

## Review

# Discipline as a tool for effective school management

\*Henry L. N. Onderi and Florence Y. Odera

Bondo University College, Kenya

Abstract

The measure of the executive is the ability to get the right thing at the right time. This usually involves doing what other people have overlooked as well as avoiding what is unproductive. To be effective, is the job of the executive. One of the most effective management tool used by an executive of an institution or organisation is discipline. To many people, discipline means punishment, pain, and fear. According to this view discipline is a negative word and considered as not being positive and educative. This paper discusses the place of punishment as a discipline in education. It outlines the five types of punishment and describes how they are used in schools or in the classroom, reasons for punishing students and the results of such punishment on students learning. It will also examine the implications of discipline in relation to the government ban on corporal punishment and the new constitution of vision 2030. The paper ends by providing suggestions that principals of secondary schools need to learn essential skills which are effective for school management.

**Keywords:** Discipline, principals, punishment, secondary school, management, Kenya.

## INTRODUCTION

Ask any teacher, whether newly employed or experienced what his/her biggest problem with student is and he/she will certainly answer discipline and classroom control (Mbithi, 1974). The school discipline is one of the frequent problems faced by most teachers throughout their teaching career. To them discipline means punishment, pain and fear, so it is a negative word. It has to do with correction of a wrong doer at home, in the school or at the place of work. Discipline is also a specific means used to punish offenders which is training through suffering, so it is a polite substitute for punishment. Punishment is therefore regarded as a positive force used to maintain and bring desirable law and order in the school, because a school exists to be of valuable service to students, teachers, parents and community (Kleinig, 1985).

However, according to Were (2006) the word discipline means a system of guiding the individuals to make reasonable decision responsibly. It is also action taken by adults to help a child change his or her behaviour. Varkey (1997) adds that true discipline imply

sincere love for one another being disciplined, and it also means the ability to discern what is right and to have some facility to do it. He states that discipline should occur in an atmosphere devoid of fear or resentment and to be handled in polite and firm manner.

### The importance of discipline in schools

In all institutions of learning, discipline is very important because it trains individuals to develop responsible behaviour leading to self-disciplined person. Discipline exposes students to the art of self-control, and social chaos can only be avoided if restraints are built into the character of students (Were 2006). Discipline exposes children to ways of handling the challenges and obligations of living and equips them with the personal strength needed to meet the demands imposed on them by the school and later in adult responsibility (Were, 2006). Discipline makes it possible for parents to pass their values and attitudes to their children in an atmosphere of genuine love. It also stimulates tender affection possible by mutual respect between parents and children, between children and teachers. Were (2006) believes that teaching children to be disciplined allows the live, humanity, and divinity of God to be introduced

\*Corresponding Author E-mail: [honderi@bondo-uni.ac.ke](mailto:honderi@bondo-uni.ac.ke),  
[henryonderi@yahoo.com](mailto:henryonderi@yahoo.com)

to young children.

### **Moral Education**

Discipline is part of moral education which is important in the development on the child's character (Were, 2006). According to Kleinig (1985) classroom discipline is frequently regarded as having a moral dimension. It involves preparing a moral atmosphere self-discipline, and moral behaviour. Discipline should establish good conditions for learning and provide a

Without discipline, a school or organisation cannot function properly in order to achieve its goals and vision. According to Mbithi (1974) discipline is the pillar for the success of a school in academic and extra curricular activities. This is because effective and efficient management of all organisational organs depend on the overall degree of discipline of the executive and the input of all the people in the organization. At the same time, Mbithi (1974) adds that discipline is also a negative word and has to do with correction of wrong doers and involves punishment.

However, discipline can also be regarded as positive force as reported by Mbithi (1974). It can be used a way of training children, not correction but guiding the individual to make a reasonable decisions responsibly. Mbithi (1974) believes that in classroom teaching, discipline means the control of a class to achieve desirable behaviour. As such the Principle of a school must have a thorough knowledge and understanding of discipline as a subject. The principal must device methods of how to maintain good discipline as a strategy to ensure the attainment of educational goals and objectives. Discipline in a school creates an orderly atmosphere in which meaningful achievement of learning can take place and positive value, social skills and attitudes can be inculcated. But while the educational management strive to attain good discipline, there will always be some students who need some corrective discipline as a result of being indisciplined or having committed an offence or going against the school rules. In such cases the educational management should apply appropriate procedures when handling discipline cases.

