

PARENTAL VIEWS OF LEARNER DISCIPLINE AT HOME AND SCHOOL

Prof N.A. Broer*, Prof J.L. van der Walt, Dr K.B. Mampane, Prof N.T. Mollo, Prof C.C. Wolhuter

Research Unit: Education and Human Rights in Diversity (Edu-HRight)
North-West University - South Africa

[*n.a.broer@live.com](mailto:n.a.broer@live.com)

Abstract

Discipline among schoolchildren in South Africa is currently not of an acceptable standard. This is due to various factors and circumstances, among which the prevailing political situation is one of the most conspicuous. The new post-apartheid government has through the past three decades found it difficult to put an end to the general spirit of violence that has become ingrained in the citizenry's social fabric. This spirit of ill-discipline has also taken root in schools, and in some cases, in parental homes. With the aid of the social space and ethical action theory, three social spaces were identified: the parental home, the school, and the space between home and school. The qualitative empirical investigation (using a questionnaire) based on this theoretical framework concentrated on the parent-respondents' views of the state of discipline at home and in the school and the interplay between parents and the school in the space between home and school. The investigation revealed that parents viewed discipline at home and in school as affected by factors such as inconsistent application of rules, lack of communication, and external pressures in the form of exposure to peer pressure and social media. They understand the need for collaborative efforts between parents and teachers, the setting of clear boundaries, and the application of non-punitive, respectful approaches for creating a consistent and supportive environment for their children's development.

Keywords: discipline, education, parent, parental home, parental views, social space

Introduction

It is a widely known fact that discipline in South African schools is currently not of an acceptable standard. This state of affairs can be ascribed to a variety of circumstances, among others the political situation in the country. Heineken (2020) surmised that the high levels of violence and ill-discipline could be due to South Africa's long history of violence: the colonial authorities and the subsequent apartheid government used violence as a tool of power and governance; their political opponents similarly resorted to violence during their campaigns to overthrow the National Party government that came into power in 1948. Their efforts led to the advent of a new fully democratic South Africa in 1994. The new post-apartheid government has through the past three decades found it difficult to put an end to the general spirit of violence and ill-discipline that has become ingrained in the citizenry's social fabric. This spirit has also taken root in the schools, and in some cases, in parental homes.

Problem Statement

Indiscipline, weak or no discipline in society - that is, a general inclination among its members to disobey the norms of propriety that are generally expected – could result from a collapse of norm structures, for instance in parental homes, in schools, and in society in general. Widespread indiscipline could result in social instability in public and private life, such as in the societal structures just mentioned. It could also point to a mismatch between personal or group demands and the social demands of society. Indiscipline, if allowed to collapse into anomie could be seriously detrimental to a country's social fabric (Naidoo, 2009; Twyman-Ghoshal, 2021). For purposes of the investigation in the current study, we concentrated on weak, no or ill-discipline in the form of a- or even anti-social behaviour among children in their parental homes, and in the schools that they attend, as well as in the “space” between these two societal relationships, in other words, on situations that have not yet deteriorated to the levels of anomie, but remain of concern.

Several parties or agents are involved in the process of attempting to instil acceptable levels of discipline in society in general and schools in particular. The government of the day, through the agency of its national and provincial departments of education, has to create a favourable legal environment for enabling, expecting and enforcing an acceptable level of discipline (in the sense of order and good behaviour displayed by all parties concerned). The learners who attend the school should have been brought up by their parents (as their primary educators) in their pre-school years as well as during their years of school attendance to demonstrate socially acceptable forms of behaviour and propriety, and not to engage in non- or anti-social behaviour. The school teachers (as secondary educators) should be trained and able to manage school and classroom situations in a disciplined (orderly, well-regulated) manner. The learners, as a result of the situation that prevails in their environment (parental home, school, community) due to all the efforts on the part of the authorities, their parents, their teachers, their peers, and others, should display acceptable (that is, disciplined, socially amenable) behaviour that would enable them to engage in the teaching-learning process, and to optimally benefit from such exposure.

Unfortunately, the situation in South African schools is currently far removed from the favourable situation sketched in the previous paragraph. There is much evidence to prove this point (see for example Cornelissen, 2023; Obadire & Sinthumula, 2021). Lumadi's (2019) study revealed that 5% of parents admitted to not being involved in managing learner discipline and behaviour, and 20% reported minimal involvement. This finding highlights the ongoing issue of parental disengagement in addressing their children's disciplinary issues. This could be because parents find themselves occupied with the challenges and distractions of their daily routines, as Motshusi, Ngobeni, and Sepeng (2024) discovered:

... parents value parental involvement and wish to engage in their children's education during the foundation phase. However, [they] reported several obstacles to greater involvement, such as a lack of time and uncertainty about how to assist their children effectively. Additional challenges [to greater or optimal involvement with their children and their behaviour] included high levels of illiteracy and parental substance abuse (Bunijevac, 2017).

Extensive research has already been done regarding discipline from the perspective of school management (cf. Mestry & Khumalo, 2012; Padayachee & Gcelu, 2022), the teaching corps (Segalo & Rambuda, 2018; Zondo & Mncube, 2024), and the state/government (the legal framework) (Mollo & Joubert, 2019; Smit, 2019). According to Ilyasin (2019), maintaining discipline and adhering to the school's discipline management practices are crucial factors in achieving strong academic performance. The study by Owino, Paulos and Njihia (2023) highlighted that involving parents in managing learner discipline has a positive influence on learners' academic performance. This means that it is not easy to achieve good academic performance where there is no discipline.

