

## **EXAMINING LEARNER INDISCIPLINE IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOL IN ZAMBEZI REGION IN NAMIBIA: A CASE STUDY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article aimed at examining learner indiscipline in selected secondary schools in the Zambezi educational settings in Namibia. The study further explored how teachers perceive and manage discipline in their schools. The study used a qualitative research approach which was positioned in the interpretive paradigm. The research instruments consisted of individuals and focus group interviews, as well as document analysis. Purposive sampling was employed to select two secondary schools, two principals and ten teachers. The study was underpinned by a theoretical framework of William Glasser (2010) the choice theory. The findings of this study established various discipline problems such as absence from school, being rude to teachers, being inattentive, early engagement in sexual activities, failure to do schoolwork, noise-making, late-coming to school, and using abusive language. Moreover, the findings found that lack of parental support in lives of their children, family background, abuse of various substances and alcohol, balance between learning content and overcrowding classrooms, peer pressure were the huge cause of discipline problems. The findings established that teachers were using different methods to maintain learner's discipline such as disciplinary committee, learner counseling, detention, and parental participation.

**Keywords:** discipline; disciplinary measures; ill-behaviour; learner behavior; punishment

### **Introduction**

Discipline in schools has always been recognized as important for the proper functioning of institutions. This was acknowledged in the Namibian

Education Act of 2001 (Namibia 2001). It is a fact that if there is no discipline, protection and a feeling of security, schools cannot function properly nor can learning take place (Kapueja 2014). It is not easy, if not impossible, for learners to concentrate on learning when they have to deal with disrespect, bullying, sexual harassments, threats or violence (Motseke, 2020, Obadire & Sinthumule , 2021; ). Kapueja (2014:18) went a step further in saying that an undisciplined class cannot be taught nor developed to its full potential. There is a global belief that discipline is necessary for learners to learn and teachers are expected to establish and maintain well-disciplined schools. Moreover, discipline has been viewed for many generations as a goal in itself, which is an essential goal in education. The government, community members, and school stakeholders historically have taken pride in maintaining well-disciplined schools. However, this has not consistently been the case in Namibia, as a number of studies and publications have pointed to the deteriorating environment of the school discipline (Amutenya 2016; Hiholiwe 2015; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2016). The major concerns are: late-coming of learners, teenage pregnancy, sexual promiscuity, cheating in examinations, and general violence (Hiholiwe 2015; Ndeleki 2016).

### **Related Literature Review**

Dealing with discipline matters is one of the most challenging tasks of the teaching work. Each indiscipline, like every learner is individual, originating from a kind of conditions directly connected to the person resulting in problems. The term “indiscipline” refers to any behaviour that mirrors social rule violation or act against others (Wolhuter & Van der Walt 2020:1). According to Temitayo et al. (2013:9), the list of indiscipline among learners in schools include displaying negative attitudes, intentionally breaking rules, cheating on tests and assignments, refusing to do what a teacher instructs them to do, wandering out of their seats, alcohol use and smoking marijuana, involvement in promiscuous behavior and making threats. This kind of ill-discipline does have negative implications on the culture of teaching and learning (Ndou, 2021). In Namibia, learners are claimed to blatantly challenge and violate school rules, attack teachers, use alcohol and tobacco on the school premises, engage in sexual promiscuity, vandalise and pilfer school assets. To validate this point, various incidents of learner behavior has been related from the two regions (Okavango and Zambezi) through the media, for example, about 232 cases of learner pregnancies, and 45 girls raped which resulted in pregnancies, as well as school dropout in the few first months of 2018. It is a fact that views regarding the causes of indiscipline vary, but it is overall agreed that indiscipline behavior in secondary school learners is common than in primary schools. Harris (2017:1) noted the following as possible causes of discipline problems: the conditions at the child’s home, the influence of peers, perceptions of reality that learner and those around him or her might please, and also the community that might provide favourable conditions for indiscipline to

