Discipline Management in Urban Middle Secondary Schools: Principals, Counselors, Students and Parents Perceptions

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Guided by the principles of helping the children in continuity learning the research aims at discipline management in urban middle secondary schools. This study examined the disciplinary issues and different stakeholders; principals, Counsellors, Students and Parents perceptions. The sample of the study consisted of 15 participants. The study is significant because its findings and conclusions are so relevant to different stakeholders to implement and strategies to keep the students into the education system and also help the children improve their discipline.

For school principals, counselors, teachers, students and parents, the findings of this research will help to maintain discipline in their respective roles and responsibilities entrusted to them. Policy makers at the ministerial level may use as bases for developing a national school discipline policy and guidelines. For future researchers it may serve as a handy tool or base to study further on discipline management. The project aims to investigate and explore viable strategies to enhance current practices of managing ethical issues concerning students in schools. Qualitative research design has been used to conduct the research. To make the study more authentic and generalization purpose, a total of 15 research participants/ respondents were involved. The findings are fundamentally based on the lived experiences and perceptions of these respondents which correspond with phenomenological strategy of qualitative research. Although respondents had common views as well as difference of opinion on certain issues on discipline management of school, outcomes of the study are triangulated.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Schools worldwide are grappling with overwhelming increase of incidences of student indiscipline behaviors. It has posed a tremendous challenge to educators to maintain effective school discipline. This has caused formidable concerns to school, parents and the society. The discipline issues posed by students has gained attention of educators, parents, and school administrators as it derails and impacts the academic performance of students and as well as the day to day function of schools [1].

Ministry of education, in 2011, has directed schools in Bhutan to introduce a policy of zero tolerance to discipline. The main focus of the Zero Tolerance to Discipline is to educate students and prevent them from indulging in serious violent disruptive behaviors and to ensure safe and friendly school atmosphere through vigorous positive disciplining.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The study aims to strengthen the existing school discipline and management system by way of bringing in grounded strategies through research based findings. In recent years, disruptive behavior of students exhibited in schools, particularly urban schools has come to limelight and gained tremendous national attention [2].

1.2 Objectives

1. To investigate systematically the existing disciplinary issues in urban middle secondary schools in Thimphu as perceived by principals, counselors, students and parents.
2. To develop frame work for the management of discipline in the schools that respects and recognizes both learners and educators needs and challenges.
3. To provide school management with strategies of its implementation on school discipline that reflects holistic views and needs of learners, educators, parents, authorities and the community.

1.3 Research Question

1. What are the perceptions of principals, counselors, students and parents on school discipline management in urban middle secondary school?

2. What are the patterns of management of discipline in middle secondary schools perceived by principals?
3. What are the strategies should school leaders/managers use to make school discipline management program more effective?
4. What is counselors' perception on different aspects of management of discipline?
5. What are the perceptions of students on different aspects of management of discipline?
6. What are parents' opinions on different aspects of management of discipline?
7. What are the existing roles of principals, discipline committee and counselors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Worldwide View on discipline Management

Disciplinary problems have been consistently ranked as one of the biggest concerns facing America's schools [3-4]. The 35th Annual Gallup Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools has repeatedly documented "lack of discipline" as one of the most critical problems facing our school system. Parents, students, and educators across the country are disturbed about so much disorder and danger in our schools and the high incidence of classroom disruptions that result in student suspensions/expulsions.

2.2 Principals Perceptions

The purpose to have safe and secure place of learning for our students is a first priority for all school Principals. Principal as the chief executive officer (CEO) of school is often under pressure from the teachers and the school counselors. The school's CEO must ensure that both parties are given right advice and justifications without compromising the school's code of ethics. Bhalla contends that in personal or professional life tends to react in two ways: a) Push through a solution that befits personal interests (My way or the Highway) b) settle for compromises or tradeoffs [5].

A successful classroom relationship between a teacher and his or her students promotes learning. Students also need to understand how they need to react to anxieties about learning, disruption, motivational issues, and outright

defiance. Relationships are the foundation of a successful classroom management program.

