

# Exogenous Causes of Misbehavior in Zimbabwean Primary Schools: A Concern of Stakeholders

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## ABSTRACT

Misbehaviour is one of the major problems that is rampant in primary schools and hinders the academic performance of most learners hence a concern for all stakeholders. The major purpose of this study was to find out the causes of misbehaviour at primary school level in Zimbabwe, particularly in Makonde District. The focus of the research was on how factors such as parenting styles and sociocultural factors exacerbate misbehaviour in primary schools getting insights from Bandura's Social learning theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems and Baumrind's Parenting styles as well as Tajfel's Social identity theory. The research adopted a mixed approach involving the interpretive research paradigm which hinges the qualitative research approach. The descriptive survey research design was employed to study purposively sampled two (2) head teachers, ten (10) teachers and twenty (20) learners from two (2) primary schools. Data were collected using interviews, observations and document analysis. The study revealed that misbehaviour is due to poor parenting, peer pressure, influence from mass media, permissive school environments, drug abuse, poor home background and the anti-social environments where learners live. The study also revealed that misbehaviour leads to poor academic performance. The researchers recommended for a collaborative effort between teachers and parents and the engagement in guidance and counseling sessions in schools to reduce the rate of misbehaviour amongst primary school learners.

**Keywords:** misbehaviour, indiscipline, discipline, academic performance

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

When learners are enrolled into schools they showcase different personalities and behaviours which are due to; diverse backgrounds, imitation of peers as well as being affected by the social environment. Thus it is imperative to explore the extent of influence of each of the factors and how they contribute to learner misbehaviour in primary schools.

A research in United States by Mike Ford (2013) on Wisconsin learners found out that from 2010- 2011; more than 48 000 learners were suspended. The disruptive behaviour leading to these suspensions is detrimental to teachers, school cultures and ultimately learners' learning. This implies that there are many causes that lead to student misbehaviour which can lead to punitive measures to be taken against the perpetrators leading to their academic suffering due to missed class time and being ostracized. According to a research by Ward (2014) in United States of America, all learners exhibit bad behaviour from time to time due to the stress they encounter in daily life. Belle (2017) also posits that, when learners fail to verbalize their emotions or fears of the unknown, it may cause them to make poor choices. Learners may become loud, aggressive, defiant or non-compliant. It is through this concern that the study was carried out in order to find out the causes of misbehaviour among primary school learners in Zimbabwe.

In addition research findings by Kageya and Kagoiya (2018) on examining factors contributing to indiscipline in primary schools in Nyeri central Sub-Country, Kenya identified different causes of

indiscipline in schools. Among the stated causes of indiscipline are permissive home environments, poverty, and lack of expertise in professional management as well as learners themselves as sources of indiscipline. It is against this background that the researchers were digging deeper into the causes of misbehaviour among primary school learners in Zimbabwe.

Kagema and Kagoiya (2018), also posit that, permissive home environments contribute to learner misbehaviour. It is noted that if parents spend little time at home, children may seek unsuitable social experiences elsewhere that have devastating effects on their lives. For example, currently in Zimbabwe, there is a mass exodus of parents migrating to neighboring countries or overseas, leaving their children under the guardianship of relatives or children to take care of themselves thus creating permissive environments for moral laxity. A research study by Gutuza and Mapolisa (2015) in Zimbabwe suggested that it is often the case that early signs of a learner's bad behaviour patterns are already appearing at home, especially if the learner has siblings she or he interacted with regularly. However, many parents do not see the signs themselves, often due to not knowing what to look for or dismissing the matter as just an untrained child who needs school routine to get in shape. Therefore it is against this background that the researchers were looking into child rearing practices as having an impact on children's behaviour.

The ruling by Justice Muremba outlawing corporal punishment on learners suppressed the previously permitted law on corporal punishment by the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act and raised a storm among the Zimbabwean populace with those in the children's rights applauding the ruling while the general public and some other sectors bemoaning the outright law as unsuitable for the Zimbabwean context (The Sunday Mail, 30 August 2015). The main reason proffered in the general public outcry being that the ban promoted misbehaviour among learners while those in authority had nothing to use in disciplining learners that are under their control (The Sunday Mail, 30 August 2015). Chikowore (2014) also agreed that, since the abolition of corporal punishment, there had not been effective ways of dealing with misbehaviour. It is for this reason that the researchers have decided to dig deeper into the effects of the abolition of corporal punishment on misbehaviour in schools.

