

**FACTORS CAUSING DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS IN SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS' STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME DISCIPLINE  
PROBLEM: A SURVEY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN  
KOTA SAMARAHAN DIVISION**

SHHRIL HAFIZI BIN SULAIMAN

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to investigate the major causes of discipline problem and strategies taken by teachers' to overcome them in seven selected secondary schools in Kota Samarahan Division. It is also aimed at identifying the most common discipline problem and the most effective strategies used in overcoming discipline problem in secondary schools. The factors that were focused in this study were personal, family, peers, teacher and school administration; school in general and the Education Department. The respondents were 300 teachers from seven schools in Kota Samarahan Division. The instrument employed was questionnaires. Data from the questionnaire were tabulated by using frequency counts and percentages and the findings were discussed descriptively. The results of the study indicated that some influencing factors that contributed to students' discipline problem were the lack of parental concern and love, lack of parental involvement in school activities, lack of support from parent, lack of motivation to study and parents- schools relationship. The findings revealed some strategies suggested and conducted by teachers had shown to be the best strategies to apply in order to curb discipline problem among secondary students.

## **ABSTRAK**

Tujuan kajian ini ialah untuk mengkaji tentang penyebab utama masalah disiplin dan strategi yang diambil oleh guru bagi menangani masalah disiplin di tujuh buah sekolah yang terpilih di Bahagian Kota Samarahan. Ia juga bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti masalah disiplin yang utama dan langkah yang terbaik untuk menangani masalah disiplin di sekolah Menengah. Antara faktor yang diambil perhatian dalam kajian ini ialah faktor peribadi pelajar, ibu-bapa, rakan sebaya, guru dan kakitangan pentadbir sekolah, sekolah secara amnya dan bahagian Kementerian pelajaran. Sampel kajian adalah melibatkan 300 orang guru dari tujuh buah sekolah di Bahagian Kota Samarahan. Instrumens yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah dengan menggunakan borang kaji selidik. Data yang diperolehi dianalisis dengan menggunakan kiraan kekerapan serta peratusan dan hasil kajian akan dibincangkan secara diskriptif. Hasil kajian ini menunjukkan terdapat beberapa faktor yang mempengaruhi pelajar untuk melibatkan diri dengan masalah disiplin dan diantaranya ialah kurang perhatian dan kasih sayang ibu-bapa, kurangnya penglibatan ibu-bapa dalam aktiviti yang dianjurkan oleh pihak sekolah, kurang galakkan dari ibu bapa, kurang motivasi untuk belajar dan hubungan diantara sekolah dengan ibu bapa. Hasil kajian ini juga menunjukkan beberapa strategi yang telah dicadangkan dan dilaksanakan oleh guru merupakan strategi yang berkesan dalam menangani masalah disiplin dikalangan pelajar sekolah menengah.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Chapter overview**

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, limitations of study and definition of the terms in the study. The chapter ends with a brief summary of what have been discussed and a mention of the proceeding chapter.

#### **1.1 Introduction**

School violence and discipline problems have reached epidemic proportions in many school districts. In far too many schools, a lack of respect for the authority of teachers and other school employees, as well as for the rights of other students, is undermining the ability of schools to provide students with quality education.

Solving school violence and discipline problems isn't easy, but it can be done. It requires a commitment by administrators to forge a cooperative effort with school employees aimed at educating students, parents and members of the community about the need for tough but fair discipline policies (American Federation of Teacher, 2000).

According to the Royal Malaysian Police record (2003) from 2000 to 2002, 14,463 children or teenagers between 10 to 18 years old were involved in discipline problems related to criminal cases. Sarawak was ranked fourth in term of the most recorded number of criminal cases that involved juvenile.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

Discipline problems in schools are perhaps the single greatest cause of concern for educators in school today. Discipline is consistently identified as a serious school problem in public opinion polls (Stickel, Satchwell, & Meyer, 1991). Instead of concentrating on delivering curriculum, teachers need to invest most of their energy and time on maintaining discipline problems initially (Carey, 2000); the main task of a teacher is to help students learn the material that is presented as a curriculum. However, with the increasing occurrence and concern for discipline problems in schools, teachers have been expected to devote more time and energy to solve discipline problems. In a study conducted in the United States by Vogel (2004), most teachers (77%) admitted that their teaching would be a lot more effective if they

did not have to spend so much time dealing with disruptive students. Similarly, many parents (43%) believed that their children would accomplish more in schools if teachers were not distracted by discipline problems. Schools need good discipline and behavior in order to flourish. In addition, Romi and Freund (1999) suggest that the issue of school discipline has gained much theoretical and empirical attention as a main facilitator in the creation of an appropriate educational atmosphere. School discipline must be maintained in order to achieve the main school goals effectively and efficiently, namely, learning and social activities.

