

Causes of Indiscipline and Measures of Improving Discipline in Senior Secondary Schools in Ghana: Case Study of a Senior Secondary School in Sunyani

Emmanuel Gyan¹ Kwame Baah-Korang¹ Paul McCarthy¹ Peter McCarthy²
1.Box 206 Department of General and Liberal Studies, Sunyani Polytechnic, Ghana
2.Mathematics Department, Lane College, 545 Lane Ave, Jackson, TN 38301, USA

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to determine the main causes of students' misbehaviour and measures teachers and students consider to be most appropriate for controlling the unruly behaviour of the students. Purposive, sample, of 50 teachers who held the various positions in the school, and 150 students comprising the Students Representative Council, the class prefects and the class secretaries, was used for the study. Descriptive sample survey was considered to be most appropriate method for the study. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the participants. Majority of the respondents shared the opinion that it is the students themselves who cause such acts of indiscipline. It is only with students late to school and demonstrations that the majority of the respondents attributed the causes to parents and school respectively. A careful look at the statistics of causes of acts of indiscipline on Table 1 shows that apart from the individuals themselves, the school is the next cause of most of the acts of indiscipline. The community closely follows with parents and the media being almost at par. With regard to the measures of ensuring discipline in the School, all the ten measures that were listed were considered by at least 90% of the respondents to be very important.

Keywords: students' misbehaviour, Students Representative Council, and descriptive survey.

Introduction

It is an under estimation to say that proper discipline leads to great achievements and for that matter students who are disciplined tend to do well academically (Frimpong, 2003). However, it is a pity to know that disciplinary problems have become issues of the day in most Ghanaian Senior Secondary Schools (SSS). The issue of students' indiscipline has been the concern of all stakeholders in education and this informed Dr Kwame Addo Kuffour, Ghana's Minister of Defence to declare that the declining rate of discipline in many schools has contributed to the erosion of high academic attainments, demoralized teaching staff and brought sorrow and disappointment to many parents (Frimpong, 2003). He observed that discipline is the mother of all great achievements in whatever field of endeavour and also emphasized respect for law, rules and regulations, self-control and desire to lead a life worthy of emulation. He said this at the 30th Anniversary and Speech & Prize-Giving Day of Anglican Secondary School, Kumasi (Frimpong, 2003).

Charlton & David (1993) attribute the causes of misbehaviour in schools to two major factors; namely biological and environmental. They continue that Biological causes of misbehaviour include problems such as the malfunctioning of the central and peripheral nervous system and the endocrine glands, disorders in the hereditary characteristics of individuals, chromosomal abnormalities and genetic defects. Other biological conditions that can cause misbehaviour are hyperactivity in children, epilepsy and asthma. The misbehaviour in schools that are due to environmental factors include family problems such as separation of young children from their parents (or parent substitutes) for a long time, which disrupts the bond of relationship between the two, parental deprivation due to death or divorce and other reasons that lead to inadequate parenting (Charlton & David, 1993). Child abuse and over permissiveness on the part of parents are other environmental factors which contribute to students' misbehaviour.

Curwin and Mendler (1998) categorised the causes of indiscipline problems in schools into two. They are: in-school causes and out-of-school causes. According to Curwin and Mendler, schools have become the battleground for too many participants, a place where major confrontations and skirmishes occur daily. This is simply because teachers and students share the same space, time, goals and needs. They spend most of the time communicating with each other, thinking about each other, scheming against each other and judging each other. This constant interaction leads to over familiarization, and that has the potential of breeding contempt (Curwin and Mendler, 1998).

The problem of unclear limits also causes disciplinary problems in schools. At least, teachers and administrators must clearly and specifically inform students of the standards of acceptable behaviour before they are violated. When limits are unclear, students will test the system to find out what they are. It is in the recognition of this, that the Ghana Education Service in 1994 provided a uniform code of discipline to all secondary schools in Ghana.

