

A Critical Evaluation of the Current Implementation of Learner Disciplinary Strategies of Principals in State Secondary Schools of Mauritius: A Case Study

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Abstract

Learner discipline is a major school problem in the state secondary schools of Mauritius. This study examines the current disciplinary strategies that principals are implementing and attempts to determine the extent to which they are effective. Qualitative data were collected from principals, educators, learners, parents and superintendents in four selected state secondary schools by using focus-group interviews, individual interviews and non-participant observation. By using content analysis, it was found that principals are implementing reactive and punitive strategies that are ineffective. Discipline is viewed from the custodial perspective. There should be a shift to the humanistic perspective and punishment-based disciplinary approaches are not recommended.

Keywords: Learner Discipline, Current Disciplinary Strategies, Humanistic Perspective, Punishment-based Disciplinary Approaches.

1. Introduction

Schools are traditionally regarded as safe places for the learners as the principal and the educators function *in loco parentis*, and the school's role, as per the Student Behaviour Policy document, is to provide "a safe, secure and supportive environment" (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, 2015). This is likely to help the learners to manifest socially responsible behaviour which brings about an improvement in their academic success. Moreover, with better academic performance, they are likely to behave in a positive manner (Dunlap, Goodman, McEvoy & Paris, 2010; Olley, Cohn & Cowan, 2010).

A recent study on learner indiscipline in Mauritius found the following causes of a lack of learner discipline in secondary schools: poor academic performance, private tuition, lack of effective and innovative teaching strategies, lack of good role model, peer pressure, an over-exposure to immoral sex, violence and drug abuse on social media, and a knowledge-based curriculum (Le Mauricien, 2016). Since principals are responsible for maintaining discipline among their learners (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2009), learner discipline management has been a complicated problem which has encouraged them to search for disciplinary strategies and interventions that they may use in the best possible and more effective way (Belle, 2014).

The principals of the state secondary schools have the duty to lead their organisation within the educational, legal and political framework. This is because they are accountable for their actions to the Minister of Education who has the sole responsibility to take and make decisions relating to education and school matters (Education Act 1957). The School Management Manual for Principals clearly illustrates the limited authority and leadership of the principal in dealing with the discipline problem in their school: "*the principal is responsible for the school under his or her responsibilities but he or she has to send reports to the Zone Director who is responsible for the proper functioning of all the state secondary schools in the Zone; the Director of Zone should keep the Ministry informed of all happenings and performance of schools; and the principal will report all the matters pertaining to the decentralisation of procedures and services.*" (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2009). There is a form of decentralisation of decision-making by the principal; yet he/she is highly accountable to the Ministry of Education. Indeed, if the school is to be transformed into a better one, the transformation of change of learner behaviour must come from within the school (Mulford, 2003). It is within this Mauritian context of the leadership of the principal with relation with the management of learner discipline in schools that the study was done.

2. Purpose of the study

This paper examines the various strategies that the principal may adopt to maintain learner discipline in state secondary schools in Mauritius. It also assesses the effectiveness of these strategies when they are actually implemented. Indeed, the principal, as the school head, has a major role to play in ensuring a safe learning environment in an attempt to facilitate effective instruction – the core function of the school (Belle, 2007). According to Belle (2015), the principal should make of his/her school a better one in which there are healthy and positive relationships among all the stakeholders of the school, including the learners in their behaviour with others, on the school premises. So, this paper aims at focusing mainly on the role of the principal in maintaining discipline among learners in the state secondary schools and the extent to which the strategies he/she adopts are effective in the Mauritian school context, from the perspective of principals, educators, superintendents, parents and learners. This study provides the principals and other stakeholders in the secondary education sector with the opportunity to gauge the effectiveness of the implementation of these strategies so that they may all reflect on adopting more effective and positive disciplinary approaches to learner discipline management. Ayadin (2010) confirms that secondary school principals have not been effective in maintaining learner discipline because they punish and criminalise learners.

3. Theoretical background

Discipline is a complex school problem (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2009; UK Department for Education, 2016) and a lack of it from learners has become a major public health problem (Smith & Green, 2007). From the traditional perspective, researchers have defined discipline as the degree of order and structure that would help maintain high behaviour standards in the school; however, this is the custodial perspective (Mabeda & Prinsloo, 2000; Mukuria, 2002; Ugboko & Adediwura, 2012). However, recent literature has established that discipline should be viewed from the humanistic perspective whereby discipline is viewed as a process which allows the learner to be personally responsible for his/her behaviour and be in a position to judge between right behaviour and wrong behaviour (Fields & Fields, 2006). Discipline is a concept that goes beyond punishment: the school should help the learner to develop self-discipline (Bear, 2010; Skiba, 2010; Abidoye & Onwezu, 2010; Serame, Oosthuizen, Wolhuter & Zulu, 2013). Discipline should no more be regarded as adults controlling the learners' behaviour (Maphosa & Mammen, 2011). This is associated with the twenty first century demand for the adults to respect the inalienable rights of the child (Oosthuizen, 2010).

