

An Exploration of Discipline among the Secondary Schools of Mulwani Zone: A Case of Livingstone District

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Abstract

This study examined the state of discipline in secondary schools in Mulwani Zone, Livingstone District, where issues such as absenteeism, classroom disruption, and disrespect for authority affect learning outcomes. A qualitative case study design was used, with data collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations involving teachers, students, parents, and administrators. Findings revealed that indiscipline is influenced by multiple factors, including teaching challenges, weak policy implementation, socio-economic conditions, limited use of positive discipline strategies, and low parental involvement. The study also found that existing disciplinary measures are often inconsistent and ineffective. The study concludes that addressing indiscipline requires a coordinated approach involving schools, families, and policymakers. It recommends adopting consistent, positive, and context-based disciplinary strategies to improve student behaviour and create a conducive learning environment.

Keywords: Student Discipline, Indiscipline, Secondary Schools, Disciplinary Measures, Qualitative Study.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discipline is an important part of learning and school development because it helps create an environment where teaching and learning can take place effectively. When learners behave well, teachers are able to deliver lessons effectively, smooth and Creswell (2018), Discipline forms the foundation upon which academic excellence, moral development and the socialisation of students are built. In the context of Mulwani Zone, Livingstone District, understanding the dynamics of student discipline is crucial for the holistic development of learners.

This chapter introduces the study on discipline among secondary schools in Mulwani Zone of Livingstone District. It presents the background, statement of the problem, significance of the study, objectives, research questions, limitations, and ends with a summary.

Background of the Study

Discipline constituted a fundamental pillar in the administration and operational efficacy of any secondary school system. It was widely recognized as a critical determinant of academic achievement, the formation of positive student character, and the maintenance of a safe and conducive learning environment. In the context of Zambia, and specifically within Livingstone District, the discourse around learner discipline in secondary schools had gained increased prominence amid broader national concerns regarding educational quality and outcomes. Mulwani Zone, a defined administrative and educational cluster within the district, presented a unique microcosm for this investigation. The zone encompassed a mix of school types and is situated in a socio-economic environment that influenced student behaviour and school management practices. Therefore, an exploration of the state of discipline within its secondary schools was not only timely but also essential for generating localized insights that could inform school-level interventions and district-wide policy support.

Mulwani Zone, which includes Mulwani Secondary School, Mujala Secondary School, Dambwa Secondary School, and Nakatindi Secondary School, continues to experience different forms of indiscipline. These behaviours affect teaching and learning, reduce academic performance, and create challenges for school administrators. There was need to explore these discipline issues so that appropriate solutions could be developed.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary schools are mandated to maintain effective discipline systems that promote positive learner behaviour, academic engagement, and a safe learning environment. Effective discipline is essential for sustaining instructional time, fostering respectful relationships, and enhancing overall school performance. However, evidence from both global and local studies indicates that persistent learner indiscipline continues to undermine these goals, particularly in public secondary schools within developing contexts

In the Mulwani Zone of Livingstone District, learner indiscipline remains a persistent and escalating challenge despite the apparent implementation of multiple disciplinary interventions. The study area continues to experience frequent cases of late coming, truancy, disrespect towards teachers, bullying, vandalism, theft, fighting, and substance abuse across selected secondary schools. This persistence suggests a significant gap between disciplinary intentions and actual behavioural outcomes.

Schools within the zone have reportedly relied heavily on reactive and punitive measures, including stricter school rules, increased surveillance by teachers and prefects, suspensions, and zero-tolerance approaches for selected offences. While such measures are intended to deter misconduct, their continued use has not resulted in sustained behavioural improvement. Instead, these approaches often address symptoms rather than underlying causes, potentially breeding resentment, weakening student–teacher relationships, and driving indiscipline outside formal school spaces.

At the administrative level, attempts such as top-down policy directives, one-off leadership workshops, and the nomination of teachers to guidance and counselling roles have been observed. However, these initiatives have frequently suffered from weak implementation, limited follow-up, and inadequate resourcing. Guidance and counselling services, in particular, remain largely symbolic due to heavy teaching workloads, lack of specialised training, and insufficient institutional support.

Efforts to involve parents and the wider community including Parent-Teacher Association meetings, disciplinary report letters, and community meetings have also yielded limited success. These engagements are often reactive, crisis-driven, and blame-oriented, rather than collaborative and preventative. Socio-economic challenges such as poverty, limited parental availability, and low educational attainment further constrain meaningful and sustained parental participation in learner discipline.

