LEARNER-INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES IN IMPROVING DISCIPLINE IN BOTSWANA SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Presenters: A.K Dilaolo (aubreydilaolo@gmail.com/adilaolo@bocodol.ac.bw) & JR Debeila (20991908@nwu.ac.za)

Abstract

This paper arose out of a qualitative research project that was conducted in Botswana senior secondary schools to investigate how learner-involvement in school management can improve discipline in schools. The researchers' used a critical discourse qualitative descriptive research paradigm, which enabled the researchers to explain the role of learner-involvement strategies in improving discipline in Botswana senior secondary schools. Data was collected through document analysis, focus-group interviews, observation, reflective notes, literature survey, tape recorder and video recorder. Results were then discussed in relation to the captured literature survey and empirical data, allowing free flow of an open coding process in an inductive qualitative analysis. The sample consisted of five principals, twenty-one heads of houses, two parent-teacher association (PTA) chairpersons and seventy-five learner representatives randomly selected from five senior secondary schools which were purposefully selected in the Central Region of Botswana.

Research findings revealed that most disciplinary problems that disrupt teaching-learning activities stem mainly from factors such as the family, the school and community-based problems. Furthermore, learner misconduct is exacerbated by teachers who lack skills to deal with learner misconduct; a lack of safety and security in schools, as well as inadequate resources which hinder the proper functioning of the schools. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that learners should be given a sense of ownership by involving them in decision-making activities; stakeholders should play a pivotal role in school governance; a written set of codes and rules based on fundamental human rights, legal frameworks of the country, sanctions

and disciplinary procedures should be made available to the school community; and stern disciplinary action should be taken against teachers who fail to be exemplary to learners.

Keywords: Learner-involvement, strategies, improving, discipline, classroom management, stakeholder involvement.

Introduction

Learner involvement in school governance has always been a worldwide problem. Learners in most countries are not involved in school leadership roles, vision building and decision making process (Basson and Smith, 1991:5). However, Bengu (1998:8) states that if learners are involved as partners in managing aspects of school life, classroom environment and learning, they could contribute towards building a school climate that is conducive to teaching and learning. It is also argued that if learners are involved in these aspects, they would be enabled to organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively as well as to participate as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities. It is also envisioned that involvement would enable learners to be culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts (Department of Education, 1997:4). Unfortunately, this has not been the case in the various educational systems in the world, e.g. Korea, Japan, Germany and New Zealand, and this has led to poor academic results and a rise in learner misconduct and tensions between the school administrators and students which often result in strikes and absolute commotion in schools (Morapedi and Jotia, 2011:9).

The Republic of Botswana (1994:5) notes the critical need to involve and consult stakeholders in the day-to-day operation of schools. Stakeholders include the board of governors, parent-teacher associations and other bodies in the community, but the inclusion of key stakeholders for whom schools exist, namely learners, was forgotten (Mngomezulu, 2001:17; Mngomezulu, 2004:50; Republic of Botswana, 1994:11). Also, Mngomezulu (2004:50) observed that school management in many schools in Botswana seems to use the pseudo-participation model whereby management manipulates the learners. This imparts the impression that learners' views are taken into account, while in fact, the decision has already been made. This oversight gives the impression that learner views or interests are not important; hence, schools are hit by a wave of

indiscipline including vandalism, peer bullying, poor academic performance and moral decadence (Keagakwa, 2008:1).

Statement of the problem

Many issues arise time and again in schools and get settled. Recurring most often in many countries of the world is the issue of learner involvement, indiscipline and violence. Many schools, including those in Botswana, are not safe learning institutions (Mngomezulu, 2001:15; Mngomezulu, 2004:48). This issue is worrisome and calls for involvement of all stakeholders, primarily the learners in our schools. From Keagakwa's (2008:1) observations, it is clear that learner involvement in both the curricula and discipline process can help engineer behavioural change in school institutions and promote ownership of policies and decisions and consequently discourage misconduct that may threaten stakeholder safety in schools.

Discipline issues have a negative impact on learners' academic progress, achievement and retention. The needs of both learners and teachers are changing, and such needs have to be identified so that better strategies can be sought that will facilitate and sustain a positive school culture conducive to learning for all learners and teachers.

