

# THE ROLE OF DISCIPLINE IN EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PROCESS OF LEARNING

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## ***ABSTRACT***

*Discipline is the deliberate, or lack of, action to regulate behaviour. It is the practice of frank and strict adherence to legislation and guidelines, and cultural standards and values; the ability to control oneself or other people, even in challenging circumstances. Discipline means teaching acceptable behaviours and unlearning maladaptive behaviours with support, guidance and direction in managing behaviour. It is about setting limits, clarifying roles, responsibilities, and mutual expectations and creating a predictable, orderly and stable life. In line with the famous quote, “**choices have consequences**”, not observing or practicing discipline should result in some form of corrective measures. Situations abound where, unfortunately, such a ‘correction’ results from a serious trigger with devastating consequences. Lack of individual discipline, including observing simple instructions like washing hands thoroughly with soap, keeping a one-to-two-meter social distance, and going into self-quarantine for 14 days, is exacerbating the exponential spread of the pandemic.*

***Keywords: legislation and guidelines, clarifying roles, exponential spread of the pandemic***

## ***Significance of discipline in homes and learning institutions***

Discipline impacts the learning process by creating a stress-free environment for apportioning time to various activities, improves planning through observing and maintaining a set daily routine, moulds learner character and enhances their motivation, enables the setting of good examples and positively contributes to better grades. Elements such as test anxiety, environment, motivation, and emotions require consideration when

developing models of academic performance. Various studies have shown a positive link between discipline in learners and their school performance, with the latter increasing with the increase in discipline levels.

Although learning institutions have a duty to enforce the rules or code of conduct guiding learner behaviour, parents also have a role to play to ensure consistency. Aspects such as dress code, hairdos, and basic manners start from home. Parents and educators, especially heads of institutions, are two pillars with a significant influence on grooming learners. Unless discipline is tackled from an early age, achieving quality education with full learner impact will remain a challenge. Thus, if learners at all levels are disciplined, they are most likely to acquire the requisite knowledge and skills with ease because they are focused and self-driven.

Despite their busy working schedules, parents should spend time with their children to discuss various issues, including discipline. There is also an increasing need to strengthen guidance and counselling in schools, to help learners attain set values. A child or young person whose social and spiritual discipline is strong has a high chance of excelling in school. The most important discipline is self-discipline, which the learner should cultivate within by setting standards and determining how far they can go amidst numerous obstacles.

### ***Punishment and the child's development and learning process***

Punishment is used as a tool to inculcate discipline. It can be either positive or negative. Physical or corporal punishment includes caning, physical labour such as watering school gardens or cutting grass, kneeling or walking on knees, or doing push-ups. As part of enforcing the conventions on children's rights, several countries have abolished corporal punishment in schools, although the illegal practice is still common in some schools.

Opponents of corporal punishment hold the view that it negatively impacts the child's learning performance and general mental health. It can also push children to learn aggressive behaviour through modelling – attempting to change a child's behaviour through inflicting pain is likely to drive the child to do the same to their peers whose actions they may want to influence. This type of punishment can also border on child abuse and may legitimize violence in children who internalize what they experience. However, proponents of corporal punishment disagree; some parents and educators see it as important in instilling discipline in children. They contend that merely removing a pleasurable or reinforcing stimulus – such as a teacher removing a misbehaving child from the class for some time or a parent 'grounding' a child from watching the television – is not enough in decreasing the probability of a recurrence in the child's behaviour in the future, and that such an action can be counterproductive.

Those against corporal punishment prefer 'positive punishment' as it decreases the probability of a recurrence in behaviour in the future. One example is the complete elimination of rewards, also known as positive reinforcement, to discourage a repeat of misbehaviour. A third perspective is the enhancement of children's cognitive development through social interactions, which in turn influence their learning and motivation to

learn. This includes attachment to caregivers, friendship and collaborative learning between peers and forming healthy relationships between children and teachers. In such a scenario, verbal methods of discipline, including explanations and reasoning, are likely to provide more cognitive stimulus than the use of corporal punishment, which may result in poor cognitive outcomes.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of punishment depends greatly on timing. A punishment delivered immediately after a response is likely to be most effective while the longer the delay between the response and the punishment, the greater the chance of the punishment associating with other intervening events. Positive and negative reinforcements are crucial aspects of altering behaviour after delivering punishment.

### ***Impact of punishment on learner performance, and alternative options***

In order to analyse the relationship between punishment and learner performance, we need to be clear about the latter, which is the extent to which a learner, educator or institution has achieved their short or long-term educational goals. It is commonly measured through examinations that ascertain completion of educational benchmarks such as diplomas and bachelor's degrees, or through continuous assessments leading to some form of grade point aggregation.

Punishment or even the threat of punishment, depending on the type, has both a positive and negative impact on learner performance. The negative impact includes fear and anxiety that distort the learning motivation (the child learns to please the teacher and not to acquire skills and knowledge), loss of interest in the subject, negative feelings against the teachers and the classes they teach, absenteeism and disengagement, aggression, reduced self-esteem, resentment, alcohol and drug abuse, resulting in poor school performance. A child who receives compliments for being a good learner is likely to show better academic performance than one who is punished for doing poorly. Positively, corporal punishment can help maintain classroom discipline and enable learners to develop their responsibilities if they are made to understand and appreciate their faults. Such learners may reform in the classroom, at school or at home as they strive for good behaviour and develop a responsible attitude enabling improvement in their performance.

