

Discipline Problems in Schools: The Case of Mauritius

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Abstract: *Discipline is an important factor which helps to bring order in the different facets of a person's life. No teaching can be carried out if there is no discipline in a classroom. Throughout the world, students are becoming increasingly undisciplined. This is due to a variety of factors: Social, cultural, structural. In Mauritius, discipline in schools have become the number one problem. Learners' behaviour has degenerated both inside and outside schools and has reached alarming level. It is important that the authorities devise innovative approaches to manage the behaviour of students.*

Keywords: Discipline, indiscipline, punishment, leadership, guidance, supervision

1. What is discipline?

Discipline in school is a code of conduct that both teachers and students agree upon. It is self - control, restraint, respect for self and others. (Kagoiya and Kagema, 2018).

The Rules have to be communicated to everyone, explained, and, at no time, to be transgressed. Discipline is paramount for every learning. It is important to create harmony in the learning environment to get the best of students. (Rhalmi, M.2010).

1.1 Causes of Indiscipline

The causes are manifold:

- Favouritism by teachers leads to rebellion.
- Rules are not enforced for an offence. This leads the student to believe that the offence is not a punishable one and so he can do it again.
- There is a lack of communication by teachers; or the message is not clearly communicated.
- When there is a breakdown of teacher - student relationship.
- Lack of teacher leadership.
- Poor pedagogy.
- Need for rules to be clear and updated from time to time,
- Bad habits: Coming late to school.
- Over - permissiveness: Not everything is permissible. Too much freedom to child results in misbehaviour.
- Unsatisfactory home condition: Broken home, persistent fight between parents affects the behaviour of children.
- Lack of guidance.
- Defective supervision.
- Inadequate attention to personal problems.
- Victimisation.
- Absence of trust. Divide and rule policy.
- Not paying attention to employee grievances.
- Misjudgement in promotion.
- Social, economic, psychological, peer influence. Child environment.
- Breakdown in society, drug abuse, theft, sex attack reflected in school.
- Poverty.
- Lack of attention and lack of protection of parents.
- Absenteeism.

- Getting too friendly with students.
- Lack of leadership of the principal.
- Lack of empathy towards children.
- Bad classroom management.

1.2 The Importance of Discipline in Schools

Discipline is the act of training people to be law - abiding, obey rules. A law - abiding person will be someone who will be able to live a distinguished and better life. It is not something you acquire when you are grown - up. Such concepts are acquired at school. The child must learn, at an early age, to be punctual, to be patient, to listen and to carry out orders. If discipline is inculcated since early childhood, it helps to bring order in the different facets of a person's life. (Khatun, A and Siddiqui, MN, 2018). When discipline is maintained in a school, a stress - free atmosphere is created. This increases motivation and enables the students to achieve better grades. School performance is generally enhanced. Quality is achieved.

Discipline is an important factor to make the child remain interested in his studies, and to keep him motivated. When a student is disciplined, he can complete his study assignments without problems. Such skill will be transferred by the child at home and later at work. One cannot achieve success in life without discipline. And this has to start early in life, at school, because it takes years to acquire this quality.

No discipline in class means no positive work. Why sit down and learn if one is not expected and forced to do so? Why do the homework? When one has learned to be disciplined at an early age, one will remember it and put it into practice throughout one's lifetime.

Discipline helps the child to develop socially. In his dealings with teachers, with classmates, he knows the limits. He becomes a balanced person.

A disciplined class allows the teacher to teach. And so, learning can take place. Potgieter et al (1997) said:

"If discipline is not taken into consideration, the school environment will be dangerous and the educational process may be disrupted".

1.3 How to Deal with Indiscipline?

Effective School Management must show respect for the school community. The discipline of pupils should be the concern of staff and parents. (Ong'era, 2016). All the staff of the school, heads and teachers need to acquire the skills and knowledge which will enable them to maintain discipline and be able to find solutions to indiscipline.

Students should be made accountable for their behaviour. Discipline energises the self - control of students. There is need for a peaceful climate for the students to bloom. Only then can quality education be delivered. The teachers will thus be able to reach objectives set. (Odoyo et al, 2016).

Discipline has to be maintained not only inside the premises of the school, but also, outside. This should be one of the regulations of the school. The student has to be groomed to continue his disciplined behaviour outside the school.

The teacher's role is quite important. (Mares, 2018). Teachers should acquire the art of managing pupils. The teacher's behaviour is very important. He is a role model. The important quality that he should possess is authority. He should be an effective teacher.

The role of parents should not be minimised. The role as educators of their children is quite important. They act as the most important role model. Their behaviour is closely scrutinised by their children who imitate them. (Olietan, Mohammed and Ajibola, 2013). Parents should find time for discussion with their children, especially on discipline. They are responsible for dress code, hairdos and manners. (Kahtun, A, and Siddiqui, MN, 2018). Parents should counsel, guide, to continue the work done by teachers.

