

Exploring the Underlying Causes of Indiscipline among Learners in Selected Secondary Schools in Mwinilunga District of North-western Province, Zambia

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Abstract: This study explored the underlying causes of indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools in Mwinilunga District of North-western Province, Zambia. The study was motivated by the increasing cases of learner misconduct reported in many secondary schools, which have negatively affected academic performance, school management, and the overall teaching and learning environment. The objectives of the study were to (i) identify the underlying causes of indiscipline among learners and (ii) examine the effects of learner indiscipline on teaching and learning processes in selected secondary schools in Mwinilunga District, Zambia. The study employed a descriptive survey research design using both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The target population comprised secondary school learners, teachers, and head teachers from 5 selected secondary schools in the district. Data were collected using structured questionnaires for learners and interview guides for teachers and head teachers. The findings of the study revealed that the most common forms of indiscipline included absenteeism, truancy, bullying, drug and alcohol abuse, fighting, examination malpractices, lateness, and disrespect towards teachers and school authorities. The study further established that indiscipline among learners was caused by several interrelated factors such as poor parental supervision, peer pressure, poverty, broken families, ineffective school disciplinary policies, negative influence of social media, and inadequate guidance and counselling services in schools. In addition, the findings showed that indiscipline negatively affected learners' academic achievement, teacher effectiveness, classroom management, and school discipline standards. The study concluded that indiscipline remains a serious challenge in secondary schools and requires collective efforts from schools, parents, communities, and government stakeholders. The study therefore recommended strengthening guidance and counselling services, enhancing parental involvement, promoting moral education, and enforcing consistent disciplinary measures to improve learner behaviour and academic performance in secondary schools.

Keywords: Absenteeism, Academic Performance, Indiscipline, Parental Guidance and Truancy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indiscipline among learners has become a major concern in many secondary schools across the world because of its negative effects on academic performance, school management, and the teaching and learning environment (UNESCO, 2021). Schools are expected to promote discipline, moral values, and responsible behaviour among learners in order to achieve educational goals effectively (Chanda & Phiri, 2025). However, increasing cases of absenteeism, truancy, bullying, drug abuse, disrespect towards teachers, and examination malpractices have continued to challenge school authorities and parents in many learning institutions. In Zambia, particularly in rural districts such as Mwinilunga, indiscipline among learners has

become a growing problem influenced by social, economic, family, and school-related factors (MoE, 2020). Understanding key concepts such as absenteeism, academic performance, indiscipline, parental guidance, and truancy is essential in analysing learner behaviour and improving educational outcomes (UNICEF, 2022).

Absenteeism refers to the frequent or habitual failure of learners to attend school without valid reasons (Chanda et al., 2025a). It is a key indicator of indiscipline because it disrupts learning continuity and reduces learner participation in classroom activities. Learners who are regularly absent often miss important lessons and assessments, resulting in poor academic achievement (Kaunda & Mwanza, 2019). Absenteeism is influenced by poverty, peer pressure, lack of parental supervision, and family challenges. In rural areas such as Mwinilunga, it is also linked to early marriages, household responsibilities, and economic activities (Chanda & Mutepuka, 2023). Persistent absenteeism contributes to dropout rates and weak academic performance (UNICEF, 2022).

Academic performance refers to the level of achievement attained by learners in their educational activities, usually measured through tests, examinations, assignments, and classroom participation. Good academic performance is often linked to discipline, regular school attendance, effective teaching, and positive learner behaviour (Simuyaba, 2020). However, indiscipline among learners negatively affects concentration, classroom management, and the teaching and learning process, thereby lowering academic achievement. Learners involved in truancy, bullying, drug abuse, fighting, and other forms of misconduct are more likely to perform poorly in examinations and classroom tasks. In many secondary schools, poor academic performance has become a concern due to increasing cases of indiscipline which reduce learners' commitment to education and interfere with teachers' ability to effectively deliver lessons (Banda & Sampa, 2021).

