

# Learner Discipline Management In Secondary Schools In Mauritius: A Misconception

Dr Belle Louis Jinot

Department of Education, Open University of Mauritius,  
Reduit, Mauritius

*Abstract: This paper attempted to reconceptualise learner discipline in Mauritius. Based on the content analysis approach, the study analysed the concept of learner discipline as it is approached from the perspectives of the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research on Mauritius, the secondary school principals, parents, educators and learners. Through non-participant observation and interviews among 80 participants, the study found that there was a misconception among the stakeholders about what learner discipline is and this explains the reasons of the failure of the learner discipline management by principals. This study recommends that there should be a shift from the custodial view of learner discipline to the humanistic view of discipline so that proactive, preventive and positive learner discipline strategies are used, rather than the reactive and punitive measures that are currently being adopted in schools.*

*Keywords: misconception, learner discipline, shift, custodial view, humanistic view.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Discipline is an essential component of the behaviour of learners; without it, the school is inefficient in achieving its core mission – effective teaching and learning. It allows the school to instil a safe and saner school environment. However, learner discipline is a major school problem in state secondary schools in Mauritius. Learners in secondary schools are adolescents who are in a period of identity crisis, disorientation and discovery (Naganandini, 2017). They are in a phase of their life when they witness many biological, physical and hormonal changes, and this affects the quality of their relationships with their classmates, educators, the school superintendent and the principal (Kumari & Kumar, 2017). Due to these internal factors, the learner manifests a lack of discipline in schools. However, discipline is also the interaction of the nature-nurture principle, whereby the behaviour of the learner is also influenced by factors in his/her immediate environment. Such factors are the family, the peer pressure, the behaviour of the educators, the leadership of the principal, the media and the community (Belle, 2014). Belle (2017) found that the education system of the country is also

responsible for the lack of discipline among secondary school learners. The flaws of the system are institutionalised private tuition, the employment of supply educators, the highly examination-oriented curriculum, a lack of extracurricular activities and the constitutional rights of learners.

It is obvious that because of the internal and external factors which are outside the control of the learners that they manifest a lack of discipline in Mauritius. The various forms of manifestations identified in a study carried out by the Mauritius Research Council in 2012 are unjustified absences from the school and bunking classes, verbal aggression, bullying, using mobile phone, class disruption, lateness, stealing, work not done, scribbling or using foul language, and smoking cigarettes and gandia. Hooliganism, improper uniform, damaging school property and immoral acts are other forms of learner indiscipline (Jeeruburkhan, 2016).

In such a situation of havoc and general learner indiscipline, it is obvious that learner discipline management has become a priority for the state secondary school principal. In many countries, the principal spends much of his/her time on disciplining learners (Meador, 2017). Learner discipline management is one of the leadership function of the principal.

## II. THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The paper aims at examining the current conception of learner discipline by all stakeholders of the education sector and to critically analyse it. Based on the information gathered, the researcher attempts to reconceptualise learner discipline by focusing on the learner at the centre of the discipline problem.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative approach to determine the insights and the perceptions of the 80 participants (6 principals, 24 educators, 24 learners, 24 parents and 2 school superintendents from 6 secondary schools) from twelve schools in the educational zone 2. Focus group interviews were carried out with educators, parents and learners; one-to-one interview was done with the principals and the superintendents. Besides, non-participant observation was done in 2 schools. Content analysis was done in order to obtain the findings.

Based on the findings, this current paper aims at providing a report about the conception of the learner discipline, which should be viewed from a new perspective if the principal is to be successful in his/her learner discipline management.

## IV. STUDY REPORT

The report that follows examines the concept of learner discipline in the context of Mauritius, and attempts to construct a new perspective of learner discipline.

### LEARNER DISCIPLINE: A DEFINITION

Learner discipline is multidimensional as it is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In this paper, discipline is defined from two perspectives: the traditional perspective and the humanistic perspective. From the traditional perspective, it is defined as the degree of order and structure that is required to maintain socially desirable learner behaviour (Ugboko & Adediwura, 2012). This custodial view of discipline implies that rules and regulations are set and learners have to obey them strictly. Failure to abide by these rules and regulations leads to the implementation of punitive and reactive disciplinary strategies. Learners are punished for defiance or disruption (Losen, Martinez & Okelola, 2014). Therefore, discipline is punishment. Such strategies aim at modifying the learner's behaviour whereby the latter is considered as the problem. Reactive or disciplinary strategies are detention, in-school and out-school suspension, corporal punishment and the use of video surveillance cameras, which are based on the zero-tolerance policy and the school-to-prison pipeline.

