



Headteacher And Student Discipline Management In Schools: A Systems Approach

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Introduction

Disciplined human behaviour defines character that is necessary for achievement of organizational goals. In a school set up, educational discipline resonates with educational expectations. According to Mitchell and Bradshaw (2016), discipline guides learners towards self-control and ordered behaviour. They are therefore quite likely to achieve an ethical environment. According to Bell (2023), indiscipline among school learners is of concern worldwide. In this respect, school teachers normally apply different methods to achieve pre-determined educational goals. The headteacher directs either a disciplined or indisciplined school culture. This eventually sets the school scholastic tone that interprets the overall academic performance. Assumed to be the most educationally alert individual in a school (Rivkin, 2010), the headteacher's role is to prepare the environment for safe operations of further on-coming educational activities, key is preventing indiscipline (Bell, 2020). It is noteworthy that perceptions surrounding school indiscipline associate student behaviour.

Key Words: Discipline, Headteacher, Systems Theory

Headteacher as a Center of Learning for School Discipline Attainment

The headteacher, being the assumed principal disciplinarian in a school ought to show disciplined behaviour that role models those under his caution that include teachers, students, and parents in pursuit of educational goals. He is by job description, a mentor. According to Egenti (2020), mentorship is a supportive relationship established between two individuals where knowledge and skills are shared. It also shapes attitude. In a school, the principal is the superior party with more advanced experience. Mentorship is a function of the school principal (TSC, 2005) hence it is not voluntary but an ingrained part of his leadership job by virtue of employment. The principal's sense of effectiveness as regards school discipline should

place him at the centre of discipline management mentorship for teachers and students. Most disciplinary approaches, if left unchecked, may be based on hardly valid perceptions and attitudes beheld by disciplinary enforcers. In addition, students are active learners of the headteacher in terms of school discipline, if he bends to allow storms to pass-by, students are likely to copy so, and bend twice as much in case of a similar storm. Allday(2011) posits that perceptions surrounding school indiscipline associate student misbehaviour with belief that such students are attention seekers, apathetic, have home-rooted problems, have personal inadequacies, and encounter negative peer influence. Therefore there is need to involve both school-end and out-of-school-end players such as parents in discipline management. Poor classroom behaviour of students can be attributed to poor teacher classroom management techniques (Allday, 2011). These are necessary for teachers to effectively control disruptive and inappropriate behaviour. Besides, it may be the result of poor attitude of teachers as regards student behaviour control. The headteacher is therefore obligated to play role model and to mentor teachers who are the main disciplinary arm, by headteacher delegation, in a school setting. In many cases, in most schools, teachers spend a substantial amount of time handling problem behaviour.

Application of Systems Theory for Headteacher Discipline Control

-Systems theory (Gibson, 2024) has 4 basic assumptions:

- i. The child, the school and the home are inter-connected. So if 1 part changes it influences activities in all remaining parts. (If there are any changes at home, the school is also influenced by the changes through inter-linkage relationship)
- ii. The system is a single whole and not effective as parts hence it is a system with activities within it (Every activity that influences a part of the life of a learner, whether at home or at school, necessarily connects to the rest of and the whole of the learner)
- iii. There is a reciprocal relationship between the system and its surrounding environment each part influencing the other (The interconnected, school and its environment, cannot operate independently as neighbouring entities)
- iv. Systems are heuristics to be used to understand the operations within an organisation and not a reality in themselves. (The relationships go beyond imaginations to practical realities for goal realization)

As regards headteacher involvement in student discipline management the systems theory proposes the following:

1: As variety within the system increases, the potential to adapt and continue on a system also increases. The headteacher plays a pivotal coordinative role between the various players (teachers, students and parents) to decrease challenges experienced and likely conflicts which would otherwise hinder

achievement of school goals. The variations may include student backgrounds, student academic abilities, student standing as regards disciplinary rating, student ambitions, parental financial abilities, parental academic backgrounds, parental social standing, religious exposure, parental priorities for their children, and many others.

2: System goals are prioritized according to school needs hierarchy. Today's high priority activities give way to lower level priority needs once the higher priority needs are achieved. The headteacher steers prioritization of school needs-based activities. It is hoped that as the headteacher does prioritization, the superior interests of the learners are allowed to over-shadow the inferior areas of focus as they institute discipline. For instance in an academically geared world, then the headteacher should prioritize academic activities.

3: Systems activities cannot be viewed as independent parts but as a continuous of a single whole. The activities include teachers, students and parents who play various roles to achieve the overall academic outcome. What roles do teachers play in student discipline that contribute to educational outcome? What role do parents play to support the headteacher activities? How does the headteacher involve stakeholders in realization of school goals through his disciplinarian role?

Among the problem behaviors that the headteacher has to manage in the school are the common school misbehaviors such as verbal insults, lateness, not doing class assignments, being absent from class, noise making, being disruptive/talking when not supposed to, cheating in examinations, and not following directions/ instructions, being truant, doing drugs, sneaking, vandalizing property, stealing, bullying, and fighting among others (Bell, 2023). The headteacher takes credit for overall school discipline and on the reverse takes the blame for poor outcomes. As reported in Kiprop (2012), there has been a rapid increase in cases of school indiscipline thereby requiring headteachers as professionals to carefully study the situation and come up with practicable discipline management techniques. In South Africa, schoolyard indiscipline was associated with school drop-out (Greenberg, 2006). It is in this respect that headteachers are to engage in preventive, interventive and restorative discipline management approaches (Jinot & Jonnes, 2021).

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