

# BEST PRACTICES FOR MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

The paper highlights some of the best practices for maintaining discipline in Secondary Schools for effective curriculum delivery in Nigeria. The paper also discusses some disciplinary problems teachers may encounter in their classrooms and possible ways of tackling them. The paper concludes stating emphatically that effective enforcement of classroom discipline is a pre requisite for smooth curriculum delivery in any classroom. The paper recommended among others that teachers should maintain a calm, productive and conducive atmosphere for effective learning. Teachers should also be firm and consistent with their classroom rules and enforcement for effective and meaningful learning.

## Introduction

Throughout the history of education in Nigeria and Africa in general, the most common means of maintaining discipline in schools was corporal punishment. While a child was in school, a teacher was expected to act as a substitute parent, with many forms of parental discipline or rewards open to them. This often meant that students were commonly chastised with the cane, paddle, strap or yardstick if they did something wrong. Corporal punishment, often by canning, remains common place in many schools Nigeria and some African countries.

Great teachers first learn how to maintain classroom discipline in their academic preparation rather than dishing out punishments. Educators also learn how to maintain classroom discipline through experience and adapt their basic techniques to the best practices for their current students who might differ substantially from the previous groups. In addition, school teachers usually work in a collaborative environment so they can learn how to maintain classroom discipline and best practices on the job. Disciplinary problems have been listed (Bello, 1981, Arum 2003) as the major concerns for most teachers. A disciplined classroom requires daily maintenance and monthly reflection. This paper provides some hints that teachers can use to maintain discipline to ensure smooth and effective curriculum delivery in secondary schools in Nigeria.

## Discipline Defined

It is not easy to define the word discipline because of the fact that the word can be used in a variety of ways. For instance, Arum (2003) Glasser (2001) see discipline as conforming in totality to laid down norms and as complete obedience to orders. Bello (1981), martella, Neslon and Marchand view discipline as a means of imparting knowledge and skills. Latham (1997) and Saich (2003) see discipline as simply punishment and control.

Classroom discipline is more than all of the above. It is more than the power the teacher exercises over his students. It is more than the mere maintenance of law and order in the classroom or the right method of dealing with offenders in schools. It means more than punishment and occasional praises and rewards. It is more than mere stillness and quietness in the classroom. Discipline according to this writer, is the application of all those influences which secure or at least try to secure proper conduct in schools. Classroom discipline is the training which produces in students self restraint, orderliness, good conduct, cooperation and the habit of getting the best out of themselves. It involves intellectual and moral education as opposed to mere order and instruction. Discipline is more than simply getting students to behave the way one expects them to or stopping them from behaving the way one does not want on a specific occasion. Discipline according to this writer is the continuous process of positive instruction and negative correction through which students are taught to act within specified rules and values. Simply stated mathematically: Discipline = Instruction + Correction. i.e Discipline = 90% Instruction + 10% Correction. A child's behavior usually gets worse, not better if this ratio is reversed.

Excessive negative responses from parents or teachers tend to encourage more negative responses from the hurt and angry child. To discipline effectively, negative correction should be used sparingly and positive instruction should be used most of the time.

