

Managing Indiscipline and Increasing Delinquent Behaviors among Adolescents: The Need to Strike Balance between Discipline Prohibitory Policy and Traditional Disciplinary Measures in the African Schools

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Abstract

Increased antisocial behaviours, moral decay and loss of societal values suggest that the child upbringing system in society has been compromised. Parents, peers, schools, religious institutions and media that constitute this system share vastly documented culpabilities in their individual roles as advertent and/or inadvertent actors. Documented analyses and reviews of available empirical studies show that the observed behaviors among youth and adolescents are traceable to parents' neglect of their wards' upbringing responsibilities along with other agents of socialization. The proliferation of antisocial behaviours was also discovered to have been accelerated by the corruptive and renegade operational modes of some schools expected to be the microcosm of larger society, coupled with the obnoxious prohibition of discipline in the schools by the government. This has driven contemporary adolescents and youth into usurping disciplinary rights from parents and teachers and consequently found themselves emboldened by the power to behave as they please without being reigned in through effective curtailing measures. Consequently, society finds itself bedeviled by the widespread shocking realization that institutionalized discipline belongs in the past. The reminder that unfavourable government policies have activated children's excesses through the right to determine mode and pattern by which they will realize their aspiration and prospect remains a complicating issue in education. This study is an attempt to reevaluate the existing system with a view to realigning stakeholders' interests to their responsibilities. Along with the need for government to contextualize disciplinary measures rather than bureaucratic approach, the study suggests a crucial rallying of teachers and parents to embrace possible alternative means to discipline.

Keywords: Indiscipline, Prohibitory Policy, Antisocial Behaviours, Policies, Adolescent, Delinquency.

INTRODUCTION

Different attempts have been made overtime to explain the misbehaviours observed among school children and youth in general. The prevalence of indiscipline, delinquency, and overall decay of values and escalating immoral lifestyles among youth in society hinges on the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with the societal system of values, cultures and socialization. It appears only older people consider value system to be of utmost importance, in spite of its influence in dictating individuals' choices and inclinations in the society. Culture which seems to guide individual behaviours and ways of life in the public setting is equally on the thresholds of being relegated. Contemporary practices amongst adolescents show a relocation of alien practices from the outside world of value and morality to the individual. In the same vein, images are replacing words; emotion are replacing thought; youth and adolescent choose life endeavor and meals according to colour, taste and satisfaction and not according to the reality, future prospect and balanced diet.

Subsistence in lack of, or refusal of guidance among adolescents has triggered various social vices indicating that youth and school children alike are in urgent need of some basic ingredients of socialization denied them in their formative years. Social indicators point to acts of shame and shamelessness being rewarded with encomiums and emphatic recognitions. Along with sexually charged songs outselling the impactful ones, sexual organs-exposing clothes are trending fashion brands and tickets to classy events. Roles of religions and other institutions in curbing this threatening development have equally attracted heavy scrutiny. The carryover effect of these malignant vices have festered into advanced corruption modes in the forms of public funds mismanagement, social rut and wholesale misconduct as could be seen amongst the ruling class. Issues revolving around cultism, illicit sex trafficking, truancy, examination malpractice and drug abuse are acts capable of hatching monsters difficult to exterminate in the future if allowed to incubate under current teaching-learning conditions by education stakeholders [1].

Indiscipline is a multidimensional construct regarding its manifestations, causes, meanings and functions in the social, psychosocial and pedagogical fields. Concerning its displays, Amado and Freire and Amado [2] believed that the major situations in education are those incidents of disruptive activities whose disturbance affects the good classroom functioning. Indiscipline affects all schools and stakeholders irrespective of gender and school type though the degree and magnitude vary from school to school.

Indiscipline according to Timothy [3] is the lack of discipline or exhibition of behavior that is at variance to the societal value and norms. In the context of school management, indiscipline is an acts or behaviors tantamount to lawlessness and disobedience to school rules and regulation. Indiscipline manifests in different dimensions such as general disobedient to constituted authority, destruction of school property, poor attitude to learning, abuse of seniority, immoral behaviour, drug abuse, stealing, lateness, truancy, dirtiness quarrelsome, use of abusive or foul languages, rudeness, gangstarism or cultism etc.

Causes and Origin of Indiscipline

The causes and the origins of adolescents' propensity for social vices have been traced to different sources. Kobiowu[4] reported that adolescents exhibit deviant behaviours as a reaction to contemporary agents of socialization's deviant ideologies against the traditional agents. They present things in non-coherent fashion to the adolescent. Kobiowu[4] reported further that peers and school activities demand much of the adolescents' time when compared with time spent with parents. He added further that there is too much reliance of parents on teachers and caregivers for child training and development. In addition, most regulations and policies made by government and some school administrators favour students' engagements in social vices that in turn lower their achievements and successes in school and life.