The researcher overviews the various models of behaviour management in order to better understand the strategies that the principal may adopt to maintain learner discipline in secondary schools. Only models that recommend a whole-school approach are discussed in this paper.

3.1 The responsive classroom model

This is a model for the whole school. It focuses on promoting self-reliance, building a sense of community, and helping learners to be more active in their learning (Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). It recommends “a set of practices that help principals create environments that enhance children's feelings of belongingness, consider children's developmental levels, foster their social skills, connect families to the children's learning goals and create a conducive environment for learning” (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). Brock et al (2008) highlight the seven principles of the responsive classroom, (a) there should be an equal emphasis on social and academic learning; (b) the focus should not be only on what the learners learn but on how they learn; (c) social growth supports academic growth; (d) more emphasis should be laid on critical social skills like cooperation, empathy, self-control and responsibility; (e) the cultural and developmental characteristics of the learners are equally important to the academic content; (f) the school should work with learners' families to better understand the former; and (g) support the ways educators may work in a collaborative manner.

The principal should therefore create opportunities for learner choice, focus on the process of effective learning, teach self-regulatory skills to learners and promote collaboration and reflection among educators and learners on the discipline problem (Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). He/she should also encourage frequent parent-school conferences and partnership and network meetings among educators and among principals of different schools to discuss the best possible practices in terms of learner discipline management (Manning & Bucher, 2013).

3.2 The School-wide Positive Behavioural Support (SWPBS) model

The SWPBS model is a framework which assumes that learners manifest goal-directed behaviour in response to events in the environment, social interactions with others and other stress related to internal emotions (Sugai & Horner, 2006; Vaughn, Sheffield, Duchnowski & Kutash, 2005). The three goals of this model are (a) to set up effective procedures and policies in an attempt to create positive learner behaviour, (b) to bring an improvement to the ecological arrangements of the institution, and (c) to determine and choose a spectrum of evidence-based interventions and practices (Martella, Nelson & Marchand-Martella, 2012). The components of the SWPBS model are (a) identification of three to five school-wide behaviour expectations, (b) teaching of social skills and behaviour expectations, (c) provision of reinforcement for positive behaviour, (d) correction of learner indiscipline by using a set of consequences, (e) collection and analysis of data on learner behaviour, (f) involving all shareholders, (g) replacing punitive discipline with proactive behaviour management, and (h) using administrative resources to enable the implementation of the SWPBS (Blonigen, Harbaugh, Singell, Horner, Irvin & Smolkowski, 2008; Luiselli, Putnam, Handler & Feinberg, 2005).

There are three levels of prevention in the model (Sugai & Horner, 2006). The primary level prevents learners from becoming at risk for a lack of discipline. The principal must set up and follow these steps: (a) set up a few positively stated expectations, (b) describe the expectations in accordance with the settings or routines, (c) teach expectations through well-developed scripted lessons, (e) establish various strategies to recognise positive behaviour, (f) develop a staff reinforcement system that recognises people who contribute to the implementation of the system, (g) develop an action plan (Simonsen, Sugai & Negron, 2008). The secondary prevention is designed to support learners who manifest too many risk factors of learning and behavioural difficulties (Manning & Bucher, 2013; Lane, Cook & Tankersley, 2013). The aim is to reverse harm. The principal must use supports such as teaching study skills, the Behaviour Education Program which uses the check-in, check-out system, and the Incredible Years Training for Children which teaches anger management skills, social skills and interpersonal problem-solving skills (Lane et al, 2013). The tertiary prevention is an individualised level of prevention addressed to learners with emotional and behavioural problems and to providing assistance to the families of such learners. The aim of this tier is to reduce harm, and to do so successfully, the principal needs the help of expertise and special educators, counsellors, educational psychologists, and behaviour interventionists (Maphosa & Mammen, 2011). Lane et al (2013) mention the following strategies that the principal may adopt at this tier, namely the First Step to Success Program, the Multisystemic Therapy Program, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Pharmacological intervention and anxiety management/relaxation training. The principal is the main agent in this model as he/she plans, motivates, coordinates and controls the system (Nealis, 2014).