**Types of Discipline**

Types of Discipline	Recommendations or Teachers
<p><b>Preventive Discipline</b> Preventing misbehaviour is obviously preferable to dealing with it after it has occurred. Most experts such as Jones (2001), Greenberg (1987) and Calvin Lazar (1997) contend that the best way to prevent classroom misbehaviour is to provide a stimulating curriculum that involves students so successfully that they spend little time thinking of misbehaving.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make curriculum as worthwhile and enjoyable as possible.</li> <li>• Remember that students crave fun, belonging, freedom, power, and dignity.</li> <li>• Involve and empower students by asking them for input and help.</li> <li>• Reach clear understandings with students about appropriate class conduct.</li> <li>• Discuss and practice behaviours jointly agreed.</li> <li>• Continually emphasize good manners, self respect, and respect for others.</li> <li>• Be a role model.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Supportive Discipline</b> All students may become restive and subject to temptation at times, when signs of incipient misbehaviour appear, supportive discipline should be brought into play at such times. This facet of discipline assists students with self-control by helping them get back on task. Often only the student involved knows it has been used.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use signals directed to a student needing support.</li> <li>• Learn to catch students’ eyes and use head shakes, frowns, and hand signals.</li> <li>• Use physical proximity when signals are ineffective.</li> <li>• Show interest in students’ work. Ask cheerful questions or make favourable comments.</li> <li>• Sometimes provide a light challenge: “Can you complete five more before we stop?”</li> <li>• Restructure difficult work by changing the activity or providing help.</li> <li>• Give hints, clues, or suggestions to help students progress.</li> <li>• Inject humor into lessons that have become boring or tiring. Students appreciate it.</li> <li>• Remove distractive objects such as toys, comics, notes, and the like. Return them later.</li> <li>• Acknowledge good behaviour in appropriate ways and at appropriate times.</li> <li>• Use hints and suggestions as students begin to drift toward misbehaviour.</li> <li>• Show that you recognize students’ discomfort: ask for a few minutes more of focused work.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Corrective Discipline</b> Even the best efforts in preventive and supportive discipline cannot eliminate all misbehaviour. When students violate rules, teachers deal with the misbehaviour expeditiously. Corrective discipline should neither intimidate students nor prompt power struggles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop disruptive misbehaviour. It is usually best not to ignore it.</li> <li>• Talk with the offending student or invoke a consequence appropriate to the misbehaviour in accordance with class rules.</li> <li>• Remain calm and speak in a matter-of-fact manner.</li> <li>• Follow through consistently on promised consequences.</li> <li>• Redirect misbehaviour in positive directions.</li> <li>• If necessary, talk with students privately about misbehavior.</li> <li>• Be ready to invoke an insubordination rule for students who refuse to stop misbehaving.</li> </ul>

## **Best Practices for maintaining Discipline in Secondary Schools for Effective Curriculum Delivery in Nigeria**

The main purpose of school is to provide students with an educational foundation from which they can build successful independent lives. However, disruptions in the classroom cause roadblocks to students' achievement. Maintaining discipline in schools is essential for effective curriculum delivery. The following are some best practices that can help teachers to achieve this.

### **1. Increase Parental Involvement**

Parents truly make a difference in student achievement and behaviour. Schools should institute a policy where teachers are required to contact parents periodically through the year. Half-term or end-of-term reports are often not enough. A parent cannot help solve an issue if they do not know one exists. While home calls take time, in the end they can help provide solutions to very difficult classroom problem. This is not to say that all parent involvement will be positive or have a measurable effect on student's behaviour. Nevertheless, this is an area which many successful schools claim make a huge difference.

### **2. Create and Enforce a School wide Discipline Plan**

Discipline plans are a way to provide students with a consistent and fair plan of what will happen if they misbehave. While some schools have a discipline plan on books, many do not have disciplinary plans on conduct/behaviour. Having it posted in every classroom and in notice boards around the school compound is a good way to start.

### **3. Practice Effective Follow Through**

While posting the discipline plan is important so that all students are informed of the consequences for misbehaviour, followings through on the discipline plan is the key to truly fostering discipline in schools. In the classroom, if a teacher does not follow through and deal with misbehaviour, it will increase. School-wide, if administrators do not follow the discipline plan and support the teachers, it would easily lose control of the situation.

### **4. Foster Discipline in Schools Through Leadership**

The principal and vice principal are of major importance in fostering an academically focused school-wide environment. Their actions form a basis of the overall mood for the school. If they are consistent in supporting teachers, implementing the discipline plan, and following through on disciplinary actions, then teachers will follow their lead. On the other hand, if they are lax on discipline, this will become apparent over time and misbehaviour will increase.

### **5. Build a Reputation for Fairness**

Hand in hand with effective leadership and school-wide consistent follow through is the belief by students that teachers and administrators are fair in their disciplinary actions. While there are sometimes extenuating circumstances that require administrator to make adjustments for individual students, overall students who misbehave should be treated similarly.