A perusal of publications regarding the state of discipline among South African learners revealed that one issue was still lacking, namely qualitative empirical evidence of how parents saw their efforts and those of their children's teachers at instilling discipline in their children. The investigation reported in this article focused on this issue. The question of how parents viewed the discipline of their children, at home, at school and in the "space" between home and school was broken down into five sub-questions, namely:

- What do parents believe are the main causes of ill-discipline among children at home?
- How do parents approach disciplining their children at home?
- What reasons do parents perceive as contributing to children's misbehaviour at school?
- In what ways do parents think they can help address unacceptable behaviour among learners at school?
- What are parents' opinions on how discipline is handled in the schools their children attend?

These five research questions reappear below in the context of the conceptual-theoretical framework in which the empirical investigation was rooted.

Method of investigation

The investigation, the results of which are reported in this article, consisted of two intrinsically linked phases. In the first phase, where we concentrated on the theoretical basis of the investigation, we conducted a literature review that covered the following parts of the investigation: what the term "discipline" means (see the previous as well as the next section), how discipline ideally should manifest itself in the parental home and the school, the relationship between parental home and school and the implications of this relationship for discipline among the children who are members of both, what morality entails, and how discipline should be grounded in an acceptable sense of morality. We employed the EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and Google Books databases for identifying relevant publications. We used the following as thesaurus terms in the computer searches: "parents", "school", "discipline", and "education" (Fink, 2014).

We then employed interpretivism-constructivism to, firstly, gain a deeper understanding of discipline, indiscipline, and ill-discipline in respectively the parental home and in the school, and the implications thereof for the relationship between these two societal relationships (parental home and school). The interpretive phase yielded webs of association relating to the issues under investigation (Chapman, 2017). In the constructivist phase, we associated ourselves with the view that the investigator imposes

meaning on what the interpretive phase has produced (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). The purpose of this exercise was to construct a sound theoretical base for the empirical investigation that we launched. Put differently, we used insights contained in the conceptual and theoretical interpretive-constructivist phase of our investigation to formulate the five research questions that we employed for the subsequent qualitative investigation (on which we report in detail below). The next section contains the conceptual-theoretical framework on which we based the qualitative empirical investigation.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Discipline in terms of the social space and ethical action theory

The word “discipline” as used in this project is derived from the core word “disciple”, meaning “follower”. In favourable situations, children become the “followers” of their parents and teachers by emulating their behaviour and being praised for doing so. (The converse is of course also a possibility where the parents or teachers set an example that should not be followed on moral grounds.) The *social space and ethical function or action theory* (see Van der Walt (2017(a): endnote 5; 2017(b): section 6; 2017(c)) was found to be useful for explaining the relationship between the parental home and other societal relationships or institutions, such as the school, and the “space” between these two societal relationships. According to this theory, everything that people do occurs in a specific social space (cf. Povinelli, 2013). In this study, as Korem (2024: Sections 1.1 to 1.3) has recently done in his investigation, the focus was on three such spaces: the parental home, where the parents are the primary educators; the school, where teachers are secondary educators (i.e. after or alongside the parents), and the “space” between these two societal relationships, in which for instance the school governing body functions. (This is not to overlook the significance of other “spaces” in which children are exposed to influences and guidance, such as the broader community, the religious institution to which their parents and they belong, the sports club, and so on.)

Each of these spaces displays a particular form of morality¹, that is an awareness of being guided by a moral compass. Where individuals and groups act and behave following a socially acceptable moral compass or standard, their basic orientation is, as far as possible, to care for the well-being of all others in their surroundings – in the case on which this project centred, the parental home, the school, and also in the “space” between these two societal relationships/institutions. Ideally, parents and their children in the home, teachers and their learners at school (who are at the same time the children of their parents), and all the role-players in that difficult-to-describe “space” between home and school, i.e. wherever all these individuals and groups interact with one another, they

¹ It is important to distinguish between morality and ethics, although the two terms are almost interchangeable in common usage. In this project, we regarded morality as referring to the rights and wrongs of a person's conscious actions, and ethics to cover the more general principles by which we understand moral questions (Thompson, 2018). Morality refers to the value system that inspires a person's actions and deeds from "within" whereas ethics refers to a value system that determines a person's actions and deeds from "the outside" (such as a professional code for teachers). In this investigation, we focused on morality, that is, a person or a group's sense of what is right or wrong, good or bad, duty, and the consequences of one's behaviour and decisions (Grayling, 2010).

should display a caring attitude characterised by love and courtesy. Such an attitude should be observable in displays of mutual understanding of situations and conditions, and in demonstrations of empathy and moral imagination, that is, of the ability to place oneself in the shoes of another.

The parental home as a social space

The parental home is the societal relationship in which a child is born and spends its first years of life. For this reason, parents should be regarded as the primary educators of the child. Because the relationship between a child and its parents is physical and relational, “the most original relationship of the child is to those who conceived” him/her, his or her parents (Burggraeve, 2010). The parents always remain the primary educators of their children; the primary responsibility for the education of their children lies with them, and not with the state or any other party. From a Christian perspective, Hayford (1991) stated that “God holds parents responsible for the upbringing of their children” – and not the state or the grandparents, peer groups or friends.” Edlin (1999) concurs with this view in stating that the state nor any other institution has been given the responsibility of education, and it is not even the teacher who primarily will be called to account for the (state of) the education of the children. It is the parents who remain responsible for the exercise of this responsibility.

Parents are expected to set a morally good example in the family because they are the primary educators of their children. In most cases, children spend the first years of their lives in the parental home, under the supervision, guidance, and care of their parents (or substitute parents such as caretakers) (Nussbaum, 2011). Parental involvement, care, supervision, and guidance are required for children to grow up into disciplined young people and adults. Parental guidance and care should be intent on preparing the children at home to willingly and spontaneously follow the example set by their parents when confronted with situations in which they are called upon to make moral choices. According to Chairilisyah (2019), this process should start as early as possible in the parental home and become part of the complete or overall education of a young person. Research has shown that poor (inconsistent, uncaring, and/or over-protective) parenting can be the cause of disruptive behaviour and indiscipline among children (Ghazi, Shahzada, Tariq & Khan, 2013).

