

Gender Difference in the Application of Preventive Discipline Practices among Principals of Secondary Schools in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT The research examined disparity in the implementation of preventive discipline practices by principals of secondary schools in Nigeria. Employing the ex-post facto design, a survey of principals, teachers, students and other stakeholders was carried out. Data analyzed revealed clear disparity between male and female principals. Findings also show that general implementation of the preventive model was low among principals. The implication is that the quality of school discipline is low. It was accordingly recommended that all stakeholders of the education industry should partner with schools' administrators and managers to enhance effective implementation of preventive discipline practices for improved quality discipline in the nation's school systems.

INTRODUCTION

Investments in current ongoing reforms in the education sector of Nigerian economy may not yield proportionate dividend if adequate precaution is not taken, now, to address current issues of crime and violence in the nation's school system. School discipline, according to Gaustad 2005 has two main objectives. The first is to ensure the safety of staff and students, and the second to create an environment conducive to learning. Acts of indiscipline occasioned by student misconducts involving violent and criminal behaviour, defeats the goals of education.

This is why all stakeholders in education, both government and non-governmental organizations, should not perceive indiscipline as an exclusive function of teachers and principals, but a partnership where all subsystems have the capacity to make positive contributions. There is consensus among education providers and consumers that if indiscipline is allowed to incubate, under current favorable conditions, it could, hatch a monster that the nation will not be able to contain.

Indeed minor samples of the envisioned problems are already being encountered in the nations economic front. Many believe that current economic woes arising from corruption, robbery, assassination, smuggling and pipeline vandalism are progenies of school indiscipline. Court injunctions and orders are indiscriminately flouted not only by those who make or interpret the law, but also by those who took the oath to defend the law. These acts of indiscipline in our

national life, likely began as a mustard seed of disobedience in the school.

Today official corruption has become the giant Frankenstein that cannot be uprooted from our national life. And how can the "war" against corruption be won when the "commanders" leading the nation are themselves celebrated heroes of corruption?

The foregoing and current issues make school discipline a very important matter in our educational life. Students' involvement in armed robbery, rape, cultism and examination fraud make regular headlines (Vanguard 2006; Ogwuda 2006; Komolafe and Ajao 2006) in our print and electronic media. Other misdemeanors may not be so widely reported yet their occurrences are at higher frequencies in our schools. Many state governments are taking serious actions at combating schools indiscipline.

In Delta State for example, the education commissioner has been taking series of proactive actions against all forms of school indiscipline. Not minding whose ox is gored; the honourable commissioner prescribed functional dress codes for both students and teachers and enforced it. Today many are neatly and smartly dressed in schools. Resumption and times for dismissal from schools are strictly adhered to. Gone are the days when students are found wandering about in markets and cyber cafes during lessons and teacher are busy selling their wares. Illegal and inadequately equipped schools were closed down but more successful is her victory over examination malpractice. She cautioned and ensured that parents do not interfere with their

children and wards examinations, while making sure that the children were adequately taught by their teachers under conducive conditions.

The struggle against school indiscipline is not limited to Delta State. In Lagos State, Obaaro (2003) reports of relentless struggle against students and teachers' absenteeism truancy, shabby dressing, and insubordinations. Similarly in Jigawa, Sokoto and Rivers States (Adenikpekun 2006) there are reports of effort at containing school crime and violence. A common denominator among these successful administrators is the effective application of both preventive and corrective models to enhance management of disciplinary issues. The ability to use a particular model at the appropriate time and condition is fundamental to effective management of school discipline

Discipline

Contemporary research in the literature on school discipline examines the subject from three dimensions. Some authors like Duke (1989), Cotton (2005) Gaustad (2005) looks at discipline from the preventive perspective. Preventive discipline involves the application of preventive measures to halt the occurrence of misbehavior. These measures include quality teaching, good school management and effective curriculum. Gaustad (2005) points out that there are other factors peculiar to the school environment, which the school principal must consider in her everyday management of the school. These peculiar factors should be well utilized to enhance preventive school discipline.

The second dimension to school discipline is the supportive approach to discipline. Here the administrator helps both teachers and students to maintain their own self-discipline. The supportive method makes provisions for the student to be constantly aware that he is effectively monitored by the school authority who will not accept any form of misbehavior. Student are also aware that management is willing and prepared to assist them maintain acceptable behaviors; therefore, there is mutual feeling of trust and confidence.

The third dimension to school discipline involves the use of corrective measures to keep students away from misbehavior. Here the principal tries to correct, support and re-channel misbehaviors.

