

Drivers of Indiscipline and Learning Loss Dynamics in Bulawayo Same-Sex High Schools, Zimbabwe

Dr. Dube Albert*

Educational Management, University of Nigeria

*Corresponding Author

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500665>

Received: 23 February 2026; Accepted: 28 February 2026; Published: 10 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study critically examined the root causes of learner indiscipline in same-sex high schools across Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe, and explored sustainable, locally grounded solutions to address the issue. Rising incidents of misconduct, ranging from bullying and physical confrontations to substance abuse, have become a pressing concern for the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, school administrators, and surrounding communities. These behaviors not only disrupt learning environments but also undermine broader educational goals aligned with national development and Sustainable Development Goal 4. To unpack the complexity of the problem, the researcher adopted a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to triangulate data and enhance the study's reliability and validity. Grounded Theory provided the conceptual lens through which individual and group experiences were explored, while an inductive approach allowed for the emergence of context-specific patterns and themes. Data collection involved open-ended questionnaire guides and structured poll discussions with learners, educators, and community members. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the qualitative data, revealing nuanced insights into the lived realities of those affected. Purposive sampling ensured that participants were selected based on their proximity to and experience with disciplinary challenges in same-sex schools. The findings identified several interrelated drivers of indiscipline, including negative peer pressure, lack of parental guidance due to broken family structures, and the increasing prevalence of alcohol and drug abuse among adolescents. These factors were found to exacerbate tensions within school settings, often culminating in aggressive behaviors and social withdrawal. In response, the study advocates for a shift away from punitive, corporal approaches toward restorative and inclusive disciplinary models. Recommendations include the implementation of intensive school-based counselling programs, the active involvement of parents, religious leaders, and community stakeholders, and the development of clear, context-sensitive disciplinary policies. Schools are encouraged to institutionalize these frameworks to ensure consistency, fairness, and the promotion of positive learner behavior. Ultimately, the study contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform in Zimbabwe by offering actionable strategies that align with both local realities and global best practices.

Keywords: Indiscipline, same-sex schools, bullying, corporal punishment, drug abuse.

INTRODUCTION

Schools serve as foundational institutions for shaping learners into responsible, well-rounded citizens. To fulfil this mandate, school authorities and stakeholders are obligated to cultivate safe, supportive environments conducive to learning and personal development. The Zimbabwe Education Amendment Act of 2019 (Section 6A) reinforces this responsibility by mandating that “the responsible authority of every school shall draw up a disciplinary policy for the school.” Similarly, Secretary’s Circular No. P35 (2018, p. 1) underscores that “the enforcement and administration of proper discipline is in fact a prerequisite to successful learning.”

Scholars such as the Canters (2005, in Charles, 2005, p. 38) affirm the dual rights of students and teachers: students deserve a calm, secure learning environment, while teachers must be empowered to teach without

disruption. They advocate for collaboratively developed discipline plans, crafted by both educators and learners, to ensure student buy-in and sustained behavioral change. Hafsa (2019, p. 1) echoes this view, noting that “sound discipline and safety underpins every aspect of school life.”

Despite these frameworks, several incidents of violence among pupils particularly outside school premises and in urban centers have raised serious concerns. Reports of bullying, inter-school fights, and gang-related clashes have led to injuries and, tragically, fatalities (The Chronicle, February 14, 2023). These developments signal a breakdown in discipline that extends beyond the classroom. In response, this study seeks to investigate the nature, causes, and implications of indiscipline both within and beyond school boundaries.

Background information to the study

In Zimbabwe, the administration of school discipline is governed by statutes such as Secretary’s Circular No. 35, which positions discipline as a cornerstone of effective teaching and learning. The circular emphasizes the participatory development of school rules, involving both teachers and pupils, and outlines procedures for suspensions, expulsions, and exclusions. These actions require consultation with the Provincial Education Director and the learner’s guardians. Notably, the statute prohibits corporal punishment, advocating instead for internal discipline mechanisms and proactive interventions such as counselling sessions involving parents or guardians.

Theoretical perspectives on discipline offer varied insights. Behaviorist models, such as those proposed by Skinner, posit that behavior is externally shaped—reinforced through positive feedback and modifiable via targeted interventions (Labrador, 2004). Kounin’s model highlights the importance of teacher vigilance and multitasking, with educators maintaining awareness of classroom dynamics through techniques like “overlapping.” Canter’s assertive discipline model promotes proactive planning and assertiveness, encouraging teachers to anticipate misbehavior and establish clear expectations collaboratively with students (Canter & Canter, 1976; Charles, 2005).

In contrast, cognitivist theories focus on internal motivation and decision-making. Glasser’s Choice Theory asserts that behavior stems from personal choices, with misbehavior reflecting poor decision-making. Teachers, therefore, play a critical role in guiding learners toward constructive choices. While this model promotes learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation, it is often critiqued for its time-intensive nature (Gabriel & Matthew, 2011).

Empirical studies across Africa offer further context. In Ghana, Gabriel and Mathew (2011) identified pupils as the primary source of indiscipline, followed by schools, parents, and media influences. In Zimbabwe, Manguvo et al. (2015) reported more severe manifestations, including rape, drug abuse, and murder, with bullying, tardiness, and theft cited as secondary issues. Charles (2003) suggests that as children mature, they become more peer-oriented, distancing themselves from parental influence. Labrador (2004) adds that environmental factors also contribute to behavioral challenges, highlighting the multifaceted and situational nature of indiscipline.

This literature underscores the complexity of school discipline, revealing both structural and psychological dimensions. The current study draws on these insights to explore the evolving patterns of learner behavior and the effectiveness of disciplinary frameworks in Zimbabwean schools.