The principal as leader and administrator in the school is viewed by staff as source of inspiration, knowledgeable in all matters pertaining school affairs. "The leadership is the moral and intellectual ability to visualize and work for what is better for the company and its employees" [6].

2.3 Counselors Perceptions

The school counselors are very important in the academic success of students as well as their personal/social growth and preparing them for successful careers afterwards. Counseling is accepting, trusting and establishing a worthy relationship between client and the clientele, where client confides and feels free to discuss openly what worries and upsets the client [7].

In the process the client acquires social skills and gains courage and self confidence to lead independent and contented life. Strong, contends that, "counseling process is a joint quest. The student's responsibility is to try to understand himself and the direction in which he should go and gain self-confidence in handling problems as they arise. The counselor's responsibility is to assist in this process whenever the student needs and is ready for help.

2.4 Students Perceptions

Students who are able to participate in making decisions at school are more committed to decision making and democracy in other contexts. He explained that when one looks inside the classrooms of teachers who are less controlling and more inclined to support children's autonomy, one finds students who are more self-confident and more interested in learning for its own sake [8].

The study posits that school and the classroom rules, as well as the consequences for disobeying them, decided collaboratively among teachers, students, administrators, and parents brings lesser indiscipline issues in the school.

2.5 Parents Perceptions

Discipline is psychologically necessary in order for schools to function smoothly. Learners need discipline for their own sense of well-being. They need to know the limits and become aware of

boundaries and thereby develop a sense of security and independence. Hence parents recommend that parents nominated as a school governing body member must be educated and well informed on school system in order to represent authentic views of parents that benefits entire community.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative Research

The researcher had chosen qualitative research approach by taking into account the nature of the research topic. Qualitative research approach is mostly concerned with the quality of findings inferred from natural settings which is often termed as lived experiences or ethnography [9]. It is the product of the first hand information derived from natural settings through direct and intensive involvement with research participants.

3.2 Research Design

The researcher has decided to use qualitative approach as the topic of the research relevant to phenomenological inquiry of dealing with lived experiences and comprehending the meaning of knowledge thus constructed. The qualitative approach provides avenue to understand people's perceptions, perceptive and understanding of particular phenomenon. If a concept of phenomenon needs to be understood researchers need to choose qualitative approach [10].

3.3 Sampling

The researcher had mainly used semi-structured interview questionnaires to gather data. Semi structured interviews was conducted. Four urban schools in Thimphu region were used as sample. The composition of research respondents will be as follows: three principals, three counselors, three parents and six students (two each from three schools). Gender representation has been taken into account by the researcher.

3.4 Research Tools used

For collection of data, the researcher has used semi structured interviews and interview questionnaires. All interviews were recorded to be transcribed. The field notes will also contain the description of facial expressions and body gestures of respondents.

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3.5 Approval to Conduct Research

Then the researcher approached the Chief Education Officer, Thimphu City Corporation, who issued official letter urging school principals to render support to the researcher in carrying out the research study.

3.6 Mode of Conducting Interview and Interview Questions

The researcher met with school principal and then requested participants to gather in a room. Then the researcher informally introduced to the participants and briefs them about the intent of research. This enables so participants to understand the purpose and impact of research studies. The participants are also informed that they have the freedom to communicate in any language that they are comfortable.

3.7 Location

The researcher had conducted research participant interview in three urban schools in Thimphu, which included: Motithang Higher Secondary School, Lungtenzampa Middle Secondary School and Dechencholing Middle Secondary School.

3.8 Data Collection

Data collection in qualitative research involves the gathering of information for a research project from a variety of data sources [11]. The researcher interviewed participants from three schools over a period of one and half month which was mostly executed during weekends so as to ensure minimum disturbance to the participants.

3.9 Data Compilation

According to Creswell [10], good ethical decisions should be followed to interpret the data. In research study researcher must anticipate the following.

1. In qualitative research, inquirers use aliases or pseudonyms for individuals and places to protect identities.
2. Data analyzed, need to be kept for reasonable period of time, so that it does not fall into the hands of other researchers who might appropriate for other purposes.

