

Implementation of Code of Conduct as a Positive Discipline Management Strategy in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT The paper examines how secondary schools implement the code of conduct to maintain positive discipline. It adopted a qualitative approach and employed a case study design. Four secondary schools and participants who comprised one Education Officer, four school heads; twenty members of the disciplinary committee, forty prefects and four School Development Committee chairpersons were purposively selected. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews and document analysis and were analysed thematically. The paper established that school personnel were involved in crafting the code of conduct and learners had limited involvement; schools experienced challenges in implementing the code of conduct. It concluded that there were pockets of good practices in implementing the code of conduct. The paper recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should come up with a policy which abolishes use of reactive strategies to deal with learners who breached the code of conduct.

INTRODUCTION

World-wide, for schools to accomplish the set goals, there should be rules and regulations in the form of a code of conduct to set the foundation for acceptable and appropriate learner behaviour (Allie 2001). According to Saya (as cited in Kiprop 2012), rules are very important because they help to set academic excellence and also contribute to all round development of learners. Whilst in South Africa and other countries it is mainly referred to as the code of conduct, in Zimbabwe and countries like Kenya the code of conduct is commonly referred to as school rules and regulations (Bilatyi 2012; Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture 1999; Kiprop 2012). This study, therefore, sought to establish whether the code of conduct has a potential to bring about positive discipline in secondary schools.

Code of Conduct

In this study the terms code of conduct and school rules are used interchangeably since they convey the same meaning. A code of conduct provides a framework of what is considered to be appropriate standards of learner behaviour while undertaking academic and non-academic activities (Yarason and Zaria as cited in Mbabazi and Bagaya 2013). Squelch (2000) and Porteus

et al. (2001) added that the code of conduct must inform the learners of the way in which they should conduct themselves at the school in preparation for their conduct and safety in civil society. The focus is therefore, to equip learners with the expertise, knowledge and skills that learners would be expected to demonstrate as worthy and responsible citizens (Mathe 2008).

The purpose of a code of conduct is to articulate acceptable behaviour in the school, promote positive and self-discipline, establish a disciplined and purposeful school environment, create a well organised school for effective teaching and learning to take place, outline how transgression from the code of conduct will be dealt with and include due process (Lekalakala 2007; Van Wijk as cited in Mathe 2008). This means that the code of conduct should be written and developed in such a way that it achieves the basic aim of maintaining positive discipline in the school to enhance teaching and learning.

Chauke (2009) asserted that effective school rules should be fair, reasonable and realistic. The language used to state the rules should be simple and unambiguous for easy understanding. The rules need to be developed with input from learners, parents, and the community (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth 2001; Sackey et al. 2016). The National Association of School Psychologists (2006) further emphasised that schools should encourage the development of

fair, reasonable, and consistent rules with input from learners, parents, school personnel, and community members about the nature of the rules and appropriate consequences for violations.

Squelch (2000) advised that when crafting a code of conduct special discipline working groups should be established to organize, coordinate the process. It implies that people with expertise can be co-opted, for example, lawyers, social workers, police, magistrates, and many others, to look at specific issues, lead and guide the discussions so as to arrive at agreed policies that deal with learner discipline. Involvement of people with expertise would enable schools to develop codes of conduct which would not conflict with existing laws and legislations, such as the country's constitution, education acts, policies, directives and human rights issues (Joubert and Prinsloo, as cited in Lekalakala 2007). Hence, a discipline policy which is developed by consensus of the school community is more likely to work effectively than the one imposed from above by the school head or governing body (Squelch 2000).

However, Squelch (as cited in Mbatha 2008) argued that involving the whole school community in developing a code of conduct could be a lengthy process, which needs to be well planned and co-ordinated. She recommended that schools should establish a special disciplinary working group which would organise and coordinate the whole process. Contrary, Allie (2001) and Sackey et al. (2016) pointed out that consultation with various stakeholders provides a feeling of ownership so that the meaning of the code of conduct can be understood. Accordingly, participation of all stakeholders in developing the code of conduct would yield positive results in the implementation of the code of conduct as a positive discipline management strategy in schools. This would be enhanced by the fact that the stakeholders would be aware of the contents and value of the codes of conduct and learners in turn would understand the consequences of breaching the school rules.

It is imperative that, during the implementation process, schools should ensure that each stakeholder receives a copy of the code of conduct and should be consulted for the annual review of the code of conduct. It is crucial that the code of conduct be well known to the school community and broadly communicated and posted using a variety of formats. Every learner and

parent should sign and be given a copy of the document. The code of conduct is a legal document that is binding on every learner at the school. In this way, the learners will always be aware of the school's rules, which will guide their behaviour while at school. Hence, the success of a code of conduct is found mainly in communicating the expectations effectively, and applying the procedures (Manitoba Education, Training and Youth 2001; Adams 2005; Mathe 2008; Hawkins 2009; Masekoameng 2010; Lappert 2012; Sackey et al. 2016).

In his study conducted in Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa, Ishak (2004) found that the school studied made a concerted effort to provide all learners and parents with a copy of the school code of conduct when learners either registered for the first time or renewed annual registration. However, Kindiki (2009) in his study in Kenya found that the only time when learners and the school administration talked about the rules in most schools was when the learner was being admitted. This was usually done in the presence of the parent and the learner signs promising to obey all the rules. Some of the rules that the learner promises to obey are undemocratic, vague or oppressive to the learner.

Furthermore, as the code of conduct is implemented, a disciplinary committee whose task deals with incidents related to poor discipline at the school should be appointed. All learners who contravene the code of conduct of the school should be given a fair hearing and, if found guilty, be dealt with accordingly. What is very important to learners and their parents is that consistency and fairness prevail in all cases being heard. The disciplinary committee should therefore strictly adhere to the code of conduct in cases where learners need to be reprimanded, punished or suspended (Hawkins 2009).