Definition of Key words and Concepts

This section defines the key terms as used in the context of this study:

Discipline

In this study, *discipline* refers to a structured set of rules, expectations, and behavioral norms designed to guide learners toward acceptable conduct and foster desirable attitudes. It encompasses self-regulation, controlled behavior, and adherence to institutional authority, contributing to a conducive learning environment (Ada & Cetin Olcum in Cetinkaya & Kocyigit, 2020, p. 313; *The English Dictionary*).

Indiscipline

Indiscipline denotes the absence or disregard of established rules and behavioral norms within the school setting. It manifests as uncontrolled behavior, defiance of authority, and disruption of order (*The English Dictionary*).

Same-Sex Schools

For the purposes of this study, *same-sex schools* are educational institutions that enroll learners of a single gender either exclusively boys or exclusively girls.

Learning

Learning is conceptualized as the process through which new knowledge, skills, or attitudes are acquired and internalized, resulting in a measurable change in the learner's behavior or understanding.

Conceptual Framework: Indiscipline in Same-Sex Schools in Zimbabwe

This conceptual framework guides the investigation into the causes, manifestations, and impacts of learner indiscipline in same-sex schools across Zimbabwe. It integrates sociocultural, psychological, and institutional perspectives to understand how gendered school environments influence learner behavior and school climate.

Table 1: Key Conceptual Constructs and Definitions

Concept	Definition in Context
Indiscipline	Learner behaviors that violate school rules, disrupt learning, or undermine authority.
Same-Sex Schools	Schools that enroll only boys or only girls, often shaped by cultural, religious, or policy preferences.
School Climate	The quality and character of school life, including relationships, safety, and discipline.
Authority Structures	The systems of leadership, rules, and enforcement within the school.
Peer Influence	The impact of learner interactions and group dynamics on behavior.
Gender Norms	Social expectations about how boys and girls should behave, which may be amplified in same-sex settings.

Theoretical Foundations

- **Social Learning Theory (Bandura)**

Learners model behavior based on observation and reinforcement. In same-sex schools, peer modeling may intensify aggressive or disruptive behaviors.

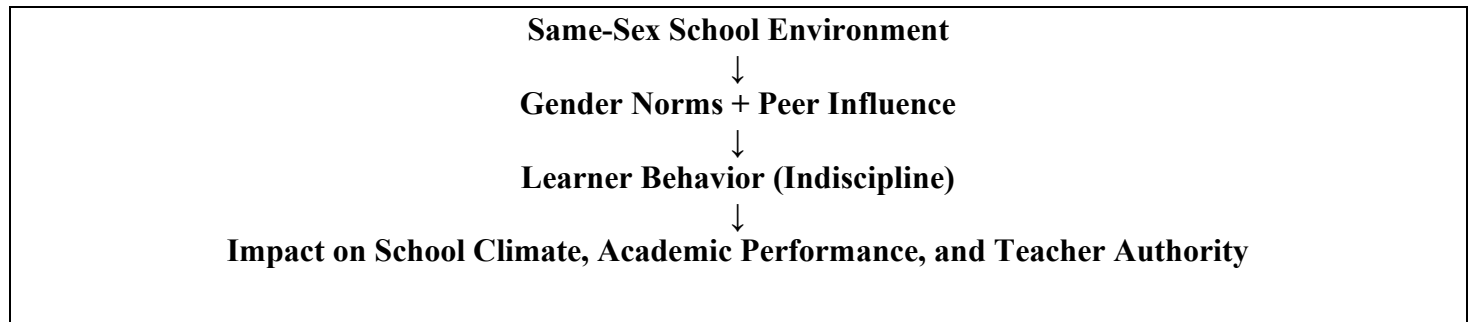
- **Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner)**

Indiscipline is shaped by multiple layers, individual, peer, school, community, and policy. This framework helps situate school-based indiscipline within broader societal influences.

- **Gender Role Theory**

Same-sex environments may reinforce stereotypical gender behaviors (e.g., hyper-masculinity or relational aggression), influencing discipline patterns.

Expected Relationships Outcomes



Research Assumptions

- Same-sex schools may amplify peer pressure and gendered behavior patterns.
- Weak enforcement of discipline policies contributes to rising indiscipline.
- Indiscipline negatively affects teaching, learning, and school reputation.
- Contextual factors (e.g., rurality, cultural norms) mediate the severity and type of indiscipline.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in two major paradigms of disciplinary theory: **behaviorism** and **cognitivism**. The dual-theoretical approach reflects the diversity of Zimbabwean school environments, where institutions are encouraged to adopt or adapt disciplinary models that best suit their contextual realities. Given the ongoing scholarly debate surrounding discipline, schools retain the autonomy to select, merge, or modify theoretical orientations to meet their needs.

Behaviorist Theoretical Perspective

Behaviorist theories posit that behavior is shaped by external stimuli and can be modified through environmental manipulation. Foundational work by Ivan Pavlov and Edward Thorndike laid the groundwork for understanding conditioned responses and the law of effect, respectively. Building on these foundations, this study draws primarily on the contributions of B.F. Skinner, Jacob Kounin, and Lee and Marlene Canter.

- **Skinner's Operant Conditioning Theory:** emphasizes reinforcement over punishment. Skinner argued that behavior reinforced with positive stimuli—such as praise or tangible rewards is likely to be repeated, while unrewarded behavior tends to diminish. In the Zimbabwean classroom context, this suggests that teachers can guide learners toward desirable conduct through consistent and meaningful reinforcement (Chimhenga & Mpofu, 2016).
- **Assertive Discipline Model** by Lee and Marlene Canter (1976), as cited in Charles (2003), advocates for clear communication of rules and expectations. Teachers are expected to assertively enforce these standards using firm, respectful language rather than punitive measures. This model promotes immediate intervention and clarity, reducing learner confusion and fostering a structured learning environment.
- **Kounin's Classroom Management Theory** (1971) builds on stimulus-response principles, emphasizing the teacher's ability to maintain awareness ("with-it-ness") and multitasking ("overlapping"). Effective classroom management, according to Kounin, involves keeping learners engaged and preempting misbehavior through strategic organization. While practical, this model has been critiqued for placing excessive demands on teachers (Chimhenga & Mpofu, 2016).