3. In the interpretation of data, researchers need to provide accurate account of the information.

3.10 Data Analysis

Creswell [10] argues that the process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and the image recordings. It involves preparing and processing the data for analysis, conducting different analysis, gaining deeper and deeper understanding of data, representing the data, and making interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (p.190). This involves transcribing interviews, optically scanning material, typing up field notes, or sorting and arranging data into different types depending on the sources of information.

1. Read through all the data. A first general step is to obtain sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning. What general ideas are participants' sayings? What is the tone of ideas? What is the general impression of the overall depth, credibility, and use of the information? Sometime qualitative researchers write notes in margins or start recording general thoughts about the data at this stage.

3.11 Validity and Reliability

The credibility of a qualitative research depends on the ability and effort of the researcher. Creswell [10] recommends strategies such as triangulation in research proposal to check the accuracy of the findings. Researcher took adequate care to triangulate the outcome research findings.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

"Qualitative research requires logical reasoning and it makes considerable use of inductive reasoning, organizing the data into categories and identifying patterns (relationships) among the categories." [12] In this study, the researcher used codes to analyze data. "Open coding is a process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing the data." [12] The procedure began with the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination data. An analysis in qualitative research is a systematic process of selecting,

categorizing, comparing, synthesizing, and interpreting data to provide explanations of the phenomena of interest [13].

4.2 Setting

The disciplinary problems faced by schools are quite frequent in urban middle secondary schools. The age groups of students chosen for research study are from 14-18 and the class range is PP-XII. These children are in their prime adolescence period where teenagers undergo lot of emotional and physical developmental changes. The school A that the researcher have chosen has 1800 with classes Pre Primary to Twelve and it is manned by seventy four teaching faculty members supported by eighteen support staff. The school B has 1300 students with seventy five staff which includes teaching as well as non teaching staff and the range of class is seven to ten. The third school is also a large school with eleven hundred plus students with sixty five staff which includes support staff. The range of class is Pre Primary to class ten.

Hence, researcher has selected the above size and composition of participants to generate information to fulfill research study mandates.

4.3 Coding

Coding is required to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the research participants as required by research norms. Creswell [1] contends that few issues call for good ethical decisions when we analyze and interpret the data.
The researcher has assigned codes for three principals, three counselors, six student and three parents involved as research participants. Codes are assigned for principals are; P-1 for principal one, P-2 for principal two and P-3 for principal three. Codes assigned for counselors are; C-1 for counselor one, C-2 for counselor two and C-3 for counselor three. Codes for students are; S-1 for student one, S-2 for student two, S-3 for student three, S-4 for student four, S-5 for student five and S-6 for student six. Finally codes

coded for parents are; Pa-1 for parent one, Pa-2 for parent two and Pa-3 for parent three to indicate research participants. By assigning such codes the researcher has fulfilled the obligation of not revealing the names of real research participants.

Eisner,(1998. P.154) advises that final work for a researcher is generate genuine general description of the phenomenon, as seen through the eyes of people who experienced it firsthand [14]. The researcher has read the data again to understand what the research participants exactly meant. This has helped the researcher break up the information into bit and pieces and to sort out relevant from irrelevant data.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ministry of Education has directed schools all over Bhutan to introduce Policy of Zero Tolerance to Discipline in the year 2011. This has indeed propelled the educational leaders to fully realize that existing tools of disciplining students no longer fits the ever evolving discipline issues. The discipline in the 21st century should be proactive; focused on preventing conflicts and disruptions rather than on punishing misbehavior [15]. The study unfolds the following findings for necessary considerations for varied educational programs and purposes.

5.1 A visionary Principal is an Effective School Leader

The study reveals that principals possessing farsighted leadership qualities will be able to maintain student discipline very productively and efficiently. The principal should be a visionary leader with sound knowledge to impart prompt, judicious and effective school discipline [16]. The focus of school discipline is not to exercise authority or control but on whole school approach to discipline, where more importance should be give to the promotion of individual's self control.