Also students' indiscipline emanates from the socio-economic conditions in which the students find

themselves. A society that has lost its values and norms is more prone to disciplinary problems, likewise the poor homes and communities (who said this?). Ovard (1969) attributes offences committed by students to specific instances such as unsatisfactory home conditions, lack of social adjustment, lack of responsibility, adjustment to adolescence, bad associates, poor teaching, poor school organization, etc. and all these instances indicate a reaction by students to circumstances external to themselves but to which their own psychological predisposition stimulates their responses (Ovard, 1969).

Of late students' indiscipline in this case study has been the concern of all the teachers, parents, the school authorities and some students of the school. In 1997, a boy who was sacked from the boarding house for smoking and possessing marijuana managed to sneak into the school one mid-night and set one of the classroom blocks on fire. Fortunately for the school, the fire was spotted at the early stage. Again, in 1999, three of the S.S.S. three students who were about to write their final examinations, the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSSCE), were sacked for stealing a large quantity of louvre blades from the school. Then again, in 2002, six students were removed from the boarding house for their persistent involvement in theft cases.

Another disturbing situation is where students break bounds. That is, students leaving school premises without official permission. Various forms of punishments have been given to such culprits yet some keep on breaking bounds. Perhaps this may be due to the flexible nature of the punishment given to these offenders. For instance, in 2003, eight S.S.S. 3 students were withdrawn from the boarding house for constantly breaking bounds. However, they were later recalled on humanitarian grounds simply because the authorities foresaw that the action would negatively affect their performance in the final examination.

These and many more of disciplinary problems in Sunyani Secondary School have prompted the researchers to conduct the study to find out the major causes of indiscipline, and the measures teachers and students consider most appropriate for maintaining discipline in school.

The results of the study will help students, teachers, parents and Board of Governors of schools to have better understanding of the causes of disciplinary problems in schools and the appropriate measures to be used to check them.

Statement of the Problem

In Ghana, almost all the Secondary schools face disciplinary problems and this has been the concern of all and sundry. From the Disciplinary Committee file of the school, where the research was carried out, there have been many suspensions and withdrawals of students from the school. These suspensions and withdrawals have many repercussions on the affected students, the concerned parents, and the teachers, particularly those on the disciplinary committee. Again, the tone of the school is seriously at stake when students are found to be indiscipline and the community is not spared either. In view of the devastating consequences of disciplinary problems in Ghanaian schools, the call for the maintenance of sound discipline, which should be a partnership among the parents, the learners, the educators and the state cannot be overemphasized.

Purpose of the study

The study was done in order to find out major causes of disciplinary problems and the measures teachers and students perceive as appropriate for maintaining discipline in Secondary School.

Significance of the study

The study will assist school administrators to know major causes of disciplinary problems and the measures teachers and students perceive as appropriate for maintaining discipline in School. The knowledge about these will be a guide for addressing disciplinary problems.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the major causes of indiscipline in the school?
- What measures do the teachers and students consider as the most appropriate for ensuring discipline in the school?

Limitation

The sample of the study was purposive and as such the finding may lack external validity. Therefore, the findings are not generalizable to all secondary schools. Also, as seen from Table 2, though a greater percentage of teachers and students consider all the ten measures as very necessary, it must be pointed out, however, that these are not the only means of ensuring discipline in schools; there are several others that were not mentioned in this study. Therefore the study is limited to the factors mentioned on Table 2 only.

Methodology

The researchers purposively sampled 50 teachers and 150 students who hold various positions in a senior high school in Sunyani that were directly involved in the disciplinary matters in the School for the study. Descriptive sample survey was considered to be a most appropriate method for the study. Babbie (1990) recommends the descriptive survey for the purpose of generalising from a sample to a population for inferences to be made about characteristics, attitudes or behaviour of the population. Gay (1987) also asserts that the descriptive survey involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. In view of the above assertions, a questionnaire was used to collect data from the sample in order to answer the research questions posed.