Indiscipline refers to behaviour that violates school rules and acceptable standards of conduct. It includes truancy, absenteeism, bullying, disrespect, theft, and examination malpractice. Indiscipline disrupts teaching and learning processes and negatively affects school management and learner development (Mwansa, 2018). Its causes include poor parental guidance, peer pressure, poverty, and weak disciplinary systems. In Zambia, indiscipline remains a major challenge affecting education quality (Phiri & Tembo, 2020). Studies by Chanda (2024) also highlight that learner behaviour is influenced by both school and community environments.

Parental guidance refers to the support, supervision, moral instruction, and direction provided by parents or guardians to children in order to shape their behaviour and development. Effective parental guidance plays a significant role in promoting discipline, responsible behaviour, and academic success among learners (Chanda, 2019). Parents are expected to monitor their children's activities, encourage positive behaviour, and collaborate with schools in maintaining discipline. However, lack of parental involvement, family conflicts, neglect, and poor communication between parents and children can contribute to indiscipline among learners. In some cases, parents may fail to monitor learners' attendance, friendships, and academic progress, thereby increasing the likelihood of truancy, absenteeism, and other forms of misconduct. Strong parental guidance is therefore considered essential in reducing indiscipline and promoting positive learner behaviour in secondary schools (Nkhata & Zulu, 2021).

Truancy refers to the deliberate absence of learners from school or lessons without permission from school authorities or parents. Chungulo et al (2025) in their study revealed that truancy is one of the most common forms of indiscipline experienced in secondary schools and is often associated with poor academic performance, learner misconduct, and school dropout. Truancy may occur when learners skip classes, leave school premises without authorization, or fail to attend school entirely (Musonda & Chileshe, 2020). Several factors contribute to truancy, including peer pressure, lack of interest in education, bullying, poverty, drug abuse, family instability, and weak school supervision. Truancy negatively affects learners because it leads to missed learning opportunities, poor examination performance, and increased involvement in risky behaviours. In many secondary schools, truancy remains a major disciplinary challenge that undermines educational goals and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process (World Bank, 2021).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Indiscipline among secondary school learners remains a serious and persistent challenge in Zambia, including Mwinilunga. According to the Ministry of Education, learner absenteeism and truancy continue to be significant concerns nationally, with examination absenteeism rates recorded at about 6.98% in 2023, representing thousands of learners missing key academic assessments (MoE, 2023). Similarly, earlier reports indicated absenteeism rates of up to 9.6% during national examinations, reflecting a worrying trend of inconsistent school attendance. These patterns of absenteeism are often

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associated with broader indiscipline behaviours such as truancy, classroom disruption, bullying, and examination malpractice, which negatively affect academic achievement and the effective delivery of education (Mwansa, 2018). In many schools, including those in rural districts like Mwinilunga, such behaviours are influenced by factors such as weak parental supervision, poverty, peer pressure, and inadequate enforcement of school rules (Phiri & Tembo, 2020). Despite efforts by the Ministry of Education to improve access, retention, and discipline management in schools, indiscipline continues to undermine teaching and learning processes. This situation therefore necessitated a focused investigation into the underlying causes of indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools in Mwinilunga District.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To identify the underlying causes of indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools in Mwinilunga District, Zambia.
- To examine the effects of learner indiscipline on teaching and learning processes in selected secondary schools in Mwinilunga District, Zambia.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study on the underlying causes of indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools in Mwinilunga District was significant in several respects. Firstly, it provided school administrators and teachers with a clearer understanding of the specific factors that had driven indiscipline, thereby enabling them to design more effective, evidence-based strategies for improving learner behaviour and enhancing academic performance. Secondly, the findings informed the Ministry of Education and other education stakeholders in strengthening the implementation of discipline-related policies, as well as improving guidance and counselling services within schools. Thirdly, the study was useful to parents and communities by highlighting their critical role in shaping learners' behaviour through proper upbringing, supervision, and value formation. In addition, the research contributed to the existing body of knowledge on school discipline in Zambia, particularly within rural contexts where empirical evidence had been limited. Overall, the study supported improved discipline management practices and contributed to the enhancement of teaching and learning outcomes in secondary schools.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Social Learning Theory and the Control Theory of Delinquency. Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, explains that individuals learn behaviours through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from others within their environment. In the school context, learners may adopt indisciplined behaviours such as truancy, aggression, or bullying by observing peers, family members, or even community role models who engage in similar behaviours without facing consequences (Bandura, 1977). This theory is relevant to the study as it helps explain how peer influence and environmental exposure contribute to learner indiscipline in secondary schools. In addition, the study was informed by Hirschi's Social Control Theory, which posits that individuals are less likely to engage in deviant behaviour when they have strong bonds to society, including attachment to parents, commitment to school, involvement in conventional activities, and belief in societal norms (Hirschi, 1969). When these social bonds are weak or broken, learners are more likely to engage in indiscipline behaviours such as absenteeism, disobedience, and misconduct. This theory is particularly useful in understanding how weak parental involvement, poor school attachment, and lack of commitment to education contribute to indiscipline among learners in secondary schools.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive research design to explore the underlying causes of indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools in Mwinilunga District of Zambia. The descriptive design was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to gather detailed information on existing conditions without manipulating variables. Additionally, the study utilized a mixed methods research approach. This approach combined both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying causes of indiscipline among learners. The quantitative component involved the use of structured questionnaires administered to learners to generate numerical data that was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. The qualitative component involved interviews with teachers and head teachers to obtain in-depth insights into the causes and nature of indiscipline, which were analyzed thematically. The target population (2000) comprised secondary school learners, teachers, and head teachers from 5 selected secondary schools in the district. A sample size of 10% of the target population (200) was determined using appropriate sampling