In Zimbabwe, the implementation of the code of conduct strategy is guided by Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular Number P 35 of 1999 which emanated from Statutory Instrument 362 of 98 (Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture 1999). The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education stated that the enforcement and administration of proper school discipline requires transparent school rules, to which both teachers and learners contribute in the formulation and execution (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993; Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture 1999). In the implementation of the

code of conduct strategy, schools might suspend, exclude or expel learners for severe cases of indiscipline such as sexual misconduct, insubordination, taking drugs and intoxicating liquors, theft, fighting using dangerous weapons, vandalism of school property, protracted absenteeism or truancy without valid reason and fraudulent practices in public examinations (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993; Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture 1999). Hence, schools should always adhere to the provisions of Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular Number P 35 of 1999 whenever punishment should be administered to a learner (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993).

Though during the implementation process schools can apply negative discipline methods such as corporal punishment, suspension or exclusion, these should be used as the last resort (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993; Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture 1999). The emphasis is on implementing the code of conduct in a way that would enhance positive discipline in schools. Workshops have also been conducted as a way of empowering schools on how to implement positive discipline management strategies (Bowora 2010).

Despite the guiding policies discussed above, concerns and complaints were raised by parents, learners and other stakeholders through the media regarding implementation of the code of conduct strategy in some secondary schools to maintain discipline. It has been alleged that learners no longer felt safe at school as they were constantly being exposed to bashing, torture and even murder (Sibanda 2013, the Zimbabwean Newspaper Reporter). For example, in Mwenzi District a school head assaulted a male learner because he was found out of school bounds and the learner was admitted in hospital with serious brain damage (Newsday reporter 2011; Mlalazi 2015).

Although the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education has recommended the use of positive discipline management strategies in schools, it is not clear how the code of conduct as a positive discipline management strategy is being implemented. Furthermore, it was also observed by some stakeholders that there are pockets of good practices whereby some schools are implementing the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline (Newsday Reporter 2011; Mlalazi et al. 2016). It is against this

background, therefore, that the study sought to examine how the code of conduct as a positive discipline management strategy is implemented in Bulawayo Metropolitan secondary schools as well as focusing on pockets of good practices.

Positive Discipline

Positive discipline in this context entails guiding learners' behaviours and helping them take responsibility for making good decisions and understand why those decisions are in their best interest. Learners learn and ultimately develop self-discipline without fear, and coercion of external forces (Naker and Sekitoleko 2009). Positive discipline management encourages use of non-punitive methods and should be for teaching valuable social and life skills in a manner that is respectful and encouraging for learners, teachers and parents. Positive discipline management is based on the understanding that discipline must be taught and that discipline teaches (Maphosa 2011).

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research question: How are secondary schools implementing the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline?

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to assess how secondary schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province implement the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted qualitative approach which typically studies people or systems by interacting with and observing the participants in their natural environment and focusing on their meanings and interpretations (Nieuwenhuis 2007). Thus, the qualitative approach was relevant for this study because the researcher studied participants' experiences as they happened in natural settings, that is, in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province secondary schools where the code of conduct as a positive discipline management strategy was implemented.

This study employed a case study design which aims to examine research questions and issues, by setting these in a contextual and often causal context (Zainal 2007). A hallmark of case study research is the use of multiple data sources, a strategy which also enhances data credibility (Patton; Yin as cited in Baxter and Jack 2008). The case study design enabled the researcher to intensively focus and obtain unique perceptions, attitudes, views and experiences of participants in rich descriptive data on implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in four Bulawayo Metropolitan Province secondary schools.

The participants who were purposively selected constituted the study sample which comprised one Education Officer (responsible for discipline in schools), four school heads, twenty members of the disciplinary committee, that is, five members from each school, forty prefects (ten prefects from each school) that is, twenty female prefects and twenty male prefects were selected and four School Development Committee chairpersons. The sample units were chosen because they had particular features or characteristics which enabled detailed exploration and understanding of the central themes and puzzles which the researcher wished to study (Ritchie et al. 2003).

The data were collected using semi-structured interviews which were held with four school heads, one Education Officer and four School Development Committee chairpersons. An interview guide with a list of the key questions to be covered was used to encourage the interviewees to talk about specific issues if they did not come up spontaneously (Patton and Cochran 2002; Hancock et al. 2007). The focus group interview participants comprised forty prefects who were divided into four focus groups and twenty members of the disciplinary committees who were also divided into four focus groups. This size generated diversity of viewpoints and good participation (Sherraden 2001). Focus group interviews permitted interactions among participants which enriched data quality because participants provided checks and balances regarding implementation of code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in secondary schools and these weeded out false or extreme views (Kruger as cited in Patton 2002). Additionally, the researcher used a digital voice recorder to capture the participants' responses

during face to face and focus group interviews. This minimised the risk of recording inaccurate data and also to ensure trustworthiness of the data collected. Sources of documentary data on implementation of code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in secondary schools which included policy circulars, schools codes of conduct, log books, disciplinary committee meetings minutes; minutes of meetings with prefects and minutes of staff meetings were examined. Document analysis was used to triangulate where possible what emanated from face to face interviews and focus group interviews. The qualitative data was coded systematically according to specific themes and then analysed to address the main research question. To guarantee credibility, the researcher used member checks and triangulation of data (Guba and Lincoln 2005).

Pertaining to ethical issues, the researcher sought permission from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to conduct the study and was granted. Ethical issues of consent, honesty, respect for the integrity of the individual, confidentiality of certain information and anonymity were considered when carrying out the study.

RESULTS

The data gathered indicated that secondary schools used various methods to implement the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline. The results of the study are presented in the subsequent sections and the identification of participants is as follows: Education Officer (EO); school heads (SH1-SH4) and School Development Committee chairpersons (SDC1-SDC4). The four focus groups for members of the disciplinary committee are identified as FGDC1-FGDC4 and four focus groups for prefects are identified as FGP1-FGP4.

