

Approaches to the Problems of Discipline in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

Discipline is a way of ensuring conformity to rules and regulations in relation to obedience to set standards by someone in authority. This paper deals with the problems of discipline in Nigerian schools which has been associated with punishment of varying degrees of severity. The purpose of it is not to see discipline as punishment but as a control measure, a way of learning. Today, to some extent, indiscipline has eaten deep into our children in schools as a result which may be due to lack of parental control, value orientation, school management and the wholesale acceptance of the European frame of reference among others. The descriptive method is therefore employed so that discipline should be seen as a necessity for social life and a standard for morality while punishment as a means for instilling such discipline. The management and the personal approaches to behaviour control were also looked at. Therefore, suggestions were made as to how the classroom teacher can in the light of the preceding analysis; promote the spirit of discipline in Nigerian schools.

Keywords: *Strategies, Discipline, Punishment, Schools, Nigeria.*

INTRODUCTION

In the school system, rule and regulations are provided and enforced by teachers for the purpose of maintaining an effective discipline where teaching and learning can take place. There are also laid down procedures for punishing pupils who violates school rules. Unfortunately, it is sad to observe that the use of punishment had not in any way solved the problem of indiscipline among school pupils. One explanation to this effect is that by frequent punishment, the pupils soon becomes used to it (Okpilike, 2010). In fact, no society had been able to live without regulations. Apparently, it is observed that the more complex the society, the greater the need for a detailed description of behaviour which is permitted and those which are prescribed. The rules and regulations are designed to make it possible for men to live together and thus enhance the living condition of the individuals. A disciplined society had always been cherished throughout human history. Thus in most African societies, the parents, brothers and members of the community participate in the education of the younger ones.

According to Orocka (1990) everyone in the society wants the child to grow up a conforming moral actor and a disciplined individual. The process of transmitting this value may include direct teaching by elders of what to do and correction by punishment when the child goes wrong; indirect method of benefiting from the experience of others through observation of how others behave and observation of how those who fail to conform to given norms are punished.

However, discipline in Nigeria schools has been associated with punishment of varying degrees of severity. The authoritarian approach to disciplinary problems in Nigerian schools is apparently encouraged attitude of our society to discipline most Nigerian parents, for instance, demand a high degree of respect from children for their social superiors and they easily regard any disobedience to school authorities as to disobedience to parental authority. As Nakpodia (2010) has observed, most Nigerian parents are quick to condemn their children's misbehaviour in school and "would, when need be, plead with the teacher not to spare the rod in the training of the children".

On the other hand, the authoritarianism which characterizes Nigerian educational institutions has not gone unchallenged by students particularly since the 1960 when Nigeria began to experience increasing outbursts of students' unrest. The typical reaction of government and school authorities to students' unrest is to take severe punitive measures against rebellious students in the hope that such tactics would foster discipline. However, experience has shown that such measures have not produced their expected result namely: the restoration of discipline in the nation's education institutions, students' unrest increase in frequency of occurrence and violence despite the punitive response by the authorities such as the suspension of students and closing down of the institutions involved in violent demonstrations. In the present decade the situation is pretty much the same. The problems of discipline in the society at large as well as in our educational institutions remain a burning issue. As a step in this direction this paper attempts a philosophical analysis of the nature of discipline and explore its relationship with punishment, social life and moral education. Etymologically, 'discipline' is derived from the Latin verb '*disco*' which means "I learn". The noun discipline means instruction, the type given to disciples or scholars. However, other meanings which the word discipline has come to acquire over the years are:

1. A branch of instruction or education; department of learning or knowledge,
2. Instruction aimed at the formation of proper conduct and action, mental and moral training; the training effect of experience, adversity etc.
3. The orderly conduct and action resulting from training; a trained condition,
4. The order maintained and observed among pupils or other persons under control or command, such as soldiers, sailors, inmates of a religious house, a prison etc.; a system of rules for conduct, and
5. The system or method by which order is maintained in the church and control exercised over the conduct of its members.