Furthermore, educational institutions are usually viewed in the level of both academic and psychological achievement of their students, so discipline of students is a must. During induction program for new students and teachers, they are often informed about the school expectations, rules and regulations, to enlighten them about the philosophy and principles governing individual expectations of the institution.

### **School Rules**

In order to maintain the necessary condition of order in a

school, and attain discipline it is imperative that students, parents and teachers must be responsible and committed to adhere to schools rules and regulations (Mbithi, 1974). Therefore, certain rules must be formulated and obeyed by all students. Any violation of the rules calls for the use of discipline and punishment. For this reason, a school disciplinary system exists to establish an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect both within and outside the school. Such rules may include attendance, absenteeism, punctuality, wearing school uniform, good behaviour etc.. All school rules should be drawn up to include the value, needs and interests of the individual child and the community. The rules should not merely be a list of negative instructions. Students should be told the conditions that govern each rule so that they will be able to understand and "know the rules in advance and will have a pretty good idea of what they are likely to suffer from breaking them" (Smith, 1985).

Consequently, this study is based on the theory of discipline advanced by Kleinig (1985), which states that discipline has often been thought to be synonymous with punishment, but despite close similarities, they are distinct notions. According to Kleinig punishment is deliberate, presumably unpleasant imposition. It is associated by some moral failure and its main immediate purpose is reform or corrections. On the other hand, discipline is the practice of training people to obey rules and orders and punishing them if they do not (Simatwa, 2010).

At the same time, it is imperative that legislated learning and effective discipline requires the consent, either explicit or tacit of parents and pupils. While few children will enjoy punishment, most will submit to it provided it is perceived as being equitable. Moreover, to be effective, punishment should never appear arbitrary. School heads award teachers great power over their students and perceived abuse of his power to punish children in arbitrary ways can be the source of much resentment and hostility. According to the Bible, in the book of Proverbs (19:18) it says that " Discipline your children while they are young to learn. If you don't, you are helping them to destroy themselves. This advances the theory of spare the rod, spoil the child.

According to (Mbithi, 1974), the aim of discipline is based on the idea that the child is naturally wrong and that this bad behaviour must be corrected. Therefore, Principals/of schools should ensure that all his/her teachers know exactly what punishment they can give to students, for what reason and how they can go about it, because there are various types of punishment for various offences. For example, there is corporal punishment (now abolished in Kenya), detention, suspension, expulsion, extra assignments, withdrawal of rewards, reprimands etc and if a teacher is not aware of the consequences surrounding punishment, he/she can be prosecuted. In most countries there are procedures laid down in educational laws and regulations governing

punishment, teachers must follow them very closely. At the same time, teachers should make sure that they are morally justified in using any form of punishment, because punishment sometimes creates fear, hatred and hostility in the child. The duty of the teacher is to maintain law and order in the school both as a condition for learning and because it symbolises his competence. The teacher should use discipline as a training device to guide the individual child to make reasonable decisions and to promote effective conditions for learning. Etisi (2008) reports that teachers have the biggest stake in the school discipline plan for the vision 2030.

## **Punishment**

Punishment as either involving or making the unpleasant happen or removing some reward or privilege. Were (2006) point out that the effect of punishment is to suppress the repeat of that behaviour on which punishment was administered. For many years, punishment has been used as disciplinary measure. However, there are two approaches to punishment in schools today. These are the traditional approach to punishment and the modern or humanistic approach to punishment. The traditional approach seems to have been based on the idea that the child is naturally bad, and that his/her badness must be controlled and dealt with. Some people even view the child's nature as being evil and this evil must be dealt with ruthlessly. Consequently, in the early days of education and schooling, punishment was considered as the only disciplinary measures to be used on wrong doers. Punishment was then based on three major aims: that is punishment as a revenge, secondly punishment as a deterrent which was used to scare other children and therefore to minimize a possible increase in the same crime, and thirdly, punishment was used as a means of reform.

