiscipline had evolved into a myriad of new forms since the introduction of the ‘no corporal punishment’ policy in Zambian schools. The major pupil indiscipline issues manifested in increased aggressive behaviour amongst the pupils and within teacher-pupil relationship, emergence of pupil (thuggery) gang and vandalism to school and private property. The main drivers for the upswing in indiscipline were negative peer pressure, drug, alcohol and substance abuse, lapse in parental oversight, negative influence of technology and the media, ineffective management of school discipline, strict or undemocratic school rules, and the misuse of human rights and abuse of ‘no corporal’ punishment. There is sufficient evidence suggesting that owing to the rise in proportion, multiplicity and sometimes novelty of the forms of disciplinary issues, there are huge challenges in school based discipline managements. It is recommended that school management be trained and equipped with modern and alternative positive strategies of dealing with indiscipline which include guidance and counselling, ‘reward and punish’ strategy and strong school-community and other stakeholders-partnerships.

Key words: *Corporal punishment, Educators, Pupil indiscipline, Management, trends.*

Background and Context to the Study

Education is a cornerstone for both personal and national development as it is vital in the facilitation of the acquisition of desirable knowledge and skills as well as influencing values, attitudes and behaviour of individuals who experience it (MoE, 1977; Masaiti, 2018). It is for this reason that quality education is a vision of most education systems. The Zambian government’s vision has also added to it inclusive education for all and the promotion of lifelong learning that should spur national development (MoE, 1996). Notwithstanding, among many elements that contribute to quality education and human capital formation is discipline (MoE, 1996). Discipline ensures safety for staff and pupils in the school as well as creating a conducive environment in which quality and effective teaching and learning thrives. However, pupil indiscipline has been a great source of concern for secondary schools, parents and stakeholders in education in most parts of the world (Gustard, 2005 in Ali et. Al, 2004).

Over the years, there has been growing incidences of aggressive and violent behaviour among pupils and even within teacher-pupil relationship in Zambian

schools. According to Phiri (2016), there has been an increase of pupil indiscipline in secondary school from the time corporal punishment was abolished in 2003. Phiri (2016), cites rising cases of vandalism, bullying, absconding from classes, drug abuse, promiscuity and other offences against school rules and regulations as examples.

Up to the time when corporal punishment was abolished in Zambia, it was seen as the main tool for managing pupil indiscipline in schools. It is important to note that corporal punishment was carried over right from the colonial era through the post-colonial days (MoE, 1997). School pupils were usually punished by strokes of the cane and sometimes were dehumanised with slaps and fists at the hands of teachers (Zambia Daily Mail, 2017). The other mode of punishment was through digging of trenches and pits, ploughing school fields and cleaning school surroundings (Kapemba, Simuyaba and Njobvu, 2019). However, the dawning of the nineteenth century saw a growing dissatisfaction with corporal punishment giving rise to the creed of human rights. Manifestos of human rights emerged with the United Nations at the center-stage, the ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ (UNCRC, 2005) was born. Some of the clauses contained in the Rights of the Child ran counter to and were difficult to reconcile with the practice of corporal punishment as practiced in schools world over (Wolhuter & Middleton, 2007:11). Around this time international thinking about corporal punishment also began to change. Communities around the world began to view corporal punishment negatively and strong advocacy arose in support of banning corporal punishment in schools. This was seen as an important step towards creating more peaceful and tolerant societies (Naong, 2007:289).

After strong activism against the practice worldwide, Zambia issued a gazette notice for the abolishment of corporal punishment in schools which was finally enacted into *Statutory Instrument Number 10* of 2003 in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). In particular, Article 37 (a) declares that “*no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment*”. This article, therefore, prohibits any form of violations against children, including the use of corporal punishment in schools (Kapemba, Simuyaba and Njobvu, 2019; Beyani, 2008; Zambia Daily Mail, September 25, 2017). Furthermore, the African Charter on Rights and Welfare of Children also condemned the use of corporal punishment in schools (Soneson, 2005). The outlawing of corporal punishment was generally welcome by youths and activists. However, educators and other more conservative stakeholders in the education sector felt that the move would encourage indiscipline among pupils and compromise the management of school discipline.