This brief outline of the parental home as a social space in which children are brought up and guided by their parents as their primary educators forms the theoretical background for research questions one and two above.

The school as a social space

None of the five research questions above pertains directly to the task and duty of the school, in the person of the principal and teaching staff, in the process of instilling disciplined behaviour in learners. It is nevertheless necessary to also theoretically attend to the task and duty of the school because the investigation focused on how *the parents* viewed and perceived the state of discipline demonstrated by their children in their respective schools. In the normal course of affairs, the education of a child is not restricted to the confined space of the parental home. Children go out to play with the children of other parents, are taken care of in preschool centres, attend religious services, and are sent to school when they are of school-going age. Parents may (and most often do) enlist the support of others such as the school to assist them in the task of educating their

children, especially when highly technical subject matter has to be taught. Parents do not delegate their responsibilities to the school or any other party; they always retain the primary charge and authority for this responsibility.

This brings us to a discussion of the principled position of the school as a societal relationship. According to the principle of sphere sovereignty (Verburg, 2015), the school is a societal institution (relationship) in its own right. In 1976, the philosopher of education Taljaard (1976) concluded that "...the school has all the features of a separate, independent, and unique community... As a unique community, [it is] equipollent with all other types of communities." Stone (1981) similarly concluded that the school emerged in the course of history as a fully internally sovereign societal institution that functions freely within its competence to fulfil its unique function, a function that is different though fully equipollent with the functions of the parental home and the state.

Parental concern with their children and their discipline does not end when the children begin attending school. The children encounter many new influences at school, and they require the guidance of their parents to discover a way through all the new experiences and influences.

Parental involvement in the "space" between parental home and school

Research questions three, four and five pertain to the "space" between the parental home and the school. The principle of sphere universality (Verburg, 2015) compels us to attend to this space. All societal institutions are interwoven in that they, in many cases, have the same persons as members. Persons who, for instance, are the mothers, fathers and children in the parental home are at the same time the parents of the learners who attend a school, and the children at home are learners at school.

Parental involvement in the "space" between the parental home and the school seems to be of the utmost importance for children to grow up into well-behaved adults (Masingi, 2017). Parents should avail themselves of the opportunity in this "space" to interact with the teachers about how discipline can be effectively developed as a joint parental home-school undertaking (Habyarimana & Andala, 2021). Parents and teachers have a shared responsibility for educational problems and should aspire to achieve a partnership between them for this purpose. Such a partnership creates a supportive climate for the development of social skills in the learners' lives. It increases the learners' sense of safety in that it transmits uniform and consistent messages to them from their parental home and their school (Korem, 2024). Wolhuter and Van der Walt (2020) contend that the moral example set by parents plays a key role in forming children's attitudes concerning acceptable behaviour and that parental involvement and sound parent-school relations should be seen as essential ingredients in shaping learners' behaviour at school.

De Klerk-Luttig (2024) drew attention to the fact that in this "space" between the parental home and the school, school governing bodies serve as the guardians of the culture, the teaching-learning climate, the ethos, and the core values of their respective schools and that they have to ensure that all of these resonate optimally with those of the surrounding community from whence the learners come to school. For this reason, she contends, the voices of parents, via the school governing bodies in which they serve, should not be silenced. Parents can, and should in principle, never abdicate their

responsibilities in this regard and outsource them to the state (for instance, to a provincial Head of Department).

Although this principled view of parenthood could be deemed to be sufficient to justify the fact that parents, as the primary educators of their children, should be constantly involved in the schooling (except for the professional-didactical aspects thereof) of their children and that they should refuse to be sidelined for any reason, reference also can be made to empirical research showing that parental involvement in the school can be advantageous to the schools, and hence beneficial to the learners (cf. Hill, Domini, Catellino, Lansford, Nowlin Dodge & Pettit, 2004; Magouirk, 2015). According to Durisic and Bunjevac (2017), children whose parents are actively involved in their schooling benefit more than children whose parents are passively involved. The active involvement of their parents leads to improved communication, promotes teacher morale, and results in improved performance. In general, Darling-Fisher (2018) contends, a child's developmental and academic success benefits from the joint support of parents and teachers. Manamela (2015) suggests that parents, as key stakeholders in the education of their children, should develop strategies to overcome the obstacles that hinder their involvement in their children's education.

It is clear from this conceptual-theoretical framework that the parents (or other educators such as caregivers) are confronted with the duty to guide their children through all the pitfalls and challenges of their young lives. There is evidence, however, that parents seem to fail in this duty, mainly where the moral foundation of social life has collapsed, as has been the case in South Africa during the last two decades (cf. Saunderson-Meyer, 2016; Moral Regeneration Movement, 2018). While parents alone cannot be blamed for these moral shortcomings, it could be argued that they must share some of the blame. The following sections of this article contain a report on a qualitative empirical investigation to establish what parents thought of the issues raised in this conceptual-theoretical framework.

Qualitative empirical investigation

Research type/characteristic

To find answers to the five research questions posed above, 236 parents completed a digital questionnaire that included questions, such as: "In your opinion, what makes children behave badly in school?" and: "In your view, how can parents assist in dealing with the behaviour of learners in school?". The -interview questions consisted of open-ended questions that allowed respondents to formulate their answers. The study therefore can be characterized as a large-scale survey generating qualitative data. Such research is exploratory and may yield tentative statements that could guide hypotheses for further investigation.

