# Strategies Employed by Schools to Mitigate Pupil Indiscipline in Selected Secondary Schools of Choma District, Zambia

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| ABSTRACT | Published Online: April 27, 2023 |
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This paper is based on a study that focused on indiscipline cases among secondary school pupils of Choma District of Southern Province. The study was both qualitative and quantitative research and used a descriptive survey design with a total population of 108 sampled from six (6) secondary schools. Using descriptive statistics of frequencies, the data was themed and coded then analyzed further. The findings of this study indicate the nature of pupil indiscipline in form of absenteeism, fighting, rudeness to teachers, reporting late, and truancy, noise making in and outside the classroom, promiscuity, and stealing among others. The prevalence of pupil indiscipline was due to many factors, these include both internal and external forces. Internal forces meant indiscipline generated within the school, and external forces involved indiscipline generated outside the school environment. According to teachers, 67% of the respondents indicated home environment as the most prominent source of indiscipline. About 42% of the teachers held that effective management of discipline does not depend on the numbers of teachers available, but on quality and consistency of application of discipline strategies such as every teacher coming on board, disciplinary committees, school rules, school councils and parental commitment The study recommends for the involvement of various stakeholders in the management of discipline in the schools such as school administrators, teachers, pupils among themselves through prefects and parents.

**Key Words:**
Indiscipline, strategies, mitigate.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTENT

Pupil indiscipline among pupils in secondary schools is one problem that educational authorities in different parts of the world contend with. Charizio (1980) states that the Gallup poll response of parents, teachers and others involved in public education found that lack of discipline was the most serious problem in American schools in the decade 1969 to 1979. This included disruptions in the classrooms such as insulting, giggling, whispering and talking in class, and disruptions occurring outside classroom but within the school premises such as fighting and beer drinking (Erickson, 1977). Indiscipline is a multifaceted phenomenon regarding its displays and causes as well as its meanings and functions in the social, psychosocial and pedagogical fields. Concerning its displays, Amado and Freire (2009) believed that the major

situations are framed in what they point out as the first level of indiscipline and which are those incidents of disruptive nature whose disturbance affects the good classroom functioning.

Frimpong (2003) observed that disciplinary problems have become issues of the day in most Ghanaian senior secondary schools and has been a concern for all stakeholders in education. On the other hand, for a long time now Kenya has continued to record increasingly disruptive cases of indiscipline among students in public schools. In response to this menace, the Kenyan government has usually set up committees to investigate the root causes of and recommend concrete solutions to student indiscipline in schools (Ndaita, 2016)

Mwanakatwe (1974) pointed out that in Zambia; discipline is an area in which the development of education has followed an unworthy path since the independence. There have been numerous acts of serious indiscipline among pupils in high schools during both pre and post-independence periods. A number of factors may contribute to indiscipline among pupils in schools. These include home background factors, psychological factors such as cognitive levels and personality

traits, biological factors such as the pre-menstrual syndrome in girls besides school-based factors. In the year 2000 a lot of high schools in different parts of the country encountered numerous acts of pupil indiscipline. These included vandalism, public demonstration and rioting (the times of Zambia, 25 July 2000; August 4, 2000; September 6, 2000; Zambia Daily Mail, June 2000) this clearly demonstrates that indiscipline is still a big problem in secondary schools in Zambia.

Acts of indiscipline among pupils especially at secondary school level is a universal challenge that is facing every school in all parts of Zambia. Southern province is not an exception to the many cases of pupils' misbehaviours outlined above. Now, Choma District is the provincial Headquarters of Southern Province, a close look at these acts of indiscipline and management strategies to mitigate indiscipline in selected secondary school in the district may be of great help especially on the educational delivery, participation and attainment.

Based on this realisation, this study was motivated to explore the most prevalent acts of pupil indiscipline, causes and establish strategies employed by secondary schools to mitigate indiscipline in selected secondary school in Choma district.