Moreover, in subsequent pieces of legislation, with a view to strengthening the ban on corporal punishment, Zambia went further to criminalise the use of corporal punishment in the *Education Act* of 2011. Corporal punishment was finally outlawed and thus prohibited under *Statutory Instrument No.1* of 2018 of the ‘Teaching

Profession Code of Ethics' Article 2, 3 (b). Following the scrapping off of Corporal punishment, there were no recommended and acceptable ways of handling pupil indiscipline in schools while the burden of managing pupil indiscipline was left to individual school management teams and teachers. The situation has posed a great challenge to most school head teachers in their attempts to solve problems of learner indiscipline (Simuyaba, Banda, Mweemba, and Muleya, 2015). Since the abolition of corporal punishment, school authorities have been exercising a lot of restraint in as far as disciplining erring learners is concerned. Head teachers have become less confident and unsure on deciding the appropriate punishment for a particular pupil's misbehavior because any action leaning towards or resembling corporal punishment risks them being dismissed, imprisoned or both. Mtsweni (2008), notes that learners are sensitised to report any form of harassment to law enforcers. As such, disruptive behaviour among students continues to be the most consistently discussed problem in most schools around the world including in Zambian schools (Maphosa and Shumba, 2010; Maphosa and Mammen, 2011).

However, current studies conducted in Zambia have shown that pupil indiscipline in secondary schools is a growing plague on the education system. Hamalengo (2016), assessed strategies in managing pupil indiscipline in secondary schools and found that there is a shift emanating from technology and associated media that calls for an array of management approaches. In addition, Phiri (2012) assessed the impact of abolishing degrading punishments on school discipline and concluded that pupil indiscipline was worsening as a result. Similarly, Simango (2012) investigated the effects of banning corporal punishment in high schools and noted that the ban on corporal punishment has brought to the fore short comings in school discipline management practices. In an earlier investigation by Mweemba (2011), the effectiveness of punishing disruptive behaviour through suppressing deviant behaviour among pupils concluded that the strategy was ineffective due to the absence of corporal punishment. Moreover, the study by Mtonga (2016) reports that the main challenges to alternative modes of managing pupil indiscipline were ineffective due to non-compliance by parents and pupils, and lack of knowledge by teachers and pupils. In the face of the lack of positive and effective alternative corrective disciplinary measures, the Ministry of General Education, has been working towards implementing some of the suggested positive solutions from some of these studies. One recommendation by Closson, *et al.* (2002), in remedying such situations was to improve teacher-pupil interrelations where the teacher takes up the roles of a coach, mentor, counselor and friend to learners, all rolled into one. A teacher's job should not end at facilitating and supporting teaching and learning of curriculum materials but also involve shaping learners' social behaviour as this would reduce discipline problems in the school. Nonetheless, some stake holder's still feel corporal punishment should be re-introduced in order to manage the ever increasing numbers of cases of pupil indiscipline in schools.

This study joins the studies highlighted in this section and other studies conducted elsewhere, by documenting pupil indiscipline trends and the associated management implications in the era of ‘no corporal punishment’ in Zambian secondary schools. It is hoped that the new information brought to the fore in this study, has offered new insights on how to manage pupil indiscipline in Zambian schools.

This study was anchored on William Glasser choice theory which is premised on the assumption that all behaviour is either consciously or unconsciously chosen. Behaviour is a choice made by an individual, based on his or her feelings and needs and is, therefore, not determined or controlled by external circumstances. It is important to note that one of the goals of education for learners is the development of self-discipline and self-control through building and nurturing quality relationships with peers, making informed choices about their learning, behaviour and development, and taking direct control over their actions and thoughts. Glasser describes pupil misbehaviour as a bad choice and appropriate behaviour as a good choice. In this sense, learners must be brought to an awareness of their responsibility in order to make their own decisions about their behaviour. As such, the focuses for education managers when dealing with indiscipline is firstly, to stop the unwanted or challenging behaviour and secondly and more importantly to teach learners how to control their own behaviour by identifying the circumstances that trigger their deviant behaviours (Masaiti and Mwale, 2017). To this end, teachers, school administrators, parents, and the community should work collaboratively to provide learning environments that promote the academic, social, mental, and spiritual development of pupils (Kajubiv, 2007). This is in line with what the education system is promoting in Zambia, that of helping learners acquire competencies as explained by Mulenga and Kabombwe (2019:117) that a curriculum should be ‘more effective and responsive to societal needs by providing relevant knowledge, skills and real-life competencies for the learners’. Indiscipline cases can be used by the school as learning points of growth for learners.