Cognitivist Perspective

In contrast, cognitivist theories view discipline as internally motivated, emphasizing learner agency, self-regulation, and intrinsic values.

- **William Glasser's Reality Therapy and Choice Theory** (1997) promotes learner ownership of behavior. Glasser argues that when pupils participate in setting classroom rules, they develop self-esteem, responsibility, and internal motivation to adhere to those norms. Teachers are encouraged to adopt empathetic, learner-centered approaches, though this model may be demanding in terms of individualized support and counseling (Chimhenga & Mpofu, 2016).
- **Rudolf Dreikurs' Mistaken Goals Theory** (1972), as cited in Manguvo et al. (2011), is grounded in the principle of mutual respect and the human need for belonging. Learners are expected to understand both their responsibilities and the natural consequences of misbehavior. Punishment is discouraged; instead, the emphasis is on helping pupils recognize the social impact of their actions. A noted limitation is the potential for misdiagnosis of behavioral motives, which may lead to inappropriate interventions.

Statement of the Problem

Incidents of indiscipline among learners in same-sex schools have escalated to concerning levels in many institutions. Reports indicate frequent physical altercations among students within the same school, as well as between learners from different schools, often leading to widespread disorder and disruption. School authorities appear to struggle with managing these behaviors effectively, raising questions about the underlying causes and the broader impact of such indiscipline. This study seeks to investigate the root causes of indiscipline in same-sex schools and assess its implications for school climate, learner outcomes, and educational management within the province.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following key questions:

1. Which environmental factors contribute to learner indiscipline in schools?
2. In what ways do parents influence the disciplinary outcomes of their children?
3. How does peer pressure affect the prevalence of indiscipline among learners?
4. What strategies can be implemented to effectively curb indiscipline in schools?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the underlying causes of indiscipline in same-sex high schools within Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. It aimed to explore the contextual factors contributing to student misconduct and to identify practical, evidence-based strategies for promoting discipline and positive behavior in these educational settings.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a **mixed methods research design**, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of disciplinary dynamics in same-sex secondary schools. The rationale for this methodological choice was grounded in the need to capture both measurable trends and nuanced stakeholder perspectives. As Hafsa (2019) notes, mixed methods research enhances **validity and reliability** by merging numerical data with rich narrative insights. However, the approach also demands significant time, energy, and methodological dexterity—factors the researcher carefully considered in planning and execution.

Research Context and Population

The study was situated in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, targeting four same-sex high schools known for recurrent disciplinary challenges. These schools were selected based on documented patterns of pupil misbehavior, as reported in district-level education reviews and anecdotal evidence from school heads.

The research population comprised key stakeholders in the school ecosystem:

- **Education Officers** at both district and provincial levels, responsible for oversight and policy implementation
- **School Heads**, who manage day-to-day disciplinary processes
- **Teachers**, particularly those involved in pastoral care and learner welfare
- **Parents**, including those residing near the schools and those serving on School Development Committees (SDCs)

This multi-stakeholder inclusion was designed to ensure a holistic view of disciplinary practices and perceptions across administrative, instructional, and community levels.

Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling technique was adopted to deliberately select schools and participants with direct relevance to the research problem. Creswell (2009) defines purposive sampling as a non-probability method where units are selected based on specific characteristics that align with the study's objectives. In this case, the schools were chosen due to their history of disciplinary incidents and sex enrolments, while participants were selected for their roles in managing or responding to such behavior.

Purposive sampling is widely accepted in qualitative and mixed methods research, particularly when the goal is to explore complex social phenomena within defined contexts. To minimize researcher bias, the study incorporated strategies such as triangulation, transparency in participant selection, and reflexive journaling to ensure objectivity and ethical integrity.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

The study utilized two complementary data collection tools:

1. **Open-ended questionnaires** were administered to Education Officers, School Heads, and Teachers directly involved in disciplinary structures. These instruments allowed respondents to elaborate on their experiences, perceptions, and recommendations without constraint, thereby generating rich qualitative data.
2. **Poll interviews** were conducted with parents and additional teachers who were not part of the formal disciplinary committees. This approach was intended to capture alternative viewpoints, particularly those reflecting community concerns and informal observations of learner behavior.

The combination of these tools enabled the researcher to cross-validate findings and uncover patterns that might be obscured in single-method studies. Data collection was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines set by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), including informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participant autonomy.

RESULTS

The thematic analysis method was used, whereby information was organized according to categories as well as uniformity. The data was then presented in various forms that include narrations, graphs, tables and pie-charts, to mention but a few.

Demographic Information

Participants according to collection tools

Table 1: Statistics on the open-ended questionnaires

Type of tool	Provincial and District personnel	Heads of schools	Teachers	Total
Open-ended questionnaire	5	6	10	21

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

Table 2: Statistics on poll discussion

Type of tool	Teachers	Parents	Total
Poll	5	10	15

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

Analysis on questionnaires

1. What are the major and minor causes of indiscipline in same sex schools? Please give details in terms of sex, ages and levels of pupils involved)

1.1 In your opinion, which are the major causes of indiscipline?

Table 3: Major causes of indiscipline

Item	Province and District N=5		Heads N=6		Teachers N=10		Overall N=21	
Drug and alcohol	2	40%	3	50%	3	30%	8	38%
Negative peer influence	3	60%	3	50%	6	60%	12	57%
Lack of role models	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	1	5%
Divided teaching staff	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Broken families	2	40%	4	67%	3	30%	9	43%
Poor nutrition	0	0%	0	0%	2	20%	2	10%
Lack of supervision by teachers	1	20%	0	0%	4	40%	5	24%
Lack of interaction	1	20%	0	0%	1	10%	2	10%
Media	1	20%	0	0%	1	10%	2	10%

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

A total of 57% of Provincial and District personnel, heads of schools and teachers cited negative peer influence as the major cause of indiscipline in same sex schools. Broken families (43%) was the next major cause followed by drug and alcohol abuse at 38%. Lack of supervision by teachers was also cited as a major cause of indiscipline at 24% and it was interesting that it was cited by the Education Officers and the teachers themselves. This could also point to a possible lack of supervision by Education Officers themselves and especially the heads of schools, who ironically, did not mention this in the questionnaire.