## **Revenge and as deterrent form of punishment**

These forms of punishment were authoritarian in that the teacher commanded and the child obeyed. Kleinig, (1982:231) says that the "school is remembered for its regimented life, the plethora of petty regulations, the threats of penalties for non-compliance, the harsh or shrill tones, the stinging flesh, the detention" and the expulsions which were not useful to the child. The child was expected to be obedient all the time because obedience was considered as virtue, and therefore he could not question or talk about the teachers' opinion or decision, as this was considered to be disobedient. Therefore, punishment was to be inflicted on the child because he/she disobeyed the rule and did something morally reprehensible and that is the reason for its

infliction (Kleinig, 1982:232). These approaches to punishment are still being used in some schools.

The modern or humanistic approach to punishment in schools is a system whereby the teacher arranges good conditions for healthy learning (Simatwa, 2007; Morrison and Macntyre (1982).. It is based on the realization that the child is a developing individual who needs to be helped to develop his/her personality so he/she must be trained to make the right choice for life (Were 2006). The teacher must guide the child to eliminate undesirable behaviour through mutual respect, guidance, counselling, and constructive suggestions Simatwa 2007). For example, if a boy in the class has a habit of fighting others in the field, the teacher should try to find out the cause of this through counselling, and if he finds that it is because of either bullying or nicknaming, the boy can be asked to write down the names of those who offend him and take their names to the teacher. The teacher through counselling would ensure that the fighting behaviour has completely disappeared, the name-calling dropped gradually and the boy's habit changed.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education has given guidelines to be followed by the principals, teachers, and all stakeholders in handling discipline cases in secondary schools by strengthening of guidance and counselling in secondary schools, teaching moral values to the students through such courses as Social education and ethics, (Were, 2006). Effective and correct channels of communication, adherence to school rules and regulations and involvement of all education stake holders in decision-making process.

Therefore, when teachers believe that punishing a child is the only effective way to produce submission and desired behaviour in children, utilitarian people do not agree (Kleinig, 1985), and contend that punishment is only justifiable if some greater good is to come out of the child, and that it must have power to prevent the same offence being committed again, otherwise the child will not be able to distinguish punishment from retaliation or vengeance, as these acts reflect our crude emotional feeling rather than our reasons for using punishment whether it be retribution, deterrence or correction, and she/he should be able to acknowledge the spirit in which the punishment is to be administered. Because punishment as retribution is unjustified in schools since teachers often fail to understand or realize the real cause of the child's behaviour and often acts emotionally in front of the pupils. Teachers should be above the level of mere vengeance and should show that the only reason for the punishment is that the misdeed is against the best interest of the child and the class (Were, 2006).

Although teachers are justified to punish children in certain cases, some of them go to the extreme and may punish one offender severely, as an example to the others in class. This is not fair because cases are known where teachers have caused permanent injury to some children, and others have even caused some fatalities of

students. This is another reason why Mbithi 1974 sees all punishment in itself as an evil act so long as it involve the infliction of pain, and says that we should only use it to minimize the increase of similar offences and to stamp out such crime in society. The teacher must weigh the degree of punishment, the age of the child and the climate in the class before taking action. If for example, a child in the class keeps on annoying the teacher by bullying others, and she/he decides to slap him, Bentham says it is better than to allow the child to cause more damage, but he doesn't qualify the type of slap and to what degree a teacher should punish a child, whether it is hard slap, light or a sever one. Therefore, the utilitarian group feels that although teachers should punish children," it would be wrong to inflict punishment if it was unlikely to bring about greater social order, or if it produced problems worse than those it was designed to prevent, or if the wrong doing could be prevented by some other means such as education in social behaviour" (Docking, 1980), and of course, teacher can use withdrawal of reward which is much more polite and is an effective method of punishment as well.