Research Methodology and Design

This study employed the descriptive concurrent mixed research design where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect and analyse data (Masaiti, Mwelwa and Mwale, 2017). The study was conducted in Luanshya district of Copperbelt province of Zambia. A sample of hundred and ten (n=110) participants were involved as follows five Head teachers and five Deputy head teachers of schools who were purposively sampled, five parents drawn from each of the Parent Teachers Executive committee (PTA) twenty-five teachers and fifty learners who were randomly sampled from the participating schools. Purposive sampling was used to choose only five centrally located urban secondary schools. Interviews were used to collect data from head teachers and Deputy Head teachers, while questionnaires were administered on parents and teachers while focus group discussions were conducted among learners. As attested to by Njobvu and Yang

(2014), triangulations of questionnaires and interview questions, member checking and pilot study were useful to validate and affirm reliability of the data. Qualitative data presented in a narrative form was analysed through the thematic framework whereas quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics and presented in frequencies and percentages.

Findings

Pupil indiscipline Trends

The study established, through the responses from school administrators (Heads and Deputy head teachers) and pupils, that pupil indiscipline cases that were experienced in schools were as shown in Table 1;

Table 1: Pupil indiscipline according to head teachers, deputy head teachers and pupils (n=60)

Disciplinary Problem	Category of Respondents	Total Number of respondents per disciplinary problem
Use of mobile phones in school	Head, D/Head, Pupils	60
Impoliteness	Head, D/Head, Pupils	60
Pupil gangs	Head, D/Head, Pupils	60
Drug, alcohol & substance	D/Head, Pupils	55
Indecent dressing	D/Head, Pupils	55
General immorality	D/Head, Pupils	55
Aggressive pupil behaviour	Head, D/Head	10
Examination malpractice	Head, D/Head	10
Vandalism of school property	Head, D/Head	10
Disrespectfulness	D/Head	5

Source: Field data, 2019

Table 1 show that the use of mobile phones in school, impoliteness and pupil gangs have been shown to be the most prevalent pupil indiscipline cases, followed by drug, alcohol and substance abuse and indecent dressing, and then general immorality. However, aggressive pupil behaviour, examination malpractice, vandalism of school and private property scored fairly low with disrespectfulness recording the

lowest. The indication is that the disciplinary problems were more of in-school cases. One of the respondents actually mentioned that;

Pupil indiscipline has increased than before as pupils are ruder and lack good manners towards teachers, they abuse internet and social media like face book and whatsApp, come late to school, cheat in examinations, among others. We have more cases referred to the Guidance and counseling department than before.

Teachers and parents were also asked to indicate what the main disciplinary issues were among pupils. Table 2 shows their responses summarized in frequencies and percentages.

Table 2: Pupil indiscipline trends according to teachers and parents

Discipline problem	Frequency	Percentage
Inappropriate use of mobile phones in school (abuse of internet and social media)	12	24
Aggressive behaviour to fellow pupils, teachers and parents	11	22
Pupil gangs	10	20
Impoliteness	6	12
Drug, alcohol and substance abuse	5	10
Indecent dressing and general immorality	3	6
Examination malpractice	3	6
TOTAL	50	100

Source: Field data, 2019

Table 2 shows highlights the use of mobile phones in school, aggressive behaviour towards fellow pupils, teachers and parents and pupil gangs were top pupil indiscipline problems in secondary schools. However, impoliteness, drug, alcohol and substance abuse, indecent dressing and general immorality and examination malpractice were quite lowly rated.

Pupil Indiscipline Management Strategies at School Level

Schools were employing several strategies to manage pupil indiscipline in the ‘no corporal punishment era’ in Zambia and these were identified as shown in table 2 below. The results were as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Alternative discipline management strategies

Discipline management strategies	Frequency
Guidance and Counselling	8
Orientation and enforcement of school rules	6
Rewards and withdraw of privileges	5
Cultivating pupil self-discipline	3
Parental involvement	2
Suspension	1
Totals	25

Source: Field data, 2019

Table 3 shows that guidance and counselling, and enforcement of school rules through rewards and withdrawal of privileges (32%, 24%, and 20%) were some of the used alternative positive strategies of dealing with the challenges of pupil indiscipline. Cultivating pupil self-discipline, parental involvement and suspension were also indicated as pupil disciplinary management strategies.