3.3 The Response to Intervention and Instruction (RTII) model

This is a comprehensive and proactive integrated school improvement model that is based on standards, and it includes prevention, assessment and intervention when it is required (Vermont Department of education, 2013; Whitten, Esteves & Woodrow, 2009). It consists of intervention at the early stage of the manifestation of learners' lack of discipline and the prevention of delays associated with social-emotions and the occurrence of challenging behaviour from learners (Fox, Carla, Strain, Dunlap & Hemmeter, 2010). It uses evidence-based strategies in an attempt to promote social development and address learners' challenging behaviour.

The model uses a four-tiered system. In the first tier, instruction in the general education classroom covers 80% to 90% of learners. A universal screening is done through office discipline referrals (ODRs), direct observation, lateness, school attendance, and poor academic performance (Horner, Sugai & Vincent, 2005; McIntosh, Chard, Boland & Horner, 2006; Walker & Shinn, 2002). It is a universal system of behavioural support. The second tier addresses academic and behaviour challenges that occur during first tier. Instructions and interventions are provided in a more comprehensive, frequent and intense manner in a small group of learners. The principal makes use of direct observation of learner behaviour and daily progress reports (DPRs) to identify those who need interventions such as social skill training, counselling, anger control training, check-in, check-out interventions and check, connect and expect interventions (Diamond, 2006; Fairbanks, Sugai, Gardino & Lathrop, 2007). The third tier is the level at which the learners with behavioural problems are examined through reviews of their progress. Those whose behaviour has not changed receive specialised individual instruction and behavioural interventions in the fourth tier (Hale, 2008; Dawson, 2013). An individualised education program (IEP) or a behaviour support program (BSP) based on the functional assessment is designed by the principal and his/her team (Dawson, 2013; Fairbanks et al, 2007).

In the RTII model, the principal facilitates cooperation between the general education educators and the special education educators who must be able to use consistent and effective instructional methods and behavioural interventions (Losen, Hewitt & Toldson, 2014). He/she must adopt the distributed leadership and collaborative leadership styles to coordinate all the four tiers and encourage the setting up of a community of practice among all stakeholders who work as a team. The principal also encourages parental engagement and continuous professional development of all the educators in learner discipline management.

4. Research Methodologies

This study uses the qualitative research approach as it aims at examining the current disciplinary strategies implemented by state secondary school principals in an attempt to maintain learner discipline. It also investigates into their effectiveness by understanding and comparing the experiences of 6 principals, 2 superintendents, 24 learners, 24 parents and 24 educators who live the problem of a lack of learner discipline and how the principal deals with it. The experiences of the participants are gathered through focus group interviews and individual interviews and analysed using the descriptive approach. In-depth interviews are the best instruments to gain insights into the experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher is a non-participant observer in the natural setting. The purposive convenient sampling is used as the selected participants are key informants about the situation and the 6 selected schools are in a particular educational zone convenient for data-collection for the researcher.

Prior authorisation from the Ministry of Education was obtained and the consent form as well as the assent form were explained to and duly signed by the participants. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the data collection, processing and interpretation stages. The six steps of Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2010) were followed for data analysis process, namely preparing and organising the gathered information; reviewing and exploring them; coding the information into categories; constructing thick descriptions of participants, schools and activities; building themes; and reporting and interpreting the gathered information. The content analysis approach was used to analyse the transcribed data and the observation log.

5. Findings

The purpose of this paper is to determine the strategies that state secondary school principals are currently implementing to maintain learner discipline in Mauritius and to critically evaluate them in terms of their effectiveness. The findings revealed five disciplinary strategies that are commonly being implemented.

5.1 Parental conferencing

The School Management Manual for principals of state secondary schools mentions that the school principal may organise parental conferencing to discuss issues pertaining to learner absenteeism, subject combinations, late coming and behaviour problems of their children (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2009). This study revealed that principals are performing as per the requirements of the Ministry of Education. They argued that calling parents is the only disciplinary strategy that the principal may implement within the political and legal framework. Principal D confirmed it: *"I deal with a lack of learner discipline by calling and getting the parents to be in. The school cannot work alone in the process of educating the child. Parents are the first partner of the school."* The Canter's assertive discipline model encourages the use of parental conferencing strategy (Rosen 2005; Iverson, 2003).