At the same time, Neill (1968) supports Klinig's (1985) idea on punishment and believes that hitting someone does not count as punishment for it causes injury and that is not the aim of punishment. He feels that punishment is wrong but agrees that a school should have a right to correct bad habits. However, Neill contradict himself when he particularly views punishment as involving the idea of just retaliation for an offence and says that each spanking is vented hatred and each spanking is bound to arouse more and more hatred in the child. Consequently, since punishment is administered for moral wrong doing, the child should be left to learn morality through natural consequences.

However, even under the very best school condition, there will be found students who have disciplinary cases and the handling of such cases is often the concern of the head or Principal and the staff who should control the situation. The role of discipline in a school should be the elimination of conditions under which such disciplinary cases cannot exists (Were, 2006). In fact I also believe that teachers are justified in punishing children, and that as a general rule, punishment must be inflicted on children with greater caution as a general rule. There is need to emphasize that it is the duty of the teacher to discipline a child when there is a mistake, but he/she should think about it , and not just to act in an arrogant manner. The teacher should be guided by the school rules and the guidelines from the Ministry of Education concerning punishment (Mbithi 1974). As such, teachers should have principle on which to base punishment because the attitude of respect for a person is morally basic in a stronger sense.

Mbithi (1974) also believed that moral quality should be developed in the young child, and that a child should be brought up to be truthful, obedient, temperate and

furthermore regards discipline as essential for learning, and without it, one learns nothing or at least very little. Mbithi (2002) further noted that discipline should be efficient in making learner accomplish a task at hand, and to develop human nature and that used to enforce instruction. Therefore, teachers should not only be concerned with what the child learn, but with his personal development as well. That is why Peters (1976) says that it is better to use punishment if in the long run the wrong doing of the child is going to change and he becomes a better person. He strongly believes that "a small amount of pain inflicted on offenders is les of an evil than the larger amount of pain which would be caused by the refusal to attach sanctions to socially important rules."

### **Negative effect of school punishment**

However, the worry with punishing children is that it has the power to demoralise the child. Consequently, when a teacher wants to use punishment he should go by moral educational requirement because punishment can cause a child to hate to come to school and once a child is no longer willing to learn then the positive value of punishment in education becomes less important. We need punishment in schools to create conditions for good learning atmosphere since there is enough evidence to show that it helps learning. As such, teachers should not use it to force education. Because this can also bring fear, produce resentment and hostility on the part of the learner. Once hostility develops, it may have bad consequences for the child that result in to fear. From my experience as a teacher, fear also increases anxiety which has drastic consequences such as worries which can affect a large segment of the child's experience, and once the child has worries he/she can develop a feeling of insecurity in learning and this makes punishment undesirable. That is why Richmond (1968:100) feels that when children are beaten, pain or fear frequently has results of which it is not pleasant to speak about and that are likely to be a source of shame, a shame that unnerves and depresses the mind."

Therefore, before any steps are taken to administer punishment, the Principal or Head teacher need to make sure that he/she is not making a mountain out of a molehill, and that he/she has satisfied himself/herself that the teachers are not the cause of the problem. Since all behaviour has a cause or causes, effort should be aimed at identifying the cause of the problems. It should be remembered that punishment may not always provide a solution to the problem. Punishment may intensify the problem of behaviour for the student. This may "make the matter even more complex because punishment however morally fitting could fail miserably in its implementation, perhaps making the culprit's behaviour even worse." (Docking, 1980:205). For example, a parent or a teacher who always uses physical punishment when he/she is

angry provides the child with an example that the child might follow at some later point when angry.

### **School regulations or rules guiding punishment**

The Principal/Head teacher and staff should therefore be very careful in deciding what punishment to administer to students who go against school rules and regulations because each offence requires different disciplinary action and different punishment as well. Any member of the staff should consider whether it is fitting to punish a child and need to be clear about the educational and moral obligations and even psychological impact it can cause or produce. The teacher should also be conversant with educational laws and regulations governing the administration of punishment to avoid any criminal charges. It is important for the teacher to be very clear in mind about the possible outcome of any punishment so the teacher should not have any bad intention or ill feeling and hatred so as cause injury to the child when giving any punishment. It is also advisable that teachers should not use threats in an effort to enforce verbal punishment. From my experience, some teachers are fond of shouting at students in loud voice, and also threaten them loud. However, threats that are not carried out only lower the position of the teacher and make him/her look foolish.