Table 1. Abstract of data collection

Level of schools	No. of schools	No. of principal	No. counselors	No. of student	No. of parent	Total Participants
Higher and Middle secondary	3	3	3	6	3	15
Total:	3	3	3	6	3	15

5.2 Schools Need Well Documented Policy on School Discipline

The study unfurls that schools must have well debated and written discipline policy document. The policy document should be living and guiding document that not only protects school from any relevant agencies on matters pertaining to school discipline serves as a comprehensive guide to solve all school related issues.

5.3 Counseling Programs can be Alternatives to School Discipline Management

The information generated from research unfolds that proper and sustained counseling and life skills education would certainly help to mold and bring a positive change in behavioral problems of students. The counseling and guidance programs serves as platform for students who are in conflict with school discipline ethics to feel safe and comfortable to share grievances as the programs respect the privacy and confidentiality matters that have been discussed. Hence, the guidance and counseling programs should be implemented as a whole school approach to school discipline management in schools.

Counselors who build strong relationship in their classrooms also understand that problems are going to arise as the school year progresses [17]. A good and cordial relationship between a counselor and clients not only helps to mend their disruptive behavior pattern but enhances academic learning.

5.4 Alternatives to School Discipline Management

The study contends that an alternative discipline is an effort made by leaders of organizations, institutions and schools to correct behavioral misconduct by using alternative strategies other than age old practices of rigid and harsh discipline, without compromising the standards required for the normal function of a firm.

Methods of maintaining discipline in schools are not always successful [18]. The misbehavior of learners is common in all schools, although most schools managed to keep within limits. Hence, alternatives discipline management is crucial to avoid behavioral crisis of students.

5.5 Mass Participation in Meaningful Programs

The schools should come up with lot of interesting, challenging and meaningful co-curricular activities where whole students can be actively engaged. Such programs would help children to focus on activities of their interest and refrain from indulging in activities that contradicts with school discipline.

5.6 Parental Involvement

The school must initiate programs where parents are vigorously and frequently involved in their children's' academic and co-curricular activities. Providing an ample of opportunities for parents to interact with their children and teachers would help to understand their child better and establish a strong bonding with teachers too. Parental involvement in curbing indiscipline of students has a very pivotal role both within and outside school [19].

5.7 Spacious Classrooms with Less Strength

Less numbers of students in a large classroom allows free movement of students as well as teachers. Teachers are able to engage students in a desired manner which also allows them to enforce discipline effectively in the classroom.

5.8 Effective Discipline Management Strategies

Discipline in the school must be executed promptly, judiciously, effectively and consistently with clear terms of reference. Students will build trust and confidence in school norms and thereby alienate from indulging in an unacceptable behavior.

5.9 Harmonious Relation between Teachers and Students

A cordial relationship between teachers and students induces a warm atmosphere for educators to teach and a learner to learn. When learning becomes enjoyable and purposeful it most likely that learners will engage in misconduct.

5.10 Educators as a Role Model

An educator should possess a high integrity and moral conduct coupled with sound academic knowledge, where students looked upon as an icon or source of an exemplarily model to adopt good virtues for their present and future life styles. Students will respect, love and develop a genuine interest for learning their academic and moral lessons with minimum disturbances to school discipline management.

5.11 Shared and Well Delegated Leadership

A farsighted leader always delegates and decentralizes power of school management system. Students and teachers are taken on board to run the discipline and the management of school. Students are made responsible for their own behavior through shared leadership and responsibility. When such administration exists, students would not involve themselves knowingly to go against school's code of ethics.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Perception of Principals on School Discipline Management

The survey reveals that school principals must function as disciplinarian for the smooth function of the school system. The head of the school must ensure that every staff and students are given right justice by the school's discipline committee when it pertains to school discipline management. Principals should be looked upon by students or parents as highest authority for appeal when deserving justice are denied by discipline committee. Principals must make best use of counsellors to ensure that emotional needs and right counselling is given to students at right time. The study indicates that school should have well defined and deliberated written school policy that clearly out lining the roles of counsellor and school discipline committee.