Table 4: Which are the minor causes of indiscipline?

Item	Province and District		Heads		Teachers		Overall	
Drug and alcohol	0	0%	2	33%	0	0%	2	10%
Negative peer influence	1	20%	4	67%	0	0%	5	24%
Lack of role models	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%
Divided teaching staff	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Broken families	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	%
Poor nutrition	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Lack of supervision by teachers	1	0%	1	17%	3	30%	5	24%
Adolescence	1	20%	2	33%	1	10%	4	19%
Learner attitudes	0	0%	0	0%	2	20%	2	10%
Social media	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	1	5%

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

24% of the participants cited negative peer influence was cited as minor cause of indiscipline, albeit with a lesser percentage than when it was perceived to be a major cause above. Lack of teacher supervision was again cited with 24%, showing that it is in fact an issue to be considered by the authorities. The adolescence stage factor

was also placed at 19%. It was not mentioned as a major cause above, but may be the participants placed it under peer influence.

Please give details of pupils involved in terms of sex, age and levels involved.

The participants opined that the problem of indiscipline in these schools affected pupils of ages 14 to 18 years as this was the adolescent stage. The schools asserted that the problem usually decreased as pupils got to 'A' Level. All the participants agreed that boys are more involved in indiscipline than girls. However, the Heads of schools added that, "Girls, too, are involved especially Form 1s at puberty stage who incite boys thereby becoming vulnerable to abuse." Education Officers were of the opinion that form ones have disciplinary issues, meaning that they began at Primary level. In terms of indiscipline right across the board, teachers blamed availability of money to pupils as well as the effects of cell phones.

Which age groups and forms are mostly involved in issues of misbehaviour in same sex schools and what do you think be the reason?

As aforementioned, participants thought that the problem cuts right across the levels, but gradually decreasing as pupils approached A' Level. This attributed to maturity. Boys of ages 14 to 16 years of age were said to be seeking recognition, whilst girls were in their puberty mostly and in adolescent stage. Peer pressure was also mentioned to be taking its toll. Education officers also added that girls of 14 years and above, as they grow older, associate with senior undisciplined members of the society that corrupted their behaviour. In terms of secondary schools, which types of schools are mostly involved in issues of indiscipline by pupils? (For example, Day schools, boarding schools, same sex schools etc). In terms of indiscipline by type of school, the participants stated that all schools are involved. The education Officers said that same sex schools, boarding schools and day schools all had their fair share of indiscipline. The teachers in same sex schools said that some of the misbehaviour is caused by sessioning which is caused by shortages of classrooms. They also stated, "Shortage of teachers as learners go for terms without teachers."

Which statutory instruments are you using to improve discipline in the school?

The participants mentioned Secretary's Circular No. P35 of 2018. Others also said that they were using Circular Number 6 of 2023 as their source document.

How effective are the statutes in terms of improving discipline in the school?

There were variances on this part with some participants saying that the statutes, while others said they were not, but without elaborating. The removal of corporal punishment seems to be the bone of contention, resulting in participants doubting the effectiveness of the statutes. However, some participants felt that the aspects like the expulsions, exclusions and suspensions could be used to control school discipline, albeit with caution.

Which types of pupil indiscipline are prevalent in the school? Please explain in detail.

Which types are prevalent within the schools?

Table 5: Common cases of indiscipline

Item	Province and District N=5		Heads N=6		Teachers N= 10		Overall N=21	
Bullying	4	80%	2	33%	5	50%	11	52%
Theft	0	0%	0	0%	4	40%	4	19%
Fighting	2	40%	1	17%	6	60%	9	43%
Late coming	0	0%	0	0%	1	10%	1	5%
Absconding	0	0%	1	17%	3	50%	4	19%
Absenteeism	1	20%	0	0%	2	33%	3	14%
Other: Alcohol and drug abuse	3	60%	1	17%	3	50%	7	33%

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

52% of the participants perceived that bullying was by far the most prevalent type of indiscipline in same sex schools. Fighting was the next with 43%. Boys-only schools cited fights for girlfriends, whilst girls-only schools cited the prevalence of fights for boyfriends. Fighting also extended to fighting taking place between pupils of different schools. This, in fact was the major purpose of this study, which, as mentioned in the background has even resulted in deaths.

Table 6: What types of misbehaviour are prevalent outside the school?

Item	Province and District N=2		Heads N=6		Teachers N=10		Overall N=21	
Bullying	2	40%	4	67%	1	17%	7	33%
Alcohol and drug abuse	2	40%	6	100%	5	50%	13	62%
Fighting	4	80%	4	67%	6	60%	14/21	67%
Vuzu parties and sex	3	60%	2	33%	5	50	10	48%
Gangsterism	0	40%	2	33%	2	20%	6	29%
Absenteeism	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Alcohol and drug abuse	3/5	60%	1/6	17%	3/6	50%	7/21	33%

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

As anticipated, in the background to the study, fighting was cited as the most prevalent type of misbehaviour with 67%. This type misbehaviour scored very high in all the three categories of participants, 80%, 67% and 60%, respectively. Alcohol and drug abuse followed close behind at 62%. The reason could be that pupils fight under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Vuzu parties and sexual activity were a close third at 48%.