Statistical tools such as frequency counts and percentages were employed to interpret the data in order to answer the research questions. Responses were compared to find out those that reflected the same opinion.

Results and Discussion

Five causes of indiscipline were used. These are indicated on Table 1.

Table 1. Responses to Causes of Acts of Indiscipline (percentage approximated to the nearest whole)

Acts of indiscipline	Respondents	School		Parents		Media		Community		Self-induced	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Students late report to school	Teachers	10	20	30	60	-	-	-	-	10	20
	Students	12	8	63	42	-	-	4	3	71	47
Stealing of students' items	Teachers	2	4	10	-	-	-	2	4	46	92
	Students	9	6	10	7	6	4	12	8	113	75
Bullying of juniors	Teachers	8	16	2	4	-	-	-	-	40	80
	Students	30	20	-	-	3	2	3	2	114	76
Lying to teachers	Teachers	20	40	-	-	-	-	8	16	22	44
	Students	9	6	3	2	7	5	3	2	128	85
Students' absenteeism	Teachers	-	-	2	4	-	-	-	-	48	96
	Students	12	8	2	3	3	2	-	-	133	89
Going to town without exeat	Teachers	18	36	2	4	-	-	-	-	30	60
	Students	39	26	-	-	-	-	6	4	105	70
Littering of school compound	Teachers	8	16	-	-	-	-	10	20	32	64
	Students	19	13	-	-	-	-	14	9	117	78
Demonstrations	Teachers	22	44	-	-	6	12	2	4	20	40
	Students	76	51	2	1	6	4	19	13	47	31
Sexual misconduct	Teachers	-	-	8	16	4	8	10	20	28	56
	Students	2	1	4	3	36	24	-	-	108	72
Improper dressing	Teachers	10	20	-	-	4	8	12	24	24	48
	Students	9	6	8	5	21	14	12	8	100	67
Cheating in exams	Teachers	16	32	-	-	-	-	-	-	34	96
	Students	23	15	-	-	3	2	4	3	120	80
Alcoholism/ drugs	Teachers	2	4	-	-	4	8	22	44	22	44
	Students	4	3	4	3	14	9	30	20	98	65
Fighting	Teachers	-	-	2	4	2	4	4	8	42	84
	Students	8	5	3	2	1	1	18	12	120	80

Source: field work, 2006

The data on Table 1 shows that with exception of students' demonstrations and late report to school, the respondents largely attributed the causes of disciplinary problems to the individual him/herself. This may be as a result of the hyperactivity in these individuals as claimed by Charlton & David (1993). The school's authorities must endeavour to instil discipline in the students for self-comportment behaviour plays a key role when it comes to matters of discipline as identified by Adentwi (1998). According to the views of the respondents, most of the students report to school late when school reopens and it was mainly attributed to the parents and the individuals themselves. About 60% of the teachers and 42% of the students attributed the cause of this act of indiscipline to the parents. This confirms the claim of Ovard (1969) who attributes offences committed by students to specific instances such as unsatisfactory home conditions. Perhaps the parents find it very difficult to get the school fees of their children on time. It could also be that the parents have lost control over their own children therefore, they cannot ask them to leave for school as soon as school reopens. Another cause that the respondents said has contributed to the lateness of students when school reopens is the individual himself or herself. As many as 47% of the students and 20% of the teachers responded to that. It could be that

the students leave their homes with the pretence of coming to school but they eventually fail to show up. Only 8% of the students and 20% of the teachers attributed the cause of this act to the school. Maybe the school authorities have not put drastic measures in place that will deter students from reporting late to school whenever school reopens.

Regarding the issue of some students stealing others students' items, about 92% of the teachers and 75% of the students said it is the individuals. This may be due to envy, greediness and fashion. On Table 1, item two column six shows that 80% of the teachers and 76% of the students agreed that bullying of junior students is also caused by the individual himself or herself. Some of the respondents on the other hand had the feeling that bullying of junior students is caused by the school and this was supported by 16% of the teachers and 20% of the students. Perhaps they see the school rules and regulations as too liberal and as such the offenders do not receive enough punishment to deter others from following suit.