However, the superintendent of School A, Learner 3 of School D and Parent 5 of School C found that parental conferencing is ineffective. Learner 3 of School D confessed: *"Parents are called at school, but the principal takes no concrete actions, except a simple verbal warning."* Also, when parents are called, they do not come to school to work in collaboration with the principal in order to try to address the learner's behaviour. Learner 6 of School B illustrated this ineffectiveness: *"Often the principal calls the parents of the learner who misbehaves, they do not come to school to take cognizance of their child's behaviour. So, learners take advantage of the parents' indifference to their behaviour to freely and fearlessly manifest a lack of discipline at school."* Indeed, Kimaro and Machumu (2015) reckoned that phone calls for parent conferencing are not the most appropriate means of communication when it concerns the children's behaviour at schools.

5.2 Special report

The special report is the check-in/check-out system (CICO). It is a daily behaviour report card that is used in conjunction with daily training in social skills (Manning & Bucher, 2013).

According to Kelly and Vaillancourt (2012), a special report helps the learner who manifested a lack of discipline to start the day positively and it establishes and reinforces the behaviour expectations from the learner; it helps to correct behaviour problem at secondary schools.

From the field notes, the special report is a small booklet with the name of the learner who misbehaved, his/her class form and the effective date when the disciplinary action was taken by the principal or the superintendent. The learner keeps it in his/her possession for a week; she/he writes the name of the subject and that of the educator; at the end of each subject period, the learner takes the special report to the educator who writes about his/her behaviour in the class. At the end of the day, the learner submits it to the superintendent who monitors his/her behaviour progress. By the end of the week, the learner takes home this report for the parents to take cognizance of his/her behaviour progress at school. This disciplinary action is waived if there has been an observed improvement; else, the principal gives a detention.

However, the special report is found to be ineffective by superintendents, educators and learners of state secondary schools. For the superintendent of School A, the principal cannot fully use the special report to really address the problem of learner discipline: the principal lacks empowerment to do so. She stated: *“When the learner misbehaves, she knows the principal will give her a special report, the principal or I will call her parents, what next? She knows she will not be rusticated. Why? We do not rusticate because we cannot accept the fact that she will miss her lessons. We do this for the benefit of the child. However, the child who misbehaves seizes this opportunity or lack of sanctions. So, you see it is better to take severe actions against the learner. However, the principal is not empowered to take decisions to rusticate, suspend or expulse a learner from the school. He will have to consult the Ministry who must then give its consent for such a disciplinary strategy. It is a very long process.”* In the event that the principal gets the authorisation to temporarily suspend the misbehaved learner following the special report which shows no behaviour improvement, the learner discipline will not positively change. This is confirmed by Learner 3 of School D: *“But, with no improvement, the learner gets a maximum of five days off school. However, the learner who misbehaved is happy to get a week “holidays” from the school. Instead of a deterrent, it encourages learners who do not like school to manifest a lack of discipline so that they are kept away from school for some days.”* Zaslow (2010) asserts that some learners find out-of- school detention to be an opportunity of vacation.

The principal is responsible for maintaining learner discipline (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2009). Yet, in the Mauritian education context, the state secondary school principal has a limited authority as the education system is centralised. All education decisions are taken by the Minister of Education who writes the educational policies, practices and procedures (The Education Act (1957)). In this context, Principal C desperately commented: *“We are restricted by the Ministry’s policies and protocol for suspension which takes a long time before it is approved or not. We are accountable to the Ministry and this is a constraint for the principal. If you really want disciplinary actions to be taken against a learner who demonstrates serious behaviour offence, but the Ministry does not approve your request, then it defeats the purpose implementing discipline.”* For Moyo, Khewu and Bayaga (2014) and Ntombela (2014), in deciding for suspension and expulsion for serious behaviour problems, the principal must refer to higher authorities who have the authority to make the final decision; but, this is time-consuming. So, from the findings, it is evident that the special report does not bring about the expected outcome in maintaining learner discipline.

5.3 Video surveillance cameras

This disciplinary measure was introduced in schools since 2010 as a Ministry’s policy to reduce incidence of a lack of learner discipline. Indeed, it forms part of a zero-tolerance policy. Skiba (2010) defines a zero-tolerance policy as the practice of adopting stricter penalties like expulsion and suspension, sending the message to the learners that the school does not tolerate any form of indiscipline.