Familiarity with the School Code of Conduct and its Implications

On this issue, the participants were required to respond to the question on how they were familiar with the school code of conduct and its implications. The responses from most of the participants implied that they were conversant with the school codes of conduct and implications. The codes of conduct were made avail-

able to members of staff, learners and parents. For example, SH1 affirms,

I am very much familiar, we have the code of conduct to mould positive behaviour of learners and discourage learners' negative traits.

FGDC3 concedes,

We are familiar with the code of conduct, we instil school rules on our learners, we hold meetings with prefects once a term so that they can properly implement the code of conduct and the school rules are printed on each and every learner's report card.

FGP1 postulates,

We are familiar with the code of conduct because on our reports there are school rules and also in the front office there is a list of rules so that any learner can look at them. The implication is that the code of conduct assists in maintaining order in the school.

EO agrees,

Well, I am familiar with the schools codes of conduct and their implications really is to maintain discipline among the learners population to ensure that they are at school to learn and nothing else and also ensure that the environment through their behaviour is safe for everyone, their colleagues as well as teachers.

However, among the SDC chairpersons, all save for one were not sure of the school code of conduct. Their responses were as follows,

SDC2: *I am not sure but what I know is that when a learner is enrolled to school for the first time we are given a list of school rules and then the parent signs and one copy is left at the school and the other is given to the parent.*

SDC3: *I have never read the school code of conduct. I have always taken it for granted.*

The responses of the three SDC chairpersons are puzzling because these are the people who are expected to be in the forefront in explaining to the rest of the parents some of the contents of the school's codes of conduct. Since they are parents or guardians in the schools, it is assumed that they were also issued out with the code of conduct when their children were enrolled in the school. This suggests that they do not even discuss the school code of conduct with their children at home to remind them of good behaviour at school.

However, since the responses of most of the participants indicate that they are familiar with the code of conduct; it could be said that they are in a position to clearly explain it to the learn-

ers so that the learners adhere to the code of conduct. This would enhance maintenance of positive discipline in selected schools.

Involvement of School Community in Developing the Code of Conduct

Participation of the whole school community in the development of the school code of conduct is crucial if positive discipline is to be successfully maintained in schools. The participants' responses indicate that the crafting of the codes of conduct in the schools involves administration, teachers and in some cases learners. It also emerged that in most cases learners were only involved in the implementation stage. The data collected, again, reveal that parents were not consulted when developing the school codes of conduct. The participants gave the following responses:

SH1: *Though we maintain the code of conduct which has been there for years but on a yearly basis we sit down as staff, that is, everybody, teachers, administration, learner representatives, that is, head-boy, head-girl, deputy head-boy and deputy head-girl to see what to add and what to refine or eliminate from the existing code of conduct. We include learners so that they can say what they think is uncomfortable or unfair on their part. But of late I have seen that it has been the same, we have been adopting the same code of conduct.*

SH4: *It usually starts with administration, there is a disciplinary committee; those are the people who assist us, that is, the crafting part. The implementation, we have prefects who keep on reminding learners.*

FGDC2: *It is rather a wide base consultation because we consult the prefects, what they think should be done to improve our school and also the teachers in general, then the disciplinary committee finally sits together with the administration and then come up with the rules. Parents are consulted in their general meetings, we talk about learner's behaviour then they put forward their suggestions, if their suggestions are constructive we consider them.*

FGP2: *The administration comes up with what should be included in the school code of conduct. The administration then consults members of staff and the disciplinary committee who also bring in the issues which should be included in the school rules. As learners, our role*

is either to agree with those rules or disagree. We usually raise our disagreements through the suggestion box. In rare cases prefects are asked the ways in which school rules can be improved.

Whilst some participants highlighted that parents are consulted in developing the code of conduct, all SDC chairpersons disputed that. They unanimously agreed that parents are never consulted when crafting the schools codes of conduct. These are their sentiments,

SDC1: Parents do not have an input when developing the code of conduct.

SDC2: The administration is involved, parents are not involved, and we have never been asked to participate.

EO also sounds not to be sure about the involvement of parents and learners when he says,

Obviously, I suppose it is the head who chairs and there is the senior master and senior woman, these are the people who are in charge of discipline at secondary schools. I am not sure if there is any input from parents and learners in developing the code of conduct.

The information gathered from participants depicts that learners and parents are not involved in developing the code of conduct. Though there are a few who have indicated that learners are involved, it seems learners and parents are mainly involved in the implementation stage. Thus, lack of involvement of learners and parents could have a negative impact on the implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in selected schools, since learners and parents might lose the sense of ownership of the code of conduct. However, there is evidence of pockets of good practice in this section as some schools consult learners through the prefects' body for their input to be included in the developing the codes of conduct.

Participants' Role in the Implementation of the Code of Conduct

Participants were requested to explain their role in the implementation of the code of conduct. Their responses reveal that most of them played supervisory and advisory role in the implementation of the school code of conduct. As for the disciplinary committee, it emerged that the disciplinary committee deliberates on disciplinary cases in the school and comes up with final decision on action to be taken to discipline learners who have shown untoward behaviour.

If the decision is to expel or exclude the learner from school, the disciplinary committee recommends to the Provincial Education Director as per requirement of Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular P35 of 1999 which states that the schools should recommend for such actions to be taken. The disciplinary committee also follows up all cases referred to them to make sure that the disciplinary measures they have given the offenders are implemented accordingly. Examples of participants' responses are indicated below.

SH3: My role is to supervise, to make sure that the code of conduct is implemented. I supervise and observe the implementation. I also organise meetings and just talk about how things are going and what action should we take.