### Statement of Problem

There are many types of indiscipline acts and numerous factors that cause indiscipline in secondary schools in Zambia. Some of these factors may be from outside the school, while others maybe within the school. Some schools tend to have more indiscipline acts and numerous factors that cause indiscipline in secondary schools in Zambia (Banja, 2002)

Acts of indiscipline occasioned by students' misconduct involving violent and criminal behaviour may defeat the goals of education which ensures the safety of teachers and students themselves creating good learning environment, (Journal of studies in social sciences, 2014)

However, even with the efforts put across by government acts of indiscipline have continued escalating (Times of Zambia, 2014). The situation in Choma is that a record number of pupils being suspended due to unwanted behaviour has been reported. The Zambian reports recorded that Francis Davidson School in Choma District Southern Province expelled over 10 pupils for allegedly exorcizing demons among fellow pupils. The pupils who were singing and praying for their colleagues allegedly possessed by demons were handed expulsion letters after management became unsettled by their actions (http//zambiareports.com retrieved on 12th December, 2020)

At the same time, it has been observed that very few studies have been conducted in Choma district to ascertain whether the management and mitigation of pupil indiscipline in secondary schools contributes to good delivery, performance and attainment of education.

This study, therefore, explored prevalent forms of pupil indiscipline and established management measures employed by secondary schools to mitigate indiscipline cases in selected secondary schools of Choma district

### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were to:

i. Establish the most prevalent forms of pupil indiscipline in selected secondary schools in Choma district.

ii. Determine strategies employed by schools to mitigate pupil indiscipline in selected secondary schools of Choma district.

iii. Ascertain challenges faced by schools in maintaining discipline in selected secondary schools of Choma district.

iv. Suggest ways of enhancing discipline among pupils in selected secondary schools in Choma district.

### LITERATURE AND THEORY

The study was based on a control theory of sociology which explored pupil indiscipline, and showed a complete understanding of how deviant behaviour could be well-ordered.

Control theory is an interdisciplinary branch of social science which had its origin in the natural sciences. It was propounded by William Glasser. The theory dealt with the behaviour of the dynamical systems and how the behaviour was modified. The usual objective of a control theory was to control a system. To do that, a controller was designed to monitor. The main issue was the analysis of a system before deciding the best control strategy to be applied or whether it was even possible to control or stabilize the system. Thereafter, several different control strategies were formulated.

Control theory in sociology was the view that people refrain from deviant behaviours because diverse factors control their impulses to break social norms. The theory explains why people often do not act on deviant impulses. And that is because some controls are internal while others are external. Internal controls involve an individual's conscience and motivation to succeed, while external controls involve factors such as one's parents, friends and legal codes (Hirschi, 1969). Control theory links non-deviant behaviour to socialization and social bonds. Those who are more socialized as children and maintain stronger bonds with others, are less likely to behave in deviant ways. The theory stresses how weak bonds between individuals and the society free people to deviate or go against the norms. The people who have weak ties would engage in crimes so they could benefit, or gain something that is to their own interest. According to Hirschi (1969) "humans are selfish beings, who make decisions based on which choice will give the greatest benefit." For example, most people do

not want to go for work, but they do just to get paid in order to cater for their basic needs. Therefore, this is where strong bonds make deviance costlier. Hence, deviant acts appear attractive to individuals but social bonds stop most people from committing the acts. Deviance is a result from extensive exposure to certain social situations where individuals develop behaviours that attract them to avoid conforming to social norms or the people who have weak ties would engage in crimes so they could benefit, or gain something that is to their own interest. Social bonds are used in this control theory to help individuals from going after these attractive deviations. The concepts in Control theory include stability, controllability and observability. Stability is the quality or state of being stable. Controllability is related to the possibility of forcing the system into a particular state by using an appropriate control signal. And observability is related to the possibility of observing the state of the system so as to determine the behaviour in order to stabilize the system.