### **Types of punishment**

Teachers should use verbal reprimands instead of threats, and that if possible, a soft reprimand should be one of the first types of punishment a teacher should use to deal with any problem in the school or class. Any form of punishment should not be punitive in nature but corrective and educational (Were, 2006). The purpose of punishment should therefore be to change the child's behaviour and let him learn to make his behaviour conform to the school's rules, and to make the child aware of certain valuable moral values involved when they are punished. Teachers need to educate children through punishment to learn and even to become aware of the things they should not do to avoid being punished. As such, punishment should be viewed as something educative that should reveal entirely different dimension of values, namely the moral dimension) from that which is bound merely by fear or loss of hope. Therefore, if any teacher feels that he/she must punish a child then it should not be administered in anger nor should it results in degrading the student before his/her classmates (Mbithi, 1974). Publicly scolding a student will make him/her feel bad and could probably turn the rest of the class against the teacher, and this will affect learning. The teacher should work with the child's uniqueness and find out individual

differences in respect of temperament, sensitivities and reactions before taking any action.

Nevertheless, once a particular punishment is decided upon, the teacher should remain firm about it. For example, the head of a school is justified to suspend a student from class for an offence committed outside the school compound provided the offence is serious and is reported to the police and calls for immediate action. Because the teacher's legal authority to punish can extend outside the school provided that the offence is related to the welfare of the school.

### **Assignments**

Secondly, some teachers give extra assignment as punishment for those who are weak or who fail to score the right answer. This is wrong. Teachers should not use homework as a form of punishment but should give it to the children to encourage them to work hard. It is not right to use homework as a punishment because it can make a student hate the subject and spoil his/her progress. Extra assignment should be used as a teaching device and not as punishment.

### **Detention**

Thirdly, detention is another common form of punishment used by many teachers. It means that students are kept in after school hours or during midday break when others go for lunch or go home. Students who are detained are required to perform some tasks that include manual work in the class or in the school playground. However, there is a problem with detention as a punishment. When a teacher decides to use detention he should inform the parents of the child in advance and this is not easy where communication is poor, and again in urban centres or cities students who are dropped at the school by the parents and collected at a particular time in the evening after classes. Even the students who use public transport will find a problem to travel home late in the evening and this is very inconvenient to them. Similarly, teachers who remain in the school after duty to supervise these students have not been in favour of it. Docking (1980) adds that practical difficulties can arise by children going home late and teachers can feel resentful at having to give up time in this way. As a result many teachers do not see the sense and find it difficult to justify the principles that regulate the use of punishment by detention.

### **Corporal punishment**

Fourthly, corporal punishment is another type of punishment administered to students in both developed and developing countries. Corporal punishment can be

seen as a painful, intentionally inflicted (by striking a child) physical penalty administered by a person in authority for disciplinary purposes. He stated that corporal punishment can occur anywhere and whippings, beatings, paddling and flogging are specific forms of corporal punishment. However, in Kenya, the Ministry of Education defined corporal punishment as the infliction of pain on an errant learner by a teacher using a well-defined cane, and in accordance with the stipulation of the Education Act Cap 211, Laws of Kenya 1980) corporal punishment was used in schools and for a long time it remained the most commonly used form of punishment. Due to misuse of corporal punishment in schools it was banned in most countries in the world because it contravened the children's Acts which outlawed any form of abuse of children. In 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to ban all forms of corporal punishment of children. By passing their corporal punishment law, Sweden set a good example for other nations. In Britain the law enforced this ban in 1987 because this type of punishment is applied to the body and produces physical pain. In Canada, corporal punishment was banned in 2004 in public and private schools. But in Kenya, caning in schools was abolished and outlawed on March 13<sup>th</sup> 2001 by the Ministry of Education. However, teachers noted that while section 127 (1) of the children' Act states that anyone who assaults a child is guilty of a felony. But Sub section 127 (1) of the same section says that nothing takes away the right of a parent, guardian, or custodian of a child to punish a child reasonably and teachers still use corporal punishment in schools.