Basically, discipline has two different but related meanings. First, discipline is a concept rooted in a learning situation which implies learning to submit oneself to rules whether they are rules necessary for the acquisition of knowledge or for orderly conduct. Secondly, discipline may refer to punishment inflicted on someone for failing to bring his conduct into line with the rules he has learned. Punishment especially in the school context is often associated with discipline. However, punishment is conceptually distinct from discipline. Discipline, as already stated, is a more inclusive notion which conveys the idea of submission to rules. To confuse punishment with discipline as many classroom teachers seem to do is to confuse just one method of fostering discipline with discipline itself,

Punishment is an intentional infliction of pain or unpleasantness by someone in a position of authority upon a person who has committed an offence or broken the rules (Nakpodia, 2010). Discipline, on the other hand is not necessarily painful or unpleasant and it does not have to emanate from someone in authority, The conceptual relation between discipline and punishment is to be found in the fact that punishment is usually inflicted for a breach of rules learned under discipline.

Discipline and Morality: A Necessity of Social Life: The value of discipline is sometimes narrowly conceived in terms of the behaviour it prescribes. Sometimes, it has been suggested that discipline constitutes a regrettable though inevitable curtailment of one's personal freedom. However, it can be shown that discipline; far from being a curb on personal freedom is indeed a necessary means for the preservation of social life as well as for the development of genuine freedom. Discipline implies submission to rules which ensure regularity in behaviour for social life to endure; it is necessary that people should be able to rely on definite, appropriate and individual responses to the stimuli provided by the social environment. Social life is subject to the same imperatives of regularity as is found in any living organism. As Nakpodia (2010) puts it, "at each point in time, it is necessary that the functioning of familial, vocational, and civic life be assured; norms must be established which determine what proper relationships are, and to which people conform." It is discipline or submission to established norms which provides the basis for social life and its role expectations. Secondly, discipline, far from being an obstacle on the road to freedom is in fact the natural and indispensable means of achieving genuine freedom. Man by nature is a limited being who has to live in a limited and finite environment. In order to survive physically and psychologically man must bring his activities, hopes and desires in harmony with his finite physical and social environment.

Acceptance of discipline into one's life is therefore necessary for our biological and psychological well-being. Paradoxically, as it may appear, the limitations imposed on all by discipline are the necessary condition for one's happiness and personal freedom. By condition of discipline, one learns to accept the limitations of his environment without which he remains for ever unsatisfied and unhappy. The ability to restrain our desires and thus bore masters of ourselves is a crucial means of achieving genuine functions and of developed individual personality. The connection between discipline and morality stems from the fact that, both concepts are closely associated with submission to rules imposed by an authority. In fact, the spirit of discipline is the first element of morality and behaviour according to rules and submission to authority characterize morality as well as discipline.

In fact, discipline is not simply an external force whose single *raison d'être* is to prevent certain behaviors; it is rather "a means *sui generis* of moral education." There exists in fact, a sort of symbiotic relationship between morality and discipline since they both function as instruments of social control concerned with regulating human behaviour. The moral life imposes discipline on those who live according to its imperatives while discipline predisposes the individual to accept the values which moral education seeks to foster and develop. The close relationship between moral education and discipline may be seen also from the fact that prospects for achieving their goals are brighter when the

teacher relies more on rational procedures and respect for persons rather than on authoritarian with punitive measures. Just as in moral education the teacher must, among other things, seek to impart knowledge and understanding of moral issues and principles, so the measures he takes to foster discipline must include rational approaches designed to promote self-discipline. An enlightenment programme on school discipline will also perform the moral function of training children for self-control and inculcating respect for rules. Having explored the relationship between discipline and morality, we may well ask, whether a similar relationship exists between punishment and moral education. Specifically, we may ask two different but related questions. First, is punishment an appropriate way of dealing with lawbreakers particularly in the case of children? Secondly, even if punishment may be justified in some cases, can punishment have any positive role in moral education?