Respondents

The respondents approached for this study resided in the South African province of Mpumalanga. A purposive (non-probability) sampling strategy was employed to select the schools to be involved in the project. These schools (N = 8) assisted with the distribution of hardcopy questionnaires to the parents who had made themselves available for the study and were also responsible for collecting the completed questionnaires.

Although the sample was not drawn randomly, it exhibited considerable diversity. The sample included parents of learners enrolled in primary schools, secondary schools, or both types of institutions. Most respondents were parents of children attending public schools. A very small proportion had children in independent schools or provided homeschooling. The schools were evenly distributed across towns (former Model C schools), townships, homelands, and farms. Parents had children attending schools across all quintiles, ranging from poor (quintile 1) to more affluent (quintile 4) schools. The age distribution of the sample was representative of the South African population. The number of children in the respondents' households ranged from one to six, with an average of three per household. The number of women who completed the questionnaire was approximately four times that of men.

Data processing and analysis

Not all respondents answered all five questions. Questions 1 and 5 had the fewest responses, with 197 and 190 responses, respectively. The number of responses to questions 2, 3, and 4 was more consistent (216, 215 and 212 respectively). On average, 206 out of 236 respondents responded to the five questions. The written responses were transcribed into digitally processable text.

According to Bingham (2023), qualitative data must be processed through five distinct phases to derive actionable findings. Given that this research was based on questions that required brief responses, it was unnecessary to traverse all phases in detail. In the first phase, the data were supposed to be organized by assigning attribute codes (such as data type, location, and time period). In this study, such attribute codes were superfluous as the responses had already been organized into five clusters corresponding with the five research questions, and because the results were not to be attributed to specific (groups of) respondents. The second phase was supposed to involve the sorting of the data into broad, relevant topical categories. In this case, the responses were categorized under the following five broad headings: 1) reasons for ill-discipline at home; 2) reasons for poor behaviour at school; 3) parental assistance with behaviour at school; 4) disciplinary practices at home; and 5) perspectives on discipline at school. Because these categories were aligned with the five questions presented to the respondents, they led to a straightforward arrangement or organisation of the responses. The third phase was executed as suggested by Bingham (2023), namely an inductive open coding process within the five categories identified in the second phase. In the fourth phase, patterns were supposed to be identified in the coding that could be articulated as themes. This was done in this study; it yielded the overview presented in the Results section below. Finally, in phase five, the findings were to be discussed considering the conceptual and theoretical framework of the study. This was done and the upshot of this phase can be found in the Discussion section of the article (see below).

Results

This section is organized around the five questions participants responded to. The responses, as explained, are categorized into five broad topical themes, as reflected in this section. In each of these themes, quotations from the responses are provided to illustrate the findings. In some cases, the respondents' reactions were not merely answers to the questions but also included recommendations for addressing the problematic

situation in question. Such recommendation-like responses are also presented as part of the results of the study.

Reasons for ill-discipline at home

The first question in this research project was: "Please provide one or more reasons why there is so much ill-discipline among children at home". The responses revealed several recurring patterns regarding the causes and nature of discipline issues among children. Here are some salient observations:

- **Lack of parental involvement and communication**

Many parents are portrayed as absent, overly permissive, or uninvolved in their children's lives. The responses highlight that parents often fail to set boundaries, spend insufficient quality time with their children, and do not effectively communicate with them. This leads to a lack of guidance, whereas the children need to know what is expected of them. Parents' inability to discipline effectively is linked to a lack of communication and understanding, the absence of rules, and inconsistent enforcement thereof.

- **Overindulgence and spoiling of children**

A recurring theme is that parents spoil their children by giving in to their demands, fearing conflict, or feeling obligated to show constant affection. This overindulgence makes children uncontrollable, disrespectful, and resistant to discipline. Parents who overly pamper or show favouritism are seen as weakening the child's ability to accept discipline, creating a sense of entitlement and a lack of respect for authority.

- **Peer influence and external factors**

Peer pressure, social media, and external influences such as bad friends or exposure to inappropriate material contribute significantly to children's ill-discipline. The responses reveal that children often imitate the behaviour of their peers, friends, or what they see on media platforms, all of which can undermine parental discipline efforts. In cases where parents are not around or not paying attention, children look to these outside sources for guidance, resulting in negative behavioural patterns.

- **Impact of modern societal and legal changes**

There is a strong sentiment that modern legal and societal norms have weakened traditional discipline structures. Parents express concern that children's rights and governmental policies prevent effective discipline, making it hard to enforce rules without being accused of abuse. The theme of "children have too many rights" emerges as a reason for parents feeling powerless, leading to decreased respect and discipline at home and in schools. This societal shift is in contrast with "the old days" when discipline was stricter and more acceptable.

Ill-discipline among children is often attributed to absent or uninvolved parents, poor communication, and inconsistent enforcement of rules. Many parents struggle to balance

discipline and affection, fearing that being strict will damage their relationship with their children. The following quotes from parents' responses illustrate this view:

Ill-disciplined children in most cases are created by ill-disciplined parents, how can one preach discipline if they also need to be taught about discipline?

Some of the parents feel as if disciplining a child is some sort of abuse, so they end up not disciplining them which causes them to misbehave.

The responding parents also contended that external factors like peer pressure, social media influence, and exposure to inappropriate behaviour at school or on TV can contribute to negative behaviour. Inconsistent parenting practices, such as unequal treatment of siblings and neglecting to establish clear boundaries further complicate efforts to maintain discipline. Effective discipline requires consistent parental involvement, clear rules, and open communication to promote respect and positive behaviour in children.