Although some schools have experimented with pedagogical and school-climate approaches, such as learner-centred teaching methods, positive behaviour initiatives, and student councils, these efforts have generally been fragmented, under-resourced, and inconsistently applied. The absence of whole-school commitment and long-term monitoring has limited their impact, resulting in minimal behavioural change.

The persistence of indiscipline in Mulwani Zone therefore does not reflect a lack of attempted intervention, but rather the fragmented, short-term, and misaligned nature of these interventions. Most strategies have been implemented without a thorough, evidence-based understanding of the specific contextual drivers of indiscipline within the zone. Furthermore, the absence of a holistic, multi-stakeholder, and culturally responsive discipline framework has prevented the establishment of sustainable behaviour management systems.

Consequently, there remains insufficient empirical evidence on the effectiveness of existing disciplinary practices and the factors contributing to their limited success in Mulwani Zone secondary schools. This gap hampers informed decision-making by school administrators, teachers, parents, and education authorities. Therefore, a systematic investigation into the nature, causes, and effectiveness of discipline practices is necessary to provide a diagnostic foundation for the development of coherent, contextualised, and sustainable discipline management strategies in the zone.

Significance of the Study

The study is important because it will help schools, parents, stakeholders, and the Ministry of Education understand the discipline challenges affecting learners in Mulwani Zone. The findings of the study are expected to help in the following ways:

- Assist schools to set up or strengthen guidance and counselling departments.
- Help school administrators and teachers develop better discipline policies.
- Encourage the Ministry of Education to provide more training for teachers on discipline management.
- Help communities and parents understand the importance of supporting learner discipline at home.
- Integrate socio-emotional learning into the school curriculum.
- Provide information that can help policymakers consider building or expanding schools where inadequate space contributes to indiscipline.
- Serve as a reference for future researchers who may wish to study discipline in other zones or districts.

According to Kumar (2019), research findings are useful when they guide improvement and help solve real problems. This study is therefore expected to contribute toward better discipline practices in Mulwani Zone.

Main Objective

The primary purpose of this study was to conduct a comprehensive exploration of the state of discipline among secondary schools in Mulwani Zone, Livingstone District. It aimed to generate an in-depth understanding of the disciplinary landscape to inform practice and policy

Specific Objectives

The study will be guided by the following specific objectives:

1. To find out the common types of indiscipline among learners in Mulwani Zone.
2. To investigate the causes of learner indiscipline in the selected schools.
3. To explore the effects of indiscipline on teaching and learning.
4. To identify the discipline measures used by schools in Mulwani Zone.
5. To suggest possible ways of improving discipline in the zone.

Research Questions

The study will answer the following questions:

1. What types of indiscipline are commonly found among learners in Mulwani Zone?
2. What causes indiscipline among learners in the selected secondary schools?
3. How does indiscipline affect teaching and learning?
4. What discipline measures are being used by schools?
5. What strategies can help improve discipline in Mulwani Zone?

Limitations of the Study

The study faced the following limitations:

- Time limitations, which reduced the number of participants that could be reached.
- Financial constraints, which affected transport and data collection materials.
- Participant availability, since some learners or teachers may not be willing to participate.

- Coverage limitations, as the study focuses only on Mulwani Zone and may not represent the entire district.
- The reliance on self-reported data through questionnaires might have driven respondents to provide answers they perceived as favourable or expected.

Despite these limitations, the study made every effort to ensure the information collected is accurate and reliable, as recommended by Saunders et al. (2019).

Definition of Key Terms

For clarity and operational consistency within this study, the following terms were defined:

Discipline: Refers to the system of rules, training, and corrective actions employed by a school to encourage and enforce acceptable standards of student behaviour, positive attitude, and compliance with established codes of conduct.

Indiscipline: Denotes the deviation from or violation of the established school rules and norms of conduct, encompassing behaviours that disrupted the learning process, showed disrespect for authority, or endangered the welfare of the school community.

Exploration: In this context, refers to an investigative study aimed at describing, analysing, and understanding the nature, causes, and management of the discipline phenomenon in the specified setting.

Secondary Schools: For this study, refers to government-operated institutions within Mulwani Zone offering education from Grade 8 to Grade 12.

Mulwani Zone: An educational circuit or administrative unit under the Livingstone District Education Board, comprising a specific cluster of primary and secondary schools for supervisory purposes.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced the study by providing the background, problem statement, significance, objectives, research questions, and limitations. The chapter shows why it is important to explore discipline issues in Mulwani Zone.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a comprehensive review of literature related to discipline in secondary schools. The review follows a funnel approach, beginning with global studies, then narrowing down to African research, followed by regional studies within the SADC region, and finally focusing on Zambian studies. The chapter also contains an empirical review, a theoretical framework, and a conceptual framework. The purpose was to highlight what is already known, show areas of agreement and disagreement among scholars, and identifying the knowledge gap that this study on Mulwani Zone particularly Mulwani Secondary School, Mujala Secondary School, Dambwa Secondary School, and Nakatindi Secondary School aimed to address.