The Justification of Punishment: There is the need to provide rational justification for most universal tendency to punish lawbreaker because normative question are involved in the very notion of punishment which involves deliberately conflicting pain or deprivation on someone. Some have argued that punishment is an inappropriate way of dealing with crime since in their view; crime is a form of sickness for which its perpetrators are not responsible for. In the case of children, it has been seen that punishment represents an authoritarian and repressive expression of adult hostility which may leave permanent emotional scars on a child's personality. Marshall (1984) argues that the concept of punishment is not logically applicable to the imposition inflicted on children and principles of justification of the punishment of children.

Therefore, punishment represents attempts to provide rational justification for the universal inclination and practice of inflicting some kind of pain on people who break the norms of their society. Physically, five different theories of punishment have been proposed. First, there is the theory of retribution. According to this theory which is strongly supported by intuitionists, it is morality fitting that those, who commit such offences should be punished because it is self-evident. Ewing (1929) observes that "most people strongly tend to think that it is intrinsically fitting that man should "get his deserts". However, the trouble with this argument based on intuition is that it lacks objectivity. There is really no objective way of evaluating such arguments to say that the punishment of offenders is right because it is evident is not really to justify punishment. It is rather to deny that punishment needs any justification. A more popular theory of punishment is the deterrent theory. According to this theory, punishment is justified as a means of preventing violations of the rule.

We punish so that the offender does not try to break the rule again, and to prevent others from following his example. In this view, the function of punishment or the threat of punishment is essentially to deter offenders and potential offenders. Peters, (1966) apparently endorses the deterrent theory in his view, "the basic case of punishment is surely in terms of deterrence and prevention". There is considerable merit to the deterrent theory of punishment. It cannot be denied 'that the fear of punishment can exert a restraining and salutary influence on many people. However, experience has shown that punishment or the threat of punishment does not always produce the expected deterrent effect. This fact of experience has often been adduced in support of the abolition of the death penalty since

the death penalty has not 'proved itself to be a universally effective deterrent to crime. Besides, one may wonder whether deterrence should be regarded as the main purpose of punishment in the context of promoting discipline or moral education. Punishment, even when it works, has only a temporary effect on the person who receives it and its effect is restricted to particular instances of overt behaviour. Punishment in itself cannot produce the interior positive dispositions which are essential for the development of self - discipline. As Durkheim has remarked, punishment when it functions only act as a threat which merely guarantees overt and superficial propriety. As such it is simply "a police procedure" which is not "in any sense a moralizing instrument" (Durkheim, 1961). A third theory of punishment is the reform theory which is widely regarded as a progressive and an enlightened view of punishment. According to this view the infliction of punishment may be permitted only when there is a chance that the person being punished will be reformed or made better in the process.

However, it is difficult to establish that people are actually reformed by punishment. In fact, the available empirical evidence does not support the view that punishment has positive effects on the character development of children (Sears, McCoy and Levin, 1957). Kohlberg (1973) shares the same view when he remarked that there is evidence "that punitive aggression by the parent leads to aggression by the child, but no evidence that it leads to moral learning". The reform theory of punishment is particularly attractive to educators and classroom teachers, perhaps because it is thought that punishing children in school may make them more committed and devoted to school work. Here again there seems not to be any evidence to support the view that punishment improves pupils' academic performance. On the contrary, available evidence suggests that rewards and encouragement for tasks well done are much more likely to improve performance than punishment and blame. As Peters (1966) has observed "punishment is one of the most potent devices for bringing about estrangement" rather than commitment to school work.