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techniques, and participants were selected through simple random sampling for learners and purposive sampling for teachers and administrators to ensure relevant and reliable information was obtained. The study sampled 5 head teachers, 1 from each selected school. 25 teachers, 5 from each selected school and 170 learners, 34 from each selected school. Data were collected using structured questionnaires for learners and interview guides for teachers and administrators. These instruments helped capture both quantitative and qualitative data on causes of indiscipline. To ensure validity and reliability, the research instruments were reviewed by experts and piloted before the actual data collection. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically by identifying recurring patterns and themes related to indiscipline. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were strictly observed throughout the study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings and discussions were presented according to set research objectives:

3.1 The Underlying Causes of Indiscipline among Learners in Secondary Schools

Table 1: Underlying Causes of Indiscipline among Learners

Causes of Indiscipline	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inadequate Parental Guidance	40	20
Peer Pressure	35	17.5
Poverty & Socio-Economic Challenges	30	15
Weak Discipline Systems	25	12.5
Poor Teacher–Learner Relationships	22	11
Substance Abuse	18	9
Lack of Positive Role Models	16	8
Overcrowding & Poor Supervision	14	7
Total	200	100

According to study findings, the study found that a significant number of learners exhibiting indiscipline came from homes where parental monitoring was weak. Many learners reported limited parental involvement in academic progress, behaviour monitoring, and moral guidance, which reduced supervision and weakened the development of self-discipline and accountability among learners. In such environments, learners often lacked consistent feedback on their school performance and behaviour, making it easier for them to engage in misconduct without timely correction (Fonseca et al., 2023). This absence of structured parental guidance also contributed to increased exposure to negative peer influence, especially during unsupervised after-school hours, thereby reinforcing behaviours such as truancy, absenteeism, classroom disruption, and disregard for school rules. Furthermore, poor communication between parents and learners regarding expectations and responsibilities weakened the reinforcement of school discipline both at home and in school settings, creating a gap in behavioural regulation (Msacky et al., 2024). Recent studies support these findings by showing that strong parental involvement and monitoring are associated with improved behavioural outcomes and reduced externalizing behaviours among adolescents, while weak supervision increases the likelihood of indiscipline and poor school engagement (Chanda, 2025).

Peer influence emerged as a major contributor to indiscipline among learners. Learners often adopted disruptive behaviours such as skipping classes, bullying, and involvement in minor criminal activities due to pressure to fit into peer groups, as conformity to peer expectations was seen as a way of gaining acceptance and social belonging. The study showed that learners who associated with deviant peer groups were more likely to engage in misconduct compared to those with disciplined peers, as peer norms strongly shaped attitudes toward school rules and authority (Wang et al., 2023). In many cases, learners gradually internalize the behaviours of their friends, leading to repeated misconduct both inside and outside the classroom (Chanda et al., 2023). Additionally, unsupervised social interactions during breaks, after school hours, and in community settings further reinforced negative behavioural patterns (Moyo & Banda, 2024). Recent studies indicate that peer groups play a critical role in adolescent behavioural development, with deviant peer association significantly increasing the likelihood of school indiscipline and risky behaviour among learners.

