

ASSESSING THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE ON THE RIGHTS OF COLLEGE STUDENTS IN TWO COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN THE UPPER WEST REGION OF GHANA

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Abstract

This study investigates the effects of school discipline on the rights of college students in Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya and McCoy Colleges of Education in Upper West region-Ghana. The study employed questionnaire and interview approaches to access data from the respondents. Questionnaires were administered to two hundred and ninety-two students (292) while in-depth interviews were conducted with the sixteen (16) teachers. The study found out that teachers clearly understood school discipline and students' rights while majority of students demonstrated limited understanding of school discipline and their rights which pose a great threat to their ability to fight for such rights. The study revealed the effects of school discipline on students as undermining the dignity of the student as humans, creating poor relationship between students and their teachers, modeling poor behaviour that poses health risks to students and resulting in student truancy and school dropout. To protect student's rights while ensuring effective school discipline, the study recommends: regular workshop and training for various stakeholders (school authorities, teachers and students) on the enforcement of code of discipline, rules and regulations for schools; continuous and systematic monitoring and supervision of the activities of students and teachers by principals, Board executives and other stakeholders.

Keywords: *Discipline School Discipline, Students' Rights, Students' Behaviour, Punishment.*

INTRODUCTION

The term discipline has varied definitions from different researchers and scholars. It may be defined in accordance with each educator's brand of educational philosophy. Discipline involves obedience and willing submission to a rule of life without which a learner will not attain his/her goal (Amoah, Owusu-Mensah, Laryea and Gyamera, 2015). Rosen (1997) defines discipline as a branch of training that develops self-control, character, efficiency and strict control to enforce obedience or as a treatment that controls and punishes. Discipline has also been defined as a training which corrects, molds or perfects the mental faculties, or moral characters, obedience to authority or rules, punishment to correct poor behaviours (Eggleton, 2001). Thus discipline is seen as a process of teaching and guiding people to abide by certain rules and regulations personally or with the orders of superiors through the imposition of punishment where necessary.

In the school situation, discipline is seen as measures put in place by school managers and authorities to regulate the behaviours of pupils and students in order to ensure effective teaching and learning in the school. Cameron (2006) defines school discipline as school policies and actions taken by school authorities to prevent students from unwanted behaviour, primarily focusing on school conduct, codes and security methods, suspension from school, corporal punishment and teachers methods of managing students' actions in class.

Slee (1995) and Rosen (1997) found out that students become successful in education, especially during the free compulsory basic education period when they conform to set rules and code of conduct in schools. This confirms the finding of Department for International Development (2005) in Ghana and Botswana where schools that had excellent performance in academics were those largely characterised by good discipline and management of staff and students.

However, Gordon (1981) stated that when schools mete out punishment to students, it may be damaging to their physical, emotional, and social well-being. UNICEF (2006) therefore argues that the first aspect of violence that disturbs the rights of students in schools is in the name of school discipline. This explains the need for ensuring school discipline without compromising on the rights of students in the school. It is in the light of this that Youth for Human Rights International (2009) and Bluwey (2002) see human rights as those freedoms given by nature which the government should protect by law. Thus students as human beings are entitled to all human rights; because rights are inherent in our humanity. They do not lose their rights because they are in a school. To this end, teachers and students need to be well informed about their rights, so that they could collaborate to protect these rights.

The consequences students receive for their behaviour determines how likely they are to repeat that behaviour thus both positive and negative behaviour. Violence in schools is a global problem, and has several negative outcomes. Punitive punishment is an assault on a person's self. It indicates that one is defenseless from it and cannot retain his/her dignity in the face of it. This is so especially with the case of students; it takes away their self-worth and respect and makes them feel as sub-humans or animals (Vockel, 1991; Gradinger, 2005; Plan International, 2008; Assan & Arthur, 2008). Discipline is meant to ensure that students learn from their mistakes and grow to be responsible adults. Therefore, any form of discipline that undermines the dignity of the child must not only be discouraged but abolished and perpetrators of such acts punished.