The fourth traditional theory of punishment is the educative theory. Ewing (1929) stresses the educative function of punishment in relation to children. Punishment, he observes, serves to instill good habits in children by fear of the consequences of acting wrongly and because of the emphatic condemnation of a teacher or parent whose authority they respect. Finally, there is yet another justification of punishment which may be called the expiatory or compensatory theory. According to this view, the basic rationale for punishment is to restore the moral authority of the rule lost by its violation. It is pointed out that the moral authority of the rule comes in the force of public opinion which regards the rule as sacred and inviolable. But the rule ceases to appear inviolable whenever it is actually violated. Consequently, whether in the school context or in, the wider society, any violation of the rule tends to erode its moral authority and the people's faith in the inviolability of social norms. This is the moral damage caused by violations of the rules; they shatter people's faith in the authority of social norms. A sacred thing profaned will no longer appear sacred 'if nothing is done to restore its original status. Punishment therefore is society's way of neutralizing the demoralizing effects of a violation of its rule. It is necessary to restore the moral authority of the law that has been violated if the law is not to lose its credibility.

Basically then, according to this theory, the role of punishment in moral education or in the development of discipline is not to make the guilty pay for his crime through the pain he suffers, nor even to intimidate possible violator of the law; it is rather to register unequivocally society's vigorous disapproval of the violation of its norms as well as to restore the moral authority of the particular rule that has been broken.

Punishment and Moral Education: Marshall (1984) argues that punishment and moral education are incompatible, because in his view, the traditional reasons given to punishment retributive, deterrent, reformative and educative are inconsistent with moral education. Briefly, Marshall's arguments are as follows: retribution is essentially backward looking at the crime committed, whereas moral education is forward looking. Besides, it is not obvious that children deserve punishment. With regard to the deterrent theory, Marshall observes that in some instances, cases of one child may not deter other children. Marshall appear to regard the very idea of deterrence as morally suspect, involving as it does threatening people, treating them as "unconscious or sub-conscious beings" and abusing "their rationality". For such then Marshall concludes that "deterrence involves assumptions and procedures which are antithetical to moral education". Marshall (1984) also finds the reform theory as incompatible with moral education for similar reasons. Reform is also backward looking as it implies the notion of returning to some previous state of grace. Besides, many of the assumptions underlying reform - presupposing children's "badness or unworthiness", "a position of superiority and authority" are incompatible with moral education. Finally, with regard to the educative theory, Marshall says that instilling good habits in children through fear of punishment is not a rational way of proceeding and cannot count as education which is concerned with the development of rationality through rational procedures. As Marshall (1984) sees it "punishment does not educate even if it changes behaviour".

It will be sufficient for our purpose to note that Marshall's conception of the nature of moral education is one-sided and thus inadequate.' Marshall seems to admit only strictly national procedures in moral education even when we are dealing with very young children who obviously are not in a position to appreciate rational argument. Moral education programme requires an integrated approach taking into account the emotional as well as the rational foundations of human behaviour. Far from being incompatible with moral education, Hobson (1986) has pointed out that punishment can in certain circumstances play a positive role in moral learning. With very young children, for instance, punishment may be the only way to get them to develop good habits. Besides, it may in fact be the only way of getting them to understand the concept of wrongness in the first place. Children's moral thinking in the earliest stages is thus characteristically based on an avoidance of punishment orientation. Secondly, punishment can be judiciously used to teach the child the relative seriousness of different offences. An important moral lesson is communicated to a child who receives a stronger form of punishment for moral offences (such as bullying other children) than he or she gets for less serious misdemeanours such as bad table manners. Thirdly, the experience of being punished when it is deserved could lead children to appreciate why certain courses of action are condemned. They could for instance,

come to appreciate the need to observe the golden rule of doing unto others as you would like other to do unto you. This could happen when children are punished by having exactly the same thing done to them which they did to another. Moral lessons on the importance of sharing, being fair and refraining from hurting other people could be taught in this way. Methods of moral education involving the use of equivalent punishment should not be made a regular practice and should not include measures that are so severe that the harm done to the child outweighs any valuable moral lesson that may be learned.

