

How Teachers are Dealing with Challenging Behaviour in Classroom

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Abstract: Generally education is concerned with development and growth and as such most of the teachers aim to offer the best nourishment to their pupils. However the aspirations of teachers are often hindered by disruptive incidents in their classes. This problem is particularly serious in Libya. Although the Libyan educational system appears to show somehow development, many aspects of the current educational situation can be disappointing. In line with this, primary school teachers are found to spend more time on managing behaviour than actually teaching. Thus, the aim of this study is to consider pupils misbehaviour within Libyan mainstream schools. The implication of this study underline the importance of strategies to deal with pupils' misbehaviour.

Keywords

Teaching, children with special educational needs, challenging behaviour



I. Introduction

There is currently a growing concern with disruptive and violent pupils within primary classroom. In fact, classroom discipline continued to be one of the most difficult problems confronting primary school teachers in Libya (Gadour, 2009). Schools can offer a powerful influence on pupil behaviour, attendance and attitudes through their approach to academic matters and the creation of a constructive social-learning ethos' (Evans, 1980). However if there is disruptive behaviour manifested in classrooms, pupils may not be able to develop positive attitudes from contact with their teachers. Even worse, there are many negative impacts both on the teacher and the other pupils as well. Gray et al. (1988) point out that the immediate consequence of disruptive behaviour is the prevention of work and the damage done to the relationship between the teacher and all the class members. It is not surprising that almost every teacher has difficulty dealing with disruptive incidents. Whenever misbehaviour is exhibited, experienced teachers will intervene to maintain the learning atmosphere of the class. But some inexperienced teachers may themselves be a contributing factor to the incidences of pupils' misbehaviour. This may result from a lack of knowledge in how to deal with pupils' misbehaviour. Hence, to reduce the incidence of disruption in classrooms requires an understanding of the phenomenon. It is not a random phenomenon, a great deal can be learnt by studying the background to disruption.

Disruptive behaviour is so defined because its consequences are disruptive. The point at which difficult behavior becomes disruptive is often a matter of judgment by schools, headteachers, or individual teachers. The National Report for Development of Education (2008) suggested that variations of disruptive behaviour might be greatly influenced by the social environment of pupils and, even more importantly, by the degree of tolerance, understanding and skills of a school's teaching staff. The role of the school is changing from time to time. It generally becomes more complex and difficult than in the past. It is not known precisely which skills and what information will be needed by pupils when they leave school. Although the majority of schools in Libya wish to offer the best nourishment to their pupils

and to provide equal educational opportunity for them and promote physical, social and moral welfare and so on, yet such objectives are always liable to be hampered by the incidences of misbehaviour. There is indeed some uncertainty about acceptable standards of good or correct behaviour for both adults and children. These inconsistencies are likely to affect the criteria of how pupils should behave in schools. Mortimore et al (1983) noticed in the past pupils would stand up when an adult entered a classroom and they would punctuate the answer to every question with 'Miss' or 'Sir'. Today many pupils do neither. They claimed that this is not due to any lack of respect from their teachers but rather because schools have become less formal and this change has affected adult's attitudes as much as those of pupils.

Although the behavioural patterns of pupils have changed to some extent, Al-Shapani (2001b) noted that the general pattern of development of misbehaviour had not altered by any substantial amount. The behaviour of disruptive pupils can often be understood, and many of the elements of it are extremely familiar to teachers in other contexts. In fact, teachers depicted disruptive behaviour as: talking out of turn, making unnecessary noise, eating, disturbing others, rude, lack of concentration, all of which led to delay in learning (The National Report for Development of Education (2008). Al-Shapani (2001b) note, the teachers' perceptions of students' ability are dominated by disruptive behaviours; under-achieving by pupils is a major cause of concern. There is a strong correlation between low academic achievement and indulgence in disruptive behaviour (for more details see Gadour, 2009) and as such, another significant element in the incidence and creation of misbehaviour could be the system of streaming (Galloway et al, 1987). In like manner, Grunsell (1980) noted that when pupils felt themselves being put down lower and lower, the only way to compound their anger was to behave 'lower and lower'. Hence, disruptive pupil is seen as one who, regardless of ability, disrupts the organization of the school by making extraordinary and unacceptable demands on staff and resources, and prevents himself and other pupils from learning. Such misbehaviour has to do with non-cooperation, lateness for lessons, failure to produce homework, open boredom, clowning, chattering and so on (The National Report for Development of Education (2008). Such pupils are not only violent towards their peers, but also towards their teachers as well as other adults in society. It is widely accepted that disruptive problems are not only manifested by pupils in schools, but they also occur in the street and home reflecting the effects of parents, home and neighbourhood. Gadour (2009) identified three major factors associated with pupils' behavioural difficulties: problems within pupils themselves, problems related to parents and home background and problems relating to difficulties in application to school work. Whilst, Evans (1980) pointed out that the majority of disruptive pupils exhibited considerable delay in learning and largely had erratic school attendance. Although these factors are interrelated with each other and are of crucial importance to the formation of pupils' disruption behaviour, it is not easy to estimate the relative influence of the various factors which may cause disruption.