Indiscriminate or excessive use of physical punishment and harsh treatment meted out to students lead to higher levels of student absenteeism, truancy and school drop outs (DFID, 2005). Assan and Arthur (2008) describe these factors leading to school drop-outs as forms of silent exclusion. According to Wettach, Owen and Hoffman (2015) though suspension is a widely used disciplinary technique in both general and special education, its frequent use has many desirable and unintended outcomes, including a less healthy school environment, lower academic achievement, higher levels of disruptive or antisocial behavior, and higher school dropout rates.

The fundamental principle about the imposition of school discipline is that it should be administered in a manner consistent with the child's dignity and in accordance with applicable international laws on the Rights of the Child. Article 28 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) to which Ghana is a signatory provides that, state parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present convention (Amoah *et al.*,

2015).

The Ministry of Education in conjunction with other stakeholders such as the Ghana National Association of Teachers has established rules and regulations to foster discipline among students. However, most teachers resort to the use of scolding and corporal punishment as other disciplinary measures which do not ensure desired change. There is the general perception that teachers use teaching and learning strategies and techniques, which perpetuate or abuse students' rights in public and private schools in Ghana. Therefore the views of teachers and students concerning discipline among students in schools are very paramount in ensuring discipline and protecting the rights of students in school. However, this cannot be achieved unless systematic investigations are carried out to find out how teachers and students understand school discipline and the rights of student and the effects of school discipline on the college students in Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya and McCoy Colleges of Education in Upper West region.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on the Cultural Reproduction and Structural Violence theory by Odora (1996). The theory allows teachers as members of society to articulate societal perceptions of school discipline and student rights in their interactions with students. Therefore, enforcing school discipline and student rights involves wiping out of oppressive structures that limit the life chances of students, which in effect reduces the amount of power held by oppressive groups. Culture of education which is the promotion of cultural knowledge, creativity and inter-cultural understanding through education explains that, learning and thinking are always situated in a cultural setting. School discipline and student rights can therefore be observed by an analysis of the resources provided by the educational system namely teachers, educational materials and code of discipline. Thus, cultural reproduction can equally be the cause of low level of practice of school discipline and student rights. The educational system therefore plays a major role in cultural reproduction process.

The school through its socialisation process, like other social institutions, has inbuilt structural violence to limit the chances of students, especially the minority groups. Structural violence can be said to be in operation when force is not exerted willfully by one person to another but through a structure created and perpetuated by a custom or law. The position then is that any form of oppression, exploitation and marginalization inherent into structures that do not give pupil equal life chances and therefore an infringement on human rights can be described as structural violence. Unfortunately, except with a trained eye, the only visible violence in schools is physical violence.

Structural violence can manifest itself in various forms at the school level: assigning girls more domestic chores at school while boys have more freedom to rest after classes. For example, buying food and fetching water for teachers. This hinders good performance at school and serves to keep girls as underdogs compared with boys who are top dogs (Odora, 1996). Structural violence works by changing the moral colour of an act of the school from wrong to right or to some other immediate meaning acceptable to the status quo. For instance, over burdening girls with menial chores is interpreted by society as lessons meant to prepare the girl for adulthood and not rather from a perspective of denial of rights to leisure (Odora, 1996).

An informal observation in society suggests that there is oppression, marginalization and exploitation of students be it at school or home. However, most oppressed (students) have

internalized the norms of the oppressor (teachers and parents) to the extent that conflicts are bound to occur in the process of getting the oppressed to understand their predicament and how to break loose from it. This emanates from the fact that, the perception of the oppressed as the opposite of the oppressor has not been awakened to the level of engaging in a struggle for liberation. It is not therefore surprising that even students in schools oppose changes in traditional disciplinary methods. This study looked at the extent to which physical and structural violence exist and its influence on school discipline and the rights of college students in Nusrat Jahan Ahmadiyya and McCoy Colleges of Education in Upper West region.