Disciplinary practices at home

The second question in this research project was: "How do you discipline your children at home?" The responses reveal five main patterns and themes related to disciplinary strategies:

- **Communication and dialogue**

Many respondents emphasize the importance of sitting down and talking with the child to explain right from wrong, discussing the consequences of their actions, and guiding them to make better decisions. This theme highlights using verbal communication and active listening as primary tools for discipline.

- **Setting rules and boundaries**

A common approach is establishing clear household rules and expectations that children must follow. If these boundaries are crossed, consequences such as taking away privileges, grounding, or assigning chores are enforced to reinforce discipline and structure.

- **Use of punitive measures**

Physical punishment, like spanking or beating, is mentioned, albeit with varying degrees of endorsement. While some believe in moderate corporal punishment to instil discipline, others prefer less harsh punishments like taking away items or restricting activities.

- **Withholding privileges**

A recurring method involves removing privileges (e.g., no TV, no phone, no playing outside) or withholding rewards (e.g., pocket money) to encourage children to reflect on their behaviour and understand the implications of their actions.

- **Modelling and teaching respect**

Many respondents stressed the need to model respectful behaviour and instil values of respect for others. This approach includes leading by example, teaching respect for authority and peers, and reinforcing good moral conduct through daily interactions. Parents use various methods to discipline their children, from communication to punishment. Many prefer to sit down and talk to their children, explaining the consequences of their actions and setting clear rules. Some enforce discipline by removing privileges, grounding, or assigning extra chores. Others implement stricter measures like corporal punishment or withholding treats, food, or items the child values. Ultimately, parents aim to guide children to respect rules and values, often balancing discipline with teaching right from wrong and encouraging respectful behaviour. One of the respondents stated:

There are rules that we abide in my household that my children should live by. If a child misbehaves, I sit and talk to them about their actions and if they repeat the same error, I take one of their gadgets as punishment. In this manner, I'm teaching them to act accordingly or risk losing something they hold dear.

Reasons for poor behaviour at school

The third question in this research project was: "In your opinion, what makes children behave badly in school?" The responses reveal several recurring patterns regarding the causes and nature of discipline issues among children. Here are some prominent elements:

- **Impact of home environment**

The text frequently references how a child's home environment influences his/her behaviour at school. Factors in this regard include lack of discipline, poor parenting, exposure to abusive or neglectful behaviour, absence of role models, or parental conflicts. Statements such as "problems at home," "parents are too busy," and "no love or attention at home" highlight the significance of familial dynamics.

- **Peer pressure and the influence of friends**

Peer pressure is a recurrent theme, with children being influenced by their peers to behave badly or engage in inappropriate behaviours like smoking, drinking, or disrespecting authority. The phrase "peer pressure from friends" and variations of it appear consistently, indicating the critical role of social groups in shaping a child's behaviour.

- **Lack of discipline and consequences**

Many references are made to the lack of discipline at home and school, suggesting that children misbehave because they do not face the consequences of their actions. Phrases like "lack of discipline," "no punishment," and "children have too many rights" illustrate concerns over leniency and the erosion of authority in both parental and other educational settings.

- **The desire for attention and recognition**

Children's misbehaviour is often attributed to attention-seeking, whether due to neglect at home or feeling unnoticed in the classroom. Phrases like "desperate for attention" and "attention seekers" show that negative behaviour sometimes signifies unmet emotional needs.

- **Influence of developmental stages**

Adolescence, puberty, and the associated changes are mentioned as factors affecting behaviour. This developmental period is characterized by experimentation, identity formation, and increased susceptibility to external influences, such as peer pressure or a need to assert independence.

Children's behaviour at school is often influenced by their home environment, peer pressure, and lack of discipline. Many children misbehave because they experience abuse or neglect at home, leading to anger or attention-seeking actions. The following are two typical responses in this context:

A parent's behaviour towards the child and other family members can affect the children's behaviour at school. Some behave badly because they are being ill-treated or abused at home.

Home environment plays a huge part in a child's behaviour at school. If the home environment is good, he/she won't behave badly at school.

Peer pressure, especially from friends engaged in negative activities, contributes significantly to bad behaviour. A lack of parental guidance or involvement, combined with a misunderstanding of children's rights, leads to discipline issues that carry over into the school setting. Additionally, children facing personal or family problems such as poverty, abuse, or low self-esteem may act out to express their frustrations.

Parental assistance with behaviour at school

The fourth question in this research project was: "In your view, how can parents assist in dealing with the behaviour of learners in school?" The answers reveal various themes and patterns related to the involvement of parents in addressing and managing children's behaviour at school and home. Here are the main patterns and themes observed (note that, as mentioned, some of the remarks take the form of a recommendation to assuage the problem):

- **Parent-child communication**

Parents should be encouraged to regularly talk to their children about their feelings, behaviour, and school experiences. Open and consistent communication is critical to identifying and addressing any underlying issues.

- **Parental involvement in school**

Parents are advised to be actively involved in their children's academic and behavioural development at school by attending meetings, volunteering, and maintaining ongoing communication with teachers to stay informed about their child's progress and behaviour.

- **Home-based discipline and moral education**

Many responses highlight that discipline should begin at home. Parents should instil good behaviour, values, and respect from an early age. Teaching morals, implementing rules, and being role models are foundational to shaping a child's behaviour.

- **Collaboration with teachers and school authorities**

Parents are encouraged to collaborate with teachers, attend school meetings, and be part of disciplinary measures. A collaborative approach between home and school is suggested to ensure consistent behaviour management.

- **Consistency in behaviour management**

Parents are urged to reinforce good behaviour at home and in school settings. Strategies like punishment for misbehaviour, enforcing rules, and maintaining high expectations are recommended to create a consistent behavioural framework.