The corrective approach puts an immediate check to the misbehavior and refocuses the student back on the right path. This model may occasion bad feelings from the corrected student, but on the whole it fosters positive work and improves self-discipline. The corrective model is bound to occur because in the management of school, despite the application of preventive and supportive approaches, some amount of indiscipline is bound to occur and principals should be well equipped to deal with it.

Theoretical Links

This study examines disparity in the management of school discipline based on Preventive Discipline Practices (PDP). Practitioners in education have over the years, in response to discipline problems in schools, developed several programmes to reduce misconduct and consequently increase school orderliness. Some of these programme which include the (Cotton 2005)

- Reality therapy of William Glasser
- Positive approach to discipline (PAD) based on Glassers Reality therapy;
- Teacher effectiveness training (TET);
- Transactional analysis
- Assertive discipline (AD)
- Adlerian approaches; and
- Student Team Learning (STL)

are elements of the preventive discipline method. Studies in preventive discipline practices (Duke 1989; Allen 1989; Bowman 1983; Cotton 1988) emphasize some key variables in its application. These elements include (Cotton 2005)

- Administrative commitment to the establishment and maintenance of appropriate student behaviour as a fundamental precondition for learning. Principals and teachers should therefore regularly emphasize the importance of learning and they should not tolerate any condition that could inhibit learning by the students.
- Principals and teachers should expect high behavioral standards from their students.
- The school should have a clear policy for the development and implementation of school rules and regulations, in which the students themselves are visible participants. These rules should be well communicated to the students who in turn should demonstrate their understanding of such rules.

- The principal and staff should be able to create a warm school climate that allows for adequate, and uninhibited social interaction between student, staff, and the administration. This can be demonstrated by teachers and principals' taking keen interest in students' achievement and development.
- Principals should effectively devolve some aspects of school's disciplinary functions to teachers, who in turn should handle such delegated roles professionally; and
- School community relationship should be very cordial. Researchers have shown that the school has a higher than average incidence of community involvement in schools activities, hence a cordial school – community relationship could help reduce incidences of examination malpractice, after school hour burglary of principal's office, cultism and gangsters.

Studies have shown that principals who adopt these and other preventive elements of the PDP approach usually have well-disciplined schools.

Statement of Problem

The preventive discipline practice (PDP) has proven to be one of the most effective globalize approaches to combating schools' indiscipline. In Nigeria, there are evidences of its application with other models; however the extent to which this approach is being used by principals of secondary schools is yet unclear. Effort is therefore made in this study, to provide answer to a key question on gender disparity in the application of preventive discipline practices by principals of secondary schools in Nigeria.

Research Questions

Answers were provided to the following questions:

1. To what extent are principals involved in the application of Preventive Discipline Practice (PDP) in schools management.
2. Is there a gender difference in the application of PDP to school administration in Nigeria.
3. What difference exists between rural and urban principals in the application of preventive discipline practices in educational management?
4. Is there a difference in the quality of discipline in schools adopting the preventive, corrective and defensive approaches to school management?

Study Objectives

The purpose of the study was to determine gender disparity in the application of preventive discipline practices by principals of secondary schools in Nigeria. Specific objectives include the following:

- (a) assess the quality of discipline in Nigerian secondary schools;
- (b) ascertain the difference in the application of preventive, supportive and corrective disciplinary models by male and female principals and;
- (c) Determine the relationship between applied disciplinary models and the quality of school discipline.

METHODS

Employing the ex-post facto design, data on administrations approach to school discipline were obtained from a sample of 100 male and 100 female high school principals, while data on quality of discipline in the sampled schools were obtained from 1000 participants comprising teachers, students, community leaders, youth organizations, and officials of the ministry of education. Data collection procedures including observations, interviews, field note-taking and document collections were used and both rural and urban respondents were considered in drawing the sample to allow for adequate representation of all groups.

The instrument developed was made up of three sections. Section A was concerned about respondents demographic characteristics; just enough to allow the researcher know those that are principals, teachers, youths, students and community leaders. It also provided information about those who are ministry of education officials, rural and urban dwellers and respondents' gender. Section B adopted a Likert-type scale to seek information from the respondents on the preventive, supportive and corrective approaches to school discipline. Key issues addressed in this section included staff commitment to school discipline, availability of clear and broad-based school rules et al. Finally Section C focused on issues about the quality of discipline in the sampled schools to enable the researcher provides appropriate answer to research question 4. This information enabled the researcher to classify the schools into two categories of well-disciplined or poorly disciplined.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Comparative means of data analyzed on the tested variables are presented in tables 1 and 2. Table 1 presents the comparative mean on gender and rural-urban disparities in the application of preventive discipline practices as compared with supportive and corrective approaches, while table 2 shows data (mean scores) on the quality of discipline of male and female principals in rural and urban communities using preventive, supportive and corrective discipline practices.