In Bandura's view, people learn by observing others, thinking and reasoning, imagining, and valuing (Hardman, 2012). Observational learning is also called social learning theory which can be considered a bridge or transition between behaviorists learning theory and cognitive learning theories. It occurs when an observer's behaviour changes after viewing the behaviour of a model. An observer's behaviour can be affected by the positive or negative consequences called reinforcement or vicarious punishment of a model's behaviour. According to Kufakunesu (2017) there are numerous role models in life who include actors, musicians, sport personalities, parents and religious ministers. In the school context, classroom practitioners remain irresistible role models and the presence of both good and bad role models coupled with peer pressure makes identity formation very dicey. Thus observational learning is one of the major causes of misbehaviour as learners usually imitate what they observe from significant others. Research has actually verified that human beings are born preprogrammed to imitate both good and bad behaviours (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006). Concurring with the above, McLeod (2011) postulate that, children pay attention to some of these people (models) and encode their behaviour. At a later time they may imitate (i.e. copy) the behaviour they have observed. They may do this regardless of whether the behaviour is 'gender appropriate' or not, but there are a number of processes that make it more likely that a child will reproduce the behaviour that its society deems appropriate for its sex.

Researches by Baumrind in the early 1960s show that parents are a vital component in any child's life from birth until later years. She concluded that parents differ in four crucial areas which are parents' nurturance or warmth, discipline strategy, communication skills and expectations of maturity. This implies that the way children are parented is also an issue in question when it comes to learner misbehaviour. Baumrind (1991) noted that children exposed to authoritarian parenting are fearful, aggressive, and experienced difficulty in

regulating emotions. Too much authority on the children may decrease the self-concept, and the ability of problem-solving and effective communication (Rahman *et al.* 2017 in Belle, 2017).

According to Santrock (2010), the ecological systems theory focuses on the impact of the environment on the growth and development of an individual. The theory holds that, we encounter different environments throughout our life span that may influence our behaviour in varying degrees. According to Bronfenbrenner (2008) a child's development is shaped by the various systems of the child's environment and also the inter relationships among the systems. The relationship between the child and the environment as he saw it is reciprocal, the environment influences the child and the child influence the environment. Bronfenbrenner suggests that human beings cannot develop in isolation, but within a system of relationships that include family and society.

At the core of Bronfenbrenner's theory are micro systems which include the few environments where the individual spends a large part of his or her time. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005), the school and the classroom represent a significant micro system of social development for children. The micro system is the layer closest to the child and contains the structures with which the child has direct contact. Bronfenbrenner cited in Woolfolk (2013), posits that the microsystems level is the immediate environment to the child that includes parents, teachers and other siblings. Structures in the micro system include the family, school and neighborhood or child care environments. How these groups or organizations interact with the learner will have an effect on how the learner grows. The more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the learner will be able to grow (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). This entails that, if the environment closest to the learner is conducive, results would be pleasing due to good behaviour of the learner and in contrary if the environment is not of good nurturance, moral laxity will prevail among children leading to an increase in learner misbehaviour in schools.

The changes that children encounter in their day to day living have an impact on their behaviour as well as their personalities. According to O'Neil (2011) the mesosystem describes how the different aspects of a child's microsystem work together for the child. That is, it focuses on the connections between two or more systems, especially the different micro system such as the home, playmate settings, school only to mention a few. This stands to reason that, what happens in the home in which the child lives, can influence what happens in a school or playground and what happens in the school or playground can influence the interactions at home. For example, the exposure of learners to electronic media during their leisure time can expose them to different types of mischief and can also bring about moral decadents in schools although on the other hand it has made their education life easier.