Asiyai, (2012) posited that education is a critical tool for the transformation of the individual and the society. Secondary education in Nigeria therefore is aimed at preparing the individual for useful living within the society and preparation for higher education. And for the individual to be able to live a useful life in his society and contribute maximally towards socio-economic and political development of the nation in which he/she belongs, relevant skills, values, attitudes, knowledge and competencies that will make him to be disciplined must be impacted. Hence, what is INDISCIPLINE?

According to Timothy (2008), indiscipline is the direct opposite of discipline that is lack of discipline. He further quoted Dittinuiya (1995), who defined it as any act that does not conform to the societal value and norms. He went further to cite Otu (1995), who also defined indiscipline as unruly acts and behaviours, acts of lawlessness and disobedience to school rules and regulation.

**Types of indiscipline acts in schools**

Acts of indiscipline among pupils in schools have been repeatedly noted in Zambia and elsewhere. These acts have become an issue in the learning institutions. Kochhar (2001) upholds that indiscipline is conceptualized as a behaviour that breaches rules and regulations of a school, and later undermines its effectiveness. Therefore, it takes discipline to blend and advance development at both personal and the national level.

Various forms of pupil indiscipline cases are increasingly reported all-round the globe. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2009) indicates the frequency of certain pupil misbehaviour amongst secondary school pupils in England, Italy, Japan, Russia, Scotland and USA. According to the report, problems of indiscipline in these countries include absenteeism, arriving late at school,

skipping class periods, violating dress code, classroom disturbances, cheating, vandalism, theft and inflicting physical injuries on other students. Several forms of indiscipline acts pervade through every corner of the secondary schools among the students. Some occurred within the classroom, some within the school premises, while others are carried out outside the school premises.

In Malaysia, Azizi, (2009) states, "indiscipline in schools was ranked as a major problem among students of primary and secondary schools." Some of the problems highlighted include truancy, assault on fellow students or teachers, verbal abuse, offensive language against teachers and other students, possession of offensive weapons, using illegal drugs and sexual harassment. This was according to a study carried out on discipline problems and published in the European Journal of Social Science, (2007)

In Nigeria, the situation of pupil indiscipline cases is not different. Onyechi, (2007) identified the nature of deviant behaviours exhibited frequently by secondary school pupils as walking around in class, noise making, sleeping in class, pinching, aggression, vandalism, pilfering, lies, truancy, tardiness, irresponsibility, cheating, immorality, alcoholism, use of drugs, cultism and examination malpractice.

Lewis (1991) as quoted by Morongwa, (2010) observed that three types of misbehavior which are regarded as disciplinary problems for the teachers in the classroom include: misbehaviours that inhibit the learner's own learning, misbehaviours by one learner which is destructive to the learning of another and misbehaviours which are disrespectful, defiant or abusive to the teacher. He outlines that some of the noticeable misbehaviours can be committed deliberately or unintentionally. He further states in a clear term some of these behaviours which he believes can impact negatively on the morale of the student himself and mentioned them as follows:

- a learner consistently comes to class late and disrupts the flow of lessons;
- He/she talks while the teacher is addressing the class;
- He/she writes graffiti on school property;
- Another one continuously calls out in class;
- One is not listening and asks questions that have already been answered;
- Another one defies the teacher and refuses to follow instructions; and
- Another one moves around in the class to the point of becoming a destructor.

In Zambia a study conducted by Simataa (1993) focused on the relationship between home background and indiscipline among pupils in Zambian schools. It noted out the forms of indiscipline in form of vandalism, strikes, bullying, smoking,

drug abuse, aggressiveness, drunkenness, stealing and many other vices.