6.2 Perception of Counsellors on School Discipline Management

The survey study depict that counsellors play an important role in transformation of students' behavioral change and character building through vigorous counseling and implementing corrective measures. The study posits that School counselor's primary responsibility lies in providing student well being services, which can be a whole school approach as well as in providing individual and group counseling.They are mandated to support students and help them find solutions to their problems. The pertinent role of counsellors should act as a bridge between the school management and the discipline committee. Counselors must help discipline committee in taking informed decision but not to interfere in decisions made by committee. Counseling services should not be treated as a disciplinary measure but as helping process. A school should have well discussed written school policy covering norms on school discipline management.

6.3 Perception of Students on School Discipline Management

The survey study contends any disruptive behavior challenges posed by student should be first be discussed and resolve by their peer helpers and class teacher. Next the counselors should be involved if the case needs to be brought to the notice of counselors for counseling and corrective measures. Then only, that discipline committee should be involved to investigate issues confronting students when class teacher and counselors refer the case to them. The survey study unveils that corporal punishment should not be used at all and the unmanageable case should be referred to relevant agencies for further management and treatment. The survey recommends that no students should be suspended or expelled from school but in extreme cases, child should be referred to agencies for corrective measures and treatment. All schools should have good school written policy incorporating rules and regulations of school for the smooth and better function of school.

6.4 Perceptions of Parents on School Discipline Management

The study denotes that nominating and selecting a good group of peer counselors so that they can guide student on school rules and regulations. Parents strongly feel that principals play an important leadership role in establishing school discipline both by effective administration and by setting an exemplary example role model to students. The study elucidates that principal should be simple, approachable but at the same time very firm and strict when it comes to the discipline issues. The existing practice of calling the student and the parent in a joint sitting with

discipline committee helps to understand the child properly and coming up with a solution for the betterment of the child rather than playing a blame game between parents and teachers. The study uncovers that school must implement comprehensive guidance and counseling program to all students to create awareness on discipline issues and counseling services to reduce discipline management issues. The study suggests that parents should be involved in the major school events, particularly when a child is involved has a disruptive behavioral issues. School's discipline committee should listen to both the parties and then investigate to take firm and right decisions. At same time school discipline committee should permit the parties to understand and negotiate themselves to resolve their issues. This opportunity make parties to realize that at the end all involved stakeholders should co- exist for the benefit of our students. The outcome of the study shows that issues mentioned above must reflected in the school policy for the effective function and record of the school system.

6.5 Major Recurring Theme

The study shows that principals as a leader of the school should be a farsighted and dynamic not only to led school but to make difference in the life of students and staff. It indicates that school principals play an instrumental role in creating a conducive, vibrant and responsive school culture. The study unfurls that, school discipline committee should take unbiased and well informed decisions pertaining to students' disruptive behavioral challenges. The study strongly recommends that schools to have commonly agreed terms of reference (TOR) written policy on discipline management in place. The study clearly posits that counseling and life skill programs should be alternatives to school discipline management. The discipline norms so framed should be implemented vigorously as whole school approach to curve the disciplinary issues posed by students. The study also reveals that corporal punishment on students should not be enforced at all as it is not helpful but has lifelong undesirable impacts on individuals. It also compels the students to leave the school with a mindset that school is a treacherous place for children. Finally, the study vehemently suggests that, suspension and expulsion should never be enforced to students but refer for further management and treatment to relevant agencies in case of unmanageable disruptive behaviors posed by children.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The ministry of Education (MOE) should develop a well defined National Policy on School Discipline Management.
2. This national policy on discipline management must have legal backing to safeguard all stakeholders.
3. All school must have their own written school policy document which includes school discipline management that is clearly understood by all stakeholders.
4. Student should not be suspended or expelled from the school. However, unmanageable students should be referred to relevant agency for rehabilitation purpose.
5. Ministry of Education must deploy full time school counselor to every schools of Bhutan.
6. Alternatives to school discipline management must be thoroughly investigated and explored by schools and Ministry of Education.
7. More research students should be encouraged to conduct research on school discipline management.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard guideline school consent and ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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