This research study aimed to investigate the extent to which learner involvement in improving discipline can lead to successful school management and an effective learning environment. The involvement of learners in the day-to-day running of schools can equip them with skills of participatory democracy, accountability, decision-making and citizenship responsibility. Learners possess skills, which put them in a unique position to make positive contributions to the behavioural improvement in their various school institutions. However, some school principals still see learners as 'children' who cannot operate at the same level as they (their principals). Such managers continue to stress the importance of obeying instructions and justifying their own authority. They therefore do not see any wrong in stifling the two-way process of communication between themselves and the learners.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the research project was to investigate the extent to which learner-involvement in school management can improve discipline in Botswana senior secondary schools. The project also investigated the strategies or models that are needed for more effective collaboration between learners and school management.

Research questions

The research project was guided by the following questions:

- To what extent can learner-involvement improve discipline in Botswana Senior Secondary Schools?

- Which strategies or models are needed improving discipline in Botswana Senior Secondary Schools?

Significance of the study

It is hoped that the results of the report will be helpful in a number of ways. Firstly, it will encourage school management to develop new skills in collaborative planning and sharing, reflection on practices, as well as on teaching and learning. Secondly, Policy makers would be able to make more informed policies that are suited to the current situation in Botswana senior secondary schools. Thirdly, In view of the fact the report involved learners, heads of houses and school principals, the findings of the research should help curriculum developers and policy makers to scrutinise the education system in as far as education for social harmony is concerned, and help them make some modifications. Thus, the report would serve as an eye-opener to the education system and government in general to formulate policies and strategies that are going to help the country sustain social harmony and warns the Botswana government not to take learner involvement in policy development and decision-making for granted.

Theoretical framework of the study

This research project was underpinned by the Botswana Ministry of Education's draft report on pastoral policy guidelines for secondary schools in Botswana (Ministry of Education, Botswana,

2005:17) which state that learner involvement is not simply about introducing new structures, such as learner councils, or providing other occasional structures for learners to speak their mind or have their say, but should be seen as forming more open and trustful relationships between staff and learners. Learner-involvement is key to improving the running of school organisations, teaching and learning and discipline, and it rests on the principle that learners can bring something worthwhile to the discussions about schooling or suggestions on how they want their school to be run. The central issues presented by this document are the involvement of learners (individually, collectively, on their own behalf, as representatives, partners or experts) in all spheres of the school as well as a call for systematic participation by all stakeholders in the daily delivery of school services.

Literature review

The concept 'learner-involvement'

Learner-involvement is perceived differently by different stakeholders in the school management process. Some perceive it as participatory collaboration in facilitating learning and improving discipline, and some perceive it as the engagement of learners in the day-to-day running of the school and in the decision-making process. Rudd, Colligen and Naik (2004:9) see it as the partnership between teachers, parents, stakeholders in education and learners. Others see it as the participation of learners individually or through learner representative bodies, such as the learner representative council, prefectorial bodies and learner parliaments. Everard and Morris (1985:32) hold that learner-involvement is found where learners at all levels are involved in decisions taken by their teachers, peers or other learners, and all the motivators are brought into play.

The Botswana Ministry of Education Pastoral Policy (2007) maintains that the aim of learner-involvement is to empower and equip the learners with skills that promote accountability, responsibility and patriotism and develops and implements realistic strategies that would address indiscipline practices (such as vandalism, bullying, truancy, destruction of school properties substance abuse, etc.), poor academic performance, learner retention and many others. Learner-involvement should put learners at the centre of any given service, taking into account their views and needs. Thus, Hayson (2007:5) sees learner involvement encompassing a wide variety

of practices that seek to enable, equip and motivate learners to voice their views and actively shape their learning.

According to Flutter and Rudduck (2004:5), learner involvement is key to improving the running of school organisations, teaching and learning and discipline, and it rests on the principle that learners can bring something worthwhile to the discussions about schooling. These authors further assert that genuine participation and discipline require that learners be given the opportunity of active and direct involvement in school matters. Despite these observations, learners are still seldom consulted (Botswana Department of Secondary Education, Botswana, 2007:1). Learners are often viewed as problematic to secondary school administrators, parents and other stakeholders. Stakeholders perceive learners as irresponsible minors, immature and lacking in the expertise, knowledge and experience that are needed in the running of a school (Jeruto and Kiprop, 2011:92).