A report by Hyman and Wise (1979) indicated that:

- 1) Corporal punishment often has a negative effect on students achievement;
- 2) Can produce strong negative emotional side effects;
- 3) Quite often is followed by a aggressive behaviour
- 4) It also leads some students to avoid further interaction with the teacher;
- 5) Corporal punishment provides a model for aggressive behaviour

Lastly, the use of corporal punishment by institutions as a tool for discipline and correcting students does not seem to have educative goals. Corporal punishment is viewed as another form of external control as opposed to internal school or classroom discipline. Above all, Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNRC) required governments to protect children from all forms of physical or mental violence while in the care of parents and others.

## Suspension

The fifth type of punishment practised in many secondary schools is suspension. Suspension is defined as the removal of the student from the school setting for the

violation of a school rule. This happens in some cases when the student's is so dangerous that removal from the school is the only option to bring order in the school. But sometimes students are sent home for a short period or for a long time. However, it is not mutually agreed that it is the best form of punishment because suspension inhibits the development of self-discipline. Suspending a student from school also interfere with learning activities. In some cases students have missed sitting for examination. A study by Pinnell (1985) noted that school policies on suspension often work in ways to discourage self-discipline and showed harsh treatment of students who are suspended. In particular, the researcher found that suspension policies:

- 1) Teach that power is absolute and arbitrary;
- 2) Removes the students from the place where he is to be taught;
- 3) May put the students irreparably behind in school work;
- 4) Is often disproportionately applied to minority group;
- 5) Teaches students a science of helplessness and build anger if applied without proper due progress.

The above finding indicates clearly that control of students behaviour is located outside of the students as opposed to being a process of developing and instilling controls.

Nevertheless, punishment should be very rare and should be used only after all other avenues or alternatives have been explored. It is also very important for the teacher to have a wide knowledge of what it means to bring effective learning in the class. The teacher should be able to identify the causes of misbehaviour and their motives. For example, at the beginning of the student's puberty stage, there is a natural tendency among children to reject authority and to seek independence and they easily form rival groups in the class. Secondly, factors such as the poor background of some children, the orphans, those who come from broken homes or where there is no discipline, and those from rich families where children sometimes lack respect etc, should be considered before punishing a child. Tolerance is very important when dealing with school children. Therefore, there is need for the teacher to think very carefully before deciding to punish a child in the class, and it should not just be administered for the sake of bringing about change, or using punishment as another method of class control. The teacher could also introduce use of reward to motivate students with good behaviour and those who make mistakes, since there is a reward for doing wrong things and reward for good work. Variety is very important for discipline in the class and in the school as well. The teacher must not hate a child but to act as a guardian and as an adviser. In this way, when punishment is used as a corrective measure, it is then seen as part of the total education process and the offence becomes secondary.

However, as for children, the teacher needs to realize

that they want to be corrected because they want to know what is right and wrong. They are learning and are going through a process of maturation and it is difficult for them to find out their way without some guidance and therefore punishment when properly used, acts as a guide and an eye-opener. When punishing children, the teacher should be firm, fair and friendly. However, firmness does not mean rigid domination of students nor does it require shouting at them in an effort to enforce authority. Most students have a sense of fair treatment. When a student does something wrong he/she expects anyone else who commits the same mistake to receive the same treatment. A teacher should not play favouritism or punish the whole class because of the misbehaviour of a few students. This is not fair because the teacher may end up punishing innocent students.

### CONCLUSION

From the above arguments, it is accepted that punishment can only be used as a training and corrective measure, to minimize the increase of undesirable behaviour in the school and to stamp out crime in society. In the classroom situation, the teacher can use punishment only after all other avenues or alternatives have been explored to maintain order so that effective learning can take place. Punishment can also be used to train children to respect the school rules and the laws of the country. The teacher should always try to use modified approach to punishment, use soft reprimand, withdrawal of reward, guidance and counselling to help develop a child's character and personality because punishment is also part of education. Teachers should also be in-serviced on emergency issues that may lead to in discipline. Parents and guardians should be sensitized and be fully involved in discipline management.

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