grow. Learners with problems at home may have more forcing issues on their minds than schoolwork; on the surface, this shows a cause of problem. A further complicating matter was the overcrowding of classes which results in lack of textbooks in subjects and other materials, as learners might be compelled to sit around in big numbers. Nxumalo's (2013:29) found that big classes learners scream or talk loudly while learning content is being taught, throw things around, eat and move or run around randomly, disregarding teachers' instructions to re-establish control. In an attempt to maintain discipline schools have followed various strategies such as detention, disciplinary committee, learner counseling, involving parents, school rules and suspension. Nevertheless, Sarwar (2016:227) asserts that there is interesting role of parents in shaping the good behavior of children. For instance, the author indicated that home is the place where a normal and healthy development of any child begins and the family constitutes the spine of an individual. From this perspective, family is pondered to be a basic ecology in which behavior of children is manifested in their childhood by a way of negative or positive reinforcement. Furthermore, the study found that indiscipline had the following impact both on learners and teachers: loss of concentration; learners poor academic performance, teachers spend most of their time solving problems associated with indiscipline instead of focusing on effective teaching and learning, and poses threat to other school learners, teachers and managers.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem of learner indiscipline in Namibian secondary schools had developed into a serious problem that stakeholders in education sector should find out means of achieving self-discipline. Ill-behaviour upsets the government directly or indirectly, the school management and the society. If permitted to prolong, it will severely damage educational settings and teaching itself. In this context, discipline sounds to be any upright for the accomplishment of a school in high academic standards and extracurricular activities. Education Act 16 of 2001 expands that when there is a lack of safety because of bad behavior and insecurity, educational settings cannot function smoothly. This implies that disorderly conduct, disruptive and unsafe environment causes teaching and learning unachievable. Managing discipline in schools is therefore of the outmost essential to permit teaching and learning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The choice theory relating to relationship-driven counseling and lead management style characteristics are used to explain the finding of the inquiry. Not only is this the Namibian, but also other African countries including South African (Khumalo, 2019). This study focused on the process of changing teachers' behavior away from the use force and authoritarian practices in promoting self-assessment and incorporating feedback from administrator and

teachers. According to Glasser (2010), the choice theory ideology was developed because of its emphasis on improving current relationships. Choice theory assumes, therefore, that an individual who is permitted to choose his or her behavior to accomplish a wanted end-product can be creative, disciplined, flexible and self-confident, while an individual who has little choice may experience lower self-respect and negative emotions (Botha 2016). Choice theory supports Reality Therapy, the counseling method (Glasser 2010). This theory acknowledges the fact that learners should be counseled regarding more effective choices in order to accomplish want satisfaction, and therefore greater happiness. The assumption of choice theory is neither insight about underlying causes of problems nor resolution of unconscious conflict (Glasser 2010). It is about truthful assessment of current behaviours, the betterment of individual insight, and most of all assisting learners to take positive actions to maintain the relationships with the individuals they want in their lives. The relevance of this theory is justified when discussing the framework of the findings later in this inquiry. Therefore, theoretical framework will significantly strengthen this study as it enables the researcher to explore more aspects relating to learner discipline.

### **Research design and Methodology**

In order to examine the nature learner indiscipline and how teachers in the selected secondary schools perceive and manage discipline, a qualitative approach which is analytical, descriptive and interpretive was applied. Qualitative research is mainly interested in how persons interacting with the social world build their own reality (McMillan & Schumacher 2010: 315). Maykut and Morehouse (2001:43) confirmed that qualitative approaches are beneficial when the researcher needs to have an understanding of a phenomenon and to determine the meaning given to events that participants experience. The qualitative approach comprises a naturalistic enquiry which focuses on understanding a phenomenon as it happens in a natural manner (Mouton 2016:130). The study also involved a case study approach, which individuals and sittings were explored in depth and described in detail in the final report. The case was two principals and ten teachers and it was a case of learner behavior in the Katima Mulilo and Chichimani circuit.

Purposive sampling was used to choose participants in terms of their relevance to inquiry questions, and specific characteristics which made them bearers of information wanted for the investigation. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2015:319), purposive sampling is a method of making a choice from the population (an existing list of the elements in the population) so as to identify the individuals to be incorporated in the research. Principals and teachers were recruited according to the following characteristics: having in-depth knowledge about discipline police and as the ones mostly directly involved in the dealings of disciplinary problems in schools. The target population comprised of 10 teachers (five in each focus group interviews) and the principals (for individual interviews)

one from each of the two selected settings. The sample comprised of 12 participants, including seven male and five teachers and their ages ranged between 28 and 57 years old.

Research instruments employed in this study comprised of three qualitative evidence gathering techniques such as individual interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis. Information was mainly gathered through interviews using an interview schedule to guide the process. It was also necessary to embark on document analysis in two selected secondary schools. Documents such as policies of schools, school code of conduct and books where minutes of disciplinary meetings were reviewed. The research recorded the audio discussions and documented them using transcriptions, subsequently using an inductive approach to analyse the data. I followed McMillan and Schumacher (2010) method of data analysis, which entails identifying, coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data. The sub-themes were then integrated into the main themes. These themes were interpreted in line with the available literature on discipline in schools to highlight results and indicate knowledge gaps for future research. Credibility and trustworthiness were ensured by use of member checks and triangulation of data (Baxter & Jack 2008:555). With regard to ethical issues, the researcher applied the following ethical considerations: confidentiality and anonymity was carefully maintained at all stages including prior, during and after the data collection, thus protecting and safeguarding the participants in this study.