The foregoing reveals a colossal loss of discipline and control by parents over their wards, a situation that has degenerated into lack of value and morals among contemporary youth. This condition also made the youth to embrace all acts of indiscipline fortified by school regulations and policies that indulge youth beyond parents and teachers' control. While this review does not attempt to foster the use of corporal punishments, it unfolds the fact that discipline is "*in pari material*" to the upbringing of a child. In fact, the philosophy of education hinges on the fact that it is only fools who teach themselves in spite of the danger in not being disciplined enough to learn [5]. This points to a strong correlation between educating a child and

discipline. It should be noted that discipline is a behavior modification tool tending towards reducing the recurrence of children's undesirable behaviors and to increase the frequency of children's desirable behaviors beneficial to their future and the society at large.

Negative Effects of Physical Discipline in School

Although, studies abound on the negative effect of physical discipline on students: Grabell, & Olson [6],[7] & [8] all reported that physical discipline by parents has been associated with heightened risk for harm to children's mental health, as well as to their cognitive, behavioral, social, and emotional development. Studies by Ma & Grogan-Kaylor [9] & [10] revealed that Physical discipline is associated with increased adverse outcomes for children across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and across community contexts. It has also been reported that physical discipline is not effective in achieving parents' long-term goals of decreasing aggressive and deviant behaviours in children, or of promoting regulated and socially competent behaviours in children [11]. The argument here is not an advocacy for the compulsory use of physical discipline on adolescents but on the effectiveness of other means of discipline towards proper upbringing of the youth.

Historical Policy of School Discipline

Historically, it should be noted that the policy that brought about abolition of physical discipline in the United States and other developed countries came as a result of disproportionate use of suspension, expulsion and other practices that removed a child from school temporarily or permanently in response to (an) alleged misbehaviour(s) on children of colour, children with disabilities and races [12]. The indiscriminate use of suspension and expulsion coupled with the disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline could not be explained by differences in child behaviour but racial and disability mistreatment that propelled cursory sanctions of district schools in those countries did [13]. The acceptance of a resultant prohibitory policy was premised on the fact that when a child was pushed out of school they lost instructional time and were more likely to come into conflict with the juvenile and adult justice systems [14].

Moreover, the abolition of discipline in most schools and societies in the developed countries was also premised on United Nations' convention on the right and privilege of a child that states "the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguard and care," [15]. Also, the ineffectiveness of physical discipline in some countries necessitated the practice being banned in all conventional academic settings (United Nations, Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), (2007). Factually, the convention does not suggest a

particular measure but the need for disciplinary approach should not be exclusionary or injurious.

Existing studies suggest that physical discipline does not lead to worse outcomes for African-American children [16] [17]. Empirical studies also revealed that some children may be particularly likely to experience physical discipline, such as younger children (e.g., [18] [19] and children with disabilities [20]. Therefore, before making a decision on whether or not to adopt physical discipline, it is advisable to conduct benefit-harm analysis of its consequences on children and also determine whether the adverse outcomes observed in such methods vary across cultural groups, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic contexts.

School Disciplinary Prohibitory Policies

The adoption of prohibitory policies among parents and school administrators in recent times is not only ruining the organized outlook of our society, but is also depriving parents of their control over their family and the respect meant for them. Based on the fact that allowing children access to their every demand (including things injurious to their wellbeing) advances their sense of entitlement, when a child pronounces insulting words on an adult without being corrected it makes them consider disrespect a right. Overall, children's insensitivity to bad behaviour makes them think there are no rules in society. The decision to abandon every known form of discipline that has earlier proven effective is tantamount to cultural, historical, and contextual abuse. If in developed countries, the use of power by teachers to discipline learners was abused [13], it is certain that the inclination to misbehave without being disciplined will also be abused by learners due to their cultural or contextual factors/forces. Hence, children in developed countries involved more with the juvenile and adult justice system [14] nowadays.

The corresponding effects of the prohibitory policy adoption by parents and schools produce different results in developing countries due to the slack criminal justice system. The proliferation of kidnapping, insurgency, drug addiction, corruption and abuse of public positions by young adults are visible in under-developed and developing countries. All these explain the shift in discipline rights/power from teachers and parents to the youth or learners. More alarming from this development is the widespread realization that this generation is unlikely to be in the era where the father is not the head of the family and the control of schools is out of the hands of teachers or school administrators.