Table 1: Comparative means of gender disparity in the application of tested discipline practices.

Location	Rural		Urban		Total
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Variables					
PDP	.16	.28	.24	.32	.25
SDP	.28	.36*	.36*	.44*	.36
CDP	.56**	.36*	.40*	.24*	.39

N = 1000

PDP = Preventive Discipline Practices

SDP = Supportive Discipline Practices

CDP = Corrective Discipline Practices

** = Highly applicable

Results presented in table 1 reveal clear disparity in the application of the preventive, supportive and corrective discipline practices, by principals of secondary schools. Data show that only 25 percent of the sampled principals use the Preventive Discipline Practice (PDP) while 36 and 39 percent adopted the supportive and corrective approaches. The focus of this research and therefore of interest in the data is the findings on the preventive approach. Data reveal a low application of PDP by principals of secondary schools. In response to research question one; it is observed that only 25 percent of sampled principals apply the preventive model. And of this 45 percent, 60 percent are female principals while 40 percent are males.

Table 2 presents results on quality of school discipline on tested variables.

Data presented in table 2 show that the quality of discipline is highest in the schools using preventive discipline practices (48%) and lowest in schools applying the corrective (18%) approach. Again the quality of discipline appears higher in schools managed by female principals (50%) as compared to male management (46%) schools.

Table 2: Indices on quality of school discipline

Location	Rural		Urban		Total
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Variables					
PDP	.48*	.52*	.44*	.48*	.48
SDP	.32	.36*	.32	.36*	.34
CDP	.20 ⁺	.12 ⁺	.24 ⁺	.16 ⁺	.18 ⁺

N = 1000

PDP = Preventive Discipline Practices

SDP = Supportive Discipline Practices

CDP = Corrective Discipline Practices

* = Well disciplined schools

⁺ = poorly disciplined schools

DISCUSSION

Educators, social and clinical psychologists may not be able to develop an antidote to completely eliminate school violence and other forms of indiscipline in the very near future, because of the complexity of the human organism. Events in our environment show that violence against humanity is indeed on the increase (Okoli 2006; Amolu 2006; Abdulah 2006; Ugwuoke 2003). The school is a microcosm in a universal society, therefore societal crime regularly permeates school membrane (Ikoya 2004). It is therefore important to look at appropriate mechanism that could be used to manage school crime and violence effectively. Hence several scholars have provided structures and developed models, for effective management of indiscipline in schools (Duke 1989; Brophy 1986; Chiam and Chan 2004; Ikoya 2005). This paper examined principals' application of these models in the management of schools' indiscipline.

Using data collected from observation scale, questionnaire and interviews the present study revealed that the level of application of preventive discipline practices is very low (25%). More of the sampled principals (39%) use the corrective approach for the management of school discipline while 36 percent adopted the supportive model. More female principals (60%) used the preventive approach when compared with their male counterparts where only 40 percent use the preventive model. The observed difference is probably due to men's assumptions of their ability to handle and deal with disciplinary issues, therefore preventive approach is not adopted. Women on the other hand may not be prepared to deal with violent situations, so they make adequate plans and preparations to prevent the occurrence of school crime and in disciplinary practices.

On the relationship between disciplinary models adopted by principals and the level of school discipline, the data analyzed reveals that schools where principals apply preventive discipline practices were well disciplined, when compared with schools where principals use the supportive or corrective approaches. The level of discipline with the preventive model is 48 percent while it is 34 percent and only 18 percent in schools using the corrective approach.

IMPLICATION

Findings from this research have practical implications for effective management of school discipline. Indiscipline in schools is linked with the application of corrective discipline practices, while well disciplined schools are associated with the use of the preventive discipline approach. The implication from findings in this study is that the level of indiscipline in Nigerian secondary schools is high because more principals are using corrective discipline practices in managing school discipline problems.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined gender difference in the application of preventive discipline practices (PDP) in the management of school discipline. Findings revealed that general application of preventive discipline model by all the principals is very low (25%), however, the level of application of PDP by female principals (50%) is higher than for male principals (40%). More principals in Nigeria use corrective discipline practices in the management of school discipline. The study also shows that the well-disciplined schools are those applying the preventive model while the poorly-disciplined schools are those using corrective discipline approaches. It is accordingly recommended that principals of secondary schools adopt preventive disciplinary practices in educational management, to enhance discipline in their various institutions.

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