What are the core principles underpinning learner involvement?

The core principles underpinning learner-involvement in school institutions as presented by the English Department for Children, Schools and Families (2007:10) are as follows:

- respecting and trusting all learners regardless of their socio-economic and political background. That is, no one should be excluded or prevented from involvement on account of age, sex, religion, disability, geographical location, skin colour or any other way that may be deemed discriminatory;
- creating the necessary time and space and resources for participation;
- providing training and support for all learners to ensure effective participation;
- providing training for stakeholders so that they support learners as well as their participation effectively;
- providing and sharing information that is timely and relevant, jargon-free and understandable by all learners;
- supplying clear and timely feedback on outcomes in a given decision-making process; and
- celebrating achievement and recognising the learning that the learners are gaining through their involvement.

The implication here is that effective learner participation and involvement depend very much on the extent to which school management and stakeholders meet the core principles listed above.

Three viewpoints that guides the extent to which learners should be involved in school governance

According to Jeruto and Kiprop (2011:92), the extent of learner involvement in schools' decision-making is debatable with often conflicting viewpoints propagated by different stakeholders depending on their (stakeholders) academic background, professional experiences and world view.

Firstly, learners remain passive and receive instructions from parents and teachers. This implies that policies are designed by adults, and learners follow them to the letter.

Secondly, learners are allowed to participate but only to a certain degree. This is due to the fact that there is a tendency among some teachers and school administrators to define the issues, which affect learners narrowly. For instance, learner consultation and decision-making are often limited to aspects of school life that affect learners only and have no immediate relevance to other stakeholders, e.g. playgrounds, toilets, school lockers. Defining the limits of learner involvement in this way is likely to give learners the impression that school commitment is tokenistic and therefore not to be taken seriously. Furthermore, the notion is authoritarian rather than democratic since, according to Jeruto and Kiprop (2011:93), "it not only assumes that students have a legitimate interest only in student-specific issues, but it also assumes that students have no right to decide for themselves the issues in which they want or do not want to be involved". This implies that opportunities for learner involvement should go beyond specifically learner-related issues to wider aspects of school life, as well as to society beyond the school.

The third view suggests that learners should fully participate in the school's decision-making (Magadla, 2007:49). This implies that learners should be involved in all areas of school life and that their contribution should not be underestimated. According to Bukaliya and Rupande (2012:74), learners should be allowed to have accountable involvement in the management activities that serve to enhance the quality and image of their conduct in their school. This

implies that leadership and involvement have certain implications for the school climate. For instance, it embraces joint management of school projects. Disciplinary issues are thus minimised because learners are able to assist school management in monitoring and supervising fellow learners in accordance with school rules and regulations.

Learner involvement in school discipline through the learner representative council has increased over the past years (Sibbiah, 2004:33). It is the duty of the learners themselves to elect the learners who must serve on the learner representative council (LRC). The LRC is an official body representing all learners in a secondary school through compulsory unionism. Therefore, it is the most prestigious official representative structure of learners in the entire school. Being learner-based, learner representative councils are run by learners to provide a variety of services to learners (Bukaliya and Rupande, 2012:71). According to Subbiah (2004:34), LRCs have major responsibilities placed upon them as they must communicate reciprocally with the learners, school management and other stakeholders at the school. This means that the LRC must foster a spirit of mutual respect and good manners and instil a sense of morality and orderliness amongst learners. The Department of Education (1999:13) concurs by stating that the LRC must assist the school management in implementing the school policy and attempt to democratise activities at the school.

The main objective of establishing LRCs is an attempt to create a sound and healthy relationship between learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders. Since the LRC provides learner voices in school management, it is enabled to keep learners abreast of events at school and in the community (Bukaliya and Rupande, 2012:73). Most importantly, the Department of Education (1999:12) adds that the LRC must promote and maintain discipline among learners and promote the general welfare of learners. This is achievable through the code of conduct for learners which should form part of a school's domestic legislation.

The legitimate role players when learners' code of conduct is compiled

An effective school environment must have rules and regulations in the form of a code of conduct to set the foundation for acceptance and appropriate learner behaviour (Allie, 2001:68; Charles, 2002:76). A code of conduct refers to acceptably binding rules, moral standards, values and behaviours that are required for a positive discipline in a school set-up.