Research Design

A cross sectional survey design was used to explore the effects of school discipline on the rights of college students in N J Ahmadiyya and McCoy Colleges of Education in Upper West region. Kumar (1999) argues that this survey is best suited to studies aimed at finding out the prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, problem, attitude or issue by taking a cross section of the population. They are useful in obtaining the overall ‘picture’ as it stands at the time of the study. Kumar (1999) contends that the survey method is an excellent tool for studying attitudes and orientations in large populations. It also allows researchers to ask many questions on a given issue. Surveys have population validity, that is, survey research uses standardized data collection instruments such as interview guide with the aim of making generalizations from a sample population to a larger population. Through asking a good number of people the same questions, it is possible to get a broad and accurate view of responses to certain issues.

Sample Size Determination

A mathematical formula by Opoku (2002) was used to determine the sample size. The mathematical formula used is given below:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(a)^2}$$

Where **n** is the sample size, **N** is the sample frame and **a**, is confidence level (margin of error) (Opoku, 2002). With a confidence level of 95 percent or 5 percent margin of error and sample frame (N) of 13, 590, the sample size derived was given as below;

$$n = \frac{1,336}{1+1,336 (0.05)^2} = 1,336 \frac{1}{1+1,336 (0.0025)} = 1,336 \frac{1}{1+3.34} = \frac{1,336}{4.34} = 307.8$$

Approximately 308 respondents

Based on the mathematical formula, a sample size of 308 was selected for the study. A simple proportional method was used to obtain the number of respondents from each category of respondents selected as shown in Table 1

Table 1: Sample for Each Category

Category	Target Population	Calculation	Sample Size
Students	1,265	$\frac{1,265}{1,336} \times 308$	292
Teachers	71	$\frac{71}{1,336} \times 308$	16
Total	1,336		308

Source: Author’s Construct, 2021

Sampling Technique

Simple random sampling was the main method used for selecting the teachers and students for the study. Simple random sampling method was used because it gave everybody an equal chance of selection and therefore avoided the likelihood of bias (Opoku, 2002; Boateng, 2017). Again, the researcher realized that, improper sampling could lead to difficulties in data analysis and making wrong inferences. As such, the simple random sample technique was employed because it assisted the researchers to avoid such difficulties. In this process, the teachers and the students assigned with numbers from the two colleges were written on slips of papers, mixed thoroughly in a container and drawn as a lottery one after the other until the required number of respondents was obtained.

The non-probability sampling technique employed was purposive sampling which was used to select the colleges in the Upper West region for the study. These included N J Ahmadiyya College of Education and McCoy College of Education. This method helped the researchers to select schools that enhanced collection of important and accurate information from respondents on the effects of school discipline on the rights of the student in selected colleges in the Upper West region.

Data Collection Methods

Data collected was entirely from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included collection of data from teachers and students on the effects of school discipline on the rights of students. Secondary sources involved data extracted from appropriate and relevant journals, documented policies of school discipline, workshop documents and relevant documents such as the African Charter on Human and People Rights (1981), Children’s Act (560), and Unified Code of Discipline for Schools (Ghana Education Service, 2010).

The study used interview schedule and questionnaire as the main instruments for collecting data from the sampled respondents. The researchers used interview schedule for teachers in the selected colleges. The researchers’ selection of interview schedule is influenced by Kerlinger (1973), who observed that more people are willing to communicate orally than in writing and will therefore provide data more readily in an interview. The questions in the schedule are pre-determined, leaving the interviewer little or no chance to divert from the schedule (Creswell, 2014). The fact that the items / questions in the schedule were structured means that interviewees can be presented with almost the same questions. The data collected through a structured interview can be subjected to statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). By this instrument, the researcher was able to solicit the views of teachers on the effects of school discipline on the rights of students in in selected colleges in the Upper West region.