According to Tajfel's social identity theory, human behaviour can be as a result of social groups with which people identify themselves with. The theory explains that a person might act differently in varying social contexts according to their affiliated groups. Hogg and Vaughan (2018) define social identity theory as a theory of group membership and intergroup relations who are based on self- categorization, social comparison and the construction of a shared self-definition in terms of in-group defining properties. According to Vinney (2020) social categorization is the process by which we organize individuals in groups in order to understand our social world, social identification is a process of identifying as a group member and social comparison is the process by which people compare their group with other groups in terms of prestige and social standing in order to maintain self –esteem. Thus primary school learners as part of the human species are not immune to having social groups and misbehaviour can also be perpetuated by these social groups, if learners decide to join groups of bullies, noise makers or disruptive students then they tend to follow the rules of that group so as to gain recognition within the group. Learners can also engage into misbehaviour so that they avoid being ousted from the group in which they identify themselves with as well as to protect the social interests of the group.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed method approach which involved the interpretive research paradigm paired with the qualitative research approach in which the descriptive survey was used as the research design. Hammersley (2013) in Pham (2018) mentions that, interpretivist paradigm is originally rooted in the fact that methods used to understanding knowledge related to human and social sciences cannot be the same as its usage in physical sciences because human interprets their world and then acts based on such interpretation while the world does not. Rahman (2017) defines qualitative research approach as, “an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.” A descriptive survey was used for the research design. Chinyoka and Kufakunesu (2017) posit that a descriptive survey is a qualitative research design which endeavors to describe and interpret the existing phenomena in the form of processes, effects, attitudes and beliefs. The descriptive survey was deemed appropriate because it accorded the researchers ample time and means to explore the issue under consideration. Interviews, observations as well as document analysis were used as data gathering instruments. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participants. According to Schutt (2010) purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure in which the researcher intentionally chooses participants who are relevant to research topic. Purposive sampling enabled the researchers to select research participants who supplied rich and detailed information about the causes of misbehaviour at primary school level in Makonde district. The researcher selected known participants because of the jurisdiction that they would be good sources of information on matters under review. To this effect, two school heads and some teachers were selected because of their knowledge about student misbehaviour; in this case teachers responsible for discipline as well as guidance and counselling were automatically a part of the chosen sample.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

From the research conducted in primary schools through interviews, participant observations and document analysis, the researchers established the following research findings:

### Research findings from open-ended questionnaires

- Learners exhibit the traits they model from televisions and social media, for example wrestling, alcohol taking and smoking. Thus using social media excessively motivates learners to engage in misbehaviour
- The home background and social environment has a great impact on how learners behave at school.
- Some parenting styles perpetuate misbehaviour in learners, for example, uninvolved and permissive parenting styles where children are given too much freedom without any guidance.

### Research findings from participant observation

- Peer pressure is so powerful and hanging out with bad peers gives rise to learner misbehaviour in primary schools as learners will be striving to fit into their peer groups through unquestionable compliance to the demands of the group.
- Most parents do not have enough time with their children to guide and lead them properly so as to meet societal standards.
- Poverty leads to other types of misbehaviour such as stealing and truancy.

## Research findings from document analysis

- Most of the offenders are living in dysfunctional families, under child headed families or with old grandparents which makes them prone to many types of misbehaviour as they lack parental guidance.
- Most parents are not involved in their children's education life which leads to truancy, stealing and lying.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

### The Extent to Which Parenting Styles Cause Misbehaviour on The Part of Primary School Learners

The research found out that, the type of parenting has a great impact on learners' behaviour either positively or negatively. Thus for appropriate behaviour to occur in schools, the learners' home background which includes his or her social environment as well as interaction patterns should be tailored to meet the needs of the learner, that is the physiological, safety and the love and belonging needs of the learners has to be met so as to mold a better human being. All the educators who participated in this research pointed out that most parents no longer have enough time with their children due to economic crisis in Zimbabwe thus most children are left under the care of maids who might not guide the children properly. Lack of love and nourishment from the parents build anti-social behaviours in learners henceforth such learners become mischievous and hostile towards others at school.

One of the informants posited that:

*“Most parents are frustrated due to the economic crisis they face on a day to day basis so they tend to be aggressive towards their children depriving them of parental love and care, so how will you expect such learners to behave well with others whilst they are not experiencing it from home.”*

The above research findings support the work of Diana Baumrind (1991) in her parenting styles whereby she indicates that there is a strong relationship between parenting and behaviour. Baumrind states that, children from different parenting styles exhibit different behaviours. According to Baumrind (1991) learners from authoritative parenting are emotionally stable and are accommodative as they are free to negotiate and to engage in discussions due to the warmth, love and nurturing which they receive from their parents. Baumrind however, states that some children from authoritarian, neglectful as well as permissive parenting exhibit bad behaviour either due to excessive love or lack of love and unmet psychological needs.