Global Researches on the Topic

Globally, school discipline remains central to effective teaching and learning. Research in the United States and Europe shows that discipline is strengthened by clear expectations, consistent enforcement of rules, and supportive teacher–student relationships (Gregory et al., 2017). In the United Kingdom, schools that implement structured behaviour management systems report reductions in bullying, truancy, and classroom disruptions (McCluskey, 2018).

Studies also emphasize that punitive approaches alone are less effective than restorative methods. Restorative discipline promotes reflection, accountability, and conflict resolution, which in turn improve student behaviour. In Asian countries like Japan and South Korea, discipline is deeply shaped by cultural norms emphasizing respect, self-control, and collective responsibility

While global research provides useful insights, much of it is situated in well-resourced systems with strong institutional support, which may not fully align with contexts in developing regions such as Southern Africa.

African Research on the Topic

Across Africa, research shows that school discipline is influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors. In Kenya, studies highlight that overcrowded classrooms and inadequate guidance and counselling contribute to rising cases of indiscipline. Nigerian research reports that indiscipline is linked to weak parental supervision, inconsistent enforcement of rules, and the influence of peer groups.

South African schools face challenges such as violence, drug abuse, and gang-related behaviour, which undermine effective discipline. Studies in Ghana note that although corporal punishment has been outlawed, some teachers still rely on it due to insufficient training in alternative behaviour management strategies.

These studies demonstrate that African schools struggle to balance punitive and preventive approaches to discipline. However, limited research examines discipline across several schools within one educational zone, which is an important gap addressed in this study.

Regional Studies (SADC Region)

In the SADC region, school discipline has been examined in relation to socio-economic pressures, cultural dynamics, and evolving educational policies. In Zimbabwe, indiscipline issues such as absenteeism and bullying are commonly attributed to poor monitoring systems and inadequate guidance programmes. Botswana's research, on the other hand, shows that positive discipline strategies such as mentoring and counselling improve learners' behaviour and social engagement.

Namibian studies emphasize the importance of collaboration among teachers, parents, and community stakeholders in preventing behavioural problems. Despite these efforts, many schools in the region still rely heavily on punitive strategies due to resource limitations and insufficient training in restorative methods. Most SADC studies focus on isolated schools or single aspects of discipline. Few provide comparative analysis across multiple schools within a defined zone, as this study on Mulwani Zone intends to do.

Zambian Studies on the Topic

Zambian research highlights diverse factors influencing discipline in secondary schools. Mwansa and Mweemba (2020) identify bullying, absenteeism, substance abuse, and examination malpractice as common disciplinary problems. Musonda (2019) argues that teacher-student relationships and parental involvement play a crucial role in shaping learners' behaviour.

Mukuka (2021) observes that while the Ministry of Education discourages corporal punishment and promotes positive discipline, many teachers still lack the skills required to implement alternative strategies effectively. Studies in Livingstone District specifically point out that urban influences, economic challenges, and peer pressure contribute significantly to learner indiscipline.

However, existing Zambian research tends to focus on individual schools rather than multiple institutions within one zone. No study has compared discipline trends among Mulwani, Mujala, Dambwa, and Nakatindi secondary schools, which forms the unique contribution of this research.

Empirical Review

Types of Indiscipline in Schools

Empirical evidence identifies several common forms of indiscipline, including absenteeism, bullying, cheating, disrespect for teachers, and substance abuse (Gregory et al., 2017). Zambian studies show similar trends and add truancy and vandalism as frequently reported challenges

(Musonda, 2019). However, the severity and frequency of these cases differ across schools depending on school culture and leadership styles.

Causes of Indiscipline

Research shows that peer influence, poor parental supervision, negative community environments, and social media exposure contribute significantly to learner misbehaviour. In Zambia, poverty and unstable home environments are also documented as major contributors to indiscipline.

Disciplinary Strategies Used by Schools

Globally, schools employ a combination of preventive and punitive strategies. Restorative approaches have been widely adopted due to their effectiveness in promoting long-term behavioural change. African studies show ongoing reliance on punitive measures due to limited teacher training in alternatives. In Zambia, common strategies include suspensions, counselling, detention, and prefect-led monitoring.