Another study conducted by Hamalengwa (2016) on management of pupil indiscipline in government and mission schools outlined that most common forms of indiscipline among both the Government and Mission schools were beer drinking, fighting and stealing. Abusive language, smoking and drug abuse were also well reported. By distinction, noise making could only be reported by teachers since it was a school-based offence. This included missing lessons and late coming which could only be identified from the school, unless parents were somehow aware. It is difficult for a parent to know that their child had missed school or reported late if they left home in time and the school has not reported the incidence. According to the pupils from government schools in the same study indiscipline by pupils was in form of beer drinking, smoking, stealing, fighting, attacking people on the way, dodging, late coming, bullying and beating up teachers. Improper school uniform was accounted for by unacceptable hair styles (cuts), using makeups, reducing uniform sizes especially trousers and skirts to be small and tight. Other offences included bringing phones, vulgar language, graffiti, and dodging classes. Undermining school authorities was found to be common among the government schools as compared to the Mission schools.

### Causes of Indiscipline Acts in Schools

Indiscipline acts in schools is not an obscure problem or phenomenon that its causes cannot be ascertained. In fact, scholars have carried out extensive studies on it and have been able to identify several factors that have led to its occurrence in our institutions of learning being it locally, nationally and internationally. For instance, Ozigi and Canlan (1979) as cited by Oyetubo and Olaiya (2009) presented seven likely causes of the phenomenon in school and which include:

i. The idea of democracy with its emphasis on the rights and freedom of the individual;

ii. The "generation gap" in ideas, beliefs and values about the nature of man, life and society. There is a wide difference of opinion in these matters between the two generations, the young and the old;

iii. The high level of sophistication of young men and women compared with that of the old generation

iv. The influence of the media (i.e. the newspaper, the radio and television) which carry regular reports about students' power against authority;

v. The failure of the adults, both in society and at school to set standards of good behaviours for young men and women to follow;

vi. The failure of many homes to provide basic and essential moral training in the upbringing of the children and the failure of parents to set good examples' and

vii. The failure in communication between young men and women insisting on their right and the authorities who tend to see the issues involved simply from the "official" point of view.

According to Morongwa (2010) eight factors are identified as the causes of indiscipline among secondary school students which among other things include: Parental / home influence; Teachers / educators; Political, social and economic factors; Learners with emotional problems; Head teachers / principals' factor; Influence of gender and race; and Public schools versus private schools.

In addition, Parson (2004) talked differently when she itemised inter alia some causes of indiscipline acts that include: The school, the society, wrong ideals, idleness, lack of good leadership, injustice, lack of realistic rules, bad home training and upbringing

### METHOD AND DESIGN

The research design employed in this study was the embedded design. The purpose of the embedded design was to collect quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously or sequentially, but to have one form of data play a support role to the other form of data. The reason for collecting the second data is that it augments or supports the primary form of data. The population of the study comprise all deputy head teachers, guidance teachers, teachers, pupils and parents in the twelve (12) secondary schools of Choma District in Southern Province. Deputy Head teachers were included in the study because they administer and preside over disciplinary issues of the school. The guidance/teachers, pupils and parents were also included because they play an important role in issues of pupil discipline.

### FINDINGS

**Findings on common acts of indiscipline by pupils in schools**

**Table 6.1 Common indiscipline cases by students as indicated by participants**

| Pupils | Deputy heads | Guidance/ Teachers& Parents |
|---|---|---|
| -truancy | - beer drinking | - alcohol abuse |
| -dishonesty | - fighting | - fighting |
| -fighting | - stealing | - stealing |
| -vandalism | - early pregnancy | - early pregnancy |
| -rudeness to teachers | - unchristian behaviour | - unchristian behaviour |

| -noise making | - dodging classes | - dodging classes |
|---|---|---|
| -promiscuity | - Ruddiness | - rudeness |
| -beer drinking | Late coming | - late coming |
| -stealing | - abusive language | - abusive language |
| Non- compliant to teachers' requests | - illegal gadgets | - smoking/ drugs |
|  |  | - illegal gadgets |

The study noted that both parents and teachers were well aware that fighting was the most prominently reported among the disciplinary problems of pupils in the schools. Alcohol abuse was of equal significance to both parents and teachers. The rest of the items were reported as isolated cases, varying according to schools.