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The findings indicated that poverty significantly contributed to indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools. Some learners engaged in trading during school hours, absenteeism, or even theft due to financial hardship at home, as they attempted to meet basic survival and school-related needs (UNICEF, 2023). In many cases, economic deprivation forced learners to prioritize income-generating activities over attending classes, resulting in irregular school attendance and poor academic participation. Lack of basic necessities such as uniforms, school materials, and adequate food also contributed to feelings of shame, frustration, and low self-esteem, which in turn increased disengagement from learning and classroom participation (Mwale & Phiri, 2024). This emotional and material deprivation often created resentment toward school rules perceived as unrealistic or insensitive to learners' living conditions. Furthermore, poverty-related stress within households reduced parental capacity to monitor and support learners effectively, thereby worsening behavioural outcomes. Recent studies confirm that socioeconomic disadvantage is strongly associated with increased school indiscipline, as learners from low-income households are more vulnerable to absenteeism, misconduct, and academic disengagement (Chomba et al., 2023).

The study further revealed that inconsistent enforcement of school rules contributed to continued indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools. In some schools, disciplinary measures were either too lenient, delayed, or not applied consistently across all cases, depending on the nature of the offence or the learner involved (OECD, 2023). One of the teachers explained that:

“This inconsistency creates a perception among learners that misconduct would go unpunished or that consequences were avoidable, thereby encouraging repeated offences and weakening respect for school authority”.

In addition, uneven application of rules sometimes led to feelings of unfairness and bias among learners, which further reduced their willingness to comply with established school regulations (Chileshe & Mwanza, 2024). Over time, this eroded the credibility of the school disciplinary system and undermined efforts to promote positive behaviour. Recent studies have shown that consistent and fair enforcement of school rules is essential for maintaining discipline, as inconsistencies in disciplinary action significantly increase the likelihood of repeat misconduct and defiance among learners.

Moreover, findings showed that strained relationships between teachers and learners contributed significantly to disruptive behaviour in selected secondary schools. Some learners reported feeling ignored, unfairly treated, or discouraged by teachers, particularly in situations where communication was limited or perceived as negative (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Such experiences reduced learners' sense of belonging and motivation to comply with classroom expectations, thereby weakening teacher-learner rapport. As a result, some learners developed attitudes of resistance and disengagement, which manifested in lack of respect for authority, poor classroom participation, and increased classroom disruptions. In addition, perceived favoritism and inconsistent treatment of learners further intensified tensions, leading to emotional detachment from the learning process and reduced willingness to adhere to school rules (Hattie, 2023). Over time, these strained relationships undermined classroom management and created an environment where disruptive behaviour became more frequent.

The study also identified alcohol and drug use among some learners as a contributing factor to indiscipline in selected secondary schools. Substance use was linked to increased aggression, truancy, poor concentration in class, and frequent violation of school regulations, as affected learners often exhibited reduced self-control and impaired judgment (WHO, 2023). In many cases, learners who engage in substance use are more likely to skip lessons, engage in fights, and disregard instructions from teachers, thereby disrupting the teaching and learning process (Chanda, 2023). The influence of peer groups and exposure to substances within the community further increased vulnerability among adolescents, particularly in environments where supervision was weak (UNODC, 2024). Over time, substance use not only affected learners' academic performance but also contributed to long-term behavioural problems within the school environment.

The absence of strong role models both at home and in school was noted as another contributing factor to indiscipline among learners in selected secondary schools. Learners without positive guidance figures were more likely to imitate negative behaviours from peers or the surrounding community, as they lacked consistent examples of appropriate conduct to emulate

(Bandura, 2021). In many cases, the limited presence of responsible adult role models reduced opportunities for moral development, guidance, and reinforcement of acceptable social norms. One of the head teachers alluded that:

“At home, some learners lack parental figures who actively demonstrate discipline, responsibility, and accountability, while in schools, insufficient mentorship from teachers further weakens behavioural guidance”.