Discipline problems in schools have always become a hot issue. In 1993 Greenlee, Annie, Ogletree, and Earl, in their study relating to discipline problems in the United States revealed that parents in their study said that schools are not doing enough for their children, or schools are expecting too much of their children.

The study by Baker (1985) suggests that if we are to improve discipline in schools, we must first agree that a problem exists. Educators must be concerned about the lack of discipline in the schools because an educational environment depends on good discipline. A study of inner-city schools in London used data collected over a number of years to show that when children move from primary schools (ages 5 to 11) to secondary schools, their behavior and achievement are effected by school characteristics. Students who are transferred from behaviorally “bad” elementary schools to “good” secondary schools became good students and vice versa.

In addition, Baker (1985) stated that a good climate for learning is a climate with good discipline. This suggests discipline to be a fundamental factor in determining a chance for success academically.

John Couldron and Pam Boulton (1996) stated that discipline is an important criterion for parents when judging the quality of school. In selecting schools for their children, there are five criteria that parents take into consideration. These criteria are discipline happiness and security, discipline and good work habits, discipline morality and moral order, discipline and the maintenance of adult authority, and schools having fair, firm and not severe discipline problems. What parents think is a vital factor in the education of their children because it determines that academic development, safety and future of their children.

Shlomo Romi and Mira Freund (1999) stated that most of the research on discipline has focused on the attitude of teachers or, less frequently, on the attitude of students and, even less, on the attitude of parents towards behavioral problem. This might be due to the fact that teachers are more accessible to research as compared to parents. In their study, they argued that teachers were found to agree in their attitudes towards various discipline problems. Besides that, their study revealed that 80 % of teachers regarded severely verbal and physical violence aimed at students, as well as vandalism involving schools property as the most common discipline problems.

Levin and James (1984) indicated that in fourteen of its fifteen years, the Gallup poll of public attitudes toward education has identified discipline as the largest

problem facing the public school in Chicago, United States. This concern for discipline was not limited to only outsiders but teachers also list discipline problems a major concern.

Annie Greenlee and Earl J. Ogletree (1993) stated that the National Education Association NEA 1977 reported 66% of responding teachers viewed managing student behavior as the main problem faced in teaching. They also asserted that many teachers felt that they were unable to cope with much less resolve the discipline problems they faced each day. When teachers leave teaching, the most frequently cited reason for leaving the profession was discipline.

In addition, Willower (1977) examined the relationship between teacher characteristics and perception of discipline problems and concluded with a differentiation between two types of teachers – the authoritarian teacher and the humanist teacher. Teachers with an authoritarian tendency view the school as an autocratic institution with a rigid hierarchical structure. They regard students as essentially irresponsible individuals who must be kept under control by sanctions whereby humanistic teachers see the school as an educational community where students learn through co-operative interaction.

Jenifer Closson, Trang Lam, Olympia McNutt, and Bruce Watanabe (2002) warned the lack of teacher-student relationship in schools today have cause for great alarm. A good teacher should be a coach, a mentor, a counselor and a friend, all rolled into one. A teacher's job does not only involve facilitating and supporting

teaching and learning of curriculum materials but also involve shaping students' social behaviors. Students' discipline problems can pose a great problem to the teaching and learning process if it is left unchecked. Teacher needs to tackle any discipline problems from the early stages before they develop into serious threats to the teaching and learning process. Besides, in their study they assert that in order for a teacher to be effective in disciplining students, he needs to establish a positive interaction with his students. When a teacher has a positive interaction with his students, the relationship between the teacher and students is likely to grow closer and thus both parties get to know each other better. The teacher is likely to know more about his students' interest and needs and the students' start to know their teacher's expectation better. In this way the teacher is able to have more influence and control over his students' discipline. In other words, both teacher and students must have a good relationship in order to decrease the gap between them and consequently prevent the occurrence of discipline problems.