The findings revealed that video surveillance cameras are only being used to identify learners who manifest a lack of discipline; no disciplinary measures are actually taken by the principal to restore discipline or to reduce indiscipline. The superintendent of School C explained the use of such cameras: *“The principal reviews the scene in the school surveillance camera and calls the learner and the parents concerned to his office to explain that the learner is at fault and actions would be taken against him if he continues to misbehave in the future. The principal asks the parents to deal with their child to ensure that the latter does not repeat the same misconduct. The principal cannot report the case of minor offences to the police.”*

The cameras therefore are not effective as they are not operating according to the philosophy of school-to-prison pipeline, where severe punitive disciplinary actions should follow an act of misbehaviour (Nance, 2014). The “broken window theory” of Skiba is not being applied for them to be effective. This theory postulates that severe disciplinary actions must be adopted to show to other learners that any manifestation of a lack of discipline among learners is not tolerated (Skiba, 2014).

Moreover, though video surveillance cameras act as a deterrent to prevent misbehaviour, yet the findings of this study revealed that they do not reduce the acts of indiscipline. Learners in state secondary schools in Mauritius avoid to manifest a lack of discipline in the open spaces of the school yard covered by the cameras. They rather manifest acts of indiscipline in areas where their right to privacy is respected. Principal D stated: *“The students are wise enough to know where the cameras are. The cameras are fitting the purpose, but students do not fear them. It is like a reality show: the cameras are there. I can tell you that the students know the cameras do not cover the areas at the side of the schoolyard. So, they run away from school from there, they smoke there, and they even bully younger learners there. They also smoke marijuana (cannabis) and synthetic drugs in the toilets where are no cameras.”* Spaces such as supply closets and bathrooms that are not within the range of the camera encourage the learners to manifest a lack of discipline as they consider these places safe to misbehave (Amos, white & Trader, 2015).

5.4 E-register (SMS) system

The e-register system is a disciplinary strategy introduced in state secondary schools in 2011. The reasons for its introduction were to control unjustified absences and lateness of learners so that the superintendent may inform parents about their children’s lack of discipline everyday through an SMS (Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research, 2014).

The field notes of the researcher-observer revealed that at the end of the morning Form Master’s period, the senior educator and the superintendent cross-check the attendance register book of learners with the register book for latecomers. After this verification, the IT unit of the school sends an SMS before the first school break to the parents of learners who are not at school.

This disciplinary strategy is one of the most effective in the state secondary schools in Mauritius. The superintendents interviewed approved its effectiveness. The Superintendent of School D observed: *“The effectiveness of this system is obvious when it happens that we wrongly send a SMS to a parent to inform about his child’s absence while the latter is t school. The parent immediately calls back the school to query about the situation.”* However, this effectiveness is questioned by the learners interviewed. Learner 3 of School A stated with much apprehension: *“However, this strategy does not work since many learners wisely give their own mobile phone number or that of their boyfriend or friend. So, parents are never aware of their absence from school.”* So, learners always find ways to circumvent the e-register system and to continue bunking classes (Trevinio, Braley, Brown & Slate, 2008; Ntombela, 2014).

5.5 The attendance card

According to the School Management Manual, *“attendance should be taken twice daily, morning and afternoon. Form Masters, the superintendent, the Deputy principal and the principal must monitor closely the attendance card on a daily basis”* (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2009). The attendance card is commonly referred to as the pink card in state secondary schools in Mauritius. It is also stipulated in the student journal of all schools that *“disciplinary actions will be taken against the learner responsible for the pink card on that particular day, in case of irregularities”*.

The field notes of the researcher showed that the class captain of each class has the attendance card signed by each educator who comes to teach after having counted the number of heads in the classroom. By the end of the school day, the class captain returns it to the superintendent who counterchecks the presences and absences on the card with the attendance register. Moreover, when the superintendent notices from the card that there is a learner who is regularly absent or not punctual, she reports the case to the principal who does counselling. If counselling does not help to improve the learner behaviour, then he/she is given a written warning and the parents are called to the principal’s office. Learner 2 of School C reasoned: *“The superintendent reprimands the late comers and those who shirk classes. Parents are called to report to school to take note of the situation and to take corrective actions.”* Ginsburg, Jordan and Chang (2014) found that the attendance card is used mainly as an early intervention strategy to prevent the problems of absences and shirking classes from beginning to worsen.