As a result, learners often turned to peer groups for behavioural cues, which in some instances reinforced misconduct such as disrespect, truancy, and classroom disruption. Over time, this absence of positive role modelling contributed to the normalization of indiscipline and weakened the overall culture of discipline within the school environment. Recent studies have shown that the presence of strong, positive role models significantly reduces adolescent risk behaviours, while their absence increases susceptibility to peer influence and behavioural problems (UNESCO, 2023).

Overcrowded classrooms and inadequate supervision in school environments were also found to contribute significantly to learner misconduct in selected secondary schools. Teachers often struggled to manage large classes effectively, making it easier for learners to engage in disruptive behaviour without being noticed or corrected immediately (Chungulo et al., 2025). In classrooms with high learner populations, individual attention and close monitoring were limited, reducing teachers’ ability to identify behavioural problems at an early stage (Mulenga & Chanda, 2023). As a result, behaviours such as noise-making, bullying, absenteeism, and inattentiveness became more common, particularly in situations where supervision during lessons and break periods was insufficient. In addition, overcrowding created stressful teaching and learning conditions that negatively affected classroom control, communication, and learner engagement. Some learners also reported that congested classrooms reduced their motivation to participate actively in lessons, which increased frustration and behavioural challenges. Recent Zambian studies indicate that overcrowded learning environments are associated with weakened classroom management and higher levels of indiscipline, especially in schools with limited teaching staff and inadequate infrastructure (Phiri & Mwansa, 2024).