The current research findings have also revealed that most parents are uninvolved with the well-being of their children in as far as behaviour is concerned. One of the educators among the 10 made the following remarks:

*“Due to economic meltdown parents are too busy to communicate and guide their children on what is right or wrong in life thereby paving way for the media and peer groups to influence their children.”*

In addition to that, it was revealed that there is communication gap between the parents and the school either due to lack of time or due to ignorance. One of the participants decried that;

*“How can children be disciplined at school when their parents do not have time to understand the proceedings at the school, they do not want to be involved in their children's education, they don't pay school fees, they don't buy books and worse still they do not even mind knowing their children's teachers.”*

Findings from the document analysis reveal that most of the learners who misbehave are living in

dysfunctional families either with single mothers or with step parents. The documents also revealed that some of the learners were left under the mercy of old grandparents at a very tender age and the whereabouts of their parents is not known. In agreement to that, most of the respondents also indicated that lack of parental guidance; neglectful parenting as well as dysfunctional families are the major causes of misbehaviour in learners.

One of the participants posited that:

*“Most parents no longer speak with one voice, they fail to unite for a common cause when it comes to guiding their children, thus children end up being confused and fail to differentiate right from wrong whereas some parents totally do not have time to sit down with their children and guide them thus what should happen to their children is left for fate to decide.”*

These findings are in line with research findings by Belle (2017) which indicates that, nowadays parents ignore their duties towards proper upbringing of their children. Little time is spent with children which results in moral laxity which is exhibited by students. Concurring with the above, Arifin *et al.* (2018) emphasizes that the development of negative personalities and problematic behaviours arises from failure in family ties. This entails that, if there is disunity within the family or if the type of parenting is neglectful, then children can also develop such attitude of not caring for others as they themselves did not receive enough love and care from their parents. Thus the role of family modeling the behaviour of the learner is compromised thereby increasing the rate of misbehaviour in schools which may also lead to poor academic performance as mischief divert the learners' focus from school work.

The current findings also revealed that, some parents are too permissive and are tolerant of their children's bad behaviour leading to the rise of misbehaviour in schools. One of the informants postulated that:

*“The current generation of parents is too permissive and very tolerant of their children's bad behaviour, they uphold their children's rights too much whilst forgetting that children should also be responsible, these parents shield their children's bad deeds and they do not tolerate their children being reprimanded by any other person even if it's the teacher”.*

Another participant cited lack of inculcation of ethical values coupled with imbalance development and undue pampering as the main causes of misbehaviour saying:

*“Some of the parents do not have a grip on their children, they consider every demand of their children and they are very much protective of them even when the children are in the wrong therefore, such children engage in misbehaviour knowing they have a shield from their parents.”*

These results are in line with Garcia and Santiago (2017) who posits that, permissive parents are too kind to their children to such an extent that they accept their behaviour decisions – they cannot discipline them and, out of ignorance, they inculcate lawlessness and anti-social behaviour in them. Henceforth, the result is that the children from such parenting styles are usually found among the offenders at school as they have difficulties with controlling themselves and want to always have their way.

### **Sociocultural Factors' Influence on Misbehaviour of Primary School Learners**

The environment can serve as a powerful tool to shape the behavioural learning process of an individual. The study revealed, that home background and the surrounding environment has a great impact on how learners behave. It was also revealed that learners who live with bad models also exhibit such bad behaviours at school, for example being bossy, fighting and using abusive language maybe as a result of poor interaction patterns within their day to day environment and bad parenting styles. One of the educators made the following remarks:

*“Parents fighting in the presence of children give rise to learner misbehaviour in schools as children will be imitating what they see at home.”*

Thus parenting and the environment were indicated as major contributors to learner misbehaviour. These research findings are in line with Bandura’s Social learning theory which states that people learn through observation and imitation of modeled behaviour. Thus learners can also observe and imitate bad behaviour from their role models as well as significant others. Concurring with Bandura’s theory, Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems also give emphasis on the impact of the environment in shaping the personality of a human being. Thus if the various systems of the child’s environment are not exemplifiers of good morals then that child will be socialized in a negative manner.