The reasons given for students lying to teachers were varied. An overwhelming majority of the students, that is 85%, said it is caused by the individual himself or herself and this was supported by 44% of the teachers. Some of the teachers were of the opinion that students' dishonesty is caused by the school as well as the community. Forty percent and 16% of the teachers attributed the cause to the school and community respectively. However, only 6% and 2% of the teachers and students respectively attributed the cause to the school and community respectively. With regard to students absenteeism, as many as 96% of the teachers and 89% of the students shared the view that this very act of indiscipline is caused by the students themselves.

Another act of indiscipline, which to the respondents is caused by the students, is breaking of bounds. Sixty percent of the teachers and 70% of students were of that opinion. About 36% of the teachers and 26% of the students however said it is the school that causes students to break bounds. It is possible that the school has relaxed its rules and regulations therefore the students can choose to do whatever they like. It is also possible that the students themselves are very stubborn and or recalcitrant.

The individuals largely cause littering of the school compound and classrooms. In the opinion of the respondents, 78% of the students and 64% of the teachers shared that view. Twenty percent of the teachers and 9% of the students also attributed the cause to the community while 16% of the teachers and 13% of the students also said that it is the school that causes the students to litter around the school. There is possibility that the way the Ghanaian communities dispose of their refuse may have influenced these students. Very few or no dustbins are provided at vantage points and that might have caused this bad habit.

Causes of students' demonstrations attracted divergent views from the respondents. About 44% and 40% of the teachers attributed the causes of students' demonstrations to the school and the individual students respectively. However on the part of the students about 51% and 31% attributed it to the school and the individual himself or herself respectively. Also, while 13% of the students were of the view that the community causes students' demonstrations, only 4% of the teachers supported this idea. It is believed that where the school rules and regulations seem to be harsher, students easily resort to demonstrations. Goldstein and Conoley (1997) confirm this when they said that over use of punitive control methods, inadequate clarity of school and classroom rules and disciplinary procedures have a high degree of correlation with students' vandalism. Also irresponsible students easily lead other students to go on rampage. Those who attributed the cause of students' vandalism to the community perhaps were of the opinion that the skirmishes that occur in our various communities could easily lead to students demonstrations.

On the issue of sexual misconduct both the teachers and students have divergent views on what causes that but with a greater percentage of each group attributing it to the individual himself or herself. About 72% of the students and 56% of the teachers had a common opinion that sexual misconduct is caused by the individual himself or herself. This may be due to lack of self-control that is indiscipline. While 20% of the teachers were of the opinion that the community causes sexual misconduct, not even a single student supported that view. Perhaps the teachers saw the community as a factor because in a community where early sex and sexual misconduct are not frowned on, students from such communities indulge in sex indiscriminately. Generally speaking, many people think that the media is partly responsible for sexual misconduct among the youth and some irresponsible adults due to some movies advertisements. The results of the study have shown that 24% of the students and 8% of the teachers also shared a similar view. Again, 16% of the teachers and only about 3% of the students had the common opinion that parents also cause sexual misconduct among the youth. Possibly, because of abject poverty many parents may force their children into early sex so that they can fend for themselves.

The main cause of improper dressing according to the respondents is the individual. Sixty-seven percent of the students and 48% of the teachers shared this view. However, 20% and 24% of the teachers also attributed the cause of improper dressing to the school and the community respectively. But only 6% and 8% of the students respectively supported the idea that improper dressing is caused by the school and the community. Again, 14% of the students and 8% of the teachers said the media also cause improper dressing among the students. While no teacher puts the blame on parents, 5% of the students said parents are the cause of improper dressing in schools. This implies that the problem of improper dressing in schools needs to be tackled holistically

since the causes are multifaceted.