- **Positive reinforcement and a supportive environment**

Besides discipline, creating a loving, supportive, and encouraging environment is suggested to promote positive behaviour. Parents are advised to show care, spend time with their children, and guide them without overly criticizing, helping children thrive emotionally and academically.

Parents should work closely with teachers to ensure children display positive behaviour at school and home. This includes maintaining regular communication with teachers, attending school meetings, and discussing their child's behaviour and academic progress.

I think parents should have sometimes for themselves to go to school and ask about the children on how are they doing from their teachers (verbatim quote).

Parents should work hand in hand with teachers and should always inform their children about good behaviour and morals.

Parents must teach children discipline, respect, and good morals at home, as these values will influence how they act in school. Addressing misbehaviour involves calmly talking to children, understanding their concerns, and implementing appropriate punishments when necessary. By actively engaging in their children's education and collaborating with the school, parents can help reinforce a consistent environment for learning and development.

Perspectives on discipline at school

The fifth question in this research project was: "What is your opinion of how discipline is handled in schools?" The answers reveal six primary patterns and themes regarding discipline in schools (with some of the remarks again taking the form of recommendations):

- **Corporal punishment controversy**

There is a strong divide between support and opposition to corporal punishment. Some argue it is an effective way to instil discipline, while others highlight its potential physical

and emotional harm, suggesting it should not be used in schools. Many emphasize the need for alternative, non-violent disciplinary methods.

- **Role of parents in school discipline**

Parental involvement is repeatedly cited as crucial for effective discipline. Many suggest that parents and teachers should collaborate to address behavioural issues, with calls for stronger partnerships to ensure children receive consistent messages on acceptable behaviour at home and school.

- **Need for consistency and clear rules**

Establishing clear, consistent rules and consequences is a recurring theme. The responses emphasize the importance of setting clear expectations and applying discipline fairly to create a predictable and supportive learning environment.

- **Empowerment and support for educators**

Teachers feel disempowered due to a lack of support from parents and restrictive policies that limit their disciplinary options. Some advocate giving teachers more authority to discipline learners, while others suggest systemic changes to ensure teachers can manage classrooms effectively without fear of repercussions.

- **Alternatives to harsh punishment**

There is a preference for non-punitive disciplinary measures over suspensions or exclusions, such as counselling, discussions, and involving parents. Many believe suspensions and similar punishments are counterproductive, as they can harm learners' educational outcomes and self-esteem.

- **Impact of discipline on the learning environment**

Good discipline is associated with a positive, respectful, and orderly school environment, essential for academic success. Many express concern that a lack of discipline disrupts learning, but they also stress that discipline should not be so harsh as to undermine learners' rights or emotional well-being.

School discipline is essential to maintaining a positive learning environment, but opinions vary among the respondents on the best methods. Many believe corporal punishment is harmful and advocate for non-physical approaches that focus on teaching children right from wrong. Others contend that teachers and parents should collaborate closely, setting consistent rules and clear expectations while considering the child's home environment and mental well-being. Some suggest bringing back stricter forms of discipline, while others emphasize respect and understanding between educators and learners. Ultimately, the goal is to balance effective discipline with compassion, ensuring children are guided but not harmed emotionally or physically. One of the respondents uttered the following advice:

Make sure punishment and rewards are clear. Establishing expectations and classroom rules for behaviour during the first days of lessons in order to proactively prevent disruptions. Create consistency. Students of all ages will react positively to a consistent approach to discipline. Resolve issues from the beginning. Establish a connection with your students.

Discussion

This section presents the main findings for each of the five research questions, relates them to the conceptual and theoretical framework, and links them to sources referenced in the conceptual-theoretical framework of the study.

The issue of ill-discipline among children at home is linked to several significant factors, primarily the lack of parental involvement and communication. Parents are often seen as absent, overly permissive, or inconsistent in enforcing boundaries, depriving children of the guidance and expectations for discipline. Overindulgence and societal changes, including the rise of children's rights and the influence of social media further weaken respect for authority and promote resistance to discipline. These findings align with theoretical perspectives on the collapse of societal norms, where inconsistent parenting disrupts moral guidance (Naidoo, 2009; Twyman-Ghoshal, 2021; Burggraeve, 2010). Additionally, societal influences, such as peer dynamics and media exposure, exacerbate this erosion of traditional authority structures (Van der Walt, 2017). These factors contribute to children's diminished respect for discipline and authority, affecting home and school environments and underscoring the complexity of addressing behavioural issues in modern contexts.

Respondents reported employing various strategies when asked how they discipline their children at home. Many prioritize open communication and dialogue, using discussions to explain right from wrong and promote moral understanding. Others emphasize setting clear rules, enforcing boundaries, and applying consequences such as withholding privileges or assigning extra responsibilities. Some parents resort to punitive measures, including moderate corporal punishment, while others highlight the importance of modelling respect and instilling values by example. These strategies reflect the parental role as primary or foundational educators in a child's moral and social development (Burggraeve, 2010). Communication aligns with fostering understanding, while structured rules and consistent enforcement are necessary for disciplined behaviour (Chairilisyah, 2019; Van der Walt, 2017). By modelling respectful behaviour, parents significantly shape their children's attitudes and reinforce disciplined conduct (Korem, 2024), thereby demonstrating the critical role of the family as the primary space for moral guidance.

Children's ill-discipline in school is attributed to several factors, starting with the home environment. Parental neglect, inconsistent discipline, and the absence of role models disrupt moral development, leaving children more prone to negative behaviour. Peer pressure and social influences exacerbate these issues, as children imitate the inappropriate actions of their peers. Additionally, the lack of consistent discipline at home and school, coupled with a need for attention, is particularly pronounced during adolescence — a critical stage for experimenting and asserting independence. These findings highlight the interplay between home, school, and societal influences,

emphasizing the need for structured environments (Naidoo, 2009; Twyman-Ghoshal, 2021). Dysfunctional home settings and inadequate supervision aggravate behavioural issues (Burggraeve, 2010; Chairilsyah, 2019). Peer dynamics and inconsistent rules reflect complex social spaces where external influences undermine positive behaviour (Van der Walt, 2017; Korem, 2024).

