

Civil Servants Awareness of The Discipline, Procedures and Effects on Performance: Malawi Exploratory Research

Dr Nimisha Beri,

Professor, Department of Education, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, India,
email: nimisha.16084@lpu.co.in

Collins Phiri,

ZMC, Lecturer, Malawi,
email: czphiri@gmail.com

Abstract

Background: to have an effective and productive work force rules, regulation, policies are taken as an integral part of any institution. These rules, regulations and policies have the power to build or destroy an entire institution and most importantly guide the proper conduct and production activities of an institution. However, not every employee adheres or conforms to these guidelines consequently penalties to misconducts or indiscipline are also put in place against every indiscipline case thought of being committed in every institution. Indiscipline happens due to issues to with being aware of the discipline measures and procedures put in place for employees to follow.

Aim: This paper is designed to explore the correlation between civil servants discipline cases and their awareness of the discipline procedures and penalties

Method: Data was collected from the reviews of research papers and other discipline case documents

Keywords: discipline, penalty, awareness, procedures, code of conduct

Introduction

The biggest challenge for managers of different institutions is to maintain discipline apart from so many challenges that they face as they endeavour to perform and make their institutions shine. Managers are finding it hard to discipline their employees considering the stressful situations that so many employees are going through day in and out. No manager or

employee is stress free. Therefore, discipline has become a common and integral problem for managers and their employees as long as they keep working for either themselves or others. Most employees view discipline as something to make them feel the pain, be embarrassed or deny them the privileges entitled for them at the work place. Literally, discipline means the bond that links the ends and the accomplishments of an institution of which managers and employees are active members. Durai (2010) quoted two definitions; “Discipline is the force that prompts an individual or a group to observe the rules, regulations and procedures, which are deemed to be necessary to the attainment of objective” by William R Spriegel and Edward Schultz, and “discipline is the a state of employee self-control and orderly conduct that indicates the extent of genuine team work within an organization” by R WayneMondy. Were (2006) defined discipline “as a system of guiding the individuals to make reasonable decision responsibly. It is also action taken by adults to help a child change his or her behaviour”. Discipline can also be looked at in three ways as described by Megginson; “self-discipline, necessary condition of orderly behaviour or act of training and punishing.”

The importance of discipline

Discipline is vital in institutions because of the so many reasons some of which include the following;

- It trains the employees develop self-disciplined characters in an individual which are important for better performance at the workplace. It exposes the employee to the talent of controlling those hidden temperamental traits. Traits which when not checked and suppressed are likely to bring chaos in an organisation’s daily running of activities.
- It gives the employees and managers the means on how they are to deal with daily challenges and demands of the work place by providing them with the willpower and that motivation to face the changes that come at the workplace in form of management changes or change in the way things are done. Changes that come with innovations.
- It helps the managers to inculcate in their employees the values and attitudes necessary for the institutions to achieve the missions, aims and objectives of the institutions but in a rational and unpretentious dear atmosphere.
- It kindles bond among employees and employer that leads to reciprocated veneration for each other in turn leads to high performance of employee/teachers.

It is imperative to understand that discipline is paramount in any organisation or institution for the achievement of that organisation or institution's mission, aims and objectives. It should also be noted that discipline has amoral connotation. It deals with preparation of the just work environment as well as preparing employees' ethical atmosphere. Discipline must endeavour to create fair environment for workers to adjust easily and give an atmosphere that allows the employees to be free and innovative for the school to achieve its objectives and dream. To have an effective and efficient school there is need for the managers to make sure all structures of the school work in unison.

However, Mbithi (1974) "adds that discipline is also a negative word and has to do with correction of wrong doers and involves punishment". It "can also be regarded as positive force as reported by Mbithi (1974)."

To have a disciplined workforce, there is a need for institutions to have rules, regulation and procedures of which all employees must adhere to. These rules, regulations and procedures must be known to all employees as soon as they join the organisation's workforce. What must not be forgotten is also a list of penalties attached to its own misconduct so that all employees are aware beforehand of the consequences of their actions in case they become one of the victims.

In Malawi, the Public Services Reforms Commission "provides strategic leadership in the implementation of Public Service Reforms (PSRs). Its objective is to identify and recommend ways and means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in order to raise the quality of the public services delivered to the public." The Civil Service Commission provides the awareness and disciplinary actions for all civil servants in Malawi. Specifically, the teaching Service commission deals with all matters relating to all teachers working in primary, secondary, public colleges and universities in Malawi. Teachers Union of Malawi (TUM) has been working hard writing documents with rules, regulations, misconducts, penalties. All above bodies have been mandated to educate and institute discipline and penalties to civil servants mainly teachers

Some common misconducts of primary and secondary school teachers are in the list below which is not exhaustive;

- Absence from duty without due reasons-Nyasatimes newspaper dated April 26, 2018 reported the minister of education, “My ministry is currently receiving high number of indiscipline cases including prolonged absenteeism of teachers.”
- Neglect to carry out professional duties and instructions
- Displaying insubordination by words or conduct
- Habitually taking intoxicating liquor and habit forming drugs
- Indulging in immoral sexual behaviours with female and male students, Nyasatimes newspaper dated April 26, 2018 reported, “and sexual relationships which is happening among teachers and students “. This was the minister’s statement when launching misconduct and disciplinary handbook for Malawi teachers

The list is long, however, the issue here is teachers and all involved in the education sector have duty to understand and adhere to the proper conduct of the profession no matter whatsoever situation they are faced with. This will help to maintain the integrity of teaching and education profession.