The father as the head of a family is autonomous in the tradition of imbibing actionable strategies tending towards restoring orderliness and being in control of the family. Children grow within families influenced

by their neighborhoods, local communities, and broader, national, cultural and societal norms [21]. Parents' choices of strategies for raising their children are frequently informed by their personal upbringing, contextual factors, and the child's characteristics [22] [23]. Obedience to parental control or sanctions invested into enhancing children's wellbeing that may seem inconvenient for now but deemed rewarding in the future are to be encouraged by both parents and other members of society.

The widespread realization in the present age was that both parents' autonomy to control their family affairs has been shifted to their children. In this era, it is not unusual to see learners causing chaos in the schools and turn it into battle fields, since learners carry weapons such as guns and knives to schools most especially in the underdeveloped and developing countries [24]. Cases have been reported of learners stabbing their educators and principals with pangas (a large heavy knife used as a weapon for cutting vegetation) and they fight each other using these weapons. It is noteworthy to mention at this juncture that there is no country in the world where students do not perpetrate acts of indiscipline. The problem is almost the same in different schools, but the intensity with which it occurs may only differ from school to school [25]. Academic failure is not unconnected to the students' neglect of parental instructions to go to school and imbibe the culture of commitment to both class and home assignment [26].

The genesis of parents' loss of disciplinary power was as a result of mental poverty [27] and is correspondingly exhibited by parents in developed and developing countries alike. It defines a situation where parents consider themselves incapable of inculcating the amount of discipline needed for desirable behavioural modifications of their children, thereby relying on external bodies by leaving their wards to be taught by either experience or themselves. While the common saying that "experience is great teacher" subsists, it suffices to note that experience places extensive premium on exceptional intuition. Many children who are left to chance or experience in life eventually regret their actions and inactions regarding the choices they did and did not embrace to gain immediate pleasurable rewards.

Parents' enrolment of children into boarding schools could also be as a result of mental poverty. Many parents are of the opinion that sending their wards to boarding schools will ease them of stress of monitoring and also reduce the energy required to administer disciplinary regimens to the children. Parents who banish their wards to boarding schools do it out of dissatisfaction with the amount of hours spent in the day school. Parents within this group lack the disciplinary strength needed to instill control in

their wards. Delaying gratification of ease and pleasure derived from children not being at home to the future comes with an added amount of difficulty for these parents [27].

Ideally, the enrolment of children into boarding schools is not a bad venture, but often times, it becomes discouraging due to the huge amount parents pay for their school fees. In schools, teachers' urge to inculcate moral values into boarding school students through discipline gets easily neutralized by fear of being reported by the same students to their parents. An added implication is the tendency for such parent to remove their wards from the school, along with its long-term financial implications on the school. In fact, personal observations and experiences in Nigeria revealed that most private school teachers' appointments are especially terminated in reaction to their attempts at instilling discipline on the students. In some private and public schools, only the head teachers or principals are allowed to correct learners irrespective of their bad behaviours.

Teachers' positions are so compromised that in many schools in Kenya, Denga and Denga [28] affirmed that teachers read answers to pupils in examination halls and even work sums for them to copy quickly before they are cleaned off. Teachers may feel that if the pupils fail to perform well, it will be a slap on their faces, hence the public will know that they did not carry out their teachings effectively. Thus, they result to reading answers to pupils in a bid to assist them excel in their examinations. Teachers do this to boast that their schools have the highest number of credits. The argument is that some public, private and boarding schools are not only making allowance for corruption and indiscipline, they themselves are agents of corruption.

Another corrupt practice among teachers and school administrators that result in indiscipline of among students is the increasing trend in the use of sex to secure grades from their teachers, a situation that promotes Sexually Transmitted Grades (STGs) among students [29] and reduction in level of students' respect for school instructions and the teachers. The epidemic of sexually transmitted grades create false impression in students. They believe in the future use of sex in their subsequent academic endeavours as leverage towards securing grades they cannot achieve through their own individual academic performances without exchange of sex. The foregoing is an indication that teachers and parents alike have failed in their duties to inculcate values, morals and discipline into the life of students.