The South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996a) and Lekalakala (2007:4) indicate that a code of conduct, which is the schools' framework for the creation of a schools' positive culture needs to be effectively implemented, adhered to and frequently reviewed to meet the ever-changing needs of the school community. Since the aim of this document is to promote discipline for learning and teaching, it must be compiled and adopted after consultation with the learners, parents and teachers and must be reviewed regularly. In fact, one of the cardinal aims of this research work was to see that learners are represented in the frequent review of the code of conduct as they are the recipients.

Edwards (2000:48), advocates that learners behaviour must be supervised and their environment must be controlled in order to elicit positive behaviours without using unnecessary punishment (Bray, 2005:134). This can be achieved through establishment of a policy on discipline, which includes details of the school rules, which should be short, observable or monitored, measurable and clear, and should reflect consistency. This is critical to creating a relationship of mutual respect and trust between the teacher and his or her learners and the stakeholders. However, discipline can only be enhanced if there is a good leadership style that positively determines the school climate, vision and mission, philosophy and curriculum.

According to Charles (2002:76) Joubert and Squelch (2005:28) and Learner discipline and school management (2007:1), the code of conduct must be compiled in consultation and with the participation and cooperation of all stake holders especially learners. The current research wanted to find out by using one of the instruments designed if learners are truly and physically present in the review of this code of conduct in Botswana. This process must be open and democratic by nature and should give opportunity for consultation and negotiation. This exercise of sharing ideas is an effort to develop a social contract on which the code of conduct and school rules will be based. Joubert and Squelch (2005:28) and Serakwane (2007:51) assert that such an inclusive process rooted in democratic considerations will give learners a sense of ownership of rules and at the same time communicate respect for learners' needs and ideas. Therefore, the whole school community should accept accountability and ownership of the code of conduct as well as the application thereof.

The South African Schools Act (RSA, 1996a) states that the Code of Conduct for learners must include appropriate disciplinary procedures, in the form of steps that school authorities should follow when disciplining learners. Procedures must be explicit and operate fairly to ensure that learners are treated fairly and justly (Lekalakala, 2007:4). This implies that learners should only be punished for offences that they had committed.

Concluding remarks

The literature survey revealed that some principals are not empowered enough in leadership skills that enhance school's effectiveness, thus, their management styles may impact negatively on the school climate. Some of these skills are participatory decision-making, communication skills, policy formulation and implementation, human relations skills and team-buildings. These may contribute or lead to problems originating from outside school such as lack of parental or stakeholder involvement and school problems related to academic as well as extracurricular activities, school rules and regulations, and personal relationships (Edwards, 2004:3). Thus, principals need continuous empowerment and regular refresher workshops on leadership skills to enable them to perform their leadership role effectively. This task can be simplified if school leaders work in collaboration with their learners.

Research design and methodology

Research design

The research project was based on a qualitative research design which served as an overall plan of the whole study (Cohen, Marion and Morrison, 2007:78; Marvasti, 2004:9; McMillan and Schumacher, 2001:166). The researcher chose this approach since it deepened his understanding about this enquiry as it went beyond numbers and statistics and produces prescriptive data (people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour). It entails the interpretation or construction of the lived experiences of the subjects (Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, 2005:65; Czarniawaska, 2004:38). It is generally defined as a research investigation that utilises open-ended interaction to explore and understand the attitudes, values, perceptions, opinions, feeling, behaviour, etc. of individuals or a group of individuals (Chimhenga, 2002:86). The researcher

was able to approach the subject, probe the setting, and describe it in a natural fashion and in great depth (Denscombe, 2007:39; Drew, Hardman and Hosp, 2008:187).

Study population and sampling

The target population of the project included school principals, heads of houses, parent-teacher association chairpersons and learner representatives in Botswana senior secondary schools. However, due to the vast expanse of the country and for purposes of logistics and accessibility, the researcher delimited the scope of the research to the fifteen senior schools in the central region of Botswana. Thus, a sample of five senior secondary schools was used in the project. The researcher used one hundred and three participants, that is, five school principals, twenty-one heads of houses, two parent-teacher association (PTA) chairpersons and seventy-five members of learner representative councils.