Examination malpractices, according to the respondents, are chiefly caused by the individual himself or herself. The percentages representing the students and teachers who shared this opinion are respectively 80 and 68. Furthermore, 15% of the students and 32% of the teachers also share a similar view that it is the school that causes examination malpractices. This clearly indicates that some students actually do not prepare well before examinations. It is also possible that some teachers unprofessionally leak the questions.

On the issue of drunkenness and use of drugs, 44% of the teachers said it is caused by the individual himself or herself. Another 44% of the teachers had the opinion that one of the causes of students' drunkenness and use of drugs is the community. On the part of the students 65% and 20% attributed the causes to the individual themselves and the community respectively. About 9% of the students and 8% of the teachers however said the media cause students' drunkenness and use of drugs. An overwhelming majority of the respondents, 84% of the teachers and 80% of the students were of the view that students fighting among themselves are mainly caused by the individuals themselves.

From the study, individual students mainly cause most of the acts of indiscipline. Therefore there is the need to strengthen the *Guidance and Counselling Unit* in the school for effective teaching and learning.

a. Measures of Improving Discipline in the School

The need for improving discipline in the school cannot be taken for granted. The respondents were asked to indicate the measures that they consider to be suitable or otherwise for improving discipline in the School. The measures that they considered to be most appropriate could then be used in maintaining discipline in the school. Table 2 shows the views of the respondents on measures of improving discipline in the School.

Table 2. Views on Measures of Improving Discipline (percentage approximated to the nearest whole)

Means of Improving discipline	Respondents	Of very great importance		Of great importance		Of some importance		Of no importance		No opinion	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Awarding well-behaved students.	Teachers	30	60	10	20	10	20	-	-	-	-
	Students	105	70	35	23	10	7	-	-	-	-
Teachers should be friendly.	Teachers	12	24	12	24	24	48	2	4	-	-
	Students	33	22	54	36	48	32	15	10	-	-
Cooperation between parents and teachers.	Teachers	40	80	8	16	2	4	-	-	-	-
	Students	105	70	26	17	12	8	7	5	-	-
Regulations to be clearly stated.	Teachers	36	72	14	28	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Students	102	68	38	25	10	7	-	-	-	-
Involving students in decision-making.	Teachers	28	56	14	28	8	16	-	-	-	-
	Students	88	59	42	28	20	13	-	-	-	-
Counselling for difficult students	Teachers	32	64	14	28	4	8	-	-	-	-
	Students	99	66	38	25	10	7	3	2	-	-
Bad students to be expelled.	Teachers	26	52	6	12	18	36	-	-	-	-
	Students	69	42	24	16	42	28	10	7	5	3
Administering corporal punishment to culprits.	Teachers	14	28	12	24	24	48	-	-	-	-
	Students	48	32	30	20	50	33	22	15	-	-
Difficult students be made to sign bond.	Teachers	34	68	12	24	4	8	-	-	-	-
	Students	83	55	37	25	27	18	3	2	-	-
Reducing students intake.	Teachers	22	44	14	28	10	20	4	8	-	-
	Students	77	51	25	17	24	16	18	12	6	4

Source: field work, 2006

In analysing the views of the respondents on means of improving discipline, the first three columns headed: 'of very great importance', 'of great importance' and 'of some importance' were considered together to mean a necessary factor. This was then contrasted with the fourth column headed 'of no importance' also taken to mean unnecessary factor in order to have a vivid picture of the views of the respondents. The heading of the fifth column was maintained as 'no opinion'. Only items 7 and 10 had 3% and 4% respectively of the students saying that they had no opinion. From Table 2, a 100% of teachers as well as the students said that awarding well-behaved students is a necessary factor for improving discipline in the school. When this is done it will serve as a motivating factor for other students to emulate as indicated by Shertzer and Stone (1976).