Teachers must act fairly for all students if they expect to be respected. If teachers do not treat all students equitably, they will be labelled as unfair. Students will not be keen to follow their rules.

### **6. Maintain High Expectations**

From administrators to guidance counsellors to teachers, schools must institute high expectations for both achievement and behaviour. These expectations must include messages of encouragement and means of support to help all children succeed. According to McIntyre (2005) Schools that foster high-esteem and promote social and scholastic success reduce the likelihood of emotional and behavioural disturbance.

Expect that students will behave, not that they will disrupt. Teachers should reinforce this with the way they speak to their students. Teachers should begin the day by telling students their expectations. For example, a teacher might say, "for the duration of this class period, I expect you to raise your hands

and be recognized before you start speaking. I also expect you to respect each other's opinions and listen to what each person has to say."

**7. Deal with Disruptions with as Little Interruption as Possible**

When teachers have classroom disruptions, it is imperative that they deal with them immediately and with as little interruption of their class momentum as possible. If students are talking amongst themselves and the teacher is having a classroom discussion, ask one of them a question to try to get them back on track. If the teacher has to stop the flow of his/her lesson to deal with disruption, then he/she is robbing students who want to learn of their precious in-class time. Sometimes all it takes is for everyone to have a good laugh to get things back on track in a classroom. Many times, however, teachers confuse good humour with sarcasm. While humour can quickly diffuse a situation, sarcasm may harm a teacher's relationship with his/her students. Teachers should use their best judgment but realize that what some people think as funny others find to be offensive.

**8. Avoid Confrontations in Front of Students**

Whenever there is a confrontation in class there is a winner and a loser. Obviously teachers need to keep order and discipline in their class. However, it is much better to deal with disciplinary issues privately than cause a student to 'lose face' in front of their friends. It is not a good idea to make an example out of a disciplinary issue. Even though other students might get the point, the teacher might have lost any chance of actually teaching that student anything in that specific period in class.

**9. Overplan**

Free time is something teachers should avoid. By allowing students time just to talk each day, teachers are setting a precedent about how they view academics and their subjects. To avoid this, teachers should overplan. Write additional activities into their lesson plans just in case main lesson runs short. When teachers have too much to cover, they will never run out of lessons and they will avoid free time. Teachers can also fill up any left over time with mini-lessons.

**10. Be Consistent**

One of the worst thing a teacher can do is not to enforce his/her rules consistently. If one day a teacher ignores misbehaviours and the next day he/she jumps on someone for the smallest offence, students will quickly lose respect for the teacher. Students have the right to expect teachers to be basically the same everyday. Moodiness is not allowed. Once a teacher loses students' respect, he/she will also lose their attention and their desire to please him/her.

**11. Make Rules Understandable**

Teachers need to be selective in their class rules for instance no one can follow 180 rules consistently. Rules need to be clearly stated. Students should understand what is and what is not acceptable. Furthermore, teachers should make sure that the consequences for breaking rules are also clearly known before hand.

**12. Keep an anecdotal record**

Keep an anecdotal record of major issues that arise in your class. This might be necessary if one is asked for a history of classroom disruptions or other documentation.

**13. Use humour**

Try to use humour to diffuse situations before things get out of hand. Teachers should Know their students. The following example could be used with students for example, if a teacher tells his students open their books to page 51 and three students are busy talking, do not immediately yell at them. Instead, smile, say their names, and ask them kindly if they could please wait until later to finish their conversation because you would really like to hear how it ends and they have to get this class finished. This will probably get a few laughs but also get the points across.

#### 14. Start Fresh Everyday

Teachers should start teaching their class each day with the expectation that students will behave. Don't assume for instance, that because Adamu has disrupted your class everyday or for a week, he will disrupt it today. By doing this, one will not be treating Adamu any differently and thereby setting him up to disrupt again (like a self-fulfilling prophesy).