In addition, Howard and Schaefer (1980) stated that teachers are perceived as a change agent for students. Besides parents, teachers are students' closest partners or contacts as most of the students' times are spent in schools. Thus, teachers are in a favorable position to give guidance and support to students not only academically but as well as in their social behaviors.

### **1.3 Statement of the problem**

Most previous studies seem to suggest that school teachers' are the suitable persons to overcome the students' discipline problem. Greenlee et al. (1993) argue that teachers' attitude plays an important role in helping to alleviate the plaguing discipline problem; and also that discipline problem is a serious matter for all teachers and school administrators.

Jacques and Horvitz (1985) found that the more traditional a teacher's attitude is the less sympathetic and tolerant he or she would be to the student's particular needs and would tend to be more severe in handling discipline problem. Teachers themselves see their ability to handle discipline problems in the classroom as crucial (Clarizio, 1976; Dreikurs, Grunwald, & Pepper, 1982; Doyle, 1986; Gellman & Berkowitz, 1992). This is because without the ability to tackle discipline problems in the classroom, the teacher will find it hard to deliver his lesson smoothly and effectively.

Hilmar Wagner (1983), in his study on discipline, contended that students need to learn to behave in a socially approved manner in order for healthy learning environment to exist. Socialization requires redirection of destructive behavior into socially helpful behavior. Well-disciplined class assists the child in developing sensitivity to the need of others, resulting in social interest and the desire to cooperate with others. Order in the "good" classroom comes from the fact that students are considering the rights of their neighbors, not as a result of fear of literature. He added

that the aims of education and classroom discipline are the same: to help children and youth to become self-directing people. When a child first enters into a new classroom he encounters a new environment which requires a certain level of maturity. Frustration develops and the level of tolerance can be broken at any time. At this time someone is needed to reinforce and support the child, thus preventing a major crisis. That someone, in most cases, is the classroom teacher, whose attitude will set the climate for curriculum implementation, instructional effectiveness, and students' satisfaction through learning in a non threatening environment. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to investigate causes of discipline problems in all seven secondary schools in Samarahan Division and strategies commonly taken by teachers to tackle these problems.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To find out the most common students' discipline problem in secondary schools;
- ii. To find out factors that cause students' discipline problem in secondary schools; and
- iii. To find out the strategies taken by teachers in order to curb students' discipline problem in secondary schools

## **1.5 Research Questions**

In conducting this research, the researcher wants to investigate the following questions;

- i. What are the most common students' discipline problems occurring in secondary schools?
- ii. What are the factors that cause students' discipline problems in secondary schools?
- iii. What are the strategies taken by teachers in order to overcome discipline problems among secondary students' and what are the best strategies that they apply to curb discipline problem?

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

Besides helping the researcher to gain knowledge about students' discipline problems in secondary schools, this study hoped to provide benefits for the selected schools in the study. The findings from this research would help to provide schools with new ideas and strategies to tackle or curb students' discipline problems in school. The findings from the study would also give secondary school teachers clearer understandings of the main factors causing discipline problem among students.

## **1.7 Definition of terms used**

### **1.7.1 Discipline**

Discipline has a few meanings according to MacMillan English Dictionary. One of the meanings that can be adopted for this study is discipline in the frame of acceptance of, or submission to, authority and control.

In addition, Romi and Freund (1999) asserted that discipline is a system of sanctions that addresses the breakdown when the code of conduct is broken.

Lewis and Clark (nd) define discipline as training that enables children to make appropriate choices in a climate of warmth and support which includes limitations with both positive and negative consequences.

Jones (1979) as cited in Cotton (1990) says that "discipline, most simply stated, is the business of enforcing simple classroom rules that facilitate learning and minimize disruption" (p. 26). Variations on this definition are offered by Duke (1989), Gettinger (1987), Strother (1985), and many others (as cited in Cotton 1990)

Leslie (2002) found out that discipline means training which both parents and teachers need to share the goal of helping the child learn to self-regulate.