Not only that the lack of disciplinary power of parents premised on mental poverty, some external factors that accounted for lack of indiscipline among

youth and adolescents, to serves as proximate causes of moral decay, delinquency and aberrant behaviours among students. These factors are rooted in socio-economic status of the parents and they are indications of shared poverty. Infact, parents believe they need to do many jobs to be financially secure, thereby giving their wards to caregivers or to parents who they believe are wealthier than them. The fact that these parents do not share common beliefs or ways of life with the individuals to whom they hand their children is an indication of presence of shared poverty. Both mental and shared poverty is not a situation where a person or group of peoples exist at a level below the globally accepted subsistence level of 1 dollar (\$1) /day/person or now 2 dollars (\$2) /day/person [27]. It is a situation where parent(s) deem themselves incapable of inculcating appropriate disciplinary measures to practice desirable behavioral modifications in their children due to their mental and external conditions.

In the recent times, due to economic situation of some countries, many parents engaged in more than one job and consequently reduce their level of involvement in child rearing. Dean [30], while highlighting the worth and importance of parents in their children's lives, asserted that parents are first teachers of the children. They know their children, hence, they shall be considered as lead and principal collaborators in their children's life endeavours.

Li-Grining [31], in stressing the importance of socio-economic status in determining levels of involvement in a child's training and upbringing, reported that socio-economic status determines to a great extent the level availability of parents for correction and discipline of their children. However, parents getting involved in many jobs does not give them the license to enroll their wards into more than one lesson period after school hours—a situation that shift children's attention to their peers and teachers entirely—because parents want to keep them away from home.

As observed by Ikobiowu [4], the deliberate transfer of children's attention by parents to their peers due to their unavailability at home constitutes greater harm to children's lives. In fact, it speeds up the process of child destruction through moral decay. This is probably due to the fact that most youth of nowadays learn most of their practices on the internet and copy their peers' ways of life. Mahoney and Stattin [32] found no relationship between the students' amount of free time outside of school activities and household chores and antisocial behaviours. However, they did find that adolescents who spent time with deviant peers who consumed drugs and alcohol, did not attend school regularly, and were physically aggressive, the adolescents were more likely to engage in antisocial behaviours as well [32].

Based on the foregoing, the observed delinquency and aberrant behaviours in the society among youth is not unconnected to parents' shift of their duties and responsibility of proper rearing of their children to caregivers, school administrators and their children's peers. Not only that some schools create environment for child moral decay, they also speed up the process through a number of unprofessional practices, coupled with government's discipline prohibitory policies. This situation has led some parents into believing that the era of uncompromising disciplinary standards (when parents and teachers had control over child discipline), has passed. It is now left with the children to determine and dictate their choices, a condition whose outcome most parents dread to think about.

CONCLUSION

Children and youth alike deserve and should be included in a warm, welcoming environment both at home and in the school. This warm and conducive environment includes one that is absent of possible threats to children's well-being and future achievement chances. Suggestively, a potent measure is the discipline of children after manifestation of undesirable behaviours. Most modern-day parents have neglected discipline as a behavioural modification measure due to mental and shared poverty.

Added to this is the fact that parents continue to cede their responsibilities of proper upbringing of wards to peers, caregivers and school administrators. In the recent times, recurrent observations revealed that teachers and other caregivers have not only failed in proper upbringing of child, but the negative contribution to child ruined life is also not small. Therefore, it was concluded that the genesis of child abnormal behaviour observed in our society is traceable to shift of responsibilities from parents to caregivers which could not help. Consequently, children are not the authors and sole determinants of their life's trajectories.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Interventions that not only teach positive parenting skills but deliver information intended to foster attitude change have already demonstrated their effectiveness in helping parents raise their wards more effectively. Such culturally-informed strategies for parents that help children learn positive behaviours, such as modeling orderly, predictable behaviours, respectful communication, and collaborative conflict resolutions are more likely to yield desirable behaviours and to foster a more positive and supportive family environment.

Based on the review, recommendations could be made that:

- ❖ Parents should be taught positive parenting skills that will deliver information intended to foster attitude change while being effective in helping parents raise their children more efficiently to achieve their child rearing goals.
- ❖ Culturally-informed strategies for parents that help children learn positive behaviors, such as modeling orderly, predictable behavior, respectful communications, and collaborative conflict resolution are more likely to yield desirable behaviours and to foster a more positive and supportive family environment should be encouraged among parents.
- ❖ Disciplinary measures should be allowed to vary across cultures, races, socio-economic backgrounds and other contextual factors rather than become conventional due to differentials in structural formation and identity elements across countries.
- ❖ Parents be encouraged to be closer to their wards for proper up-bringing and control of external influences from peers and internet.
- ❖ Power to discipline children and punish undesirable behaviours should be restored to schools and parents by government, to aid parents and schools alike in regaining control over learners and discharge their duties appropriately.
- ❖ There should be proper synergy between parents and teachers to foster adequate child discipline in the students.

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