

Effective School Discipline Practices of Some Primary Schools in Pema Gatshel *Dzongkhag*

Tshering Norbu

Teacher, Khothagpa Primary School, Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag (District), Bhutan

Received: 02 Oct 2021; Received in revised form: 25 Oct 2021; Accepted: 02 Nov 2021
©2021 The Author(s). Published by TheShillonga. This is an open access article under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract

The study was conducted under Pema Gatshel Dzongkhag (district) to investigate the effectiveness of school discipline under Pema Gatshel district in Bhutan. The main objective of this article was to evaluate the perception of the effective school discipline according to the principals, teachers, and parents. This paper was a qualitative study based on in-depth semi-structured interviews which were limited to forty-five key participants from six different schools under the Pema Gatshel district. Data were analyzed employing content analysis. The major findings of this study revealed that for efficient functioning of school discipline policy in schools, various stakeholders like parents, teachers, students and the community should work collaboratively. The study also revealed that schools should include students and parents in the decision-making process particularly while trying to bring changes to school discipline policy

Keywords— Primary Schools, education system, Discipline problems.

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, when the education system was introduced in Bhutan it was teacher-centered. With the monastic style of teaching, students pictured the teacher as strict and rude particularly regarding discipline viewed discipline as very rigid and strict. However, with the modernization the education system in Bhutan has changed from teacher-centered to student-centered and people's view of discipline has changed.

The development of disciplines is considered a necessary aspect of social evolution. The evolution of disciplines begins with the knowledge that develops through social experience or interaction between human minds and the environment in the form of a personalized experience (Yadav and Lakshmi, 1995). Thus, school discipline evolved with the evolution of time. In the context of Bhutanese classrooms, school discipline has changed since the modern education system was introduced in Bhutan in the early 1950s.

According to Curwin (2003), the key definition of discipline is enabling learners to make appropriate choices knowing that there are both positive and negative consequences to their behaviors in school. He further states that discipline is a word used often by administrators, parents, and educators,

yet he suggests that there is little common agreement on its meaning. For instance, it is referred to as 'punishment' for many, but for others, it means what an educator does to control a learner's behavior.

Schools face many discipline problems. Students are frequently involved in fights, they get into conflict with school norms and country law at large. Students are also found to be using drugs and alcohol. According to the national baseline assessment of drugs and controlled substance use in Bhutan (2000), 50% of students have tried alcohol and one-third of students have used tobacco products. The survey also shows that 2% are dependent on cannabis, 0.9% on alcohol, and 0.5% on solvents. Such great challenges have made it administrators and educators to maintain effective school discipline difficult. It has posed formidable challenges to schools, parents, and society.

This study explored the opinions of the principals, teachers, and parents of students in six primary schools under the Pema Gatshel district regarding the existing discipline practices in their schools. The study investigated the factors that played a role in effective school discipline practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Discipline problems in schools are nothing new. According to Nelson (2002), “throughout the last decade of the 20th century, increased attention was given to the lack of discipline and growing use of violence among young people, particularly in and around schools”. Even in Bhutan, there are many disciplinary issues among the students who often come into conflict with the national law. There are offenses such as stabbing, drug abuse, drug peddling, serious participation in gangs, fighting in the town, ambushes, breaking school property, bullying, and smoking. It is essential to institute appropriate disciplining mechanisms so that schools have a safe and supporting environment. Therefore, according to the 11th Annual Education Conference, 2008, the ministry of Education decided and adapted to ban corporal punishment in the Bhutanese Education system and replaced it with the new school discipline policy. With such a policy in place, this study explored how effective the school discipline has become with the introduction of school discipline and the literature review relates to students’ perception, school climate, zero-tolerance policy, and parental and community involvement.

2.1. Students’ Perception

Small children tend to look upon all punishment as unfair and undeserved, whereas older students generally regard punishment for misbehavior as fair and acceptable if the punishment is equitable and fits the problem. Cohn (1996) states that students who can participate in decision-making at school are more committed to decision-making and democracy. He also explains that when one looks inside the classrooms of teachers who are less controlling and more inclined to support students' autonomy, one finds students more self-confident and more interested in learning for their own sake. Each aspect of life in a classroom offers an invitation to think about what decisions might be turned over to students, or negotiated with students, individually and collectively.

According to DeCocco and Richards (1994) who did the study on urban, suburban, and rural high schools, students from these schools expressed a strong interest in helping the school management with classroom planning, school policymaking, and discipline. Studies revealed that one of the key elements in the encouragement of productive student behavior is to create a common feeling among students that they are also involved in the operation of the school. However, some educators feel threatened sometimes because they tend to consider students’ involvement in rulemaking will eventually lead students to challenge the school authority in subject matter and evaluation.