#### Attributes a teacher should possess to maintain good discipline for effective curriculum delivery

A disciplined teacher is one who:

- succeeds in getting children to learn in a meaningful, enjoyable and business like manner. He creates a learning environment that is stimulating and disciplined.
- creates varied opportunities/learning experiences for children to learn.
- always aims at achieving his/her lesson's behavioural objectives.
- encourages his children to ask questions and talk about their experiences as they relate to the lesson.
- holds the philosophy that all children can learn. He does all he can to ensure that each child has sufficient opportunity to learn something.
- is patient with all. He explains the same thing in different ways and exposes children to several modes of learning. They see, hear, touch etc.
- uses class time wisely and efficiently. That is, children are productively involved in learning activities most of the time.
- ensures that learning time is maximized and disruption of class time is reduced to the minimum.
- ensures that a good percentage of the class time is spent doing things that have academic value.
- establishes and enforces routine for time wasting chores such as, change of lesson, submission of assignment, class work etc.
- has a clear purpose or objective for every lesson. He gives children explicit guidelines on how to perform each classroom task. He is goal-oriented. He introduces activities that match his objectives. He never digresses unreasonably from what he has set out to achieve.
- personalises his teaching. He treats learners as individuals and he is sensitive to their needs. He makes provision for individual differences by adjusting the pace of his instruction in such a way that the fast learners are not held back and slow learners are carried along.
- always resourceful. Uses teaching aids to make lessons more meaningful. He/she is willing to go the extra mile to improvise as the need arises.

#### Disciplinary cases and consequences proposed by this author

Disciplinary Cases	Scenario	Consequences
Bullying	A JS 2 girl has reported that a boy in her class has been verbally bullying her for the past week. He has continuously called her fat, ugly, and other derogatory terms. He also mocks her in coughs, etc. The boy has admitted to this and says he did so because the girl annoyed him.	Start by contacting the boy's parents and asking them to come in for a meeting. Next, require the boy to go through some bullying preventing training with the school counsellor. Finally suspend the boy for three days
Continuous Disrespect/failure to comply	A JS 3 boy argues about everything with a teacher. The teacher has talked to the student, given the student lines to write, and contacted the parents for being disrespectful. This behaviour has not improved and has gotten to the point that the teacher is starting to see it affect other students' behaviour.	Set up a parent meeting and include the teacher. Attempt to get to the root of where the conflict lies. Give the student three days in school punishment within the school.
Continuous failure to complete home work	A Senior Secondary 2 student has turned in eight incomplete assignments and has not turned in another five assignments at all over the past-three weeks. The teacher has contacted the student's parents and they have been cooperative. The teacher has also given the student lines to write each time they have had a missing or incomplete assignment.	Set up parent meeting and include the teacher. Create an intervention programme to hold the student more accountable. For example, require the student to attend an extra school lesson if they have a combination of five missing or incomplete assignment. Finally, place the student in detention during break and after school until he/she catches up on all work.

Fighting	Two Senior Secondary 1 male students got into a major fight during break over a female student. Both students had injuries on their faces and one student may have a broken nose. One of the students involved has been involved in another fight previously in the year.	Contact both students' parents. Contact the local police asking them to cite both students for public disturbance and possibly assault and/or battery charges. Suspend the student who has had multiple issues with fighting for ten days and suspend the other students for five days.
Possession of alcohol or drugs	A student initially reported that a Senior Secondary student is offering to sell to other students some "weed". The student reported that the student is showing other students the drug and is keeping it in a bag inside their sock. The student is searched and the drug is found. The student informs you that they stole the drugs from their parents and then sold some to another student that morning. The student that bought the drugs is searched and nothing is found. However, when his locker is searched you find the drug wrapped up in a bag and tucked in his backpack.	Both students' parents should be contacted. Contact the local police, advise them of the situation, and turn the drugs over to them. Always make sure that parents are there when police talk to students or they have given permission to the police for them to talk to them.
Possession of a weapon	A JS 2 student took his Dad's pistol and brought it to school because he wanted to show his friends. Luckily it was not loaded and the clip was not brought.	Contact the students' parents. Contact the local police, advise them of the situation and turn the gun over to them. A possible consequence would be to suspend the student for the remainder of the school year. Even though the student had no ill intent with the weapon, the fact remains that it is still an offence and must be dealt with severe consequences in accordance with law.

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