Giancola and Banicky (1998) believe that discipline is a student misbehavior that brings a problem which is affecting not only in schools but also across the nation

and around the world. Student misbehavior means any activity which involves students that can interfere with teaching and learning. They also claimed that misbehavior or students with discipline problem is any activity that hinder the misbehaving student's ability to learn, such as excessive absenteeism, cheating, alcohol and drug use.

In addition, The MASTER Teacher, Inc (2002) asserted that discipline can be defined as the adjustment of unacceptable behavior according to our individual standards and measures. They also believe that an effective discipline program needs to be accompanied by three teacher actions such as a program discipline must teach self-discipline, students must know what the standards are in our classroom and the adjustment of behavior must fit the occasion and the environment.

School-wide positive Behavioral Support System (2000) defines discipline as the steps or actions, teachers, administrators, parents, and students follow to enhance student academic and social behavior success. The system also believes discipline is conceived as an instrument for success for all teachers, all students, and all settings.

### **1.7.2 Students**

Students in this study refer to children who believes have behavior problems and students who spend time with problem or criminal children tends to be problem or criminal children themselves (Giancola & Banicky 1998)

In addition Macmillan English Dictionary (2000) defines student as someone who is very interested in a particular subject. (p.1426)

### **1.7.3 School**

Tischer (1993) found out that school as an institution tended to socialize children in related skills and knowledge (p.82).

Macmillan English Dictionary (2000) defined school as “place where children go to be taught and a place where people sharing ideas which is the learning process between teacher and student” (p.1267).

Duke (as cited in Cotton, n.d) writes “.... What is known about the organization of orderly schools is that they are characterized by commitment to appropriate student behavior and clear behavior expectations for students” (p.47).

#### **1.7.4 Teachers**

A teacher is someone whose job is to teach and in this study, teachers are the participants providing the data for their views or opinion regarding discipline problem among secondary school students.

#### **1.7.5 Strategies**

Strategies can be defined as a method or a plan used for achieving something especially over a long period of time. In addition strategies used to overcome discipline problem among secondary students would provide the answer to one of the objectives.

### **1.8 Scope of the study**

This study attempted to investigate the most common discipline problem in secondary school and the major causes of discipline problem and strategies taken by teachers to overcome discipline problem among secondary students. It only involved examining students' misbehavior in the school in general as well as in the classroom that hinders teaching and learning. Besides, this study investigated common discipline problems in seven selected secondary schools in Kota Samarahan division.

This study did not involve studying discipline problem among primary school students or youths who are not in school.

## **1.9 Chapter review**

Chapter one explained the background and setting of the study, statement of the problem, objectives of the research, research questions, significance of the research, limitation of the research and definition of terms. The next chapter would review on related literature or research done by other authors such as discipline in general, major causes of discipline problem in school and the strategies to tackle discipline among students.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter consists of the discussion on related literature and brings to light findings from previous research on major causes of discipline problem in secondary schools and also research related to strategies taken by teachers in order to curb or tackle discipline problem in secondary schools.

#### **2.1 Major causes of discipline problem**

Discipline problem among students in schools have become major international issues and also it is common news that society does not want to hear about. North Central National Educational Laboratory (1996) stated that crime, violence, and disorder in schools have become major national issues and these problems not only endanger students and teachers, but they also prevent teachers from concentrating on teaching and students from concentrating on learning.

This discipline problem needs serious attention for schools in order to overcome the discipline problem in schools. In order to overcome it, a school needs to identify tools, strategies and model programs that enhance the safety and success of all children in schools.

Jose Rodriguez (1994) argued that it is no accident that schools experiencing the greatest number and most severe incidents of crime and violence are located in communities that also exhibit these negative characteristics. To offset these tendencies, the creation of safe schools must involve students, teachers, administrators, parents, law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, business and community leaders, and a wide array of youth-serving professionals in the community. The involvement of expertise and support from a variety of resources is essential because schools have been organized for the purpose of learning rather than as institutions designed to control crime and violence.

To support this claim Virant (1992) stated that the most efficient and effective programs for developing safe schools are those that emphasize prevention, positive alternatives, the development of psychosocial skills, and recognition of socially competent behavior. A school climate that builds on the strengths and assets of each student, improving resiliency and protective factors while promoting self-esteem, counteracts the destructive factors that contribute to violence. Improving school order and safety is promoted by providing an environment in which students find a meaningful role and have a variety of pro-social activities in which to participate.