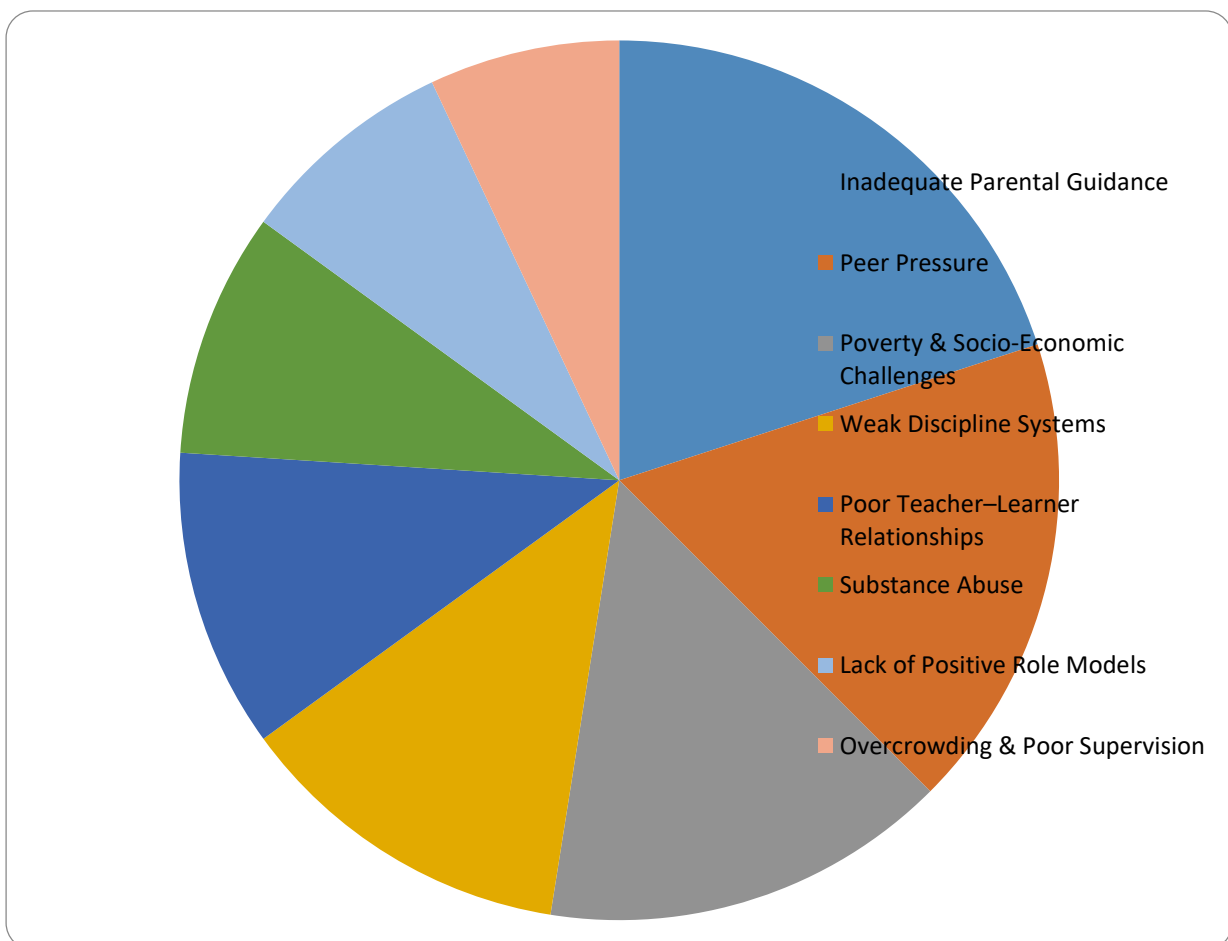


Figure 1: Underlying Causes of Indiscipline among Learners

3.2. The Effects of Learner Indiscipline on Teaching and Learning Processes in Secondary Schools
Table 2: Effects of Learner Indiscipline on Teaching and Learning Processes

Theme/Area Affected	Key Findings (Summary)	Frequency (n=200)	Percentage (%)	Impact on Teaching and Learning
Classroom instruction disruption	Noise making, lateness, truancy, bullying, and disrespect disrupted lessons	176	88%	Reduced teaching time and incomplete syllabus coverage
Academic performance	Frequent absenteeism and lack of concentration among learners	170	85%	Poor examination results and low academic achievement
Teacher morale and stress	Teachers spent more time managing discipline than teaching	160	80%	Reduced motivation and teaching effectiveness
Learning environment	Fighting, bullying, and verbal abuse created fear and insecurity	150	75%	Poor learner participation and reduced engagement
School attendance and retention	Learners avoided school or were suspended/expelled	140	70%	Increased dropout rates and reduced continuity
Teacher-learner relationships	Disrespect and defiance weakened communication and trust	145	72.5%	Poor interaction and weak instructional support
Administrative workload	Increased disciplinary cases burdened school management	135	67.5%	Reduced time for academic planning and development
Peer influence	Undisciplined learners influenced others into misconduct	155	77.5%	Spread of negative behaviour and weakened school discipline culture

The study findings revealed that learner indiscipline negatively affected the teaching and learning process in several significant ways. One major effect identified was the disruption of classroom lessons and academic activities. Teachers reported that behaviours such as noise making, absenteeism, bullying, late coming, fighting, and disrespect toward teachers frequently interrupted lesson delivery and reduced the amount of productive learning time available in class. As a result, teachers experienced difficulties in maintaining classroom order and concentration among learners, which negatively affected the overall learning environment. One of the head teachers stated that:

“Frequent disturbances forced teachers to spend more time managing behaviour problems instead of focusing on instruction and learner support. In addition, absenteeism and late coming caused some learners to miss important classroom content, thereby affecting continuity in learning and reducing academic performance”.

The study further revealed that indiscipline made it difficult for teachers to complete syllabi within the planned academic period, especially in examination classes where adequate time management was essential. Similar findings were reported by Mwansa (2019), who noted that indiscipline contributes to reduced instructional time and poor academic achievement in secondary schools. Likewise, Phiri & Tembo (2021) observed that disruptive learner behaviour weakens classroom management and negatively affects the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes in Zambian schools.

The findings further showed that learner indiscipline contributed significantly to poor academic performance among learners. Frequent absenteeism, truancy, lack of concentration in class, and failure to complete academic tasks reduced learners’ understanding of lessons and negatively affected examination results. Schools experiencing high levels of indiscipline were reported to have lower learner participation, weak study habits, and reduced academic achievement compared to more disciplined learning environments. Teachers explained that learners involved in misconduct often lost interest in academic activities and spent less time focusing on schoolwork, which resulted in poor grades and increased failure rates. In some cases, disciplinary issues such as bullying and classroom disruptions also discouraged other learners from actively participating in lessons, thereby affecting the academic progress of the entire class. The study further

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established that persistent indiscipline created an unstable learning atmosphere that limited effective teaching, learner motivation, and academic excellence. Similar findings by Chishimba (2020) revealed that indiscipline among secondary school learners contributes to poor examination performance and reduced educational attainment. Likewise, Banda & Simui (2022) observed that truancy, absenteeism, and disruptive behaviours negatively influence learner participation and academic success in Zambian secondary schools.