FGDC2: I think we are the biggest stakeholder considering that we are the ones who normally get involved in discipline issues in the school. We bring in both the parents and the learners, and even the community; we can even involve the police sometimes depending on the case. In other words we supervise the implementation of the code of conduct. We are also involved in making learners aware of the rules. Accordingly, our role is to prevent ill-behaviour, and also correct in case a learner is involved in bad behaviour.

The prefect participants were also asked the same question and conceded that their role was to implement the code of conduct and make sure that all learners toe the line in the implementation process. In their responses FGP3 pointed out that,

Our role as learners and prefects is to make sure that learners abide by rules of the school and if there are any law breakers we make them understand what they have done before they are counselled or punished depending on what they have done. The prefects are also tasked to talk to learners during every morning patrols and after break prefects get into classes and teach other learners about school rules. Prefects can choose one or two rules so that learners will be well versed with the school code of conduct and then in the process they will be implementing it.

However, the prefects mentioned that they encountered some challenges which thwarted their performance in the implementation of the code of conduct. For example, FGP2 complained about ...lack of cooperation from some of the learners.

Threats and hostility from some of the learners make us not perform our duties effectively.

On the same question, the SDC chairpersons expounded that they make sure that parents participate in the implementation of the code of conduct by including discipline issues in the agenda of the parents' meetings. In some cases the SDC is invited in the hearing of critical indiscipline cases. The inclusion of discipline issues in the agenda of parents' meetings was evident in the minutes of the parents' meetings which were analysed during the data collection process.

SDC2 highlighted,

If we have parents' meetings we talk about the need for the learners to conduct themselves properly at school. We encourage parents to keep on referring to the list of school rules which they are given by the school when the child is enrolled. We encourage parents to keep on reminding their children about those school rules. Sometimes as the SDC we are invited to the hearing if there is a serious case.

Despite the efforts made by the SDC chairpersons, some challenges that hinder the implementation of the code of conduct in schools have been observed. For instance, SDC2 highlighted that,

There is lack of respect from some parents and some members of staff, that is, some parents talk negatively about teachers in the presence of their children and some teachers also pass negative comments about some parents in the presence of the learners.

Responding to the same question EO cited that,

Our role is to ensure that learners behave accordingly, but the actual duty of ensuring that learners behave accordingly is done at school level. Our role is advisory, we advise school administrators on how to handle certain situations in accordance with regulations.

Regarding the role of the disciplinary committee, the EO spells out the role of the disciplinary committee as follows,

Their first and key role is to institute an investigation or to carry out an investigation; whenever there is a case you do not just take action before you conduct investigations. So they conduct investigations to establish the facts surrounding the matter, and then there after they take action from an informed point of view.

SH4 confirmed,

They handle serious cases like drug abuse, consumption of beer and fighting, those actually according to the Ministry regulations in this country, the learners are supposed be expelled but at this school we do not expel, we talk to them, counsel them, invite parents, a learner should always be given a second chance.

The above responses show that the Education officer, school heads, members of the disciplinary committee, prefects and SDC chairpersons are all involved in the implementation of the code of conduct strategy in different capacities and roles. It should also be noted that despite the challenges encountered, some of the participants' responses indicate some pockets of good practices in terms of implementation of the code of conduct in selected schools. This is evident in cases where prefects take up the responsibility of teaching school rules to other learners during morning patrols and after break time. Another pocket of good practice that has been raised in this section is the inclusion of discipline issues in the parents' meeting agenda, in particular the encouragement of parents to keep on reminding learners about the importance of adhering to school rules.

Participation of Teachers in the Implementation of the Code of Conduct

The participants' responses reveal that teachers participate in various ways to implement the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in schools. Teachers are involved during registration time, when teaching during lessons, during weekly assemblies and during consultation sessions. In addition, it was mentioned by participants that teachers are also involved in orientation of new learners. Participants had this to say,

SH3: *Teachers participate first as class teachers; we normally encourage class teachers that before they mark the register they should talk to learners in terms of discipline, reminding learners about the code of conduct. There is a duty roster so that teachers on duty monitor learners and also conduct assemblies where learners are also reminded of the school code of conduct.*

FGDC4: *It starts with orientation, particularly form ones, it is the teacher that we expect to orient particularly form one learners who*

are new within the school, they should be exposed to what the school expects of them, how to conduct themselves in as far as the school environment is concerned. So during orientation the teacher cascades those rules to the learners themselves. Again, when they are on duty they remind learners of the code of conduct, also during registration time, and even during lesson delivery there is a certain conduct the teacher observes, and to conduct that lesson properly the teacher can talk to them about their conduct.

FGP3: Class teachers remind learners about school rules during registration time. There is a duty roster for teachers so the teachers on duty also remind learners about school rules at assembly.

SDC2: Class teachers invite parents if they notice that the learner is misbehaving. The teacher and the parents work together to correct the behaviour of the learners. They also talk to learners during the lessons to remind them about the code of conduct.

Though some of the SDC chairpersons were familiar with the participation of teachers on the implementation of the code of conduct, the other SDC chairperson, SDC3 seemed not to have an idea about the issue. He said *...I am not sure how the administration deals with that.*

On the same question, EO explained,

Class teachers are the ones who are in contact with the learners, so whatever case of indiscipline, in fact during register making time, teachers are always encouraged to have a chat with their respective classes and always insist on good behaviour on the part of learners. It is actually a requirement that they talk about such issues during registration time and also during guidance and counselling lessons. And then in the event that they encounter a situation where a learner behaves untowardly, they then refer to the authorities, but it depends on the nature of the act of misconduct. If it is a minor one they deal with it, but for those other complicated ones they involve the school authorities.