It is widely accepted that schools can influence children's behaviour as well as their academic attainment for better or worst. If the relationships between all elements in schools are harmonious, knowledge can be conducted more effectively. As a result, pupils can benefit much from school. Such a positively learning environment is consistent with a good school ethos or climate. By school climate is meant the network of relationship between pupils, between teachers and teachers that determines what they expect of each other and what kind of work or behaviour they regard as acceptable (Galloway et al, 1987).

Nonetheless, there are many aspects of schools which may not be in sympathy with each other. Inevitably these will hamper the creation of a harmonious ethos. Moreover, when schools offer a palpably inferior curriculum to pupils whom teachers consider to be less able, these pupils are more likely to turn their interest to other aspects which are either irrelevant to school work, or directed against classmates, teachers, lessons and schools.

The importance of the ethos of school has been noted, but although attitudes and mission are set and greatly influenced by headteachers, their full implementation will depend on the attitudes of staff towards pupils. Yet, one is not sure whether Libyan teachers enter the profession with positive attitudes and hope to relate in an easy and close way to pupils; though teachers are subject to pressures too. They are subject to the systems of school, and increasing demands are made on them by the wider and more specialized curricula of the school. As a result, when teachers try to meet all the demands of school, they do not have time to cover all aspects of their work adequately. In this respect, teachers may fail to exert efficient and powerful influences during lessons, and consequently some pupils will eventually lose their confidence in their teachers and school. Teachers like to be respected by pupils. Reciprocally, pupils also need to be respected. Evans (1980) stated that pupils are sometimes made to feel inferior because of the harsh and condescending attitudes of teachers. Indeed, mutual respect will not happen if the pupils are being picked on unfairly, called names, physically hustled, treated disrespectfully, persistently, supervised and denied the opportunity to use their initiative (Graham, 1988). Moreover, children often feel annoyed when teachers themselves sometimes break such rules: for example, smoking. The attitude do as I say, not as I do is often resented by pupils. Certainly the personality of children need to be modelled and shaped by good example. Before children start schooling, parents are the most significant figures that influence their personality development. When children become older, there is no doubt that the teacher can present a prominent role model for children to emulate. If teachers cannot provide good examples to pupils, this will not only adversely influence the personality of pupils but will also debilitate the relationships between them (see for example, Rutter, 1975).

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 Classroom Management and School Discipline

Generally pupils like teachers to be seen as good at managing the class (getting pupils settled, working and behaving) as well as good at teaching (making the subject clear and interesting). Different teachers have various ways of motivating their children. Undoubtedly, good lesson planning would definitely lead pupils to learn effectively without becoming disruptive. When the subject matter and activities during lessons are stimulating, attractive and creative, pupils are likely to concentrate their efforts on learning (Al-Shapani, 2001b). In contrast, if a teacher arrives late, hands back homework unmarked and initiates lessons which seem to lack either plans or direction, their credibility will be impaired and respect lost or never attained (The National Report for Development of Education (2008). Moreover, pupils' confidence in the general enterprise of schooling will be undermined (Coulby, 1984). It should be noted that pupils are willing to distinguish good or bad teachers according to their own judgements. Under such circumstances, some pupils will exhibit hateful or resentful feelings against their teachers, and again, poor teacher-pupil relationships will develop.

There is an additional danger that some teachers sometimes neglect petty but important elements in classrooms; for example: the seating of pupils; displays on walls,

boards or tables; the positioning of equipment such as overhead projectors, videos and television sets; general tidiness and appearance. All these factors can make a considerable difference to lessons. Consequently, an unawareness of the classroom environment will create a careless atmosphere which will rub off onto some pupils.