Also, questionnaire as a data collection instrument contains questions that are printed or typed on paper in a certain order. By this instrument, the researcher developed each item to address a

specific objective or research question of the study (Orodho, 2003). Both closed and opened questions were asked. The respondents were expected to read and understand the questions and provide answers to them on their own. The researchers only explained questions to respondents who found difficulty in understanding them without influencing their responses in any way to avoid the likelihood of bias and to make the findings of the study credible. This instrument was selected because it made the gathering of data from a large sample very inexpensively. Questionnaire was administered among the students to solicit their views on the effects of school discipline on the rights of students in selected colleges in the Upper West region.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in analyzing the data collected from the field. Data collected were edited, coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) version 21.0. SPSS software was used because it is highly flexible in manipulating and managing data. Quantitatively, descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages and tables were used to analyze major responses on the effects of school discipline on students' rights. A qualitative technique involving thematic or content analysis was used to analyze information derived from the field. Wherever possible, interview transcripts and direct quotations were used to enrich the presentation of results, and to contextualize the discussions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

How Teachers and Students' Understand School Discipline and Students' Rights

The study found out how teachers and students understand school discipline and students' rights in selected colleges in the Upper West region.

It was realized that teacher respondents clearly understood school discipline. About 13 (81.2 percent) of them defined it as the obedience to school rules by both teachers and students while 3 representing 18.8 percent viewed discipline as a teacher-student relationship in which the teacher corrected the student with absolute control. They explained that school discipline is where teachers ensure that students keep the school neat and punish students who come to school late, students speak politely and dress decently, become obedience to teachers; teachers making laws for students to obey.

Table 2: Respondents Views about School Discipline

Respondents views about school discipline	Teachers		Students	
	No.	%	No.	%
Obedience to school rules by both teachers and students.	13	81.2	78	26.7
Teacher-Student relationship in which the teacher correct the child with absolute control.	3	18.8	20	6.8
Obedience to school authority, rules and regulations by students.	0	0.0	109	37.4
Punishment given to students.	0	0.0	85	29.1
Total	16	100.0	292	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Generally, it was observed that teacher respondents clearly understood school discipline. One teacher at 'S 2' perceived school discipline as *"an act, whereby students and teachers comport*

themselves and obey school rules and regulations governing the school, organisation of school activities to ensure that teachers and students use existing facilities to create a favorable learning environment for teaching and learning” (Field Survey, 2019).

Again, a teacher at ‘S 3’ defined school discipline as “ the practice that deals with teachers and students going to school on time, teachers teaching students under the supervision of the head, obeying school rules and regulations” (Field Survey, 2019). Also, teacher respondents at ‘S 6’ had this to say, “school discipline is an act, whereby pupil and teachers comport themselves and obey school rules and regulations governing the school, organisation of school activities to ensure that teachers and students use existing facilities to create a favorable learning environment for teaching and learning” (Field Survey, 2021).

These findings confirm Cameron (2006) that school discipline are school policies and actions taken by school personnel to prevent students from unwanted behaviour, primarily focusing on school conduct, codes and security methods, suspension from school, corporal punishment and teachers methods of managing students’ actions in class.

Even though, the study revealed that teachers had a fair understanding of school discipline, majority of them indicated that they did not strictly abide by school rules. The teachers mentioned lateness, absenteeism and others as some common offenses they committed at school.

On the other hand, 109 students representing 37.4 percent understood school discipline as obedience to school authority, rules and regulations by students while 78 (26.7 percent) of them defined it as obedience to school rules by both teachers and students. Student respondents from ‘S 1’ explained that school discipline is the rules and regulations for school. Also, about 85 (29.1 percent) students explained that school discipline is the punishment given to students for wrong doing in the school. Similarly, a student from ‘S 5’ defined it as “punishment given to students at school for their wrong doing” (Field Survey, 2021). Generally, they concluded that discipline is when a teacher corrects a student for wrong doing or the student is punished by a teacher for refusing to obey school rules and regulations. This supports Eggleton (2001) assertion that discipline corrects, molds or perfects the mental faculties, or moral characters, obedience to authority or rules, punishment to correct poor behaviours of students.

Respondents Understanding of Student’s Rights

This section investigates how respondents (teachers and students) understood students’ rights in selected colleges in the Upper West region.

Table 3: Respondents Understanding of Students’ Rights.