**Findings on Factors leading to indiscipline in schools**
**Table 6.2: Factors leading to indiscipline as indicated by parents, guidance/ teachers and disciplinary committee**

| **Parents and teachers** | **Guidance/ Teachers /Disciplinary Committee** | **Deputy Headteachers** |
|---|---|---|
| -peer pressure<br>-home environment<br>-personal indiscipline<br>-technology/media<br>-playfulness<br>-teachers not enforcing discipline<br>-no school punishment<br>-poor discipline education<br>-teachers not watching over pupils | -community<br>-peer pressure<br>-technology<br>-media<br>-lack of school punishment<br>-re-entry policy<br>-over -enrollment | -teachers reporting late for classes<br>-teachers getting too close to pupils<br>-teachers'failure to address pupils'individual problems and concerns<br>-teachers drinking beer with pupils |

Table 6.2. Showed that home environment was taken as the major cause of indiscipline among pupils in school. This accounted for sixty-two percent (62%) of the respondents. Fifty-two percent (52%) of the respondents also mentioned the community as well as re-entry policy to be influencing factors. Peer pressure was accounted for by sixty-nine percent (69%) among the respondents while technology and the media accounted for thirty-eight percent (38%) of responses with lack of punishment and over-enrollment mentioned by individual respondents.

The study revealed that ten (10) parents indicated peer pressure as one of the factors that leads to indiscipline in schools representing ninety percent (90%), the same score was given to lack of punishment at school another factor. It was noted that eight (8) parents indicated home environment, playfulness and poor education on discipline as factors leading to indiscipline respectively accounting for sixty-seven percent (67%). However, six (6) parents held that personal indiscipline was a factor that led to indiscipline among pupils in schools representing fifty percent (50%) and fifty-eight percent (58%) indicated technology as one of the factors

Reacting from the presented factors leading to indiscipline, one of the parent respondents whose child had a fighting case mentioned that:

*"The school has no discipline problems. My child is often influenced by the friends – sometimes I am not sure whether it is him who influences the friends; but I know that the school has no provisions or chance that may lead pupils to start fighting and he cannot fight alone. So that is about him and the friends"*

The study revealed that fifty-eight percent (58%) of the participants indicated peer pressure as one of the factors that lead to indiscipline in schools. Home environment and non-school punishment was represented by fifty-six percent (56%) respectively. Sixty-one percent (61%) was recorded on personal indiscipline and not enforcing discipline ass factors that influenced indiscipline respectively. However, technology/media was accounted for sixty-nine percent (69%) while playfulness and teachers not watching over pupils was recorded at fifty-three percent (53%) respectively. Poor discipline education was the last with an account of forty-seven percent (47%).

In the schools studied, deputy headteachers indicated that teachers reporting for work triggers indiscipline in schools. They also shared teachers' closeness to pupils as well as drinking beer with them to be conduits of indiscipline. The deputy headteachers finally responded that failure to attend to pupils' individual problems and concerns may cause indiscipline.

**Findings on how schools manage disciplinary cases among pupils in secondary schools**
**Figure 6.3 Common measures employed by schools as indicated by participants**

| Parents | Guidance /Teachers |
|---|---|
| -enhance pupil's conduct | -punishment |
| -parental involvement | -parental involvement |
| -punishment | -punishment |
| -administrative controls | -administrative controls |
| -rewards | -rewards |
| -government policy | -government policy |
| -suspension/expulsion or forced transfer | -suspension |
| -guidance/counselling | -expulsion |
| | -forced transfer |
| | -guidance/counselling |

Table 6.3 shows that teachers from schools in the study cited a number of management strategies employed in dealing with pupils' indiscipline in their schools. Revealed were occasional summoning of parents on serious cases, punishments, rewards, one to one talk, guidance and counselling, suspensions, forced transfers on rare cases and conducting school councils. However, the study found that parental involvement in dealing with pupils' disciplinary actions in schools was very low. The study established that parents were aware of administrative controls and government policy as measures used by schools to mitigate on pupils' indiscipline.