Moreover, a school cannot function well without an effective administration that develops reasonable rules and enforces them. Such rules often serve a purpose to regulate the discipline of pupils. The effectiveness of a discipline system probably depends on many factors. For example, the consistency and principles of disciplinary demands is vital. Pupils are likely to respond and behave better when they see the rules as reasonable and for a purpose. In Libya, discipline sometimes tends to be thought of largely in terms of punishment, as if the main objective is the suppression of 'bad behaviour. Although this is not totally correct or wrong, it is necessary to create a balance between punishment and praise. When there is a minimum of prohibitions and a premium on praise, pupils will become more likely to respect the school rules.

Although rules appear to be a useful tool to regulate the behaviour of pupils, improper ways of applying them might escalate the severity of disruption. Moreover, there is a considerable literature suggesting the weaknesses of school rules. For example, Graham (1988) notes that where teachers attempted to assert their authority through the enforcement of rules which are considered petty or illegitimate, considerable damage occurred to teacher-pupil relationships.

Likewise, Al-Shapani (2001b) observes that unpredictably applied rules creates the problem that pupils do not know where they stand. If the pupil feels inadequate to cope with adults, the threat to his/her self-esteem is massive. Under such circumstances, insecure pupils are very likely to exhibit disruptive behaviour. Thus, this study aims to explore disruption behaviour within classroom and how teachers deal with such behaviour.

III. Research Methods

This study was part of a large project concerned with children's emotional and behavioural difficulties and how to manage these difficulties within primary classroom. Semi-structured interview based on the findings from previous research questionnaire was used in this study with 17 teachers of whom 4 were discipline teachers. The interviews were carried out in the mainstream schools, and lasted on average for 40 minutes. Confidentiality was assured and all interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and later translated to English and analysed.

IV. Results and Discussion

The results of the interviews with teachers suggested that pupils' misbehaviour is becoming more frequent and serious during lessons. Although the degree of seriousness is not as high as frequency, it is still a worrying issue to many teachers. Yet teachers appeared to spend more time on problems of order and control than actually teaching. Most teachers cited behaviour such as talking out of turn and lack of concentration as troublesome. The findings are quite similar to that of (Gadour, 2009; Wheldall et al, 1988) reflecting the great majority of disruptive behaviour in primary classrooms is of a mild nature relating to poor attention, persistent infringement of class rules and procedures and inconsistent on-task behaviour. The present study agrees that most misbehaviour which

teachers encounter is of a mild nature suggesting most of the incidents can be dealt with and prevented. Yet, disruptive problems do not occur only in schools and as such teachers found it difficult to deal with such misbehaviour. Although the results suggested that the majority of pupils' misbehaviour is of a mild nature, there appear to be some serious misbehaviour such as "stealing others' equipment". More evidence from the discipline teachers suggest that there are many unfavourable factors which contribute to the growth of pupils' misbehaviour in terms of frequency and seriousness. In this regard they highlighted the disruptive factors associated with schools. Although they reported that teachers want to offer quality educational nourishment to pupils, this aspiration is often hampered by the incidence of disruptive incidents. Indeed, schools ought to play an important role in dealing with misbehaviour of pupils. If the relationships among members of the administration, teachers and staff are harmonious, not only will knowledge be conveyed more effectively, but also pupils will be less likely to exhibit disruptive behaviour. Unfortunately such co-operation will not always be there. Teachers reported that there are many aspects of a school programme which may not be in harmony with each other. The weak administrative policy of schools is one of the most unfavourable factors. In ten cases, teachers held the weak policies of their schools responsible for the growth of pupils' misbehaviour. In line with this, they associated these policies with the management skills of headteachers. Only if headteachers have a clear picture of what they want, will they be able to pursue and implement their aims and objectives effectively, teachers reported. Hence, if the philosophy and the aims of schools as formulated by headteachers are made clear to all staff, teachers will be able to feel that their schools are seeking to forge a distinctive identity (Al-Shapani (2001b)). Yet, all discipline teachers identified somehow weaknesses in their headteachers, reflecting lack of management and supervision. One teacher stated that "she (headteacher) seldom communicate with staff and pupils; some pupils do not know who is the headteacher of our school". Certainly the role of headteacher is essential in that he/she ought to engage themselves actively in every school matter, so that they can have a clear picture of their school all the time. If they concentrate their efforts only on administrative work inside their offices but neglect the daily lives in classrooms, they may not understand the work on "the front line". In a similar way, all discipline teachers held headteachers responsible for the absence of regular and formal appraisals of all teachers. Consequently, they reported some teachers do their own work in classrooms and leave pupils unsupervised. In such cases, the incidences of misbehaviour will almost certainly occur. While this reflects the concerns highlighted in the National Report for Development of Education (2008), all pupils understand which teachers they respect, which teachers commit themselves to their jobs and which teachers are irresponsible. It is widely appreciated that disruptive behaviour appears to be much less manifest from pupils in the classes of responsible teachers. In contrast, irresponsible teachers may cause frequent incidences of pupils' misbehaviour. The presence of irresponsible teachers ought not to be ignored. Yet it should be noted that almost all teachers agreed that pupils are commonly hard to teach these days, besides their dissatisfaction with their own profession due to inadequate chances for promotion, as well as the prospects for teachers appear to be poor. Indeed, the status of teacher is relatively low today and as such Libyan teachers feel no longer respected by the public at large. Hence, it is not surprising to note that a low morale among teachers commonly exists in schools. If there is not any modification or improvement of the current educational system in Libya, more teachers will feel burnout and eventually give up their jobs. Inevitably, the quality of teaching will certainly be weakened.