The study also established that indiscipline significantly increased teacher stress and reduced overall teacher morale in selected secondary schools. Teachers reported that:

“They spend excessive time managing learner misconduct, such as noise making, lateness, insubordination, and disruptive behaviour, instead of focusing on effective lesson delivery, preparation, and learner support. This constant interruption of teaching activities created emotional strain and professional fatigue among educators, leading to reduced job satisfaction”.

Some teachers indicated feeling frustrated, overwhelmed, and demotivated due to the continuous disciplinary challenges they faced on a daily basis, which negatively affected their effectiveness in classroom management and instructional delivery. In extreme cases, persistent indiscipline contributed to burnout and reduced commitment to teaching responsibilities, thereby weakening the overall quality of education provided. Similar observations were made by Mutale (2020), who found that persistent learner misbehaviour increases teacher workload and stress levels, ultimately affecting morale and performance. Likewise, Zulu & Phiri (2022) noted that poor learner discipline is strongly associated with reduced teacher motivation and effectiveness in Zambian secondary schools.

Another important finding was that indiscipline created an un conducive learning environment that undermined effective teaching and learning. Acts such as fighting, bullying, intimidation, and verbal abuse caused fear, anxiety, and insecurity among learners, making some pupils uncomfortable to participate freely during lessons. As a result, affected learners often became passive in class discussions, avoided asking or answering questions, and withdrew from active engagement due to fear of victimization. This situation negatively affected learner confidence, peer interaction, and overall classroom participation, thereby limiting the development of critical thinking and communication skills. Teachers also reported that such an environment disrupted lesson flow and forced them to divert instructional time toward conflict resolution and maintaining order instead of focusing on academic content delivery. In addition, persistent exposure to bullying and harassment contributed to low self-esteem among learners, which further reduced academic motivation and performance. Similar findings were reported by Sakala (2019), who noted that school violence and bullying create fear among learners and reduce participation in classroom activities. Equally, Tembo & Banda (2021) found that unsafe and hostile school environments negatively affect learner engagement and academic achievement in Zambian secondary schools.

The findings additionally revealed that learner indiscipline contributed significantly to increased school absenteeism and dropout rates in selected secondary schools. One of the learners expressed that:

“Some learners deliberately avoided school due to fear of bullying, violence, intimidation, or negative peer influence, while others were frequently suspended or expelled as a result of repeated misconduct and violation of school rules”.

This persistent absence from school disrupted learners' academic progression and reduced their exposure to continuous instruction, thereby weakening their academic foundation. In addition, prolonged absenteeism often resulted in learners losing interest in education altogether, eventually leading to school dropout. Teachers also noted that learners who were frequently absent struggled to reintegrate into classroom learning, as they had missed key concepts and instructional content. This situation negatively affected overall learner retention rates and reduced opportunities for educational attainment among affected pupils. Similar findings were reported by Mwape (2020), who observed that learner misconduct contributes to increased absenteeism and dropout rates in secondary schools. Likewise, Chanda & Phiri (2022) found that indiscipline, particularly truancy and suspension, is a major factor influencing school dropout in Zambian learning institutions.

The study further found that learner indiscipline significantly weakened teacher-learner relationships in selected secondary schools. Cases of disrespect, defiance, and verbal confrontation towards teachers reduced mutual trust, respect, and cooperation in the classroom environment. As a result, teachers found it increasingly difficult to build positive rapport with learners, which is essential for effective teaching and guidance. Poor relationships between learners and teachers negatively affected open communication, learner willingness to seek academic help, and the provision of effective academic and moral support. In some instances, teachers reported becoming emotionally detached from learners as a coping mechanism to

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persistent misconduct, which further strained classroom interaction and reduced instructional effectiveness. This breakdown in relationships also contributed to a hostile learning atmosphere where learners felt less supported and less motivated to engage in academic activities. Consequently, the overall teaching and learning process was compromised, as both academic and behavioural development were negatively affected. Similar findings were reported by Mumba (2021), who noted that learner indiscipline undermines teacher-learner relationships and reduces classroom cooperation. Likewise, Kauffman & Landrum (2018) in the United States observed that persistent disruptive behaviour in classrooms weakens teacher-student relationships and negatively affects instructional quality. In addition, Espelage et al. (2020) found that bullying and defiance in school settings significantly damage teacher-student trust and reduce positive engagement in learning environments.