How are the schools managing issues of misbehaviour in the school?

Table 7: What strategies are in place to instil discipline among pupils? Please elaborate.

Item	Province and District N=5		Heads N=6		Teachers N=10		Overall N=21	
Using rules	3	60%	0	0%	2	20%	5	24%
Empowering prefects	0	0%	1	17%	1	10%	2	10%
Punishing students	2	40%	5	83%	7	70%	14	67%
Counselling	5	100%	6	100%	9	90%	20	95%
Disciplinary committees	0	0	2	33 %	3	30%	5	24%

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

95% of the participants perceived that counselling was the major strategy of instilling discipline in schools. It was worrying to note that most participants felt that more could be done in this area. Punishing pupils came next on 67%. Use of rules (24%) was mostly mentioned by Education Officers. It is surprising that the heads of schools did not mention the school rules, thereby raising eyebrows on the effectiveness of such rules in keeping pupils in line. Heads were the highest in emphasizing punishing pupils at 83). In contrasts scholars believe that punishment is not the answer to misbehaviour (Skinner, 1997; Dreikur, 1972).

Table 8: What mitigating measures are in place in schools to prevent misbehaviour in the school?

Item	Province and District N=5		Heads N=6		Teachers N=10		Overall N=21	
Use of clubs	2	40%	1	17%	4	40%	3	14%
Involving parents	3	60%	3	50%	2	20%	8	38%
Capacitating teachers	2	40%	0	0%	0	0%	2	10%
Use of disciplinary committees	0	0%	2	33%	3	10%	5	24%

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

Parental involvement scored the highest at 38% in terms of mitigating measures. Use of disciplinary committees was next with 24%. Use of clubs and capacitating teachers were at 14% and 10%, respectively.

Generally, how are incidences of learner behaviour handled in the institution?

Heads of schools said that they evoke the provisions of Secretary’s Circular No. 35 of 2018. Others said that they use disciplinary committees, whilst others talked of involving parents in educating pupils of disciplinary measures.

In your opinion, what could be done to improve discipline in the school?

Table 9: What can be done to improve discipline?

Item	Province and District N=5		Heads N=6		Teachers N=10		Overall N=21	
Reintroduce corporal punishment	3	60%	0	0%	4	40%	7	33%
Use of proportional non-corporal punishment	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Improve school rules	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Use of statutes	0	0%	3	33%	0	0%	2	10%
Involve parents	1	20%	2	17%	6	60%	8	38%
Guidance and counselling	2	40%	6	100%	3	50%	9	43%
Workshops for teachers	1	20%	0	0%	0	0%	1	5%
Keep learners busy	2	40%	1	17%	0	0%	3	14%

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

In terms of improving discipline in same sex schools, Guidance and counselling was perceived to be the best method with 43%. There is an irony in that the heads and teachers, who are perceived to be neglecting the area scored a high 100% and 50% respectively.

Which policies and statutory instruments are in place in terms of dealing with issues of behaviour in schools?

Both groups of participants mentioned the Secretary’s Circular P35 of 2018. The general consensus was that it is sometimes too prohibitive to teachers and school authorities in such a manner that it inhibits action in as far as administering discipline is concerned. The area of inhibiting use of corporal punishment was the bone of contention.

How effective are these policies and statutory instruments in dealing with issues of behaviour in schools. For example, some parents, who are teachers said that they are only effective with pupils who respect authority.

In your opinion, how could these policies and statutory instruments be improved for the good of school behaviour in schools?

For example, some participant, who are teachers. said that they are only effective with pupils who respect authority. Others said that Secretary’s Circular No. P35 in no longer effective as it deters corporal punishment.

Are there any other policies and statutory instruments that could be added to improve discipline in schools?

Participants stated that, “Pupils to attend local schools. Commuting schools misbehave because they are unknown in the area and can do anything.” This was interpreted to mean that the zoning policy should be adhered to.

What contributions do you have in terms of pupil discipline and indiscipline in schools? Please elaborate.

Participants opined that there should be a need for peer educators in all high schools. They also called for the intensification of the Guidance and counselling programme. Others advocated for the introduction of mild corporal punishment. Yet others advocated for the enlisting of parent disciplinary committees. Furthermore, participants called for the inclusion of peace education. Some scholars believe in it (Mukonyora and Chikohora, 2022).

Are issues of misbehaviour affecting effective teaching and learning in the school? Please give details.

As aforementioned, the perspective was unanimous that indiscipline disturbs effective teaching and learning. There were statements such as:

- Adversely, discipline is the beginning of learning.
- Demoralising teachers.
- In disciplined learners disturb others.
- Gang involvement increases dropouts
- Solving disciplinary issues disturbs teaching and learning.

One particular contribution was that, “Learners become disrespectful in class and sometimes bunk (skip) lessons and fail after any assignment.” It was also stated that schools experience learner absenteeism through Vuzu parties and that some pupils sometimes come to school drunk. All these are serious perceptions that do not augur well with the required environments stated by the statutes.

In what way could the situation of indiscipline be improved?

The participants across the board made interesting contributions that included:

- School communities and stakeholders come together to amend policies that are in place. Also, involvement of all stakeholders, parents, community, police, ministry and religious groups.
- Children to be taught how to handle conflict.
- Adopt researches corned out in line with discipline.
- Parents to tighten security at home. Child headed families to be reduced.
- Increase consultations.
- More learner forums.
- Counselling sessions to intensified.

These were some of the contributions by the participants that included Education Officers, heads of schools and teachers.