The Teachers' Role in the Promotion of Discipline and Morality: We may distinguish basically two approaches to behaviour control which the classroom teacher may adopt. One is the management approach which is based on the psychological principle that people behave in response to the kind of forces exerted on them. It is, of course, a fact of experience that people perform many of their social duties such as paying their taxes, obeying orders and so on, as a result of pressures exerted upon them in various ways. From this fact of experience, it would seem that the proper way for the teacher to solve behaviour problems in his class is to manipulate the external forces or stimuli at his disposal. In practice, adherence to this principle results in the use of motivational forces that are dependent upon rewarding what is perceived as right behaviour and punishing what is perceived as wrong behaviour. In alignment with the management approach to behaviour problems, it must be admitted, often works particularly in situations where we expect only compliance with prescribed rules. Disruptive behaviour in the classroom, for instance, can be stopped by various forms of reward and punishment. But the trouble with this technique is that their effects are short-lived and transient. They do not lead to permanent behaviour changes. The other approach to behaviour problems is the personal approach.

The objective of this approach is to bring about a change in a person's belief system. It concentrates on ways of assisting people to solve their behaviour problems rather than on direct control and management of specific behaviors. The personal approach to disciplinary problems is more consonant with the objectives of school education. Schools are primarily concerned with the achievement of long-term goals such as bringing about permanent desirable changes in students beliefs, values, feelings and attitudes, imparting skills needed for intelligent and responsible action. Management approaches, by their nature are not adequate for the achievement of many long-term educational goals. The classroom teacher will make a greater contribution to the development of the spirit of discipline if he or she adopts the personal approach to disciplinary problems. The adoption of such an approach by the teacher will mean that he or she will strive to give students an understanding of the need for discipline in the school. Pupils can be brought to appreciate, for instance, the connection between discipline and morality or between discipline and social life. Pupils can be made to understand that disruptive behaviour is incompatible with teaching and learning and that discipline is necessary for success in school work, the development of their personality and a successful life in society. Student should be helped to see school discipline not as an unnecessary and vexatious limitation on their freedom but rather as an indispensable means of their intellectual and moral development.

Secondly, the teacher through whom the rules of the school are presented must be able to radiate authority which comes not merely from his power to punish and reward but also from his personal example and commitment to the moral ideal which the school seeks to uphold. The rule should be presented as an impersonal authority which both teacher and pupil willingly accept. As Durkheim (1961) put it the teacher must present the rules not as coming from him personally, "but as a moral power superior to him, and of which he is the instrument not the author".

Finally, the teacher should have as his or her aim the achievement of democratic discipline consonant with the ideal of a democratic society to which the nation is committed. When he has to punish he should not do so in a harsh, abusive and vindictive manner. If punishment is to perform a positive role in the promotion of discipline and moral education the teacher must avoid harsh and authoritarian procedures which can destroy the mutual understanding which should exist between him and the pupils. Democratic discipline is a rational and human approach to the problem of behaviour control. It is based on the respect for persons and it avoids exaggerated emphasis on status differences between subordinates and superiors. It repudiates arbitrary and authoritarian reactions to instances of misbehaviour. It provides explanations and rationale for actions taken, permits discussion of issues and welcomes suggestions from pupils as to how to improve the standard of school discipline.

CONCLUSION

The obvious lack of success of the traditional approach to the problems of discipline has called for change of attitude and redirection of effort on the part of the authorities concerned. Therefore, there is need to review our concept of discipline and the conventional methods we have been employing to achieve it. If we are to succeed in finding a lasting solution to the problem of discipline in our society as well as in our educational institutions, more comprehensive approach rather than the conventional tactics needs to be attempted. The recognition of the close connection between discipline, social life and morality may point a way to such an approach. Discipline should be instilled in children as soon as they develop moral consciousness to enable them distinguish between good and bad so that it would form part of their moral code. This has become necessary because the problem of discipline is not peculiar to children and schools alone but applies also to a larger society. Indeed, it is the spillover of inevitable collapse of discipline in schools in spite of previous efforts is the lack of conscious and sustained efforts to fight the problem. And unless this is done, the problem of indiscipline in schools is likely to rob us our aspirations of achieving moral stability and rapid but prosperous natural development in the year 2020 and even beyond.

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