The paper noted that from both parents and teachers' preferential measures employed, punishment as a deterrent to indiscipline mounted to be the most prominent, though it seemed a violation of children's rights. Punishment was represented by twenty-eight (28) respondents giving a score of ninety-three percent (93%). With suspensions and expulsion being the least used measures in secondary schools, owing to the fact that it has a serious bearing on pupil's academic performance.

Reacting on the disciplinary measures put in place, the study found that among the teachers from schools five (5) of the respondents indicated that their school's disciplinary measures used were good but needed to be improved. In this regard, one of the teachers said that:

> *"The disciplinary measures taken by our school although effective needed to be improved in order to make them less harsh and intimidatory, but rather helpful to ensure the learner excels in education."*

On the other hand, sixty-six percent (66%) of the guidance teachers indicated that enhanced pupil's conduct and rewards to be the most effective disciplinary measures taken by their schools as opposite to suspensions or forced transfers. Thirty-three percent (33%) settled for administrative controls while fifty percent (50%) indicated government policy and

guidance to be the most effective disciplinary measure used. Another teacher from one of the schools observed that:

> *"Some disciplinary measures taken by ourschool do not help the pupils change to better behaviour. In fact, when learners are punished by missing school, suspension or even expulsion, it only makes them more stubborn and to some extent rebellion."*

The study discovered that administrative control was the least measure which received only twelve (12) of the respondents representing forty percent (40%). The view may be associated to reluctance by parents to allow management to handle disciplinary cases in schools.

The study suggests that when such channels are well followed in the management of pupil disciple the result for the schools would be; well behaved pupils, orderly pupils, high retention rate of pupils, good academic performance and an ideal learning environment.

Curwin, et al. (2008) describes strategies for developing a philosophy about behavior and classroom management based on sound educational, psychological, and commonsense principles. These include developing a comprehensive classroom discipline plan; preventing behavior and management problems from occurring; stopping misbehavior when it occurs without attacking the dignity of the student; resolving problems with students who chronically disrupt the learning process; reducing student stress as well as the teacher's own; and using special guidelines for rules and consequences that work.

**CONCLUSION**
The findings of the study were that indiscipline among pupils was caused by both school-based and home/community factors; while peer pressure held a significant place. The prominent forms of indiscipline were drinking, fighting and stealing. The common forms of indiscipline were late coming, missing classes, noise making and rudeness.

The study established that there was information gap or miscommunication between schools' authorities and parents in the communities regarding reporting of indiscipline cases. It was discovered in the study that changes in discipline affected pupil performance. A comparison of school and community revealed that there were similarities in the way indiscipline occurred among pupils. There were however, significant differences in the way pupil indiscipline was handled at school level.

## RECOMMENDATION AND IMPLICATIONS

1. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education should introduce a component in the teacher training courses that addresses indiscipline problems as they obtain in secondary schools in Zambia. This would equip the trainee teachers with knowledge and skills that would help them tackle discipline problems peculiar to Zambian schools. For teachers who have been longer in the service, the schools' Continuous Professional Development (CPD) programs should involve every teacher including Guidance and Counseling section, administrators and other staff in order to promote children's rights within the context of citizenship education.

2. Parents should be involved actively in disciplinary matters of school pupils by being part of Disciplinary Committees sessions in the school; being participants in the formulation and approval of school rules and holding regular meetings with teachers to discuss strategies for helping children with discipline problems.

3. It should be made mandatory that school administrators and teachers in secondary schools hold meetings together to discuss matters pertaining to pupils' discipline, and share ideas on how to make improvements.

4. Ministry of Education should give secondary schools autonomy to instill stiffer measures for indiscipline cases. This would reduce the long procedure that is followed before pupils with serious offences can be disciplined by the ministry.

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