From the related literature read, mass media which includes printed media, electronic media and the internet (cyber media) are said to have a strong effect on student life. Electronic media such as television air lots of violence programming. Normally students like to watch television and are indirectly affected by antagonistic characters in the shows they watch (Arifin *et al*, 2018). Ninety-two percent (92%) of the teachers as well as 80% of the learners who participated in this study were also in concurrence with the above literature as they have pointed their hands towards cyber culture as the major cause of misbehaviour among learners. The study revealed that, due to changing times as well as changing lifestyles most learners are rallying towards the western culture and modernization and they also exhibit the traits they model from televisions and social media if they are not guided, for example aggression, alcohol taking, smoking, being disrespectful and many other forms of misbehaviour since they will be modeling different types of celebrities from the movies they watch. One of the informants wrote:

*“Watching social media platforms such as televisions, YouTube and whatsapp communicate to learners pluralistic cultures, thereby shifting their beliefs to the extent of failing to differentiate right from wrong.”*

These research findings are in line with Bronfenbrenner’s macro system whereby he states that the macro system is a societal blue print for a particular culture and sub culture. That is if the social media becomes dominant in the children’s day to day living they will tend to exhibit the values, beliefs as well as the practices which are portrayed to them by the social media. Henceforth misbehaviour will become rampant.

Findings from the study also revealed that dysfunctional and broken families are also the sociocultural factors which lead to misbehaviours. Primary school learners are still tender and need love, affection and guidance from both parents, but due to the rise of divorce cases most children are left under the care and guidance of a single parent henceforth they will fail to get proper guidance and love. This is in concurrence with Mendler *et al* (2008) who posits that, most of the learners with disruptive behaviour come from troubled homes where there may be continuing erosion of the nurturing family structure, the absence of the fathers in the home and drug abuse. Therefore in such scenarios the role of the family in molding the behaviour of the child will be compromised.

Poverty was cited as being a particularly important factor when it comes to learner misbehaviour. People living in abject poverty value survival more highly than good behaviour. Thus most learners who come from poverty stricken families resort to stealing and telling lies as ways to escape from the confinements of their situations. It was also revealed that learners from such families lack parental guidance and support as the parents themselves would be busy taking multiple jobs to make ends meet thereby other responsibilities and in this case child discipline. One of the informants decried that:

*“Some learners resort to misbehaviour due to harsh home backgrounds, some children come from child-headed families where they need to look after themselves so they can resort to stealing from others at schools due to hunger and lack of resources needed at school and some live with very old grandparents who are no longer capable to support them fully and no longer have the energy to keep guiding these children*

*properly.”*

The issue of loitering aimlessly with bad peers was cited by 75% of the educators as one of the major social factors which can lead to learner misbehaviour as these young children will be striving to seek acceptance within their peer groups henceforth they will be forced to abide by the expectations of those groups. One of the educator participants averred that:

*“Learners belong to certain groups and it is that peer group which determines how one behaves most of the time, thus some learners engage in misbehaviour in order to gain recognition within the group.”*

The above findings support Taffel’s ideas on his social identity theory whereby the theory states that, individuals define their own identities with regard to social groups and such identifications work to protect and bolster self –identity ( Gazi, 2015). That is learners can misbehave to protect their social group and to gain recognition within a certain group thereby resulting in cultural identity crisis. However not all peer groups are a bad influence to one’s personality as Arifin *et al* (2018) posits that, peer influence is important for the development of children, especially the development of intellect, personality, emotion and social interaction between peers will drive the intellectual development and its potential to an optimistic level.

School culture was also cited as one of the major causes of misbehaviour in primary schools. The informants explained that, some schools lack discipline due to liaise fair type of leadership whereby those in authority do not care about what is happening within the school community thus they end up having a culture off bullying, truancy and even drug abuse within the school. One of the informants reiterated that:

*“Teachers are no longer who they used to be back then, they no longer have their work at heart and they no longer care much about the learners, their main worry is on how to get extra cash to curb the poor remunerations which they are getting. The situation was even worsened by the banning of corporal punishment as well as the over exercised issues of children’s rights since teachers are now more worried about their safety at the expense of the well -being of the learners.”*

The above sentiments clearly shows that the school environment itself can be a breeding place for misbehaviour because when learners lack guidance and are not aware of the rules and regulations that govern that institution then there will be nothing stopping them from misbehaving.

## CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, the current researchers believe that primary school learners engage in unruly behaviour as a result of poor parenting styles as well as living in a bad behaviour permissive environment. Therefore, the need for parental involvement was found necessary as it has a great impact on how learners behave at school since parents are the immediate role models for young children. The study has also shown that, the advent of cyber culture has caused a rapid increase on learner misbehaviour as most of the learners are keen to imitate what they see on televisions and social media. It has also been concluded that due to excessive use of social media learners tend to lose their focus on school work thereby attaining poor academic results. The current researchers also believe that learners’ academic performance can be hindered due to misbehaviour as they lack concentration and waste their time on unnecessary things.

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