Respondents understanding of students’ right	Teachers		Students	
	No.	%	No.	%
a.) Understand	16	100	120	41.1
b.) Do not Understand	0	0.0	172	58.9
Total	16	100.0	292	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

From Table 3, all 16 teachers (100 percent) understood student rights correctly and explained them as the free will of the student to exercise his/her opinion without any intimidation, the privileges enjoyed by a student in school, the things every student must have and the things that

protect the welfare of students in the school. They further revealed that the rights of students should not be infringed upon whenever he/she is being corrected for wrong doing in the school. Similarly, Youth for Human Rights International (2009) and Bluwey (2002) observed human rights as those freedoms given by nature which the government should protect by law. Thus students as human beings are entitled to all human rights; that they do not lose their rights because they are in a school. Therefore, rights of students are the relationship between the individual students and the schools and in such a relationship the school has the obligation to protect and provide certain rights to the citizens.

On the other hand, student respondents gave several definitions of their rights. Whereas about 120 students (41.1 percent) explained it as the personal freedom, advantage or opportunity of a student or the right every student is entitled to in the school, the remaining 172 (58.9 percent) could not define students' rights correctly. It implies that majority of the students did not understand students' rights which poses a great threat to their ability to fight for such rights. Even though, majority of student respondents' did not understand students' rights, Bluwey (2002) suggests that human rights as those freedoms which are conferred on the individual by nature and which his government should protect by law.

What are the Effects of School Discipline on Students' Rights?

The study examined the effects of school discipline on students' rights by teachers and students. In this study, students were presented with the following statements connoting effects of indisciplinary actions of teachers and students on students.

Table 4: Students Responses to Statements Showing Effects of the Indisciplinary Actions of Teachers and Students on Students.

Statement	S A		A		D		SD		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
a) Undermine human dignity	210	71.9	0	0.0	82	28.1	0	0.0	292	100.0
b) Poor personal relationship between students and teachers	260	89.0	0	0.0	32	11.0	0	0.0	292	100.0
c) Health risks	265	90.7	0	0.0	27	9.3	0	0.0	292	100.0
d) Truancy and school dropout	292	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	292	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2021.

From Table 4, about 210 (71.9 percent) students strongly agreed that the strategies teachers adopted to discipline them especially caning, kneeling down and insults undermined their human dignity as persons while 82 (28.1 percent) of them disagreed. They explained that meting out these punishments to students infringed upon their human rights and made them lose self dignity in the school. Thus the use of corporal punishment robs the child of self worth in the school.

Again, 260 students (89.0 percent) agreed that violent disciplinary strategies resulted in poor relationship between students and their teachers. A student had this to say: "there are some

teachers you even fear to ask a question because such teachers would insult or beat you for asking a question" (Field Survey, 2019). This results in poor and bad communication between teachers and students in the school. This confirms the finding of Straus (2001) that the use of corporal punishment is linked to the fear of teacher and or school and decreased communication between students and their teachers.

Also, about 265 students representing 90.7 percent agreed that, indisciplinary actions of teachers and students could pose health problems to students. Students recounted events where through fighting, a student became unconscious and hospitalised and several others also sustained various degrees of injuries. This findings is in line with that of Assan & Arthur (2008) and Vockel (1991) that indisciplinary behaviours of teachers can result in mental health problems and injuries.

All 292 (100 percent) students unanimously strongly agreed that student and teacher indisciplinary actions led to student truancy and dropout. Students laid much emphasis on sexual relationships, that it could lead to pregnancy and school drop out especially among female students. They cited a particular student, who got pregnant and stopped school, probably to escape the ridicule of her mates. Also, a student respondent at 'S 2' had this to say: "Yesterday, I did not come to school because of Goliath (where 'Goliath' was referred to a particular teacher). This student said he was late and because of the fear that the teacher on duty was going to cane him, he decided to be absent from school" (Field Survey, 2019). This portrays an effect a student might suffer from teacher indiscipline in school. Similarly, Wettach *et al.* (2015) stated that wide use of disciplinary techniques in both general and special education may lead to higher school dropout rate.