The role of parents in managing learners' behaviour in school is seen as pivotal, emphasizing collaboration and proactive engagement. Open communication between parents and children is crucial for addressing behavioural issues, while active involvement in school activities ensures accountability and consistent oversight. Parents are encouraged to instil discipline and moral values at home while working with teachers to maintain consistent expectations. A supportive and loving home environment, reinforced by positive reinforcement, helps foster emotional well-being and encourages academic success (Burggraeve, 2010; Chairilsyah, 2019). Collaboration between home and school is critical for aligning disciplinary measures (Van der Walt, 2017; Korem, 2024). Parents acting as primary educators create the foundation for positive behaviour, while consistent communication with schools ensures that children receive unified messages on discipline. These findings underscore the importance of structured, empathetic, and collaborative strategies in effectively addressing behavioural challenges (Masingi, 2017).

The management of discipline in schools evoked diverse perspectives from respondents. Corporal punishment remains controversial, with some supporting it as effective while others argue for non-violent alternatives to safeguard learners' well-being (Chairilsyah, 2019). There is consensus on the importance of clear, consistent rules and empowering teachers to manage classrooms without fear of repercussion. Non-punitive measures, such as counselling and discussions, are preferred to harsh punishment, as they preserve emotional well-being and promote a positive school climate. These findings align with theories emphasizing the interaction between home and school in fostering moral norms and behavioural expectations (Naidoo, 2009; Van der Walt, 2017). Parental involvement in disciplinary practices and structured and fair school policies ensure effective behaviour management (Korem, 2024). Schools can maintain discipline by empowering teachers and establishing supportive environments while promoting academic and social success (Masingi, 2017; Twyman-Ghoshal, 2021).

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made based on the discussion in the previous section:

Parents could consider the following in the "space" of the parental home:

- Consistent parental involvement should be fostered: Parents should actively engage in their children's lives by setting clear boundaries, spending quality time with them, and consistently enforcing rules. Regular communication and involvement will help establish a strong foundation for positive behaviour.
- Open communication: Parents and children should engage in discussions about actions, consequences, and expectations. By listening actively and addressing concerns calmly, parents could teach children to make thoughtful decisions and understand right from wrong.
- External influences: Parents should consider monitoring and managing external factors such as peer pressure, social media exposure, and inappropriate content. Parents

should guide children in how to navigate these influences while reinforcing respect and self-discipline.

Parents could consider the following regarding their involvement in the “space” between the parental home and the school attended by their children:

- Deliberate and consistent collaboration with the school (the teachers, the principal, the governing body): They could attend to strengthening the partnership between parents and educators by maintaining regular communication about the child’s behaviour and academic progress. They could join the school in establishing consistent rules and expectations to create a unified environment for discipline.
- Adopt compassionate and non-physical discipline: Parents could consider replacing punitive measures such as corporal punishment where it is still practised — it is not admissible in South Africa — with approaches aimed at inculcating respect, understanding, and morally justifiable behaviour, including caring for others and their interests. Strategies such as withholding privileges, assigning responsibilities, and modelling good behaviour can effectively guide children without causing emotional harm.

Conclusion

This investigation centred on two social “spaces” of concern to all parents of school-going children: the “space” of the parental home, where the parent is the primary educator, and the “space” between the parental home and the school attended by their children. The conceptual and theoretical phase of the research reported in this paper revealed that parents have key functions and responsibilities in each of these spaces. The qualitative investigation launched in one of South Africa’s nine provinces revealed that the parents who participated in the study were aware of their responsibilities and duties in these two spaces but that they occasionally were at a loss about how exactly to deal with the challenges facing them. The recommendations with which the discussion is concluded provide guidelines about how they could go about addressing these challenges.

References

- Bingham, A. J. (2023). From data management to actionable findings: A five-phase process of qualitative data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231183620>
- Bunijevac, M. (2017). Parental involvement as an important factor for successful education. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 7(3), 137–153.
- Burggraeve, R. (2010). The ethical voice of the child. In A. Dillen & D. Pollefeyt (Eds.), *Children’s voices: Children’s perspectives in ethics, theology and religious education* (pp. 103–121). Leuven, Belgium: Uitgeverij Peeters.
- Chairilisyah, D. (2019). Educating children to be disciplined individuals. *Jurnal PAJAR (Pendidikan dan Pengajaran)*, 3(6), 1282–1288. <https://doi.org/10.33578/pjr.v3i6.7880>
- Chapman, C. S. (2017). Commentary: Interpretive methodological expertise and editorial board composition. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 51, 47–51. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpa.2017.10.007>
- Cornelissen, C. (2023, November 10). Verkragtings, daggakoekies: LUR bekommerd oor “swak dissipline” by skool. *Maroela Media*. <https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/sa- nuus/verkragtings-daggakoekies-lur-bekommerd-oor-swak-dissipline-by-skool/>