### **Findings and discussions**

The results of the study based on established themes are displayed as follows: conceptualizing discipline, types of discipline problems experienced, possible causes of learner behavior, how disciplinary measures are administered and impact of discipline. Participants were coded as follows: P1 and P2 were used to represent the two principals with whom I had individual interviews. The codes T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5 represented the five teachers from School “A” that participated in one focus group interview while T6, T7, T8, T9 and T10 represented teachers from School “B” respectively.

### **The types of discipline problems experienced in the selected schools**

The data gathered exhibits that there is indiscipline among the learners of the involved schools. Instances include unauthorized absenteeism from school, being rude or lack of respect for teachers, being inattentive, early engagement in sexual activities, failure to do given work, getting up and moving around without permission, late-coming, noise-making, talking and laughing inappropriately, and abusive language (P1,P2, T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8 & T10).

### **Absenteeism**

This study disclosed that discipline problems amongst learners such as frequent absence without permission, as well as dodging and absconding. T4 commented that:

*There are times when learners leave classrooms without permission; some learners are used to cheating and noise-making during class. Late-coming and absenteeism from class lessons are also presenting some problems in my class.*

P2 indicated that:

*“Absenteeism without proper communication happens when a learner stays at home without informing the class teacher, and when there is no proper reason given”.*

These findings are in agreement with Makendano’s (2016:124) findings that teachers in many instances complain of inappropriate types of behavior such as interruption of school activities by ill-behaved learners, skipping classes as they wish, absent without proper reasons given, rudeness to teachers, vandalizing furniture and textbooks in class, and lack respect for teachers. These types of behavior consequently contribute to a negative effect on the teachers’ instruction. As stated by the participants, frequent absence from school is the most committed disciplinary infraction in these secondary schools. Learner’s absenteeism in these schools revolves around the home environment such as broken homes and bullying from fellow learners.

### **Stealing**

Most of the participants P1, P2, T1, T2, T3, T5, T6 & T8 described stealing as another individual’s belongings without his or her approval. According to participants this behavior is mainly influenced by factors such as broken homes and peer pressure grouping. They complain about learners pilfering each other’s goods such as food, stationery, clothes, and to some extent pocket money (P1, P2, T1, T2, T3, T5, T6, & T8). Talking about these issues P1 said:

*“Some big boys bully the younger ones and to some extent stealing their properties such as calculators, underwear and money”.*

P2 remarked that:

*“The life at home of the child sometimes results in a learner goes on stealing other learners’ food”.*

The findings confirm the view of Nxumalo (2013:33), who noted that stealing is a widespread trend in educational settings and poses an everyday problem for teachers. Marais and Meier (2010:51) argued that learners pilfer each other clothes, cellular phones, lunch-boxes, food as well as stationery and pocket money. Mtsweni (2008:85) asserted that stealing by some secondary schools learners is an addictive behaviour which involves alcohol and substance abuse.

Learners steal and vandalise as a means to acquire money for alcohol or tobacco because pilfered articles are often recovered in shebeens. This is confirmed by Glasser's (2010) choice theory that unsatisfactory, combined with the strong sentiments in the offender that others should be punished for the way he or she feels is by far the main reason why anyone attacks at another human being. The theory advocates that the reason why an unsatisfied learner would lash out at a particular time cannot be predicted. In this study it is also notable that stealing can indeed corrupt the good behaviour and thus result in ill-discipline

### **The possible causes of learner misbehavior in selected schools**

The causes of learner indiscipline are multifaceted and stems from a variety of contributing factors are generally dynamic depending on surrounding circumstances. This study has demonstrated that several factors are accountable for the lack of discipline in schools. These are: the home surroundings, the classroom and the school circumstances, the learner himself or herself, the community, the learner's parents and the teachers (P1, P2, T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9 & T10). Six subthemes were recognized, namely alcohol and substance abuse, lack of parental support, learners' rights, overcrowding classrooms, peer pressure, and teacher inconsistency.