According to Adentwi (1998) teachers being unfriendly with the students causes disciplinary problems in schools. This proves why 96% of the teachers and 90% of the students considered teachers being friendly with the students as a necessary factor for ensuring discipline. However, 4% of the teachers and 10% of the students said such a measure is not necessary. If teachers become friendly with students they will get to know and understand the students better. However, there should not be over fraternisation so as to give room for suspicion of bad motives.

Both the teachers and the students considered cooperation between the teachers and the parents as a necessary factor for ensuring discipline in the school. An overwhelming 100% of the teachers and 95% of the students considered it as such. This attests to the fact established by Goldstein and Conoley (1997) that getting parents on the school's side could minimize indisciplinary problems. Only 5% of the students said cooperation between the teachers and parents is not necessary as far as ensuring discipline in the School is concerned. The cooperation between the teachers and the parents could be effective through the Parent-Teacher Association.

With regard to distinct and clearly stated rules and regulation, 100% of both the teachers and students said it is a necessary factor for improving discipline in the school. This confirms the claim of Jones and Jones (1995) who say that school rules need to be clearly stated. The suggestion is that where there are loopholes in the school rules and regulations, the students may capitalise on them and misbehave for obvious reasons.

The respondents unanimously supported the view that involving students in decision-making process is a necessary factor for ensuring discipline in the school. This proves Jones and Jones (1995) right when they claim that students need to be involved in developing rules. Implementation of such decisions becomes easy since the students themselves were part of the process. On the issue of referring difficult students to the Guidance and Counselling Unit for advice, again, a 100% of the teachers and 98% of the students said it is a necessary measure. Only 2% of the students said such a measure is unnecessary. The view of the majority of the respondents suggests that guidance and counselling is necessary for the students in the school. The suggestion is that the Guidance and Counselling Unit in the school must be well resourced in order to make its work easy and effective.

On the issue of expelling bad students from the school, 100% of the teachers and 90% of the students were of the view that it is a necessary means of improving discipline in the school. About 7% of the students said it is unnecessary while the remaining 3% said they had no opinion. Perhaps, the fear of the majority of the respondents is that if the bad students are not expelled from the school other students may copy from them.

All the 50 teachers used in the study and 85% of the students considered giving corporal punishment to culprits as a necessary factor. However, 15% of the students said it is unnecessary as far as ensuring discipline is concerned. Possibly, the 15% of students who said corporal punishment is not necessary are the types who do not want to be given corporal punishment when they do go wrong rather they prefer a different form of punishment.

Making very difficult students to sign a bond to be of good behaviour was viewed by all the teachers and 98% of the students as a necessary factor for improving discipline in the school. Only about 2% of the students said that measure is not necessary. The statistics indicates that some of the students do not like corporal whenever they go wrong but rather they should be made to sign a bond to be of good behaviour.

Finally cutting down of students' intake was considered as a necessary factor by 92% of the teachers and 84% of the students. Those who considered this measure as unnecessary were 8% of the teachers and 12% of the students, while 4% of the students said they had no opinion. The majority of the respondents are in support of the view of the Ghana Education Service Council that says that schools with large intake should reduce their population to 1500 in the next three years so that students can be controlled to ensure effective discipline.

The analyses of Table 2 have shown that a greater percentage of teachers and students consider all the ten measures as very necessary. It must be pointed out however that these are not the only means of ensuring discipline but there are several others that were not mentioned in this research. It must be emphasized that among those measures mentioned no single measure could be used exclusively to ensure effective discipline but rather a collaborative application of all or some of the measures can provide the required results.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that respondents shared similar views on the causes of acts of indiscipline. The responses indicate that the disciplinary problems are caused by the individuals themselves, the school, the community, parents and the media in that order. Once the leading cause of most of the disciplinary problems is the individuals themselves, it implies that most of these problems can be controlled if the individuals truly reform.

The ten measures listed as means of improving discipline were all considered to be crucial by the respondents. The conclusion drawn is that the schools authorities may use these measures and many others that were not mentioned in the study in checking disciplinary problems in their schools particularly participant Secondary School.

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