- De Klerk-Luttig, J. (2024, March 27). 'n Aanslag op ouer-inspraak [An attack on parental involvement]. *Beeld*, 12.
- Durusic, M., & Bunijevac, M. (2017). Parental involvement as an important factor for successful education. *CEPS Journal*, 7(3), 137–153.
- Edlin, R. J. (1999). *The cause of Christian education*. Blacktown, Australia: National Institute for Christian Education.
- Fink, A. (2014). *Conducting research literature reviews: From the internet to paper* (4th ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- Ghazi, S. R., Shahzada, G., Tariq, M., & Khan, A. Q. (2013). Types and causes of students' disruptive behavior in the classroom at the secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. *American Journal of Educational Research*, 1(9), 350–354.
- Grayling, A. C. (2010). *Thinking of answers*. London, UK: Bloomsbury.
- Ilyasin, M. (2019). Students' discipline management in strengthening modern human resources. *Dinamika Ilmu*, 19(2), 351–361. <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v19i2.1796>
- Lumadi, R. I. (2019). Taming the tide of the achievement gap by managing the parental role in learner discipline. *South African Journal of Education*, 39(1), 1–10.
- Habyarimana, J. D., & Andala, H. O. (2021). Parental involvement and students' discipline in twelve years basic education schools in Rwanda: A case study of Nyarugenge district. *Journal of Education*, 4(1), 33–52.
- Hayford, J. W. (1991). *Kingdom dynamics*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Heinecken, L. (2020, January 15). What's behind the violence in South Africa. *The Conversation*. <https://tinyurl.com/22sewxju>
- Hill, N. E., Domini, R., Catellino, J. E., Lansford, P., Nowlin, K. A., Dodge, J. E. B., & Pettit, G. S. (2004). Parent academic involvement as related to school behavior: Demographic variations across adolescence. *Child Development*, 75(5), 1491–1509.
- Korem, A. (2024). Parental involvement in assisting students in the social domain: The educators' perspective. *Social Education Research*, 5(1), 176–189.
- Magouirk, T. A. (2015). *A correlational study of parental involvement at the elementary school, middle school, and high school level* (Doctoral dissertation, Liberty University).
- Manamela, L. M. (2015). *The role of parental involvement in improving discipline in secondary schools of the Kgakotlou Circuit* (Doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa).
- Masingi, T. M. (2017). *The impact of ill-discipline on the performance of grade nine learners: A case of Nghonyama High School, Limpopo Province* (Mini-dissertation, University of Limpopo).
- Mestry, R., & Khumalo, J. (2012). Governing bodies and learner discipline: Managing rural schools in South Africa through a code of conduct. *South African Journal of Education*, 32(1), 97–110.
- Mollo, N., & Joubert, R. (2019). Application of due process in ensuring fair learner disciplinary hearings. In C. B. Zulu, I. J. Oosthuizen, & C. C. Wolhuter (Eds.), *A scholarly inquiry into disciplinary practices in educational institutions* (pp. 113–140). Durbanville, South Africa: AOSIS.
- Moral Regeneration Movement. (2018). The history of the MRM. Retrieved March 18, 2024, from <https://www.mrm.org.za/about-us/history>
- Motshusi, M. C., Ngobeni, E. T., & Sepeng, P. (2024). Lack of parental involvement in the education of their children in the foundation phase: Case of selected schools in the Thabazimbi circuit. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 6(2), 21–41.

- Naidoo, P. (2009). Taming the young lions: The intellectual role of youth and student movements after 1994. In W. Gumede & L. Dikeni (Eds.), *The poverty of ideas* (pp. 152–168). Johannesburg, South Africa: Jacana.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press.
- Obadire, O. T., & Sinthumula, D. A. (2021). Learner discipline in the post-corporal punishment era: What an experience! *South African Journal of Education*, 41(2), 1–8.
<https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n2a1862>
- Owino, A. M., Paulos, W. M., & Njihia, R. W. (2023). Influence of parental involvement as a discipline management strategy on the academic achievement of students in Siaya county. *Journal of Strategic Management*, 7(6), 27–42.
- Padayachee, A. S., & Gcelu, N. (2022). Collaboration: The key to managing discipline in South African schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 42(2), 1–10.
- Povinelli, E. A. (2013). Citizens of the earth: Indigenous cosmopolitanism and the governance of the prior. In S. Ben-Porath & R. M. Smith (Eds.), *Varieties of sovereignty and citizenship* (pp. 211–226). Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Saunderson-Meyer, W. (2016, April 16). Time to ditch SA's failed Moral Regeneration Movement. *Mail & Guardian*. Retrieved January 18, 2018, from <https://thoughtleader.co.za/williamsaundersonmeyer/2016/04/16/time-to-ditch-sas-failed-moral-regeneration-movement>
- Segalo, R., & Rambuda, A. M. (2018). South African public school teachers' views on the right to discipline learners. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(2), 1–10.
- Smit, M. (2019). Disciplinary hearings: Legal principles and procedures. In C. B. Zulu, I. J. Oosthuizen, & C. C. Wolhuter (Eds.), *A scholarly inquiry into disciplinary practices in educational institutions* (pp. 141–168). Durbanville, South Africa: AOSIS.
- Stone, H. J. S. (1981). *Die aard en struktuur van die skool*. Pretoria, South Africa: Academica.
- Taljaard, J. A. L. (1986). *Polished lenses*. Potchefstroom, South Africa: Pro Rege Press.
- Thompson, M. (2018). *Ethics for life*. London, UK: John Murray Learning.
- Twyman-Ghoshal, A. (2021). Global anomie theory. In E. Erez & P. Ibarra (Eds.), *The Oxford encyclopedia of international criminology: Criminology and criminal justice* (pp. 405–427). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Van der Walt, J. L. (2017). Some recent responses to neoliberalism and its views on education. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 73(3), Article a4493.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4493>
- Wolhuter, C. C., & Van der Walt, J. L. (2020). Indiscipline in South African schools: The parental/community perspective. *KOERS*, 85(1), 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.19108/koers.85.1.2447>
- Zondo, S. S., & Mncube, V. S. (2024). Teachers' challenges in implementing a learner's code of conduct for positive discipline in schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 44(2), 1–10.