### **Alcohol and substance usage**

It was revealed by this study that drug abuse including cigarettes, alcohol, smoking dagga is another factor helping to cause the general learner indiscipline in the selected secondary schools. Participants complained of unpredictable worsening of the learners' behavior and impertinence, when they indulge in taking harmful substances (P1, P2, T1, T3, T6 & T7), They pointed out examples of some learners who attend school while under influence of drugs which is mostly "dagga" commonly known as "marijuana". In this regard, P2 had this to say:

*"A group of learners had recently been found with a big supply of marijuana and cigarettes with the intention of selling them".*

T9 concurred with this viewpoint by stating that:

*"Learners are using drugs which make them disrespect their teachers. Learners bring drugs and alcohol on school premises which make them being rude to teachers".*

Dealing with or merchandising unlawful drugs not only affects learners' actions directly but also changes the whole environment of the setting. This is supported by Charles (2008:23) who contended that alcohol is an ever-present temptation for many people during fun times, as it help loosen tongues and creates a relaxed atmosphere for socialising. According to Mtsweni (2008:85), alcohol and substances misuse add to the ill-behaviour of learners in educational settings and has turn into a horrible source of unsafe academic learning institutions. The ease with which alcohol and drug substances are accessible at

settings therefore multiplies the chances of learners being attacked by fellow learners at school or in their way to or back from school.

### **Overcrowded classrooms**

It was established during the interviews that overcrowded classrooms helps to cause a lack of discipline in the selected secondary schools. It was found that teachers have an average of 45 to 52 learners per class (T3, T4, T8 & T9). Participants view overloaded classrooms as the cause of some disorderly behavior among learners (T4, T8 & T9). T4 stated:

*“Overcrowded classrooms promote hostile environment in the sense that learners do not concentrate on their work, instead they pinch, scratch and assaults each other and lastly start fighting one another”.*

While T9 put it as follows:

*“The overcrowding of classes result in lack of textbooks in subjects and other materials”.*

Overcrowded classes increase the e lack of adequate resources, which in turn leads to increase tension between learners themselves. This finding confirm Charles’ (2008:23) ideas that learners often becomes restless when made uncomfortable by inappropriate noise, lighting, temperature, seating, or workspaces. Mokhele (2006:154) asserted that congested classes force learners to sit around in big numbers. Sharing desks or books can turn into a tug of war when one learner may ask to make use of the textbook at home. During this process, arguments erupt which can end up in scuffling or even fighting.

### **How disciplinary measures are administered in selected schools**

The most commonly used disciplinary measures to cope with learner ill-behaviour in the selected schools are: disciplinary committee; counseling of a problem learner, discussing the problem with a learner, suspension, involving parents, use of classroom and school rules, as well as the cleaning of the school surroundings and detention after learning period.

### **Learner counseling**

Participants described learner counseling as an awareness of problems and knowing different kinds of misbehavior in school environment by talking and listening to the learner problem (P1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6 & T7). They pointed out that taking a personal interest in learner’s lives motivates them to take an interest in learning from cooperating with the teacher. Regarding counseling of learners, P1 stated:

*“A learner may in some other cases be referred to the school counselor for further counseling to rectify this improper behavior”*

T3 explained that:

*“From the class teacher we have the school counselor. Each learner is given an opportunity to be counseling to find out whether it’s something that really needs counseling or something that really needs counseling or something that can just be talked about”.*

This study has established that speaking to a learner individually in private is of utmost importance since it can provide an opportunity to determine the root cause of ill-behaviour. Koenig (2008:60) found that it is important to make an effort to determine and know the actual causes of learner’s indiscipline in an effort to figure out the problem. Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (2008:8) stated that talking and counseling a learner enable the learner to recover his or her composure from confusion and frustration. The counseling should look for the source of inappropriate behaviour in order to help learners to act properly. Glasser’s (2010) choice theory believes that through counseling learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own and peer’s behaviour and learn to control themselves. Counselling assistance for disobedient learners should be done in their belief that learners miss insight and understanding regarding their own wrongdoing.

### **Parental participation**

It is clear that information collected during the interviews with the participants shows that they needed support from the parents so as to play a meaningful role in their instructional task. According to participants (P1, P2, T3, T4, T6 & T7) they involve the parents by inviting them to school if there is disciplinary problem so that they can be informed about their children’s behaviour. T7 stated that:

*“Parents normally supervise the schoolwork of their children that they have been given by a teacher to go and do as homework at home”.*

P2 had this to say:

*“Parents are a very important element of a school and as such their constant involvement in school issues is of utmost important. Parents play a role of a primary instructor at home that is why their constant involvement is needed”.*

This study revealed that parents are the cornerstone of their children’s education, without them, learners would have to go it alone and the chances of failure are high. The findings are in line with Koenig’s (2008:85) conclusion that parents who are involved in education of their children are likely to make sure that the standards of behavior, direction and character of the community are established and maintained in school. Van Deventer (2018:388) was of the view that through community participation in the work of the school parents may become more interested in the things their children are doing, and this may in turn help to reduce the number of learners who drop out of school. The choice theory argues that the family is the most important aspect in the life of a learner since it provides an emotional and physical environment that constantly

surrounds the child and in which close psychological ties exist (Koenig 2008:60). When that influence is combined in a positive way with what goes on in the school, an enhanced outcome for the learner can be expected.