Learner motivation and engagement is one of the six factors of academic achievement (others are instructional design quality, accuracy and alignment, data forms and quality, whole literacy, and depth of knowledge). Helping learners to develop intrinsic motivation through self-effort in mastering educational content is key. A motivated learner with little or no technology experience and limited resources is likely to perform much better than a non-motivated one in a '21st-century classroom.' Positive discipline helps to improve learner motivation through teaching rather than punishing and, as a result, helps learners to succeed and thrive in school.

Positive discipline allows students to learn and adapt their behaviours to meet expectations in the classroom, while simultaneously teaching them how to make better choices in adulthood. The choices include taking

time to reflect deeply about self and life, in order to be grounded on an issue. It provides an opportunity to seek the silver lining during tough or challenging situations, appreciate and embrace the bigger picture and seize opportunities in times of hopelessness with great humility. The distinction of adult behaviour in those who are disciplined is visible. The disciplined person observes the rules outlined by the authorities and can have a deeper appreciation of the pandemic as an opportunity for reflection in terms of caring for one other and looking out for each other, because “I am because you are” – this is the spirit of *Ubuntu*.

***Some of the alternative ways of enforcing positive discipline include the foll***

- ❖ *Learning ‘to be’* – taking the learners through the process of self-knowledge and motivating them to see the importance of acquiring the necessary skills and attitudes to improve their personality. Making them more aware of themselves and others. Ensuring learners appreciate that they have a right to be heard and their views considered when important decisions are taken.
- ❖ *Taking away privileges that seem to be the cause of poor performance* – such as watching TV, visiting friends or receiving pocket money; coaching by reinforcing positive attitudes through praise and recognition; using behaviour management techniques to promote social classroom interaction among students; and using positive reinforcement techniques that reward appropriate behaviour and promote self-management through counselling.
- ❖ *Time out* – which involves removing the child from the situation to give time for reflection about the consequences of the offending behaviour. Time out entails non-exclusion (the learner can observe, but not participate in, ongoing classroom activities), exclusion (the learner is excluded from participating in, and observing, ongoing classroom activities without removing them from the classroom) and isolation (placing the learner in a separate area for a predetermined period). To be effective, time out must be consistent and should not last long.
- ❖ *Positive reinforcement* – through appreciating excellence in performance. Positive, non-violent discipline sends the message that conflict can be resolved without undermining respect.

Good school discipline depends not only on non-violent responses to poor learner behaviour, but also on skilled and properly trained teachers.

### ***What factors can schools consider in disciplining learners?***

In applying positive discipline, teachers and parents should take the following into account, with a focus on maintaining a safe and dignified schooling environment for learners:

- ❖ Does the action help the child to feel a sense of connection?
- ❖ Is the action kind and firm at the same time, and mutually respectful and encouraging?
- ❖ Is the action geared towards a long-term effect on the child? Does it consider what the child is thinking, feeling, learning, and deciding about themselves and the world?
- ❖ Does the action teach important social and life skills such as respect, concern for others, problem-solving, and cooperation as well as the skills to contribute to the home, school or larger community?
- ❖ Does the action encourage the child to discover how capable they are in terms of constructive use of personal power and autonomy?

Card system – an example of positive discipline: A child who misbehaves is given a “yellow card” as a verbal warning by the teacher. If the situation persists, they are given another card and are separated from their peers. If needed, the situation is escalated to a “red card” and the child sent to the head of the school.

### ***Practicing In-the-Moment Tools***

For the second part of the activity, students will practice discipline techniques to correct misbehavior. Students will work in small groups of about five. Taking turns, one student will act as the teacher and the other students will act as students. The "students" should decide who will misbehave and how. Then, as the scenario plays out, the "teacher" will correct the students using strategies like eye contact, proximity, one-on-one intervention, etc.

Some misbehavior that would work well in these scenarios include: talking over the teacher, students moving when inappropriate, yelling, throwing items, etc.

### ***Impact of Home Life***

One of the first things Martin noticed was that much of the student misbehavior was rooted in a **dysfunctional home life**, one that wasn't operating in healthy ways. He found things like economic instability, parental disharmony, changes in family routine and relationships, and parental views on education and discipline, which all impacted a student's ability to make good choices.

When a student's family struggles with poverty, he or she is affected in many ways. The stress that results from lack of money, inconsistent employment, and overall financial instability, can cause students to feel overwhelmed at school. Martin has several students each year with changing family relationships due to divorce, death, or separation. These unstable times are confusing for students and often result in behavioral issues. Finally, some families have a negative view concerning education and share their thoughts openly

with students. These students then bring preconceived ideas to school that interfere with their ability to succeed.

## ***Conclusion***

There is a considerable dependence of learner performance on personality and social environment. Learners possess various motivational traits in their quest to acquire education. Those with a good level of such traits use numerous learning strategies depending on the beliefs they hold: those with extrinsic motivation are more likely to use strategies that include good planning and better organization. In view of this and based on the significant role of motivation on learners, teachers must focus attention on inculcating motivation in learners to promote their self-efficacies, and strongly believe in the learners' abilities to do well. Teachers also need to be well-prepared to effectively integrate the value system in the learner, while practising the same, and the use of diverse strategies in issuing instructions to the learners. In the final analysis, we are like a well-prepared meal with different ingredients blending well, together...we must play our part without exaggerating our individual parts or downplaying those of others.

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