Jamtsho (2017) states, that "a traditional notion of the teacher-student relationship in our culture of high expectations of obedience and compliance is still very strong especially among teachers; while the students are brought up in a different time, and do not subscribe to it as much". As an educator, one has to move with time and adjust accordingly. Today student wellbeing is considered important to solve the disciplinary problem in the classroom. Student wellbeing is the same as providing non-academic student service to maintain discipline, manage student behavior, or provide another form of help and support (Jamtsho, 2017). This implies that student wellbeing is important as it is instrumental to achieve effective school discipline in school.

2.2. Zero Tolerance Policy

In response to the falling standards of behavior among the Bhutanese youth, the Ministry of Education has allowed schools to take a harder stance, introducing a zero-tolerance policy for any disciplinary issue and crimes in particular (Pelkhil School, 2012). According to Sautter (1995), many schools are standing up to violence by trying everything from enacting new school suspension policies to adopting zero-tolerance policies for possession of weapons, drugs, or any kind of violent behavior. Zero tolerance policy has been intended primarily as a method of sending a message that certain behaviors will not be tolerated, by punishing both major and minor offenses severely (Noguera, 1995).

In recent times, many of our schools have been plagued by a high incidence of lack of student discipline and increased student violence. In response, the MoE has initiated a series of consultation meetings with the schools and instituted a new policy that calls for zero tolerance to lack of discipline (BBS, 2012). According to Joseph (n.d, p.1) "zero tolerance"—referring to policies that punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor—was an invention of the US government in support of state and federal drug enforcement policies in the 1980s.

According to the 13th Education Policy Guidelines and Instructions (2012, p.18), the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy in our schools is expected to bring a safe and secure environment in school where parents are on board as active partners in the education of children. The new policy aims to have less disparity in the identification of offenses and application of sanctions. Besides, students are made aware of the consequences of their actions, and schools are empowered and made more accountable for their decisions. The policy also focuses on valuing the school culture. According to former Education Secretary Sangay Zam, the policy of zero tolerance is placed to nurture and help children realize their full potential but not to punish the students (BBS, 2012).

2.3. Parental and Community Involvement

At the foundation of a disciplined school are an involved community and supportive parents. Sergiovanni (1994, p.87), "community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort". Frosch and Gropper (1999) suggested that parents and community are crucial partners in efforts to create a discipline plan and they need ongoing communication about what is going on in the classroom, as well as suggestions for ways to communicate with their children concerning discipline.

Teachers, parents, students, and the school community can play an important role in changing the school environment. By taking a proactive approach and with all groups working together, the community and parents have the opportunity to create a climate that fosters respect and potential friendships among students who might otherwise remain apart (Levin, 1994).

According to Walker (1995) "our deteriorating societal conditions are producing a much larger class of children who are designated as "at-risk" or as "special needs" populations- many of whom will ultimately develop severe conduct disorders and antisocial behavior patterns leading to negative outcomes such as delinquency, school dropout, vocational adjustment problems, interpersonal adjustment problem". According to Walker, the behaviors of children are greatly affected by the type of conditions that prevail around them.

It is also true in Bhutan. For example, with the fast pace of development in our country, many modern amenities are now available. Media like television, advertisement, rock music, newspapers, and commercial films have the potential to excite young minds into practicing unhealthy acts like drugs, gang fights, unruly hairstyles, night partying, and so on. We have already started to feel the effect of this modernization in our schools. Kessler (1988, p.149) pointed out "there is the number of family situation comedies or serials which depict parents and children, often everyday conflicts". The essence of this statement is that these programs convey to us the deteriorating social conditions that need to be carefully considered for our children's wellbeing.

According to Hunter (1990, p.112), in seeking a collaborative partnership with parents, the school needs to keep four messages in mind- "(s) he can, (s) he doesn't, you care, and let's plan". The first message means that their child is capable of learning (by example) and the second message considers what the child does or does not do which does not reflect a child's ability. The third message conveys that the school is fully aware that parents care as much as the school does and no more doubt and the school appreciates the parents' desire to improve the situation. The