Nonetheless, schools have encountered some challenges pertaining to participation of teachers in the implementation of the codes of conduct. This is evident in FGDC1's and FGDC2's responses which reveal that some members of staff still believe in using traditional methods of disciplining learners. Hence, such teachers would not participate in using positive meth-

ods of disciplining learners. For instance, FGDC2 observes,

Not all teachers participate because some of the teachers still believe on traditional methods of disciplining learners, e.g., corporal punishment, and that one through experience we have found that it hardens the learner or it actually reinforces negative behaviour.

Thus, the data presented depicted that teachers participate in the implementation of the codes of conduct in schools though there are some who still resist. This, therefore, portrays that there is teamwork in the maintenance of positive discipline in selected schools.

Dealing with Learners Who Breach the Code of Conduct

The participants were asked on how they dealt with learners who breach the code of conduct and they indicated that they used various strategies. The strategies included having dialogue with the learner to establish the root cause of the problem so that the learner could be assisted accordingly. The learners' parents are also invited to school to be put in the picture of their child's disciplinary problem if necessary and learners are also counselled. The participants' responses were as follows:

SH1 explicated,

There are some cases like in our code of conduct it is stated that there should be no bullying and if the learner bullies other learners, for the first time we talk to the learner, counsel and try to understand the cause, but if it becomes persistent we resort to negative discipline strategies where we give them some kind of punishment.

As for serious offences the school heads have acknowledged that they refer learners to experts who have the capacity to deal with such cases accordingly. At times schools are forced to recommend exclusion or expulsion as per Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular P35 of 1999. SH2 explained,

If it is criminal case like coming across a learner who has pornographic magazine we phone the police or even when in possession of marijuana we phone the police depending on the gravity of the offence. We refer them to the police because we do not have the capacity.

SH3 concurred,

At times we use negative discipline strategies such as punishment, sometimes if the case

is serious we act according to Permanent Secretary's Circular P35 of 1999, we have done it before, where we apply for exclusion, expulsion of a learner for cases that are just bad, like drug abuse and alcohol abuse.

The school heads' responses confirmed what was found in disciplinary cases log book during document analysis where cases of exclusion and expulsion were recorded. Referring learners to the police was also recorded in some of the disciplinary cases log books analysed.

FGDC1 illustrated,

We counsel, basically I would say it depends on the extent of the breach, some just need counselling, for some you would find that counselling no longer helps then we call in the parents, worst cases we exclude, isolate, punish or detain.

FGP1 explained,

We punish them, detain them, they do manual labour, we refer them for counselling. We also have a junior disciplinary committee chosen from the prefects' body which deals with some of discipline issues as a disciplinary committee. We take up some of the cases to the senior disciplinary committee members if we do not have the capacity to handle the case.

As for the SDC chairpersons, their responses concurred with the views of other participants except for one SDC chairperson. This is how they responded to the question.

SDC2 confirmed,

They are given light punishment, learners are also referred to counsellors and parents are also invited to school. At times if the school counsellors cannot handle the case the child is referred to the experts so that she/he can be assisted.

Regarding the same question, EO advised,

In secondary schools, there is the application of corporal punishment which is unfortunately now unlawful, but the reason why I am talking about corporal punishment is that we do not have a replacement of Circular P35. Although the supreme law now says it is unlawful but we have not yet received any new policy document that replaces Circular P35, so schools apply corporal punishment. Some give learners punishment but they are not allowed to exclude learners from lessons, whatever punishment, whatever measure that is taken it must be in such a way that the learner is not affected in terms of lesson attendance.

The issue of not excluding learners from lessons when they are punished was observed during document analysis where in one of the disciplinary cases log book it was clearly indicated that the learner was to carry out punishment when he/she was off session. This suggests that Permanent Secretary' Policy Circular P35 of 1999 was applied in this situation.

However, one of the problems that has been observed in dealing with learners who breached the code of conduct as identified by EO is that,

Some schools do not follow the guidelines, you hear of certain learners who get expelled from schools but the policy is clear that the head merely recommends and the Provincial Education Director is the one who makes the decision. Also there are some teachers who end up administering corporal punishment which is unlawful and some go to the extent that they do it in front of other learners. The circular is very clear that it should be done in a private place where other learners do not see but some school authorities want to discipline learners in places like assemblies so that they set the record straight that indiscipline is not tolerated, which is unlawful.

The information presented suggested that schools use various methods in controlling the behaviour of those learners who breach the code of conduct. From the responses it is indicative that schools apply both negative and positive discipline when dealing with learners who breach the code of conduct. However, from the participants' responses there has been mention of pockets of good practices in the implementation of the code of conduct strategy. It has been pointed out that in some schools there is a junior disciplinary committee which deliberates on discipline issues at learners' level. This gives learners an opportunity to encourage each other to be responsible of their behaviour. Other good practices noted are that schools counsel learners who breach the code of conduct, talk to learners as individuals to establish the source of the problem and communicate with parents so that they work together with parents to correct the behaviour of the learners.

DISCUSSION

The study sought to examine how secondary schools implemented the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline. The find-

ings of the study are discussed in succeeding sections.

Familiarity with the School Code of Conduct and Its Implications

The research findings indicated that the participants were conversant with the school codes of conduct and implications. To make sure that the school community members were acquainted with the code of conduct, the study revealed that the codes of conduct were made available to members of staff, learners and parents. The findings of the study revealed that members of the disciplinary committee held meetings with prefects once a term so that the prefects can properly implement the code of conduct. It was also found that the school rules were printed on each and every learner's report card and for the severe cases the consequences were indicated. There was also evidence from data that the codes of conduct were stuck on noticeboards so that learners were kept reminded of them. The findings of the study support the information found in literature reviewed that it is important that the code of conduct is broadly communicated and posted using a variety of formats. The code of conduct should be prominently displayed on noticeboards throughout the school. In this way learners will always be aware of the school's rules, which will guide their behaviour while at school (The Manitoba Education, Training and Youth 2001; Adams 2005; Mathe 2008; Hawkins 2009; Masekoameng 2010; Lapperts 2012; Sackey et al. 2016).