1.4 What Punishment to Administer?

In the former days, corporal punishment was used, often lavishly, to ensure discipline. Such action should be considered as barbarous. We have now international conventions on children's rights. Most countries have abolished corporal punishment. But, unfortunately, despite laws, many parents and schools have recourse to corporal punishment. Such punishment can affect the child psychologically throughout his lifetime.

There is no doubt that some form of punishment should be meted out to the child when there is recurrence of indiscipline. A positive punishment should be adopted. It can take the form of elimination of rewards. Temporarily taking away privileges. For example, not allowing to watch television for a few days, no pocket money, not meeting friends. On the other hand, positively rewarding the child when he shows good behaviour.

Better relationships with the child, showing love and care will transform the child. To be effective, punishment should not be delayed. Everything should be done to make the child feel safe, loved, that the parents are interested in his problems and doing everything to help. The child should feel, in all circumstances, that he is being fairly dealt with. Always acknowledge positive behaviour.

1.5 Discipline in the Schools of Mauritius

Mauritius is a tiny country of 720 sq kilometres off the coast of the Malagasy Republic. It has an impressive educational system with 100% literacy. The school buildings are modern and well - equipped, teachers are trained with impressive results at primary and secondary level, a number of universities providing the labour force needed for the country's development. Still, there are a number of problems facing the educational system of Mauritius. One is lack of autonomy of schools, another is decentralisation. A problem which needs to be solved immediately is indiscipline in schools.

According to Dr. Belle (2016), discipline in secondary schools in Mauritius have become the number one problem. His study has aimed at finding out why there is a lack of learner discipline, what prevents the maintaining of discipline, and what must be the role of principals to maintain discipline.

Why discipline is important, Dr. Belle, quoting Van Wyk (2001) and others, says:

"The end - goal of discipline is not punishing but controlling teaching and guiding the learners so that an atmosphere of school climate conducive to effective teaching and learning is created and sustained".

In Mauritius, discipline has become an important issue, as can be seen by the number of articles written for the local press. Quoting Varma, Dr belle says that discipline is the greatest problem in Mauritian schools. For the Ministry of Education and Human Resources (2007), it has been observed that learners' behaviour has degenerated both inside and outside schools. The Mauritius Research Council (2006) has confirmed that indiscipline is reaching alarming level.

For Dr. Awotar (2019), school violence in Mauritian schools have increased incrementally, both in frequency and intensity. Through his party's Education Commission, Dr. Awotar (2019) has done a study on the causes of indiscipline in the schools of Mauritius and why students feel disinterested in studies and indulge in violent behaviour.

For Dr. Awotar, there is no consensus how indiscipline in schools should be tackled. It has become even difficult for a teacher to scold student. He says that home atmosphere is an important element in the behaviour of a child. The schools of Mauritius put too much emphasis on examinations. For students, the school has become a symbol of punishment and humiliation.

The schools, in poor areas, have not become agents of change, but rather, have absorbed the habits, culture and love aspiration of the people. There is too much emphasis on academic studies. *"There is a lack of commitment towards social, emotional, aesthetic, artistic and sporting developments, and failure to make the school a more inviting and agreeable place"*. (Dr. Awotar, 2019).

And so, students are not given the opportunity to express their talents. Automatic promotion is a disaster. Less

performing students move to higher grade and find it difficult to adjust to the new environment. Teachers are overloaded with work with an overcrowded class. And so, they do not have time to show attention on slow learners. The students develop a negative image of themselves. The result is that they divert their anger and frustration towards educators, classmates, damaging cars, furniture, school bus.

Dr. Awotar has found that there is a total abdication of parental responsibility. Each party - the school, the parents - blame each other.

Prem Saddul, former Director of the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), in an article in the Daily l'Express of the 26th April 2005, says that, in Mauritius, violence and indiscipline in secondary schools, have become a real cause of concern. Nowadays, many students have moved from unruly behaviour in class, truancy, theft, damaging school property, bullying, extortion, rowdiness, to smoking, consuming alcohol and drugs, assaulting teachers and gang fighting.

For Prem Saddul, schools should have a code of ethics to be signed by parents who are aware of sanctions to be applied. There is need of graduated sanctions for all misbehaviours. But unfortunately, there is little response, in many cases, for collaboration with teachers. There are things that are considered wrong at school, are allowed at home.

Violence in the schools of Mauritius has now become a major challenge. The school is a powerful institution of inclusion which can help undisciplined students to act responsibly.

In an article by the Editor of l'Express, Violence and Indiscipline in Mauritian schools, quotes the figures provided by the Mauritius Council of Social Service (MACOSS), an increase of 42% of indiscipline since 2010, and says that an alarming bell is being sounded concerning violence and indiscipline in schools. 35% of students say that they have been implicated in physical fights causing wounds. Even arms have been used. They range from bullying, intimidation, via the internet, mobile phones, social media, to sexual violence, gang violence.