Head teachers and deputy head teachers, in the participating schools, mentioned that summoning parents of erring pupils to the ‘disciplinary hearings’, regular counselling of erring pupils and rewarding well behaved pupils were the main strategies in managing pupil indiscipline. Other strategies were home visits, reprimands and verbal warnings, behaviour modification through withdrawal of privileges, orienting pupils to and enforcing school rules. In rare cases suspensions were meted out to erring pupils for serious offences aimed at serving as an example to would be offenders.

One deputy head teachers further added that:

We also encourage our pupils to belong to clubs such as peace clubs and religious groupings such as scripture union to help inculcate good morals in pupils as a way of managing pupil indiscipline.

A head teacher observed that even though guidance and counselling was the most preferred non-corporal discipline management strategy, it required special knowledge and skills to practice it effectively.

Moreover, counselling as a discipline management strategy was also seen as time consuming both for the teachers and the pupils (Mtonga, 2016., Mulenga and Mukaba, 2018). As such, for the approach to be effective, there was need to set

aside time for counselling sessions. Sometimes the counselling department was overwhelmed by pupils who needed counselling services.

Discussion

Pupil Indiscipline Trends

Findings of the study indicated that pupil indiscipline has evolved into a number of new forms in the “no corporal punishment era’ in Zambian schools. The most prevalent manifestations of indiscipline were inappropriate usage of mobile phones in schools (abuse of internet and social media), increased aggressive behaviour among pupils and within teacher-pupil relationship, emergence of pupil gangs, impoliteness, drugs, alcohol and other substance abuse, indecent dressing and general immorality. Others were vandalism to school and private property, examination malpractices (through phones and social media applications like WhatsApp) and disrespectfulness to teachers and parents. Mobile phone technology has also been associated with the emergence of disciplinary problems like watching pornography on phones, inappropriate dressing in school, vulgar language, and general immorality among others (Grant et.al, 2015).

These findings resonate with the findings of Korong (2004) who observed that indiscipline among school children has become a global problem. He added that the rise in cultism, vandalism, examination malpractice, squandering of school fees by students, and truancy among many others are common among school children. Other examples were assaulting and insulting teachers and non-teachers, chewing gums in class and alcohol or drug abuse. Kounin (2008), adds that indiscipline among students manifested in various unruly behaviours exhibited by students in and outside the school like violence, street fighting and hooliganism, truancy at school and improper dressing.

From the foregoing, it is vital to rethink the way school discipline ought to be managed in the light of emerging discipline problems as needed. This may require novel ways of dealing with the pupil indiscipline. For instance, the usage of mobile phones in schools has brought about distraction from school activities and acquisition of bad language and behaviour not accepted in school (Grant et.al, 2015). In addressing this vice, school management may strengthen the ban or rethink the use of phones in schools. The noted increase in pupil aggression may lead to fatalities and therefore school management may decide to employ security. The rise of pupil gangs in schools may lead to harassment of fellow pupils and teachers. This may in turn affect pupil performance leading to absenteeism among pupils as school environments become insecure and un conducive for the learning and teaching process (Keoreng, 2004). Lack of respect and courtesy leading to impoliteness challenges the norms of interpersonal relations between school management and pupils.

These new disciplinary trends call for training so that educators acquire skills to manage discipline in contemporary classroom. Drug, alcohol and substance abuse,

indecent dressing and general immorality, though subtle, may affect behaviour of pupils. Pupils engaging in these indiscipline acts may be seen as ‘stars’ by others who may wish to emulate them. Therefore, peer counselling clubs and religious groupings may help the school management to manage indiscipline acts before they escalate, hence having little effect on pupil performance and overall school discipline.

Evidence from data further shows a rise in the proportion, multiplicity and sometimes novelty of forms of disciplinary problems in schools. All these pose huge challenges to school managements. The seemingly ineffective disciplinary management at the school level is likely to ultimately affect the provision of quality education and pupil performance (Mwangi, 2016). Therefore, a call for close collaboration between the school authorities, teachers and parents who have a closer interaction with the pupils in a classroom situation and home must be sought (Ngari, 2014). This will aid the use of proactive strategies to manage pupil indiscipline as well as inculcate self-discipline in pupils.