last message is about the high regard schools have for parents as potential partners to join in a mutual effort to promote the child's success in school. Hence, the above ideas of Hunter tell us that it is important to bring parents into the daily workings of the school system.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This research was carried out employing a qualitative research approach to examine the perception of principals, teachers, and parents on the effectiveness of the school discipline under Pema Gatsel Dzongkhag (district) located in the eastern part of Bhutan. This study was a qualitative method in orientation because it will have the potential to obtain the required data to enrich the understanding of the perception of principals, teachers, and parents on the effectiveness of the school discipline. To obtain data, the researcher employed in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions applied to find the utmost appropriate and understanding data required. Semi-structured interviews will have a few guiding questions, which will guide the researcher to get the required responses from the participants (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). According to Miles & Gilbert (2005), semi-structured interviews are discussions grounded on the researcher's questions aimed at encouraging a dialogue where the interviewee feels comfortable and speaks what he or she thinks about the topic. In-depth interviewing is a qualitative investigation technique encompassed of conducting and comprehending with a small number of participants to examine their perceptions on a particular idea, issue, or condition. The in-depth interviews in this study were directed by a set of pre-determined questions to explore the perception of principals, teachers, and parents on the effectiveness of the school discipline.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected from forty-five key participants from six different schools under the Pema Gatsel district for two weeks and the key participants included both males and females to maintain a balance between the views given by different gender. Key informants included five participants (the principal, four teachers; two males and two female) from each school and four parents, two males and two females from each community around the schools. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select the key participants in this study because it allowed the freedom to select the units to be observed based on the researcher's judgment of which ones are the most useful or representative. According to Schumacher and McMillian (1993), in purposeful sampling, the researcher identifies information-rich participants for the reason that they are

possibly knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation. The data were analyzed by applying a content analysis technique. According to Fraenkel, et al. (2012), content analysis is a technique by which people's behavior

can be studied by analyzing their communication. They contended "it is extremely valuable in analyzing observation and interview data."

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The social demographic profile of the key informants

Table.1. Key informants' demographic profile

Respondent type		Frequency	Percent
Respondent by Gender (N= 30)	Female	3.00	10.00
	Male	27.00	90.00
Respondent occupational category (N= 30)	Principal	8.00	26.67
	Vice Principal	2.00	6.67
	Teacher	20.00	66.67
Respondent by educational level (N= 30)	Bachelors Degree	27.00	90.00
	Master and above	3.00	10.00
Respondent by age (N= 30)	Below25 years	1.00	3.33
	25 – 35 years	14.00	46.67
	36 – 45 years	10.00	33.33
	46 - 55 years	5.00	16.67
Respondent by years in service (N= 30)	Less than 5 year	11.00	36.67
	6-10 Years	5.00	16.67
	11-15 Years	2.00	6.67
	16-20 Years	7.00	23.33
	More than 20 Years	5.00	16.67

4.2. Findings from Teachers

The majority of teacher key informants were excited to share their perception about effective school discipline in their schools. One of the common disciplinary issues that the teacher encounters are disrespecting elders and teachers. As one key participant said;

“Fighting, quarreling, bullying and not obeying teachers and parents were some common

disciplinary issues the school faces daily among many. Fighting and creating groups have

become common among the youth these days. We have to continually keep on reminding

students not to fight and to maintain peace among each other. We instruct those students

to observe their seniors. At the same time, we also provide counseling”.

Further, classroom discipline like not being able to maintain the pace of clean well-ordered classroom in the absence of the teacher. Irregular attendance, failing to do work on time, dress code is also some challenges that the school faces these days (Key Participant 1, 2, 3, 5). However, the teacher says that such discipline issues can be dealt with and resolved through, a constant reminder, giving close attention, verbal warning not in the open but in bilateral. Further, if the child shows no improvement in the collection of the statement, reporting to the class teacher and can be referred to a teacher counselor for counseling related to respect and convince them of benefits if having respect to others. (key Participant 2, 3, 4).

While teachers and Principals were asked about their perception regarding the current school discipline practices in their schools, some of the teacher participants said that the current discipline system is perfect which brought

changes in students' discipline. Key Participants 1, 2, 4, 5 feel that the current discipline practices in the school are going well and it is helping students to change their behavior and attitude in the school. Though there are some challenges involved students are aware of the discipline that they need to maintain and the consequence of breaching school discipline norms. They also shared that to date there are no issues regarding the current discipline practices in schools, however, one key area focused by the system should be supported by students and parents equally to implement school discipline effectively.

On the contrary, key participants 3, 6, 7, and 8 feel that to improve school discipline, there is a need for light corporal punishment sometimes. They said that at the time it is challenging to address disciplinary issues since it has to be done through various strategies.

According to the key participant, 1 "Discipline practices are not up to the satisfaction and it can be the failure of parents and teacher. Banned corporal punishment has spoiled school discipline. Students of this generation seem like they have less fear and respect for the school discipline. With modern technologies easily accessible all over, the discipline of students has declined to compare to erstwhile".