Data gathering instruments/tools

Qualitative data was collected through document analysis, focus group interviews, observation, reflective notes, literature survey, questionnaires, tape recorder and video recorder. These methods of triangulation of data sources are supported by Cohen et al. (2002:112) and Borg and Gall (2002:393) because it helps the researcher to be confident that the data generated is not simply artefacts of one specific method of collection. Since enquiry was qualitative by nature, data collection was in the form of words rather than numbers.

Data analysis

Data was analysed through open coding which Nemutandani (2004:40) defines as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data through inductive and deductive reasoning. Maree (2010:101) stated that inductive reasoning helps in organising the data into themes and categories using inductive process while deductive mode helps to verify it with additional data. The researcher moved back and forth during the collection and analysis processes, and data collected from the first interview was scrutinised and compared with the responses of the subsequent interview. Ultimately, repeated data and statements were grouped together, merged as was deemed necessary and recorded accordingly. This multi-data collection

strengthened the reliability and validity of the research enquiry as it enabled the researcher to study and analyse data collected from more than one perspective.

Ethical considerations

The researcher observed the following ethical issues to strengthen trustworthiness of the study:

Ethical approval was sought through the university ethical committee prior to fieldwork.

Permission was then secured from the Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development: Central Region, to visit senior secondary schools to conduct interviews concerning the topic with principals, teachers, parent-teacher association representatives and the learner representative council and all involved participants were informed of the nature and purpose of the research, as well as the use of tape recorder and video recorder. Since young people are termed 'vulnerable' because of their perceived openness to coercion, exploitation or harm by more powerful ones (Crow, Wiles, Heath and Charles; 2006:83), there was written consent. The names of the participants were not used in the findings; pseudonyms were used instead and each participant was requested to give his or her permission to be observed or interviewed. Following the clarification, participants were given the option to discontinue participation, for any reason whatsoever, at any time during the investigation process. Participants were given the assurance of full confidentiality and anonymity in that other than identifying factors such as biographical data, no personal identifiable information would be disclosed, nor would specific schools be identified by name. Each school was assigned a code letter, e.g. school A, school B, school C, school D and school E for identification purposes.

Findings

The literature survey revealed that learner–involvement was perceived divergently. The positive group perceived learner involvement as a platform for equipping them to voice their views and actively shape their learning and by so doing assisting their schools to function without disciplinary problems. The second group perceived learners as problematic because they challenged their traditional power relationships. The third group perceived learners as minors who lack expertise that is needed in the running of their organisations. For example, the parent-teacher association (PTA) chairperson of one school said, "… they will be shy to talk in a

meeting full of parents due to age … they will not feel safe". Therefore, learner involvement in school decision-making and governance is still confined to issues dealing with learner welfare and not with core government issues.

Generally, it was established that many learner misconducts were caused by exclusion of learners in the decision-making process regarding issues affecting their welfare. The main reasons learners misbehave can be summed up as: attention seeking, a desire for power, revenge and display of inadequacy (frustration and/or pain) (Rogers 2004:22; Lewis 2006:76 and Lessing and Deyer 2002:34).

The study revealed that schools do not have the necessary structures to address learner indiscipline effectively and to promote the learner voice in the school environment. The prefects in Botswana senior secondary schools were not involved in the core business of the running of the affairs of the schools nor in drawing up the school's code of conduct other than to supervise meals, afternoon studies, cleaning of the school environment and reporting wrongdoers to the administration. The prefect system was not based on democratic principles since their election to power was basically spearheaded by school authorities without much involvement of the learner body (Morapedi and Jotia, 2011:14). Jeruto and Kiprop (2011:94) add that, "Lack of student involvement on disciplinary matters either of students or teachers was also reported to be lacking in student involvement as a majority of students (97%) reported that they were not involved in disciplining errant fellow pupils."

The study revealed many parents were minimally involved in matters relating to the academic performance of their children. As a result many learners were on their own without parental supervision. Still, most parents were reluctant to cooperate with education authorities in disciplining their children (Van Wyk, 2001:198).

Learner democratic participation is not regarded as valuable by some stakeholders and thus learners were not seen as equal partners to others stakeholders. PTA chairperson of school C remarked thus, "… learners should be left out of PTA meetings because they are not intellectually or emotionally ready to carry the burden of school governance", while that of school E said: "… children do not need to know everything, … children are children, they are inexperienced and they do not know what is expected of them".