From the humanistic perspective, learner discipline is defined as the teaching of self-discipline whereby he/she takes responsibility for his/her own behaviour. It goes beyond discipline. It is the "internalisation of discipline" which ensures that the learner develops autonomy and responsible citizenship (Bear, 2010). Mahatmaharti, Triyono and

Hanurawan (2017) add that it should be viewed as a constructive and positive force measured through three dimensions: self-ability to delay satisfaction, self-regulating ability and self-control. The learner is therefore in a position to judge by himself/herself the difference between right and wrong behaviour, and between socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

### THE CONCEPTION OF DISCIPLINE IN MAURITIUS

All stakeholders in the education section, from the Ministry of Education to the school principals, parents, educators, superintendents, and learners consider discipline at school to be the safety of learners who should obey to rules and regulations; otherwise, reactive and punitive disciplinary measures are used to restore learner discipline. Discipline is considered to be the control of learner behaviour.

By using content analysis approach to review the different documents from the Mauritian Ministry of Education, the transcribed interviews and the observation logs, the following can be observed:

The School Management Manual for Principals and the Student Behaviour Policy state the following disciplinary strategies to deal with learners' lack of discipline in state secondary schools: using a verbal or written warning; suspension of privileges; issue of a severe warning by informing parents through the registered post; detention; immediate temporary suspension for gross misconduct; and expulsion from school as last resort strategy if there is no improvement in the learner's behaviour. These actions are followed up through counselling by educators; giving a special report to learners who continue to be disruptive to monitor their work, conduct and attendance, support from the pastoral care committee; counselling from the educational psychologists (Ministry of Education, culture and Human Resources, 2009; Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, 2015). However, corporal punishment is prohibited in Mauritius, as the country has ratified the United Nations Conventions on the rights of the child (1989), and passed laws such as the Child Protection Act (1994), and the Ombudsperson for the Children Act (2003) in order to protect and promote the constitutional rights of the learners.

From a study carried out by Belle (2017), in the focus group interviews carried out with principals, educators, parents, and learners, parents suggested that to maintain learner discipline, the following disciplinary strategies would be effective: enforcement of laws and school rules in schools; calling the Brigade des Mineurs who would talk to the learners who are at risk of manifesting disruptive behaviour; referral to the Police Academy to train the learners about socially acceptable behaviour through drilling; no flexibility on the implementation of rules; the use of authoritative leadership with learners; a greater use of surveillance cameras on the school compound; giving supplementary school and home work to those who are more likely to be indisciplined; greater empowerment of the school principal to expel learners who do not improve their behaviour; and the implementation of more strict disciplinary measures.

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that all stakeholders have a misconception of discipline. Discipline for Mauritians, in general, means punishment. Indeed, all the disciplinary measures proposed by the principals, educators, parents, learners and superintendents imply that the behaviour of the learner should be modified in order to reduce this school problem. All of them are measures that are implemented to counter the misbehaviour after the manifestation of the lack of discipline. The learner is punished because of his/her non-compliance to the rules and regulation set by the school administration or the Ministry of Education. The protocol for dealing with misbehaviour is prescribed in the Student Behaviour Policy document; this implies that the school principal has to respect these protocols in case of learners' indiscipline. So, people has a custodial view of learner discipline where the adults who represent the authority has the power to control the behaviour of the learner.

However, the adoption and implementation of these reactive and punitive disciplinary measures have significant impact on the learners' behaviour. Instead of reducing the manifestation of a lack of discipline, learners who are get detention, temporary suspension, rustication, or are deprived of their privileges and who are victimised or criminalised, manifest more serious misbehaviour. The Human Rights Watch (2010) found the following effects of using punitive measures, namely difficulty to concentrate in studies, deteriorating peer relationships, poorer academic performance, development of a greater dislike for the authority from the educators and the school principal, negative high risk adolescent behaviour or juvenile delinquency, and the manifestation of more anti-social behaviour.

#### A SHIFT TO THE HUMANISTIC PERSPECTIVE OF DISCIPLINE IN MAURITIUS: AN URGENCY

It is obvious that punitive disciplinary measures are destructive for disciplining learners. State secondary school should not rely on harsh and threatening actions that make of the learner a victim. The learner who misbehaves is one who needs help and guidance from those people who have the authority and responsibility to act in loco parentis so as to educate him/her to be self-discipline. There should therefore be a shift from the custodial perspective of discipline to the humanistic perspective of discipline in the Mauritian education sector. The stakeholders should view the learner who displays disruptive behaviour not as the problem to the effective teaching and learning process, but as the solution to the phenomenon. Disciplinary strategies that the principal intends to use to maintain effective discipline should be learner-centered, not authority-focused. The learner should be part and parcel of the school disciplinary plan that is devised by the school principal.

Proactive or preventive disciplinary measures should be taken by the state secondary school principal. They are alternative to reactive and punitive disciplinary measures. In the context of the twenty-first century demands for the respect of inalienable rights of humanity in general, and of the child, in particular, it is important that those who have authority and power do not use their power to cause harm to the vulnerable learner. They should rather protect him/her by helping him/her

to grow as a learner who is responsible for his/her own behaviour. Principals, as leaders of learner discipline management, must respect the dignity of the learner. For instance, the Ombudsperson for the Children Act (2003) of Mauritius stipulates that the government must "(a) ensure that the rights, needs and interests of children are given full consideration by public bodies, private authorities, individuals and associations of individuals; (b) promote the rights and best interests of children; and (c) promote the compliance with the Convention of Rights of the Child." Though reactive measures such as corporal punishment is prohibited in schools, yet the study carried out by Belle (2017) found that educators and principals are still using it to restore positive discipline among learners in state secondary schools.

#### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above analysis, it is obvious that all the stakeholders, starting by the Ministry of Education of Mauritius, should change their conception of the school problem, learner discipline. They need to rethink about the way they look at the problem so that they come forward and devise disciplinary strategies that take into consideration the dignity of the learner as an individual and as a child, so that the adolescent learner does not lose his/her self-esteem. Indeed, learners who have low self-esteem cannot deal with their stress and they become more frustrated; this may drive them to manifesting a lack of discipline at schools (Naganandini, 2017). The school should adopt a comprehensive school-wide positive behaviour system which consists of preventive and interventionist measures to improve school discipline practices (Bershad & Hudson, 2017). Such a framework is used to support the learner by increasing his/her self-concept. Such disciplinary strategies are choice-making, self-management, use of praise, increasing student opportunity to respond, compliance training, check-in/check-out, positive peer reporting, pre-correction, active supervision, rules and behaviour expectations, providing feedback, compliance behaviour game and replacement behaviour training. They are evidenced-based strategies that have proved to be successful in many countries (The Vermont Department of Education (2013).

Moreover, the Ministry of Education should start with a process of decentralisation of authority for decision-making concerning learner discipline as discipline should henceforth be dealt at the school level. This is important as each school is a unique organisation with its own characteristics. So, the discipline policy cannot be taken from the Ministry level to be dictated onto the schools. Each state school should be able to design a comprehensive school plan that would cater the needs and expectations of its learners after the process of data collection about the problem of learner behaviour. The principal needs to use the inclusive and visionary leadership in order to have the collaboration of each and every school stakeholder in the process of effective learner discipline management.

The school should also develop an effective school-home partnership which would allow to create a synchronous approach to learner discipline so that there is no dichotomy in

disciplining the child by the school and the parents. Parents should be an invaluable partner in the process of causing the shift in paradigm about learner discipline in Mauritius. It is only within such a new perspective of learner discipline that the problem of discipline may be eliminated.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This report based on the observation of the researcher and on the interpretations of the findings has enlightened about the fact that learner discipline is misconceived by the Ministry of Education, the principals, the superintendents, the parents and the learners. This necessitates a new conception of this particular school problem. It is also worth noting that the traditional conception of learner discipline has proved to be an obstacle to effective learner discipline management, and in many countries, the shift was made to a new perspective of learner discipline that facilitates the management of learner behaviour.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Bear, G. 2010. Discipline: Effective school practices. NASSP.
- [2] Belle, L. J. (2017). A critical review of the current education system of Mauritius and the learner discipline problem in Mauritian state secondary schools. *Journal of Education and Social Sciences*, 8(1), 47-55.
- [3] Belle, L. J. 2014. Learner discipline management. Reduit: Open University of Mauritius.
- [4] Bershad, C. J., & Hudson, J. E. 2017. Team users' guide: Positive school discipline course for school leaders. USA: National Charter School Resource Centre.
- [5] Human Rights Watch. 2010. Corporal punishment in schools and its effects on academic success: Joint HRW/ACLU statement. Retrieved on 5/12/2017 from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/15/corporal-punishment-schools-and-its-effect-academic-success-joint-hrw/aclu-statement>.
- [6] Kumari, S., & Kumar, P. 2017. Student alienation among college students in relation to their (restrictive-permissive) parental behaviour. *International Journal of Advanced Education and Research*, 2(3), 204-211.
- [7] Losen, D., Martinez, T., & Okelola, V. 2014. Keeping California's kids in school. Los Angeles, CA: University of California.
- [8] Mahatmaharti, A. K., Triyono., & Hanurawan, F. 2017. Construct validity in research development instruments: The analysis of self-discipline factors. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22(6), 33-44.
- [9] Meador, D. (2017). The role of the principal in schools. Retrieved on 28/11/2017 from <https://www.thoughtco.com/guide-to-school-discipline-for-principals>.
- [10] Mendels, P. (2012). The Effective principal. *Leadership*, 33(1), 54-58.
- [11] Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Resources. (2015). The Student Behaviour Policy. Phoenix: IVTB House.
- [12] Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources. (2009). The School Management Manual: Policies, procedures, and guidelines on school management issues. IVTB House, Phoenix: School Management Division.
- [13] Naganandini, R. 2017. Self-esteem among adolescents. *International Journal of Advanced Education and Research*, 2(4), 198-199.
- [14] Ugboko, F. E., & Adediwura, A. A. (2012). A study of principal supervisory strategies and secondary school discipline. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 2(1), 41-49.
- [15] Vermont Department of Education. 2013. Vermont multi-tiered system of supports Response to Intervention and Instruction (MTSS-RtII) field guide. Vermont: Vermont Reads Institute.