Hence, making the codes of conduct available to members of the school community implies that schools are committed to implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline. In addition, the revelation of the participants' proficiency with the codes of conduct indicated that the schools were in a position to clearly articulate the contents of the codes of conduct to those who had problems in understanding them. However, the findings of the study contradict the results of the study conducted by Adams (2005) in Cape Town, South Africa, who found that learners in the school studied did not understand their school code of conduct.

The results of the findings furthermore indicated that most of SDC chairpersons were not familiar with the school codes of conduct. The

data showed that the SDC chairpersons had never read the school codes of conduct but agreed that copies of school codes of conduct were given to learners and parents, and were made to sign and retain a copy while the other copy was kept by the school. As part of the parents who were made to read, sign and retain the copies of the codes of conduct, it is surprising that the SDC chairpersons did not have the knowledge of the codes of conduct. In actual fact, they were expected by the schools to be in the lead in explaining the codes of conduct to the rest of the parents who might not have understood the contents of the codes of conduct. The ignorance of the SDC chairpersons pertaining to the code of conduct suggests that they did not bother discussing the code of conduct with their children at home so that they remind them of good conduct at school. This finding, therefore, deviates from Lekalakala's (2007) observation that there should be an open discussion regarding school code of conduct so as to bring about successful implementation of code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in schools.

Involvement of School Community in Developing the Code of Conduct

The study established that the developing of the codes of conduct in the selected schools involved mainly administration, disciplinary committee, and teachers and in rare cases learners. The study also found that in most cases learners were mainly involved in the implementation stage. The finding contradicts the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education's requirement where it is stated that the enforcement and administration of proper school discipline requires transparent school rules, to which both teachers and learners contribute in the formulation and execution (Ministry of Education and Culture 1993; Ministry of Education, Sports, Arts and Culture 1999). The finding also refutes observation by Sackey et al. (2016) that the school authorities should involve the students in the formulation of rules to enhance their uses and procedures.

As for the parents, the study revealed that parents were not consulted when developing the school codes of conduct. Though the results of the study reveal that school heads and members of the disciplinary committee indicat-

ed that parents were consulted through parents' meetings, the SDC chairpersons denied any participation of parents in developing the school codes of conduct. The findings of the study commensurate with the results of the study conducted by Lekalakala (2007) in some secondary schools in North West Province in South Africa which revealed that educators developed the codes of conduct without consulting other stakeholders such as learners and parents. The findings of the current study are also in agreement with the results of the study by Kindiki (2009) conducted in Kenya which found that most of the respondents indicated that the schools came up with the school rules without consulting the learners. However, lack of involvement of other stakeholders in developing the school codes of conduct could be the reason why the SDC chairpersons were not familiar with the school codes of conduct since they were not exposed to how the codes of conduct were developed. Scholars like Squelch (2000) argued that a discipline policy which is developed by consensus of the school community is more likely to work effectively than the one imposed from above by the school head or governing body. Nonetheless, the findings of this study oppose Chauke's (2009) results of the study carried out in Gauteng Province in South Africa which revealed that educators, parents and learners were involved in developing codes of conduct.

It was established from the findings that despite the fact that not all selected schools consulted the learners in developing the codes of conduct, there are some of the selected schools which consulted their learners during the crafting of codes of conduct. It was found that some selected schools sourced the views of learners through the learners' representative body. Thus, the inclusion of the learners' input in crafting the code of conduct is a pocket of good practice in the implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline.

Participants' Role in the Implementation of the Code of Conduct

It was established from the study that participants as the key players were all involved in the implementation of the code of conduct in different capacities and roles. The study found that the Education Officer advised school administrators on how to handle certain situations

in accordance with regulations. It emerged that the school heads' roles were to supervise, organise meetings to discuss how the code of conduct was implemented and to strategise on the way forward. In accordance with the findings of the current study Ntuli (2012) stressed that the school head has to equip teachers to increase their knowledge on positive discipline issues. Ntuli adds that school heads should ensure that sufficient and apt advice is provided to the teachers so that the school implements the code of conduct effectively.

Regarding the disciplinary committee, the findings of the study revealed that the disciplinary committee conducted investigations to establish the facts surrounding the case, and then thereafter they took action from an informed point of view. It also emerged from the study that the disciplinary committee played the supervisory role and enforced the implementation of the code of conduct. The results of the study are consistent with what was observed by Joubert and Bray (as cited in Mbatha 2008) where they conceded that the disciplinary committee becomes involved in cases where acts of serious misconduct has been committed. Furthermore, the findings of the study confirm the results of the study by Mugabe and Maposa (2013) which revealed that the disciplinary committee plays a key pastoral role in the school as they facilitate fair and democratic administration of discipline among staff and learners. Hence, the findings of the study suggest that the disciplinary committee is indispensable in secondary schools for the code of conduct strategy to be successfully implemented.

From the findings of this study it emerged that the prefects' role was to supervise and also implement the code of conduct. The data revealed that prefects made sure that they abide by the school code of conduct and ensured that all learners in the school followed the school rules. It also came out from findings of the study that the prefects were also tasked to talk to other learners during every morning patrols and after break. They did this by just getting into a class taught the class about one or two school rules, so that other learners would be acquainted with the school code of conduct and then in the process they would be implementing it. The finding is in line with Kiprop's (2012) observation that prefects play a very important role in the management of discipline in schools. The

findings of this study are also in accordance with the findings of the study conducted by Muli (2011) in Kenya where it was revealed that prefects played major roles in the administration of public secondary schools, their roles included supervising learners in their performance of duties, being mediators between learners and teachers and ensuring that rules were followed.