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It was also established that, instead of working together, the stakeholders who should give learners skills of negotiation, critical analysis and discussion along with accompanying values of transparency, tolerance, respect, humility and consultation and conflict resolution techniques, were pulling in opposite directions. The effects were that learners engaged in a power struggle with teachers, parents and other stakeholders, e.g. law enforcement agencies, or they took out their revenge on anyone around them. They also lash out by destroying school property, bullying others, engaging in gang fights, arriving late for classes, truancy, absenteeism, being disruptive, and having disrespect for school authorities.

The findings revealed that in most cases top-down approaches were adopted. This approach never gave learners a chance to express their opinions in matters that affect their welfare. All the schools operated through the traditional prefect system. This implied that the senior secondary schools did not have learner representative councils that promoted democratic participation. They still used authoritarian leadership styles which reinforced docility and passive subordination among learners.

The current learner-involvement initiatives in schools are not promoting the learner voice in the school environment. Discipline problems will not be reduced as long as learners do not find school enjoyable and interesting. There are no initiatives taken or followed to address learner indiscipline effectively or on ways to involve stakeholders. Some of the strategies employed by teachers exacerbate learner misconduct, for example overuse of corporal punishment as the only method of discipline used by teachers and school authorities as stated by Louw and Edwards (2005:252) and intimate relationships between male teachers and female learners. Although the use of corporal punishment is used in an attempt to reduce misconduct, instead it routinely increases misbehaviour as learners feel teachers fail to recognise them as responsible persons.

The causes of learner-indiscipline in senior secondary schools are a lack of learner, parental and stakeholder involvement, a lack of a code of conduct at the school, overcrowded classrooms, limited discipline management strategies by teachers and unjustified school rules. Furthermore, schools had no member of staff appointed as a liaison officer for learner affairs nor were they involved in the school structure, which made policies that affected them, such as the parent-teacher association meetings and disciplinary committees. Learners were not consulted and

played a minimal role in school governance. Therefore, learners did not identify closely with their schools and did not feel positive about contributing towards school life and the school environment and did not feel intrinsically that they belonged. The results are strained relations with teachers, perpetual riots in schools, truancy, bullying and gang fights, vandalism, taking and selling drugs, teachers being regarded as poor role models as well as poor relationships between teachers and learners.

The findings revealed that certain aspects of the school led to learner indiscipline, such as overly restrictive school or classroom rules, inconsistency and unfairness in the application of rules, overuse of certain forms of punishment and inadequate attendance at lessons by teachers or inappropriate handling of learners with behaviour problems by teachers. Some teachers were not acting fairly towards all learners and learners retaliated by not giving them respect other than labelling them as unfair and corrupt, and not following school rules.

 The findings confirmed that facilities in schools were inadequate and poorly maintained and overcrowding was a serious problem. In one school more than 57 learners were crammed into one classroom because of shortage of classrooms. These conditions may lead to other problems such as vandalism, theft and other socially unacceptable behaviour. This confirms that school size or unmanageable class sizes and structure are also factors in learner indiscipline and misconduct. One learner remarked thus:

> *'The whole school is falling apart. This classroom that we are in right now is better than the rest. In other classrooms, the ceilings and notice boards are falling off, doors are broken and we suffer much during winter season....would queue for minutes at the toilets and then some teachers would punish them thinking they wanted to dodge their lesson.'*

The findings noted lack of teacher discipline, commitment and morale as another cause of poor learner discipline. Teacher morale was low as was evident in arriving late for school, favouritism, rudeness, inconsistency and absenteeism. One learner representative remarked, "… sometimes we are left without teachers for days especially towards month-end. This may cause discipline problems as there would be no one monitoring the teaching and learning process."Another learner concurred and indicated that teachers arrive late for class by 15

minutes, and they may even remain in class at the end of the lesson, and this causes learners to be late for other subjects. She went on to say, "some students have copied these behaviours as they are not punctual for lessons, meal times, especially after break times."

The schools had no records or documents on learner involvement, except for the government pastoral policy, which was never evaluated to check its success or failure rate, nor were there any follow-ups. This shows that the schools were operating without a discipline policy. Furthermore, initiatives to involve learners were haphazard, ill-planned and had little continuity or purpose, which was an indication that learners were not taken seriously and not seen as equal partners with other stakeholders.