Causes of misconduct

Chirwa, H. (2014) investigated causes and effects of misconduct in public schools and he highlighted the following; “absenteeism and late coming as common causes of teacher misconduct in the selected public secondary schools despite knowledge of the Teachers’ Code of Conduct among teachers.”

Chirwa, H. (2014) also found out “that factors related to low job satisfaction, negligence, lack of support as evidenced by irregular school inspection and lack of cooperation among teachers contributed to some of the cases of teacher misconduct.”

Other causes of misconduct are lack of resources in education institutions because that gives teachers a reason for not doing things in the right way. For example, a teacher will report not going to class to teach because there are having no textbooks for reference and preparation of notes for teaching a particular subject.

Inefficient and ineffective transport system in Malawi is contributing a lot to misconduct among many educators in the system. In Malawi transport system is poor and often relies so much on privately owned buses and minibuses which are expensive. More to this is that these private buses do not keep time of departure as well as arrival which

contribute to most teachers reporting late for duties. Teachers and other employees fail to report on time and also leave duty station early just to make sure they arrive home in good time too.

At times negligence-some teachers are not serious with their duties. They can sleep at the work place while they are supposed to be in class. Others play games like chess and drafts and many other phone games. The moment they realise the class time is gone.

Some educators come to school drunk. This is common in primary schools than in secondary school. In public schools the situation is worse as compared to that of private due to the fact that in public school principals act leniently towards acts of misconduct probably due to high poverty level. Other teachers go drinking for a week or so after getting their salaries at the end of the months and that too leads to misconduct

Offensive verbal exchange, which is very common among female teachers, is one contributing factor of misconduct in schools. This to a larger extent is due to dissimilarities in personality of female teachers and at times it escalates into some uncontrollable behaviours leading into misconduct.

Effects of misconduct/indiscipline

The effects of misconduct in the education system cannot be underscored because it is often manifested in the performance as well as the end products in education are often students and citizens who are unproductive. Misconduct has long life influence and impact on the society and nation at large. Since if influence, may not be seen on the onset, it is imperative that principals, teachers, parents and other stakeholders are aware of the consequences of misconduct in the education system.

Dealing with misconduct/indiscipline in schools

Dealing with indiscipline in schools varies depending upon the principals heading those respective schools where the misconduct is likely to occur. School principals often take their time provide advice. Rarely are procedural steps followed in dealing with misconduct in most schools. Education Managers fear losing relationships with teachers and other staff members they work with. In a staff meeting some principals generalise issues of discipline without actually specifying the culprit in question just for the same stated fear of losing relationships as well as the support they need to run school activities better. Other even prefer

using their deputies of other discipline committee members. Most teachers know also that their principal often just reprimand them through words of mouth during staff meetings. In rare cases, teachers are called to be talked to by the principal, his deputy or any other member of the discipline committee.

Discipline procedures in Malawi schools

Disciplinary procedures in Malawi schools are quite different from rest of what other countries are following. Briefly, the procedures can be outlined as follows;

1. Clear comprehension of the disciplinary issue at hand
2. Having a very good and clear enquiry of misconduct
3. Inviting the teacher for a hearing before the disciplinary committee
4. Having the session of the disciplinary meeting with the culprit
5. Determining on the action to be taken after the hearing
6. Writing a formal report
7. Culprit has right to appeal

Penalties of misconduct

Malawi Teaching Service Commission, Teachers Union of Malawi highlights the following as penalties for different degrees of misconducts;

- Dismissal
- Termination of contract of a contract officer in accordance with terms or his or her contract
- Reduction in grade
- Reduction in salary
- Stoppage of increment
- Withholding of increment
- Severe reprimand
- Compulsory retirement under regulation³¹
- Suspension
- Posting to another school or remote area
- Interdiction

Findings from the discussions

- From the discussion above, it is concluded that managers/principals are conscious of the indiscipline cases happening in their institutions but they are hesitant to take action.
- Their challenge is the fear to lose relationships with members of staff. They also know time is taken to address issues of misconduct.
- Some principals are not confident enough to handle cases of indiscipline depending upon the cases' magnitude.
- Human rights to some extent also contribute the school misconduct
- It is important for school principals to take time to understand the need to following the procedural steps in carrying out discipline cases.
- Principals need to take care of all discipline issues in a fair and just manner and most importantly be consistent in all dealing at every other stage or step of the case being handled.

Recommendations

Suggestions to the above conclusions are as follows;

1. All principals of schools and teachers must endeavour to follow all discipline procedures at all times and be consistent.
2. There must be refresher trainings on discipline and code of conduct to make members be aware of the misconducts and professional ethics.
3. Provision of adequate teaching and learning resources in schools.
4. The ministry through inspection department must enforce the Teacher's code of conduct.

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