However, the study also revealed that prefects encountered some challenges in the implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in schools. The results of the study indicated that prefects lacked cooperation from some of the learners. It was found that threats and hostility from some of the learners made prefects not to implement the code of conduct strategy effectively. The findings are in accordance with Oyaro's (as cited in Kiprop 2012) observation that learners view prefects as puppets of the administration, traitors and sell-outs; and they see them as part of the autocratic system that suppresses them and as such they despise and loathe them. The findings of the study also confirm the results of the study by Mugabe and Maposa (2013) in Harare, Zimbabwe, which revealed that some prefects were timid while others were defied and threatened by jealousy and stubborn learners. Nonetheless, such misrepresentations of the role of prefects could frustrate the successful implementation of the codes of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in selected secondary schools.

The findings of the study further revealed that the SDC chairpersons' role was to encourage parents to participate in the implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in schools. It came out from the study that discipline issues were included in the parents' meeting agenda and whenever there were parents' meetings the SDC chairpersons talked to the parents about the need for the learners to conduct themselves properly at school. It was further found that the SDC chairpersons advised parents to keep on referring to the list of school rules which they were given by the school when their children were enrolled and also encouraged parents to keep on reminding their children about those school rules. It also emerged from the findings that sometimes the SDC chairpersons were invited to the hearing if the case was critical. The findings of the study support Lapperts' (2012) observation when he

said parents' representatives can play an important role in communicating with, and involving, parents, particularly those with children who are experiencing discipline problems at school. The findings of this study also concur with Skiba and Losen (2016) who mentioned that parental involvement is always critical in effective implementation of the code of conduct in schools. Thus, if the parents play their role and reinforce school rules at home learners might realise the importance of adhering to the code of conduct.

Nevertheless, the study established that the problem experienced in the implementation of the code of conduct strategy is that there is lack of respect from some parents and some members of staff. It came out that some parents passed negative remarks about teachers in the presence of their children and some teachers also expressed negative comments about some parents in the presence of the learners. This is also observed by Sugai et al. (2000) when they conceded that schools face significant challenges in their effort to establish and maintain safe positive environments that allow all teachers to teach and all learners to learn.

In spite of the challenges encountered, there is evidence from the findings of the study that there are pockets of good practices in implementing the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in selected schools. There was evidence that prefects took up the responsibility of teaching school rules to other learners during morning patrols and after break time. Another pocket of good practice raised in the findings of the study was the inclusion of discipline issues in the parents' meeting agenda, in particular the encouragement of parents to keep on reminding learners about the importance of adhering to school rules.

Participation of Teachers in the Implementation of the Code of Conduct

The study found that teachers participated in various ways in implementing the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in schools which included reminding learners about the code of conduct during registration time every day before the lessons began. It also emerged that every week there were teachers on duty who monitored the conduct of learners and one of those teachers would conduct assembly. During assembly the teacher on duty would

emphasise to learners the necessity of observing the school code of conduct, this was also done during the teaching and learning process. The current findings confirm what Roos (as cited in Mbatha 2008) observed, where it is mentioned that teachers should acquaint learners with the code of conduct, and tell them exactly what is expected of them and also inform them about disciplinary measures. The findings of the study also corroborate with the results of the study carried out by Adams (2005) where participants indicated that the code of conduct should be enforced and learners should be constantly reminded of the rules. Furthermore, the findings of the study buttress Maphosa's (2011) view that positive discipline management is based on the understanding that discipline must be taught and that discipline teaches.

Additionally, it was found that teachers also partake during orientation of form ones where learners would be exposed to the new environment and the school code of conduct would be explained to those learners. It also came out from the findings that prefects referred some of the cases which they could not handle to the class teachers and the class teachers likewise referred severe cases to the senior master or senior woman. The results of the study are aligned with the view of Roos (as cited in Mbatha 2008) who maintained that it is practically impossible for the school head to deal with every disciplinary matter at school, ranging from minor contraventions of classroom rules to serious behaviour that endangers others. The findings of the study, therefore, imply that teachers play a pivotal role in the implementation of the code of conduct since they interact constantly with the learners.

Nonetheless, it was found from the study that schools have encountered some challenges pertaining to participation of teachers in the implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline. The data revealed that some teachers still believed in using traditional methods of disciplining learners. Hence, such teachers would be reluctant to participate in using positive methods of disciplining learners. The finding concurs with the results of the study by Nkabinde (2007) which revealed that teachers showed failure to apply related alternatives to corporal punishment to discourage misbehaviour because most of them still believed that corporal punishment was good in disciplining learners. The finding also confirms the re-

sults of the studies by Mugabe and Maposa (2013) and Onyango et al. (2016) conducted in Zimbabwe and Kenya respectively, which indicated that teachers who felt disempowered by the policy on corporal punishment quietly relinquished their responsibility for administering learner discipline to heads of schools and ignored offenders. The findings could suggest that some teachers still believe in maintaining the status quo even if the situation is no longer permitting. Such practices by teachers as revealed by findings make it difficult for the schools to effectively implement the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline.

Dealing with Learners Who Breach the Code of Conduct

The findings of the study revealed that schools invited parents or guardians for some extreme cases such as carrying dangerous weapons, involvement of learners in serious fighting whereby they bring in gangs to school, consuming beer on school premises or smoking and also absconding from lessons for no reasons. In such cases parents have to come in and know what is happening regarding their children's behaviour. The findings of this study correspond with what was found by Bilatyi (2012) where his study revealed that parents were always informed and were involved in the procedures when their children committed a serious act of misconduct. Accordingly, the involvement of parents or guardians would give them a picture of their children's behaviour because at times it might happen that the parents are not aware of that kind of behaviour. Hence, the school and parents would work together to assist the learner in behaviour modification.