Recommendations

Teachers should try their best to instil in learners a sense of ownership and responsibility by involving them in all aspects of school life including learner welfare and core governance issues. They must ensure that they involve learners in formative evaluation to check if the system is working, and to make some changes when needed. The literature made it clear that schools should establish a collaborative partnership with learners where controversial issues of indiscipline are reviewed and discussed

Thus, schools that have close ties with community institutions, families, support services, community police, religious communities can benefit from making use of these many valuable resources. These people can be invited to schools to speak to learners about good behaviour and good values. It is important to note that, when these links are weak, schools heighten the risk of violence and decrease their opportunities to serve children who are at risk for violence.

School should come up with a set of written school codes and rules. These should be based on the fundamental human rights charter, legal frameworks of the relevant country, school rules, sanctions and disciplinary procedures. The code should include rules for safety and security, and the consequences for breaching these. All relevant stakeholders should take part in the formulation and compilation of this document. This implies that learners should be fully involved in all administrative decisions made in their school.

Individual schools or clusters may conduct workshops where teachers and learner representatives come together to share the best learner-involvement strategies for improving discipline in their schools. This recommendation is informed, firstly, by the finding of inconsistency and favouritism by teachers in the administration or application of disciplinary measures to learners, and secondly, by the finding that some teachers lack the skills to deal with learners who have emotional and behavioural problems.

Open communications between professionals should take place in senior secondary schools, as participants claimed that there is little collaboration between schools and community agency personnel. Some participants felt that for discipline to be maintained in the schools, stakeholders such as social workers, police personnel, parents and health sector workers had to be involved in all school activities. All these stakeholders share the responsibility of creating and sustaining an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Furthermore, schools should establish organisational structures in which all concerned parties (internal and external) have an opportunity to become involved with the planning, development and implementation of school-wide plans. These parties include staff, learners, parents and community agency personnel.

The Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development should employ and deploy social workers to schools to provide guidance and to support to teachers with regard to handling learners with emotional and behavioural problems. These officers should also provide support to orphaned learners living with guardians, alone or in child-headed families. Learners experiencing major psychological problems should also be identified early by trained personnel and be dealt with accordingly in a professional manner. Problems identified at an early stage can be more easily corrected.

It is also recommended that schools should benchmark their practices against the practices of other schools to gauge and establish best practices. They may create a forum in which they collectively share their challenges and possible solutions for learner-involvement strategies and discipline-related challenges. The Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development: teacher training and development, in-service section may coordinate such workshops on a regular basis to ensure that schools come together to discuss and share best practices that could

become effective learner-involvement strategies for improving discipline in senior secondary schools.

Stern disciplinary action should be taken against teachers who are found having sexual relationships with learners, or who are drinking liquor with learners, whether during or after school hours. Schools should also encourage learners to disclose names of people who sell drugs and alcohol to learners. The aim of this exercise should be to curb the problem at its roots. Workshops should be conducted where teachers can be taught how to identify learners who are using drugs and alcohol.

Limitations of the project

The study was limited to learner-involvement strategies in improving discipline in Botswana senior secondary schools as perceived from educational-psychological point of view. The scope of the study was limited to five rural senior secondary schools in the South Central Region of Botswana. The presence of a participant-observer may have had some impact on the setting and the participants. Some learners and heads of houses may have not felt free to disclose internal information to the researchers especially information pertaining to the general administration of the school. Since the research project was conducted in settings where not all could speak fluent English, not all the discussions were in English. Some interview questions were translated to the vernacular to be understood by members of the LRC who could not express themselves properly in English. Thus, the vernacular was used to elicit rich information on learner-involvement strategies in improving discipline in senior secondary schools in Botswana. Translating these interviews may have unintentionally compromised some inferences of the participants.

Suggestions for further research

Future researchers should focus on the innovative ways in which community agency personnel can assist schools to enhance discipline in senior secondary schools and the extent to which a school's code of conduct and classroom meetings can improve school discipline practices.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding discussions, findings and recommendations it has become clear that learners can become fully involved to improve school discipline if school managers are sensitised to do away with top-down management strategies in favour of distributed leadership styles that recognises the role played by learners in school governance.

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