The findings also indicated that school resources and administrative time were heavily affected by disciplinary cases. One of the teachers observed that:

“School administrators spent a significant amount of time handling conflicts, disciplining learners, addressing cases of misconduct, and responding to parental complaints instead of concentrating on academic planning, curriculum supervision, and school development activities”.

This diversion of attention and effort reduced institutional efficiency and weakened the overall management of schools. In addition, repeated disciplinary hearings and follow-ups increased the administrative workload, leading to delays in implementing key educational programmes and development initiatives. Financial and material resources were also indirectly affected, as schools had to allocate funds toward disciplinary measures, security concerns, and repairing damages caused by learner misconduct. Consequently, the smooth operation of schools was disrupted, affecting both academic and administrative performance. Similar findings were reported by Adeyemi & Adeyemo (2019) in Nigeria, who observed that student indiscipline significantly increases administrative burden and reduces time available for instructional leadership. Similarly, Gottfredson & Gottfredson (2017) in the United States found that frequent disciplinary cases reduce school efficiency by diverting administrative resources away from academic improvement and school development activities.

Additionally, the study revealed that peer influence associated with indiscipline played a significant role in encouraging the spread of negative behaviours among learners. Undisciplined learners often influenced their peers to engage in misconduct such as substance abuse, absenteeism, classroom disruption, examination malpractice, and general disobedience to school rules. This peer pressure created a chain effect where initially disciplined learners gradually adopted deviant behaviours in order to fit into certain peer groups or avoid social exclusion. As a result, the general school culture was negatively affected, leading to weakened academic focus, reduced commitment to learning, and increased normalization of misconduct within the school environment. Teachers reported that peer-influenced indiscipline was particularly difficult to control because it often spread quickly through friendship groups and informal learner networks. This situation undermined efforts to maintain discipline and created challenges for sustaining positive behavioural standards in schools. Similar findings were reported by Wang & Eccles (2019), who found that peer influence significantly contributes to the spread of risky and disruptive behaviours among adolescents in school settings in the United States. Also, Salmivalli (2018) in Finland observed that peer group dynamics strongly shape student behaviour, with deviant peer associations increasing the likelihood of bullying, truancy, and other forms of indiscipline in schools.

4. STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

- School authorities and the Ministry of Education should promote structured parent engagement programmes such as regular meetings, parenting workshops, and communication platforms. This would help improve parental supervision and support for learners' behaviour both at home and in school.
- Schools should review and consistently enforce clear disciplinary policies to ensure fairness and effectiveness in managing learner behaviour. In addition, increasing teacher presence through improved supervision in classrooms and school premises can help reduce opportunities for misconduct and promote a more disciplined learning environment.
- Schools should establish or reinforce functional guidance and counselling departments staffed with trained personnel. These services should focus on behavioural change programmes, peer mentoring, and psychosocial support to help learners address underlying issues contributing to indiscipline and promote positive behaviour.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study established that learner misconduct is influenced by a combination of interrelated factors. These include inadequate parental guidance, negative peer influence, socio-economic challenges, and weak enforcement of school disciplinary policies. The findings further revealed that indiscipline disrupts teaching and learning processes by reducing instructional time, lowering learner academic engagement, and straining school administrative resources. It also contributes to a negative school climate characterized by increased cases of truancy, absenteeism, and classroom disruptions. Overall, the study demonstrated that indiscipline is not a result of a single factor but rather a complex interaction of home, school, and community environments. Therefore, addressing it requires a collaborative approach involving parents, teachers, school administrators, and other stakeholders to strengthen guidance, improve supervision, and promote positive learner behaviour in schools.

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