Effectiveness of Disciplinary Systems

Research indicates that discipline improves in schools where rules are consistently enforced and where teachers adopt participatory approaches to behaviour management (Gregory et al., 2017). Moyo (2019) argues that discipline systems become ineffective when schools lack adequate resources, counselling services, or strong leadership. This is an important consideration for schools in Mulwani Zone.

Theoretical Review / Framework

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977)

Social Learning Theory posits that individuals learn behaviours by observing and imitating others. It is relevant to this study because learners often adopt behaviours exhibited by their peers, teachers, and community members.

Behaviourist Theory (Skinner, 1953)

Skinner's Behaviourist Theory emphasizes reinforcement. It suggests that positive reinforcement encourages desirable behaviour, while negative reinforcement discourages unwanted behaviour. This theory explains how rewards, punishments, and feedback shape student behaviour in schools.

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

This theory argues that human behaviour is influenced by multiple systems family, school, community, and society. It is applicable in understanding how external factors such as home conditions, peer groups, and community dynamics influence learner indiscipline.

Summary of Theoretical Framework

Together, these theories provide a holistic understanding of learner behaviour. Social Learning Theory and Behaviourist Theory explain behaviour within the school environment, while Ecological Systems Theory highlights broader influences that shape discipline patterns in schools.

Conceptual Review / Framework

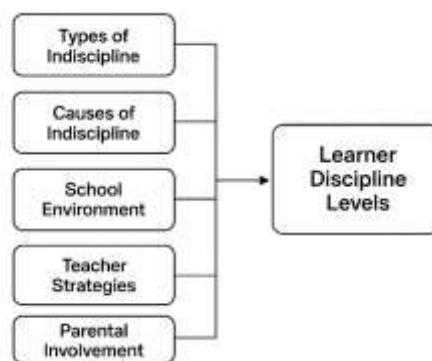
The conceptual framework identifies the main variables informing the study:

Independent Variables:

- Types of indiscipline
- Causes of indiscipline
- School environment
- Teacher strategies
- Parental involvement

Dependent Variable:

- Levels of learner discipline in secondary schools



Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature on school discipline from global, African, regional, and Zambian perspectives. The empirical review discussed the major themes surrounding types, causes, strategies, and effectiveness of school discipline. The theoretical review provided the foundation for understanding learner behaviour, while the conceptual framework illustrated the variables guiding the study. Despite extensive literature, a clear gap remains: there is no comparative study on discipline across multiple secondary schools within Mulwani Zone. This study seeks to address that gap.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research methodology employed in the study entitled “*An Exploration of Discipline among the Secondary Schools of Mulwani Zone: A Case of Livingstone District.*” The chapter outlines the research design, population, data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were adopted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing discipline in secondary schools. The methodology provided a roadmap for how data were collected, analysed, and interpreted

Research Design

The study employed a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches:

- **Quantitative Design:** Structured questionnaires were administered to students, teachers, parents/guardians, and school administrators. This approach enabled the researcher to collect measurable data on perceptions, challenges, and effectiveness of disciplinary practices. The quantitative design was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to generate statistical results that reflect patterns in discipline practices across the schools.
- **Qualitative Design:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, and parents to explore underlying reasons for student Misbehaviour and strategies used to manage discipline. Qualitative methods provided deeper insight into the context, motivations, and experiences that cannot be captured by numerical data alone.

The mixed-method design allowed for triangulation of data, increasing reliability and providing a comprehensive understanding of both the prevalence and causes of indiscipline.

Population

The population for this study consisted of pupils, parents/guardians, teachers, and school administrators from four secondary schools in Mulwani Zone:

- Mulwani Secondary School
- Mujala Secondary School
- Dambwa Secondary School

- Nakatindi Secondary School

Participants were selected because they are directly involved in maintaining and enforcing school discipline and can provide first-hand information about the challenges and effectiveness of disciplinary measures.

Size and Sampling Plan

Size

The total target population was estimated at 110 individuals across the four schools. However, due to time constraints, resource availability, and willingness of respondents to provide information, a size of 40 respondents was selected.

Sampling Method

The study employed stratified random sampling, a probability sampling technique. The population was divided into strata based on stakeholder groups (students, teachers, parents, administrators), and random sampling was conducted within each stratum to ensure proportional representation. This method minimized bias and captured diverse perspectives on disciplinary practices.

Data Sources

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources:

- **Primary Data:** Collected through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, parents, and school administrators.
- **Secondary Data:** School records, policy documents, disciplinary logs, and reports from the District Education Board, providing historical and contextual information on disciplinary measures.

Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Collection

Structured questionnaires were administered to all d participants. The questionnaire addressed:

- Perceptions of overall school discipline
- Common types of misbehavior
- Methods of discipline used by teachers and administrators
- Effectiveness of disciplinary measures
- Stakeholder involvement in discipline

Examples of Questionnaire Items:

- How would you describe overall discipline in your school? (Very Good / Good / Fair / Poor / Very Poor)
- Which discipline methods are most commonly used? (Verbal warning / Detention / Suspension / Corporal punishment / Others)
- How effective are these methods in improving behavior? (Very Effective / Somewhat Effective / Not Effective / I don't know)

Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, administrators, and parents/guardians to explore:

- Causes of student misbehavior
- Challenges in enforcing discipline
- Effectiveness of guidance and counselling services
- Recommendations for improvement

Data Analysis Methods

Quantitative Analysis

Data from questionnaires were coded and analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Methods included:

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, charts, tables)

- Cross-tabulations and correlations to examine relationships between variables

Qualitative Analysis

Interview responses were transcribed, coded, and analysed thematically. Recurring patterns and themes were identified, such as:

- Causes of indiscipline (peer pressure, academic frustration, substance abuse)
- Effectiveness of disciplinary strategies (detention, counselling, corporal punishment)
- Parental and administrative involvement

Validity and Reliability

- **Validity:** Ensured by aligning questionnaire and interview items with research objectives and previous studies. Instruments were pilot-tested with 5 participants to identify ambiguities.
- **Reliability:** Internal consistency of questionnaire items was assessed using Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha \geq 0.7$), ensuring acceptable reliability of measurement constructs.

Ethical Considerations

- Permission was obtained from the Ministry of Education and school authorities.
- Informed consent was obtained from all adult participants; parental consent was obtained for pupils under 18 years.
- Participation was voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any time.
- Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured; data were used strictly for academic purposes.

Limitations of the Study

The study faced several limitations that could have influenced the scope, depth, and generalisability of the findings. These limitations are explained in detail below:

1. Time Constraints

The research was conducted within a limited timeframe, which restricted the ability to include a larger number of schools or extend data collection over multiple periods. As a result, the study focused on four secondary schools in Mulwani Zone, potentially limiting the variability of experiences captured. Longer data collection periods would have allowed the researcher to observe changes in disciplinary practices over time and capture seasonal or contextual variations in student behaviour.

2. Availability of Resources

Limited financial and logistical resources constrained the range and depth of data collection instruments. For example, more extensive qualitative methods such as focus group discussions or multiple rounds of interviews could not be conducted due to cost and time considerations. Similarly, access to comprehensive school records or external reports from the district office was sometimes restricted, which may have limited historical data for triangulation purposes.

3. Unwillingness of Participants

Some respondents, particularly students and parents, were hesitant to provide full or candid information on disciplinary practices, student behaviour, or challenges faced by the schools. This could have led to incomplete responses, gaps in data, or underreporting of sensitive issues such as corporal punishment, substance abuse, or truancy. Efforts were made to reassure participants of confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest responses.

4. Size Limitations

Out of an estimated total population of 110 individuals across the four schools, only 40 respondents participated in the study. While stratified sampling ensured representation across students, teachers, parents, and administrators, the small size may limit the generalisability of findings to all schools in Mulwani Zone or other districts. A larger

have increased the reliability of statistical analysis and captured more diverse perspectives on discipline.

5. Response Bias

Participants' responses may have been influenced by personal perceptions, social desirability, or fear of repercussions, leading them to overstate positive aspects of discipline or understate challenges. For instance, teachers may have emphasized the effectiveness of their methods, while students may have minimized their own misbehaviour. The study mitigated this by using a combination of quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews, allowing cross-verification of responses.

Chapter summary:

Despite these limitations, the study employed a carefully designed **mixed-method approach**, using stratified sampling and ethical protocols to enhance reliability and validity. While the findings may not be fully generalizable to all secondary schools in Zambia, they provide credible, context-specific insights into the state of discipline in Mulwani Zone schools and offer a solid foundation for future research and interventions.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined learner indiscipline in Mulwani Zone secondary schools. It found that students display behaviours such as truancy, disrespect, bullying, and substance abuse, influenced by factors like peer pressure, poor parental supervision, socio-economic challenges, and weak school systems.

Schools mainly use punitive measures, which address immediate behaviour but are less effective for long-term change. Limited collaboration between parents and schools further weakens discipline efforts.

The study concludes that indiscipline is caused by interconnected social, school, and individual factors, and requires a coordinated approach involving positive discipline strategies and stronger stakeholder involvement.

Limitations include a small sample size, possible response bias, and limited study scope.

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