### **The impact of indiscipline in schools**

Most of the participants who spoke on this aspect felt that indiscipline among learners has a negative effect on learning and teaching, as well as hampers the performance of learners (P1, T1, T3, T5, T6, T7 & T8). Participants explained that teachers waste much teaching time rebuking learners, regulating late-coming and controlling unnecessary noise-making, fighting and bullying. Three sub-themes were determined, namely hampering the performance of the learners, posing a threat to other learners, and late dropout from school in some cases leading to suicidal tendencies, hence affecting their entire lives as these learners remain delinquent.

### **Hampers the performance**

The participants expressed the view that ill-behaviour has a negative influence on teaching and learning. In addition to causing disruptions, participants say that learners' acts of indiscipline also take up time that could have been used for teaching. According to P1:

*"This ill-behaviour hampers the performance of the child at school. These learners who are ill-behaviour also lead a bad influence on the other learners, and these ill-behaviour learners are also difficult to handle in school".*

T7 had this to say:

*"Learners with ill-behaviour tend to perform low in their schoolwork and they mostly do not do their schoolwork as expected".*

Cotton (2008:2) and Gastic (2008:394) have pointed that indiscipline is a serious problem in the classroom, and the way in which it is dealt with, result in learners getting into trouble at school, as well as causing them punished, whereas Upindi (2012:71) was of the view that learners can miss a lot in the process and this influences negatively the learners' overall academic achievement at school. For example, continuously learner absenteeism is and endless disruption of the schooling process. Prolonged absences mean that a learner falls behind and struggle to participate in and understand school work.

### **Pose a threat to other school learners, teachers and managers**

The ill-behaviour of learners not only impacts learner performance, but also impact on teachers' ability to plan and present classroom teaching in a consistent and orderly manner. Some participants claim that schools are no longer settings of order and safety (P1, T3 & T8). P1 remarked that:

“Such kinds of children who are ill-behaved pose a threat to other learners. They tend to bully other learners, so as a result those other learners also will not be able to study well, they will not be able to concentrate at school”.

T8 commented that:

*“Learners’ ill-behaviour frustrates the relationship between a teacher and learners. So, when that relationship is not well, performance of such learners also goes down so in the end they will fail”.*

According to Naong (2007:284), disorderly behavior makes situations alarming and intimidating which are not favourable to the formation of a conducive learning environment. Marais and Meier (2010:41) were of the view that badly behaved learners and disciplinary problems are getting out of hand and hard to deal with, forming part of every teacher’s experience of teaching. The issue of ill-behaviour among learners not only has a negative influence on fellow learners or teachers, but it also has a negative impact on the way in which school managers make use of time. Instead of devoting their time to innovative teaching or enhancing the current programmes, they end up wasting time on disciplinary matters. Upindi (2012:71) attested that ill-behaviour occurring amongst learners often forces teachers to leave the teaching fraternity.

### **Conclusion**

The objective of this investigation was to examine learner indiscipline in selected in selected schools in the Zambezi educational settings in Namibia. This was achieved through responding to the research questions stated above. The overall findings indicated that the management of learner behavior is a huge problem for teachers in the Zambezi region of Namibia, particularly schools under study. The findings of the study are that learners’ ill-behaviour causes’ emotional damage, affects the self-esteem of learners and adversely impacts their academic performance. Ill-behaviour is bad and no teaching and learning can happen in setting where disrespect, bullying, sexual harassment, threats or violence happens. These actions make social injustice and are unsustainable for standard schooling. As a result, learners’ accomplishment is disturbed badly because no learner can work in a way that is suitable when frightened with violence. This study accounted on the disturbing scale at which indiscipline happens in the Zambezi educational region in Namibia. These occurrences happening frequently in various schools and school learners are at the earning pay-off. This study was limited to the use of a qualitative approach, by which interview schedules were conducted with principals and teachers at the selected schools. A further study could be carried out to provide same insight as to enlighten educationists, educational planners and teaching personal about the discipline phenomenon.

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