Interestingly, some students feel that discipline in school is not needed as it is a burden for both the teacher and students. Assertive disciplining is overtaking positive disciplining-most people have fewer ideas on positive discipline which leads to old age methods that disturb the young minds.

Some of the contributing factors that enhance good school discipline practices are setting strong rules and regulations in shaping the behavior of the student and ensuring that students understand it well and act accordingly. Having the right rules and regulations will help in the smooth functioning of the school minimizing the disciplinary issues (Participant 3, 4, 5). Teachers also shared that teachers must set a good example and give equal care and love to all the students. Students must be made that they are part of the school. Participant 5 said,

"Being agreeable, openness, active listening to the children's, engaging in co-curricular activities, understanding children's background, not being quick responsive can add additional values in implementing school discipline effectively".

All the teachers' participants shared a common view that teachers and parents must work hand in hand to address and solve the disciplinary issues in the school. They also shared that regular counseling must be given to students, and Bhutanese etiquette must be taught to all the students so that they will not forget the Bhutanese values.

"Parents and Teachers must support each other to bring a best in the child discipline. At home, parents must discipline their child and at school teachers must take responsibility. Though I have not encountered such a problem, I have heard like parents supporting their child even when the teachers tried to correct and discipline the child. Such attitude from some of the parents supporting their child in wrongdoing is disheartening" (Participant 5).

There must be a written school discipline guideline that must be made aware to all the teachers, students, and parents. Timely awareness to students, keeping the progress of students, and meeting frequently with parents are deemed important to have effective school discipline in school.

According to teacher participants, some of the barriers to effective discipline practices were illiterate parents, lack of continuous counseling, coaching, and irregularity of taming basic discipline. In addition, having a lazy parent, and ignoring the child's behavior, and not setting a good example to their child remains as a barrier in implementing discipline. Participant 1 shared that though some effort can be shown from the teacher's side in instilling good discipline it must all start from home. A well-behaved child at home will be the same in school and vice versa. If the parents shoulder their responsibility without any failure and discipline their child at home, there is no need for disciplinary issues in the schools. According to key Participant 5,

"Lack of parents' support in understanding children's interest, children failing to share their cause of the problem, however, such barriers can be addressed through the collaborative meeting of teachers and parents in solving and identifying the cause of the problem of children, encouraging positive work and interests of children and constant monitoring by teacher and parents, motivation and reinforcement can help in overcoming from the problems of children".

Some of the barriers also include students who are least bothered about disciplinary issues. In the erstwhile, there is a profound respect for teachers and elders. There are some different ways to talk with the elders. However, today, it seems like the value is lost, where students least bother to respect their teachers and elders (Participant 1, 2, 4). Teachers also shared that age of a student and the family background influences the effective discipline technique. Such problems can be addressed by discussing with parents during Parents-Teachers meetings, making them aware of child discipline, and sharing the policies of school administration.

Teachers feel that to implement school discipline effectively in schools, they feel that they need training or guidance on how to deal with disciplinary issues and positively help a child. All the participants shared that set of positive discipline techniques must be educated to all the teachers so that they can effectively address a disciplinary challenge. Teachers also shared that there must be some clear discipline guidelines in the schools, empowering/educating parents on the school discipline is equally important.

4.3. Findings from Parents

The findings are from the interviews conducted with the parent respondents from different position levels who share a shared concern just like some teachers. While parents were asked regarding their children's discipline in school, parents shared that their children obey what they say at home and they expect that their children behave the same in the school too. As key Participant 4,5 noted that,

"I can see lots of improvement in my child's discipline, which should be credited to the teacher for their good supervision. I am really happy with how my child behaves. To have effective school discipline, I feel that teachers and parents must support and work together. Both parents and teachers must take an equal responsibility to discipline a child. What parents cannot do teachers can, and what teachers cannot do parents can do, so to shape the future of the child, disciplining a child is necessary".

Just like a teacher, parents also shared that parents and teachers must work together. Parents shared that the discipline of a child can be described as the potential of children to be normal humans and maintaining expected behavior.

On the contrary, few parents observed that the discipline of their child is worst compared during their time. As suggested by key participants 6 and 7,

"These generation children must be given practices in terms of discipline beginning from basic Bhutanese etiquette since these are important aspects of life. There is a huge generation gap. To discipline a child, one must know the etiquette and values of our forefathers. We must change the attitude of our child".

The discipline of the younger youths is concerning and must be changed before it is too late. Parents said that children must be engaged with the academic and co-curricular activities with strict supervision of parents and teachers in the school and at home. Participant 8 said that last time there was a video on Facebook where students were fighting in the school uniform. Seeing such things question how

schools are implementing and overcoming such disciplinary issues.