Alternative Strategies of Dealing With the Challenge of Indiscipline

Pupil indiscipline in the 'no corporal punishment era' calls for novel and positive alternatives of dealing with the huge challenges schools are facing in contemporary times. Mtonga (2016), strongly recommends that school managements in this regard are required to build capacity among staff in order to equip them with modern alternative skills that will positively handle contemporary pupil indiscipline. In this regard, one prominent strategy for managing pupil indiscipline in schools, especially drug abuse is guidance and counseling (Abdulahi 2009). Peer counseling amongst the pupils is also being explored. School management can also use rewards and punishment strategies where certain things and incentives such as co-curricular activities are withdrawn or withheld in order to reinforce positive behaviour change in pupils. This may help pupils to cultivate self-discipline and refrain from negative influence. Furthermore, school management needs to strengthen existing non corporal proactive discipline management strategies as well as utilise the novel ways to manage contemporary issues of pupil indiscipline (Chianu, 2007).

Strong collaboration and partnerships must be created with key stakeholders such as pupils themselves, parents, communities, non-governmental organisations and the government. This is another avenue for reducing pupil indiscipline to insignificant levels, as well as mitigating indiscipline problems in schools. This is supported by the views of Johnson and Johnson (1991), who contend that teacher assertiveness is very important in obtaining good discipline in the classroom and in the school as a whole. They further hold that Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA) meetings are a good forum to share ideas on how to deal with pupil indiscipline in schools. Another avenue in modern schools is Open-day events where individual teachers interact with parents to get to know the behaviour and performance of their children.

Etsey (2005), links discipline to performance and explains that deviant acts lead to poor performance of students and poor examination results. Most deviants are responsible for theft, destruction of property, violence, assaults, rape and armed robbery in the society. These negative acts can create tension and fear in the minds of other students and authorities in the school. This may prevent teachers from giving out their best since most of their time would be concentrated on their safety in the school environment (Paul, 2009). This study has revealed that disciplinary problems have a lot of effects on the smooth running of a school. For instance, pupil gangs might create fear in pupils and teachers may fail to administer corrective measures to such pupils. As a result, some pupils who feel they have no protection may drop out of school while teachers may fail to abate indiscipline for fear of being harassed by the pupil gangs. Therefore, Charles (2011) suggests that educators must focus less on punishment but on behavioural correction so as to enable erring pupils gain self-discipline and help them feel safe and valued. This can be one avenue of managing indisciplined pupils in school.

Achieving good behaviour starts from the pupils themselves. They have to make a choice bearing in mind the implication of the behaviour they have chosen to portray. This is what William Glasser's choice theory (1992) advocates for. Glasser describes pupil misbehaviour as a bad choice and appropriate behaviour as a good choice. He advocates that, learners must be brought to an awareness of their responsibility if they are to make their own decisions about their behaviour. Gaustard (2005), argues that the ultimate goal for pupils is to develop self-discipline and self-control through building and nurturing quality relationships with their peers, making informed choices about their learning, behaviour and development, and taking direct control over their actions and thoughts.

Conclusion

This study examined trends in pupil indiscipline in the 'no corporal punishment era' in Zambian schools. Aggressive behaviour among pupils and within teacher-pupil relationship and vandalism to school and private property is on the rise. Misuse and abuse of mobile phones for non-educational purposes, impoliteness, pupil thuggery, drugs, alcohol and other substance abuse, examination malpractice, indecent dressing and general immorality are other vices. Indiscipline among pupils is on the rise and has become increasingly unmanageable. Guidance and counselling, constant orientation on school rules, rewards and withdraw of privileges, cultivating pupil self-discipline, parental involvement and suspension are offering some glimmer of hope as contemporary alternative positive strategies of dealing with pupil indiscipline. Commenting on the significance of guidance and counselling in school Mulenga and Mukaba (2018:57) explained that 'it is important for guidance and counseling teachers to know the things that are known to the pupils only such as home environment setting and financial status that pupils may not be willing to share with others and have the potential of affecting their education.' As long term measures, schools encourage formation of positive-influence clubs and groupings like Human Rights Clubs, and religious activities like Scripture Union to help inculcate responsible attitudes, uphold rights, obligations and good morals. The office of the Guidance and Counseling needs strengthening by training and equipping with the requisite knowledge and skills. Pupils can also be trained in counselling so as to offer peer counselling to their mates.

School discipline involves the management, parents, teachers and the pupils. These stakeholders must be proactive in effectively dealing with pupil indiscipline. A school with high levels of discipline is highly supportive to high performance. Therefore, striving for discipline in schools is critical to raising human rights-disposed and responsible citizens.

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