However, the findings of this study show that if there is no follow-up from the superintendent, the strategy does not work as it should. This is because superintendents are taken up by many administrative tasks and there are around one thousand learners in each state secondary school in Mauritius. Indeed, in these schools, some class captains neglect to return the attendance card to the superintendent who is often not able to monitor closely the card; he/she lacks the time to do so and cannot determine which class captain has not submitted the card in the afternoon. Learner 5 of School A commented in this regard: *“A learner may bunk a class and throw the pink card in the bin or steal it, or even cut their name off the list of learners who are late. Another example is when a learner knows she is recorded absent on the attendance register, but is not recorded late on the pink card, she is free to leave the school premise earlier and she will not be sanctioned as she is officially absent. This is often done with the help of the class captain as the card is not closely monitored by the superintendent.”* Though the superintendent has the responsibility to monitor the attendance card, yet the principal does not supervise him/her: this gives way to learners to manifest a lack of discipline.

6. Discussion

The data gathered from the participants allowed the researcher to identify the strategies or measures that state secondary school principals are currently adopting to maintain positive discipline among learners. Interestingly, despite the various laws and educational policies that the government passes to protect the child and to make of the learner a disciplined citizen of the country, learners' lack of discipline is a common major school problem. This study has attempted to analyse the reasons why the identified disciplinary strategies are not successfully effective in Mauritius. It has become evident that the strategies that are being implemented are reactive and punitive. When using the parental conferencing, the principal and/or the parents reprimand and use warning against a reproduction of an acts of discipline. The video surveillance camera is a repressive strategy since it uses a school-to-prison pipeline, via in-school and out-school suspension, which has proved to be unsuccessful in US; the principal criminalises the learner who misbehaves (Lewis, 2009; Sprick, 2009). The e-register system is a reactive strategy as the superintendent informs the parents only after the manifestation of the lack of discipline by the adolescent.

It is evident that state secondary principals, educators and superintendents as well the Ministry of Education are in favour of implementing the traditional reactionary strategies to discipline learners. The findings have revealed that the degree to which these strategies are effective in managing learner discipline is questioned by the participants as they have both positive and negative effects on the willingness of learners to misbehave. Punishment-based disciplinary approaches may only discourage socially unacceptable behaviour of learners since they may instill fear in them (Maynes, Mottonen & Sharpe, 2015). However, though the goal of discipline is to make the learner responsible for his behaviour (Wolfgang, 2009), yet punishment-based disciplinary approaches may take away their responsibilities (Maphosa & Mammen, 2011).

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study about the extent of the effectiveness of the disciplinary strategies implemented by the state secondary school principals, it is evident that there should be a change in the way stakeholders perceive the concept of learner discipline and the strategies to adopt to effectively manage this problem. There should be shift from the traditional approaches to discipline management to alternatives to reactive approaches. It is therefore recommended that evidence-based disciplinary strategies or interventions should be used to address the problem of a lack of discipline. These strategies are defined as *“curriculum and educational interventions that have been proven to be effective for most learners based on scientific studies that use empirical methods, including rigorous and adequate data analysis, have been applied to a large study sample, are replicable, show direct co-relations between the interventions and learner progress and have been reported in a peer-reviewed journal”* (Vermont Department of Education, 2013). It is always advisable and wise to adopt and adapt researched-based strategies that have proved to be successful elsewhere, though they have to be contextualised to be effective. The Ministry of Education should determine to what extent they may be implemented within the legal and political framework.

There should a decentralisation of authority and leadership in decision-taking. The Education Act (1957) should be amended to suit the modern society which has its own characteristics in terms of the nature of adolescent behaviour and the perception of values, norms and culture. The Minister of Education does not know the actual context of state secondary schools which varies from school to school as each school is a unique organisation.

Moreover, not only the rights of learners should be protected by law but the law should educate them as far as their responsibilities and duties are concerned when they are living in the social setting of a school.

8. Conclusion and future research

Through this study, it has established that punitive strategies do not contribute significantly to positive learner behaviour. By critically examining their implementation, it is evident that the principals should rethink about their current strategies in an attempt to fulfil their fundamental role of the leader of learner discipline management in schools. Using the visionary leadership and inclusive leadership styles, they may adopt a school-wide approach to maintain effectively learner discipline. They need to set up a community of practice and adopt the best management practices that have proved to be successful in the developed world. The principal alone cannot achieve success in the school; he/she needs to have the collaboration of the superintendent, the educators, the parents, the learners as well as the immediate outside community of the school. This is because learner discipline is a complex and multifaceted problem (Ali, Dada, Isiaka & Salmon, 2014). Further research may be carried out to determine the extent to which researched-based disciplinary interventions may be implemented in state secondary schools in Mauritius. We cannot continue implementing punitive strategies that are worsening the learner discipline problem.

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