It also came out from the findings that if the act of misconduct became persistent, schools resorted to reactive strategies depending on the nature of misconduct. The findings further revealed that schools were not allowed to exclude learners from lessons when learners were performing whatever form of punishment, whatever measure that would be taken should be in such a way that the learner was not affected in terms of lesson attendance. It also emerged from the study that prefects were not allowed to give severe punishment to other learners. The findings of the study, again, revealed that schools detained learners who breached the code of con-

duct. It came out that those learners who were detained remained cleaning classrooms. The findings support the results of the studies by Serame (2011) in South Africa, Ouma et al. (2013) in Kenya and Mugabe and Maposa (2013) in Zimbabwe that detention was used in schools though not effective. The findings of the study are also in line with Van Wyk's (as cited in Mtsweni 2008) observation that many educators in South Africa had limited knowledge of disciplinary strategies and as such most disciplinary measures were reactive, punitive, humiliating and punishing instead of being corrective and nurturing. The findings of the current study contradict Naker's and Sekitoleko's (2009) view that when managing positive discipline in schools learners should be encouraged to learn and ultimately develop self-discipline without fear, and coercion of external forces.

The study also revealed that the referral strategy was used by schools to deal with learners who breached the code of conduct. It emerged from the findings that schools referred some of the disciplinary cases to those with expertise to assist learners. The study found that some selected schools had junior disciplinary committee chosen from the prefects' body which dealt with some of discipline issues at learners' level and referred some of the cases to the senior disciplinary committee if they did not have the capacity to handle the case. The results of the study also indicated that as for criminal cases like possession of pornographic magazine or marijuana they phoned the police depending on the gravity of the offence. It came out that schools referred learners to the police because schools did not have the ability to deal with such cases. The findings of the study are consistent with the results of the study conducted in Kenya by Maina and Sindabi (2016) which revealed that head teachers sought police assistance for criminal acts such as wanton destruction of property, theft of individuals' or school property, assault, drugs and substance abuse among others. The results of the current study also concur with literature revelation that police should be notified for serious incidents that happen at school, during school-related activities in or outside school, or in other circumstances if the incident has a negative impact on the school environment (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning 2014).

It was also found that referring cases to the school counsellors was the most popular strategy used by schools to deal with learners who breached the code of conduct. The study found that referring learners for counselling helped a lot and the behaviour of learners had improved. Additionally, it was found that school counsellors further referred the cases they could not manage to the professional counsellors so that the learners could get maximum assistance. The results of the study support what was observed by Roos (as cited in Mbatha 2008) that if the efforts to assist a learner are not successful, the learner may be referred to a specialist. The findings of the study are also consistent with what was found in studies conducted by Mugabe and Maposa (2013) in Harare, Zimbabwe, Ouma et al. (2013) in Kenya and Mlalazi et al. (2016) in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe that counselling was rated as the most popular method used in schools to curb misconduct without causing physical and psychological harm to the offender.

However, the findings of the current study differ from the results of the study conducted by Tungata (2006) in Mthatha District in South Africa where he found that although teachers and parents were in favour of counselling strategy they did not consider the use of professional support from psychologists and counsellors as an important possible approach in helping to instil discipline in schools.

The study also found that as last option schools were forced to recommend exclusion or expulsion as per Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular P35 of 1999. It emerged from the findings that sometimes if the case was serious schools acted according to Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular P35 of 1999 where they applied for exclusion or expulsion of a learner for cases that were just bad, like drug abuse and alcohol abuse. The findings of the current study confirm the results of the study carried out by Mugabe and Maposa (2013) in Harare, where the respondents indicated that exclusion and expulsion were used as last resort to ward off misconduct in accordance with procedures stated in Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular P35 of 1999. The findings of the current study also correspond with what came out from studies conducted in Kenya, where it was found that schools minimally used extreme methods like expulsion, exclusion and suspension in handling disciplinary cases among learners (Ouma et al.

2013; Maina and Sindabi 2016; Onyango et al. 2016). However, one of the challenges that emerged from the findings of this study was that some schools did not follow proper procedure when applying Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular P35 of 1999 in dealing with learners who breached the code of conduct.

Nonetheless, the findings of the current study are contrary to observation by Skiba and Losen (2016) that in United States of America schools have restructured their codes of conduct, replacing some behaviours that lead to suspension and expulsion with comprehensive plans for creating positive school climates. Skiba and Losen further argued that by shifting the focus from punishment to prevention and providing guidance for alternative strategies, such codes support and encourage teachers who are already seeking to implement strategies for supporting positive student behaviour in the classroom.

Regardless of the hindrances experienced in implementing the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in schools, the findings of the study indicated that there are some pockets of good practices in the implementation process. It emerged from the study that in some selected schools there was a junior disciplinary committee which deliberated on discipline issues at learners' level. This gave learners an opportunity to encourage each other to be responsible for their behaviour. The other evidence of good practices was that selected schools counselled learners who breached the code of conduct, talked to learners as individuals to establish the source of the problem and communicated with parents so that they collaborated with parents to instil positive behaviour in learners.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to assess how secondary schools implemented the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline. The study revealed that selected secondary schools employed various methods to implement the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline. However, the study established that secondary schools experienced challenges which hindered effective implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline. Despite the impediments encountered, the study concludes that there were pock-

ets of good practices in implementation of the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in secondary schools which encompassed prefects taking up the responsibility of teaching school rules to other learners in different forums; encouraging parents to keep on reminding their children about the importance of adhering to school rules; having a junior disciplinary committee and counselling of learners who breached the code of conduct.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should come up with a policy which abolishes use of reactive strategies in schools when dealing with learners who breached the codes of conduct.

Schools should initiate staff development programmes for teachers to empower them with knowledge and skills for implementing the code of conduct strategy to maintain positive discipline in schools so that those teachers who still believe in use of reactive strategies can have a positive view of proactive strategies.

A study in rural secondary schools should be conducted so that the results could be compared.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study is that the results of the study are restricted to four urban secondary schools. Hence, the results of the study lack generalisability to all secondary schools in the province.

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