When parents were asked if they could see any improvement of school discipline implemented by school authority comparing to 5 years ago, parents' respondent that they see a huge change in the school discipline comparing to the past 2-3 years. Most of the parents said that there is an improvement in implementing the discipline policies well in the school since they can see a positive attitude of their child comparing to experience. However, few parents feel that the school discipline has deteriorated compared to the past five years. Key Participant 6 stated that,

"The school discipline seems like declining compared to past years. It may be because of the change in government and education policies. The different schools have their way to discipline their students depending upon how the teachers implemented them. As parents, we understand how strictly discipline is implemented in school, judging children timely. In the past, during our time, due to corporal punishment, most of the students stays disciplined. However, ever since corporal punishment was banned in the school, I started questioning the effectiveness of the school discipline".

All the parents agree that the school discipline had changed widely comparing to the last five years.

Parents also expressed their view that to have effective school discipline, their child must be strictly monitored by teachers as well as parents themselves. Proper and consistent guidance must be provided to all the students, and special attention must be given to those students that frequently breach the discipline of the school. Rather than misjudging a student that cannot adapt to school discipline, special attention and care must be provided. Participants 6, 8, 9 said that parents and teachers must guide their children on basic discipline and should be well monitored, teach extra values to help them guide in the right direction. Some parents support the strict monitoring of their children. They feel that to have a good discipline child, parents are equally important to teach child good attitude through strict monitoring and proper guideline to streamline good discipline. If not well monitored, there are chances that students might get distracted, which might lead to other unethical work and ruin their own life. Discipline shapes what types of future you want.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this study revealed that from the three domains, external support was found strongly important in bringing effective school discipline followed by the

education system and self-discipline. To have well-disciplined students in school the external support of parents and teachers is believed crucial. Parents and teachers must work together for the discipline of students. While teachers are responsible for bringing about positive behaviors in children, parents must also take responsibility for inculcating positive behavior in children while at home and as well as in school. This study has indicated that appropriate behavior by students is essential to attain successful education. In the absence of well-disciplined students, schools will not be able to function smoothly. Hence, all stakeholders need to engage meaningfully and cooperate with the school management. to function smoothly and bring out positive results.

Several recommendations can be considered for future research:

1. To add to the research database, researchers should examine this topic with another group of participants from primary schools in other Dzongkhag (districts).
2. Classroom strategies and their relation to classroom disruptions and their impact on students' behavior should also be studied.
3. To see the change in the student's perceptions and their behavior, future researchers could study the same students at a later stage. The findings can provide insights into the effectiveness of school disciplining and guidance.
4. Future research should include a broader base of grades such as middle secondary school and high school.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bhutan Broadcasting Service. (2012, July 27). *Comprehensive school discipline policy in action*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=15613>
- [2] Bhutan Narcotics Control Agency. (2009). *National baseline assessment of drugs and controlled substance use in Bhutan*. Royal Government of Bhutan.
- [3] Canter, L. (1984). *Assertive discipline teachers plan book plus: Vol.I*. Los Angeles: Lee Canter & Associates.
- [4] Cohen, S. (1996). *Teachers and pupils' attitudes and practices regarding the abolishment corporal punishment in schools in the Gauteng area*. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- [5] Curwin, R. L. (2003). *A human approach to reducing violence in schools: Education leadership online*. Retrieved April 25, 2002, from <http://www.ascd.org/readingroom/edlead/9502/curwin.html>
- [6] Glasser, W. (1969). *Schools without failure*. New York: Harper & Row.
- [7] Hoberg, S. A. (1999). *Education management: Research methodology*. Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- [8] Jones, F. (1989). *The gentle art of classroom discipline. Principal, 10*, 28-32.
- [9] Joubert, R. & Prinsloo, S. (1999). *Education law: Study Unit 1 (Reader)*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal/AACTE.
- [10] Mbithi, D. (1974). *Foundation of school administration*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- [11] Miles, J. & Gilbert, P. (2005). *A handbook of research methods for clinical and health psychology(pp.12)*: Oxford University Press on Demand.
- [12] Nelson, M. F. (2002). *A qualitative study of effective school discipline practice: Perception of administrators, tenured teachers, and parents in twenty school*. East Tennessee State University, 1-96.
- [13] Rice, J. E. (1987). *The attitude of teachers towards corporal punishment. A conceptual primer (2nd ed.)*. Englewood Cliff: Prentice-Hall.
- [14] Royal Court of Justice, Bhutan. (2004). *Penal code of Bhutan*. Thimphu: Kuensel Corporation Ltd.
- [15] Yadav, M.S. & Lakshmi, T.K.S. (1995). Education: Its disciplinary identity. *Journal of Indian*