According to MACOSS, most of the aggressors come from poor families, where parents indulge in drugs, have to submit to violence, delinquency, and often, are subject to discrimination.

Bon Zour, in l'Express (2017), has interviewed a number of people, parents, teachers, students about indiscipline in schools and what should be done about it.

Joanne, who is a trainee teacher, says that students are not interested in classroom teaching. They concentrate on enjoying themselves. It is up to parents to see that their child takes seriously his/her studies.

For Stephane, Coast Guard, students show no more any respect. It is the result of the prohibition of corporal punishment.

For Ehshan, street seller, young people nowadays think that everything is allowed. They are disrespectful towards elderly people. When they leave school in the afternoon, there is total chaos. Parents are failing in their duties. Respect is not acquired at home from parents.

Mohammad is also of the same opinion as Ehshan. The behaviour of children depends on the education he has received at home. If the child knows that parents will take action against him, he will think many times before committing a fault.

For Yashvin, educator, there should be permanent communication between parents and teachers. They will act in harmony to deal with any problem.

As we can see from the series of interviews, there is an important problem of indiscipline in the schools of Mauritius, especially outside the school.

Carole Grimaud (2019), says that the number of school violence has quite increased. Even small children, at primary level, act as the big ones.

Student violence has existed for quite a long time. But what has changed, is the use of smart phone, and the facility to broadcast by the social media.

1.6 Solutions to the Problem

A nation should never underestimate the problems of indiscipline in its schools. The large number of articles in the papers show that indiscipline has become an important issue. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources recognises that learners' behaviour has degenerated both inside and outside the school. The Mauritius Research Council (2006) has confirmed that indiscipline is reaching alarming level. What measures can be taken?

Through the Education Regulations (1957), the Ministry has listed measures to be taken against indiscipline. The most important are suspension and expulsion. According to Dr Belle (2016), the definition of discipline in Mauritius is reduced to controlling and punishing.

Lam Hung (2008) came to the conclusion that measures to deal with cases of indiscipline are inadequate as there are few or no administrative or legal guidelines. There is too much centralisation. Principals lack guidance. There is a lack of political will to solve the problem. MACOSS suggests a number of solutions. The system watch of schools should be reinforced. Already a number of cameras has been installed in schools. Psychologists and qualified educators have to be recruited to accompany difficult students. There is need to develop mutual trust between students and teachers.

Dr Awotar (2019) recommends a number of measures to start solving this dramatic problem.

- A student behaviour policy to be elaborated with the collaboration of all stake - holders.
- Schools in poor areas must be upgraded.

- A disciplinary committee to be established in each school.
- Various activities - emotional, artistic, musical, sporting - should be organised.
- Abolition of automatic promotion.
- Review of mixed - ability teaching.
- Improvement of the condition of work of teachers.
- Professionalisation of teachers.

1.7 (a) The Role of the Principal in Managing Discipline

The quality of discipline among learners reflects the quality of leadership of principals (Management Plan 2001).

Stake holders expect from schools high academic success. The role of the principal, in this field, is quite important. He should be able to inspire his staff, to get the best out of them, to improve continually the academic performance of the school. And this goes to maintaining strong discipline among students.

For Leithwood et al (2004) "Leadership is second only to teaching among influences of students' success". Due to the complexity of leadership, the principal is unable to respond to the huge burden. So, he needs to have leadership shared, distributed. Elmore (2004) is of opinion that the principal needs to share responsibility with teacher leaders to have his school function properly. Research has shown that distributive, shared leadership has the capacity to improve teaching and learning and, therefore, make the lesson interesting and prevent students from behaving badly. (Harris, 2005).

1.7 (b) Empowering Teachers

Despite a culture of hierarchy, it is important to empower teachers. Teachers' innate leadership has to be developed. (Ellison and Hayes, 2009)

For Marks and Louis (1997) participation in school decision - making can enhance teachers' commitment, expertise, and so, maintain discipline which will enhance student performance.

Educators should work as a team to ensure the success of their professional duties. The result will be that teachers will take the upper - hand on the behaviour of students.

The problem in Mauritius is that tradition has established that principals are the sole leaders of schools. Teachers put into practice the instructions that principals have received from the Ministry. No one at school is free to take the initiative. Is there a possibility to change the situation? A culture of autocratic leadership which has been established since two centuries, cannot be changed overnight. Culture is a difficult element to change.

2. Conclusion

Good education is brought about by school discipline. The education of a child can be affected negatively if there is a

lack of discipline. Discipline is paramount for learning. It enables the creation of harmony in the learning environment so as to get the best of students. (Rhalmi, M, 2010).

As discipline is important to ensure that the school runs smoothly, it is important to devise innovative approaches to manage the behaviour of students to enable the increase the performance of students.

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