A. Analysis of the poll discussion**1. In your opinion, what are the major causes of indiscipline in same sex school? (N=15)**

- Drug and alcohol abuse 7 (47%)
- Broken families 4 (27%)
- Lack of supervision 3 (20%)
- Other 1 (6%)

According to the poll, drug and alcohol abuse by pupils was perceived to be the major cause of indiscipline with 47%. Broken families and lack of supervision were next with 27% and 20%, respectively.

What do you think are the minor causes of indiscipline in same sex schools? N=15

- Negative peer influence 7 (47%)
- Lack of supervision teachers 5 (33%)

- Lack of models 2 (13%)
- Broken families 1 (7%)
- Dropped: drug and alcohol abuse; poor nutrition

47% of the participants stated that negative peer influence was a minor cause of indiscipline. This was contrary to the perceptions of Education Officers, heads and some teachers that it was the major cause of indiscipline in same sex schools. Meantime, lack of supervision by teachers scored a high 33% compared to the 24% scored in the questionnaires. Interestingly, broken families that scored 0% in the questionnaires also had a low 7% in the poll. The reason could be that parents are not on the ground and they may have perceptions that are contrary to teachers and heads.

Which types of indiscipline are prevalent in schools? N=15

- Bullying 8 (54%)
- Fighting 4 (26%)
- Late coming 2 (13%)
- Theft 1 (7%)
- Dropped: absenteeism/ absconding

Bullying was cited as the most prevalent form of indiscipline in schools. This is in agreement with the views in the questionnaires. Fighting and late coming scored 26% and 13% respectively. Theft scored a low 7%.

Which types of indiscipline are prevalent outside the school? N=15

- Fighting 8 (54%)
- Bullying 3 (20%)
- Theft 2 (13%)
- Late coming 2 (13%)

54% of the participants stated fighting as the most prevalent form of misbehavior outside the school. This could be expected taking into account of fights that take place in the Bulawayo CBD. There are also reports of fighting amongst pupils from different schools, especially after schools or when schools close.

How is the school managing discipline in the institution? N=15

- School rules 11 (73%)
- Punishing 1 (13%)
- Empowering prefects 1 (7%)
- Counselling 1 (7%)

73% of the poll participants believed that school rules were the best in terms of managing school rules in schools. Punishing pupils was second with a low 13%. It was, however, surprising that counselling only scored 7%.

How is the school managing indiscipline in the institution? N=15.

- Counselling 6 (40%)
- Using rules 5 (33%)
- Punishing 3 (20%)
- Empowering prefects 1 (7%)

This time, 40% of the participants believed that counselling was the best tool for managing indiscipline in schools. 33% of parents and teachers perceived that school rules could be used to manage indiscipline in the same sex schools. They believed that punishing learners and empowering prefects was not very beneficiary.

Are issues of indiscipline affecting effective teaching and learning in the same sex schools? N=15.

- Yes 15 (100%)
- No 0 (0%)
- Not sure 0 (0%)

When asked if indiscipline affected effective teaching and learning all the poll participants responded positively. They cited pupil disrespect for teachers, as well as factors such as bullying and fighting disrupting learners' attention to school or even dropping out. Some parent added that there will be issues of bunking lessons by pupils and that some pupils would not even do their homework.

How could issues of indiscipline be improved un the school? N=15.

- Reintroduce corporal punishment 12 (80%)
- Use relevant statutes 2 (13%)
- Improve school rules 1 (7%)

80% of the participants thought that discipline could be improved through the reintroduction of corporal punishment. Only 13% believed in the use of relevant statutes. A further 7% only stated that improvement of school rules could be effective.

How could the situation of misbehaviour be improved outside the school?

Reintroduce corporal punishment 1 (7%)

Use proportional no corporal punishment 0 (0%)

Improve school rules 1 (7%)

Use relevant statutes 12 (80%)

Reintroducing family structure I (6%)

80% of the participants almost unanimously opined that the use of relevant statutes would be the most appropriate method. The use of corporal punishment, and improvement of school rules had 7% each.

Table 10: Questionnaire and poll summary analysis on same sex schools

Question	Questionnaire Result	Poll result	Results
1.In your opinion, which are the major causes of indiscipline?	*Negative peer influence *Broken families *Drug and alcohol	*Drug and alcohol abuse *Broken families	Negative peer influence, broken families and alcohol and drug abuse were cited as major causes of school dropouts in same sex schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.
2.In your opinion, which are the minor causes of indiscipline?	* Lack of supervision by teachers *Adolescence *Drug and alcohol abuse/Learner attitudes	*Lack of supervision by teachers *Lack of models	Lack of supervision by teachers, adolescence, lack of models and learner attitudes were cited.
3. Which types are prevalent within the schools?	*Bullying *Fighting *Drug and alcohol abuse	*Bullying *Fighting *Late coming	In both questionnaires and polls attendants opined that bullying was the highest followed by fighting. Late coming was also mentioned, as well as drug and alcohol abuse.

4. What types of misbehavior are prevalent outside the school?	*Fighting *Drug and alcohol abuse *Vuzu parties and sex *Bullying	*Fighting *Bullying *Theft	Fighting topped the types of misbehavior. Girls were said to fight for boyfriends, whilst boys fought for girlfriends. Bullying appeared as well. Vuzu parties and sexual activity were also cited.
5. What strategies are in place to instill discipline among pupils?	*Counselling (95%) *Punishing pupils *School rules/Disciplinary committees	*Using school rules *Prefects/Punishing/Co unselling	95% cite counselling in both tools. Punishing pupils was also stated in both tools, as well as school rules. Disciplinary committees were mentioned in the questionnaire, but not in the poll.
6. How is the school managing indiscipline in the school?	*Involving parents *Disciplinary committees *Use of clubs	*Counselling 6 *Using school rules 5 *Empowering/Punishing	Involving parents was cited in the questionnaire, whilst poll participants opined that counselling was essential. So did the use of committees
7. Is the issue of indiscipline affecting effective teaching and learning?	*Yes	*Yes 15	In both cases, participants unanimously begged for the reintroduction of corporal punishment.
8. How could the situation of indiscipline be improved in the school?	*Guidance and counselling *Involve parents *Reintroduce corporal punishment	*Reintroduce corporal punishment *Use relevant statutes *Improve school rules	Participants advocated for more guidance and counselling as well as the involvement of parents.
9. How could the situation of misbehaviour be improved outside the school?	-----	*Use relevant statutes *Reintroduce C.P./Improve school rules/Reintroduce family status	Poll participants stated the use of statutes, improvement of school rules. There was also another call for the reintroduction of corporal punishment.