Table 5: Teachers Responses to Statements Showing Effects of the In disciplinary Actions of Teachers on Students.

Statement	S A		A		D		SD		Total	
	N _{Q.}	%	N _{Q.}	%	N _{Q.}	%	N _{Q.}	%	N _{Q.}	%
a) Undermine human dignity	13	81.2	0	0.0	3	18.8	0	0.0	16	100.0
b) Poor personal relationship between students and teachers	15	93.8	0	0.0	1	6.2	0	0.0	16	100.0
c) Health risks	15	93.8	0	0.0	1	6.2	0	0.0	16	100.0
d) Truancy and school dropout	16	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	16	100.0

Source: Field survey, 2021

From Table 5, all 16 teacher respondents (100 percent) mentioned that indiscipline actions of teachers and students led to student truancy and school dropout. They explained that student-student/student-teacher sexual relations could lead to teenage pregnancy which eventually results in affected students dropping out of school as remarked by Wettach *et al.* (2015). In addition, a teacher at 'S 2' mentioned that student-teacher relationship can lead to forced marriage, where a teacher is made to marry a student for impregnating her to save his face and job. Also, the study revealed that the teenage pregnancy could result in court litigation if parents of students involved failed to reach a compromise on the mode of catering for the unborn child

and the mother.

Yet gain, about 15 (93.8 percent) teachers strongly agreed that violent disciplinary actions of teachers resulted in poor relationship between students and their teachers. They explain that such actions put fear and panic in the students which ruins the kind of relationships that exist between teachers and students in academic institutions. They concluded that such actions of teachers result in poor and bad communication between teachers and students in the school as found by Grading (2005).

The study revealed that due to poor school attendance of both teachers and students, students did not complete their syllabus before their final examination so they ended up failing their exams or engaging in examination malpractice in order to pass exams. Again, the study revealed that, students imitated indisciplinary actions of their colleagues and teachers.

CONCLUSION

The study sought to find out the effects of school discipline on students' rights in selected colleges in the Upper West region. It was realized that teachers clearly understood school discipline while students demonstrated limited understanding of school discipline. Again, teachers understood students' rights correctly and explained them as the free will of the students to exercise his/her opinion without any intimidation, the privileges enjoyed by a student in school and the things every student must have and the things that protect the welfare of students in the school. However, majority of the students did not understand students' rights which pose a great threat to their ability to fight for such rights. Despite majority of student respondents' inability to understand students' rights, it was suggested that human rights are essential for every individual and therefore should be considered and protected by institutions and laws of the state. The respondents (teachers and students) mentioned some of the effects of school discipline on students as undermining students' human dignity as persons, poor relationship between students and their teachers, posing health problems to students and resulting in student truancy and school dropout.

RECOMMENDATION

These recommendations were made to improve effective school discipline while protecting students' rights in Senior High Schools in Kumasi metropolis. on the rights of students.

1. The various stakeholders (school authorities, teachers and students) needed to be educated about ensuring effective school discipline while protecting student rights. This could be done through workshops and seminars to build capacity of the stakeholders. Student clubs should also be formed to educate students.
2. Principals, School Board executives and other stakeholders should continuously and systematically monitor and supervise the activities of students and teachers in Senior High Schools. The monitoring exercise should be interaction with students on teachers' disciplinary measures and procedures since harsh and psychologically unhealthy measures on students goes a long way to affect them and the entire purpose of education.
3. School Disciplinary Committees should enforce the implementation of drafted student right sensitive Code of Discipline for both teachers and student within the framework of the GES Code of Discipline for both teachers and students.
4. Counselling and reporting structures needed to be developed in Senior High Schools in the metropolis. Apart from counselors, teachers should also be tasked with the

responsibility of counselling students while the contact numbers of the District Education Directorate and other child protection institutions should be pasted in all the classrooms and made available to the parents. This would help victims of abuse to report directly to superior authorities if they think the school is not giving them adequate protection.

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