Source: Field observations from Bulawayo Province same-sex schools indiscipline review (2025).

Summary Interpretation of Table 10: Indiscipline in Same-Sex Schools

Major Causes of Indiscipline

- Common themes:
 - Drug and alcohol abuse, broken families, and negative peer influence were consistently cited.
- Implication: These factors are strongly linked to school dropouts and behavioral challenges.

Minor Causes of Indiscipline

- Shared concerns:
 - Lack of supervision, adolescence, learner attitudes, and lack of role models.
- Insight: These are seen as contributing factors but less severe than the major causes.

Types of Misbehavior Within Schools

- Most prevalent:
 - Bullying and fighting topped both tools.

- Additional mentions:

- Late coming and drug/alcohol abuse were also noted.
- Interpretation: Peer aggression and punctuality issues dominate school environments.

Types of Misbehavior Outside Schools

- Top issues:
 - Fighting (often gender-related), bullying, vuzu parties, sexual activity, and theft.
- Gender dynamics:
 - Fighting linked to romantic rivalries among boys and girls.
- Concern: External environments reinforce indiscipline, especially through social gatherings.

Strategies to Instill Discipline

- Most cited:
 - Counselling (95% agreement), punishment, school rules.
- Questionnaire-only:
 - Disciplinary committees.
- Poll-only:
 - Prefects.
- Takeaway: Counselling is the cornerstone, but enforcement structures vary.

School Management of Indiscipline

- Questionnaire emphasis:
 - Parental involvement, clubs, disciplinary committees.
- Poll emphasis:
 - Counselling, school rules, empowerment.
- Conclusion: A blend of internal and external support systems is used.

Impact on Teaching and Learning

- Unanimous agreement:
 - Yes — indiscipline disrupts education.
- Notable reaction:
 - Strong advocacy for reintroduction of corporal punishment.

Improving Indiscipline Within Schools

- Suggested interventions:
 - Guidance and counselling, parental involvement, corporal punishment, statutes, school rules.
- Trend: A mix of psychosocial support and stricter enforcement.

Improving Misbehavior Outside Schools

- Poll-only responses:
 - Use of statutes, corporal punishment, school rule enforcement, family status restoration.
- Observation: External misbehavior requires broader societal and legal interventions.

Key Insights

- **Counselling is central** to both prevention and management.
- **Corporal punishment** remains a controversial but popular recommendation.
- **Parental involvement and community norms** are critical to addressing external misbehavior.
- **Gendered dynamics** in fighting suggest deeper social issues influencing behavior.

FINDINGS

Core Drivers of Indiscipline in Same-Sex Schools

- Educators consistently cited negative peer influence, broken family structures, and alcohol and drug abuse as the top contributors to learner indiscipline in same-sex schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.
- Secondary factors included inadequate teacher supervision, adolescent developmental challenges, lack of positive role models, and problematic learner attitudes.
- These findings diverge from Chimhenga and Mpofu (2016), whose study across all high schools in the province emphasized poverty, over-permissive home environments, and lenient school cultures.

Impact of Family Separation and Diaspora Dynamics

- A shared concern across studies was the prevalence of broken families, particularly those affected by parental migration to the diaspora.
- This absence of parental oversight was linked to increased learner autonomy and risk-taking behaviour, underscoring the need to address family dislocation as a structural issue.

Patterns of Misbehavior: Inside vs. Outside School

- Within school premises, bullying emerged as the most frequent form of misconduct, followed by fighting, late coming, and substance abuse.
- Outside school, fighting was dominant, often triggered by romantic rivalries—boys over girlfriends and girls over boyfriends from neighbouring schools.

- Vuzu parties and sexual activity were acknowledged but perceived as less widespread, though still concerning.

Existing Disciplinary Mechanisms

- Questionnaire respondents prioritized counselling and the role of disciplinary committees.
- Poll participants leaned towards school-based peer groups, school rules, learner empowerment, and punitive measures.
- Both groups affirmed that indiscipline significantly disrupts effective teaching and learning, compromising academic outcomes and classroom management.

Guidance and Counselling: A Shared Priority

- There was strong consensus on the need to strengthen Guidance and Counselling services, with calls for more structured and frequent sessions.
- A minority of participants advocated for the reintroduction of corporal punishment, despite its prohibition under the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment No. 20 (2013) and Secretary's Circular No. P35 of 2018, highlighting tensions between traditional disciplinary beliefs and legal frameworks.

Governance, Supervision, and Safety Concerns

- Although disciplinary committees exist in most schools, their visibility, consistency, and effectiveness were questioned.
- School rules were inconsistently applied, raising doubts about their clarity and legitimacy.
- Participants expressed concern over inadequate supervision, especially during unstructured times, which compromised both learner and teacher safety.
- Teacher shortages and low morale were identified as systemic barriers to maintaining discipline and supervision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Address Root Causes Through Preventive Programming

- Develop targeted interventions addressing peer pressure, family fragmentation, and substance abuse, with a focus on same-sex school dynamics.
- Introduce community-based parenting support for families affected by diaspora migration.

2. Scale Up Guidance and Counselling Services

- Institutionalize Guidance and Counselling as a core component of the school timetable, staffed by trained personnel.
- Promote restorative discipline models that focus on healing, accountability, and behavioural change rather than punishment.

3. Revitalize Disciplinary Committees

- Ensure that disciplinary committees are active, inclusive, and supported by clear mandates.
- Include student representatives to foster peer accountability and democratic participation.

4. Reformulate and Enforce School Rules

- Facilitate collaborative rule-making processes involving learners, teachers, and parents to enhance legitimacy and buy-in.
- Disseminate rules widely and monitor consistent enforcement across all staff.

5. Strengthen Supervision and Staff Support

- Heads and inspectors should implement structured supervision schedules, especially during high-risk periods like breaks and after school.
- Address teacher shortages through expedited recruitment and retention strategies.
- Improve conditions of service to boost morale and reduce absenteeism.

6. Develop and Operationalize School Discipline Plans

- Each school should have a comprehensive discipline plan aligned with national policy and best practice.
- Plans should include incident tracking systems, early warning indicators, and community engagement protocols.

7. Enhance Oversight by Education Authorities

- District and provincial education offices should conduct regular audits of discipline structures and learner safety.
- Provide technical support to schools in implementing discipline frameworks and monitor compliance with statutory guidelines.

8. Promote Safe Learning Environments

- Urgently address safety risks posed by unsupervised learner behaviour in public spaces, including street fights and vendor confrontations.
- Collaborate with local authorities to create safe zones around schools and engage community stakeholders in violence prevention efforts.

CONCLUSION

The findings from both the questionnaire and the poll reveal a shared concern: while schools are making efforts to uphold discipline, indiscipline remains a persistent challenge. Although views differ on its severity and causes, there is broad consensus that more robust interventions are needed. The existence of disciplinary committees, as mandated by statute, is acknowledged; however, their effectiveness hinges on active leadership from school heads. The sporadic mention of school rules raises questions about their clarity, accessibility, and enforcement, underscoring the need for inclusive formulation and consistent implementation.

Participants also highlighted inadequate supervision as a critical issue, with implications for the safety of both learners and teachers. This compromises the statutory requirement for a safe learning environment. Encouragingly, teachers themselves recognize this gap, suggesting potential for improvement through stronger oversight by heads and inspectors. Where teacher shortages exist, swift recruitment is essential, alongside improved conditions of service to boost morale.

While some schools offer Guidance and Counselling, its reach and impact must be expanded to address bullying and violence, both within school premises and in surrounding communities. Incidents such as student fights in

the streets of Bulawayo, dispersed by vendors, reflect poorly on the education system and pose serious safety risks. To prevent such outcomes, schools must develop and enforce comprehensive discipline plans, in line with statutory expectations and best practices in educational leadership.

REFERENCES WITH LINKS

1. **Canter, L. & Canter, M. (1976).** Assertive Discipline: A Take Charge Approach for Today's Educator. Seal Beach, CA: Lee Canter and Associates.
 - [Google Books](#)
 - [Internet Archive \(2001 edition\)](#)
 - [Perlego PDF/ePub version](#)
2. **Cetinkaya, U. & Kocyigit, M. (2020).** Disciplinary cases at high schools: An analysis of decisions of disciplinary committees. *Journal of Pedagogical Research*, 4(3), 312–326.
 - [DOAJ Article](#)
 - [Full PDF via ERIC](#)
 - [Journal Homepage](#)
3. **Charles, C.M. (2003).** Building Classroom Discipline. New York: Pearson.
 - [Pearson Product Page](#)
 - [Internet Archive \(2008 edition\)](#)
4. **Chimhenga, S. & Mpofo, J. (2016).** Effectiveness of Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Circulars in Managing Students' Misconduct in Zimbabwean Schools. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 6(3), 32–36.
 - [Full PDF](#)
5. **Education Act [Chapter 25:04].** Harare: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.
 - [Veritas Zimbabwe](#)
 - [Download from law.co.zw](#)
 - [PDF via African Child Forum](#)
6. **Gabriel, E. & Matthews, L. (2011).** Choice Theory: An Effective Approach to Classroom Discipline and Management. *Journal of Adventist Education*, 73(3), 20–23.
 - [Andrews University Repository](#)
 - [Academia.edu PDF](#)
7. **Hafsa, N.E. (2019).** Mixed Method Research: An Overview for Beginner Researchers. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 58, 45–49.
 - [IISTE Journal Page](#)
 - [ResearchGate PDF](#)
8. **Labrador, F.G. (2004).** Skinner and the Rise of Behavior Modification and Behavior Therapy. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 7(2), 178–187.
 - [Redalyc PDF](#)
 - [APA PsycNet Record](#)
9. **Manguvo, A., Whitney, S.D., & Chareka, O. (2011).** The Crisis of Student Misbehavior in Zimbabwean Public Schools: Teachers' Perceptions on Impact of Macro Socioeconomic Challenges. *International Journal of Education Administration and Policy Studies*, 2(4), 40–44.
 - [Academic Journals PDF](#)
 - [Academia.edu PDF](#)
10. **MoPSE (2018).** Secretary's Circular No. P35. Harare: Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.
 - [UNESCO Summary & Download](#)
11. **Mukonyora, J. & Chikohora, E. (2022).** Waging Peace in Schools: Contemplating the Inclusion of Peace Education in Primary and Secondary Education Curriculum Framework in Zimbabwe. *Sarcouncil Journal of Education and Sociology*, 1(2), 25–39.
 - [Full PDF from Sarcouncil](#)
12. **UNESCO (2023).** A Training of Trainers Research Toolkit for Strengthening Research in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. Harare: MoPSE.
 - [UNESCO Article](#)
 - [OER Africa Toolkit Portal](#)