Schools are individual communities. In order to function satisfactorily, it is necessary to have their own rules and order systems. Such rules are not only designed for the safety and welfare of pupils, but also to encourage the pupils to attend regularly and punctually, to take responsibility for their own motivation and output, and to consider the consequences of their actions before reacting to "various" situations" (Emerson, 1984). This is with the aim to stop pupils behaving in undesirable ways and to train them in self-control so that they can be relied upon to behave appropriately when they are not being directly supervised. Hence, school rules should be clear and reasonable. The demands made upon pupils have to be appropriate to their developmental level and should not be too restrictive. In line with this, Al-Shapani (2001b) stated that youngsters will challenge a rule that seems to them to be unfair or unreasonable. This is particularly when pupils are obliged to obey the school rules. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers and pupils to reach a mutual agreement upon the school rules and expectations of conduct and behaviour. Pupils may suspect the effectiveness of those rules which teachers fail to enforce them. If pupils consider their teachers are concerned or inconsistent, they may lose confidence in the rules, their teachers and learning as well. In order to put rules into practice effectively, it is often necessary to reduce their number (Coulby, 1984). When pupils realize that teachers are firm and consistent, there will be less-testing of later rules. Minimising the rules do not mean lowering the standard, but makes those rules more enforceable and effective. In a similar way, school rules should be made known to pupils and all members of staff. Hence, when rules are clear and reasonable, they can be put into practice through a reward and punishment system; yet it is more effective to reward than to punish. Indeed, verbal praise or tangible rewards will often draw pupils away from bad behaviour. Moreover, pupils may be encouraged in a positive attitude towards lessons or to their individual learning. This is more significant when directed towards the performance of good behaviour. The quicker the praise or reward follows the successful performance, the more effective it is likely to be. Likewise, much of the excitement of learning can be maintained through the careful use of rewards (Graham, 1988). Even disruptive pupils can be motivated to behave positively by means of appropriate rewards.

Furthermore, disruptive problems will be reduced if teachers recognize early warning signs, identify the types of problems likely to occur and make contingency plans. Teachers should also notice any changes in pupils' behaviour and be alert to symptoms in need of further investigation or careful handling. The National Report for Development of Education (2008) suggests teachers should pay special attention to the following changes in behaviour: poor health loss of appetite and weight, refusing or ignoring responsibilities, frequent absence from school or truancy, sudden drop in academic performance; aggressive or withdrawn behaviour, and neglect or over-consciousness of personal appearances. Thus, if such changes in behaviour can be identified, modified and controlled and at an early stage, many disruptive incidents may be avoided. In line with this, Evans (1980) suggested that assistance or extra care, remedial teaching, counselling or the modification of curriculum can make a significant contribution to keeping behavioural problems within reasonable bounds,

Currently Libyan teachers feel very much alone in coping with a classroom of children. This come out clearly from almost all participants in this study. In fact, classroom disruption is becoming a threat and alarming for all teachers; even well-established and experienced teachers appear from this study to find it difficult to deal with disruptive incidents. This may reflect the need for possible measures to support and prepare teachers in the beginning of every school year. For example, schools should not arrange difficult

classes' for new teachers. If new teachers have more time to adapt to their career, they would be able to realize their capacity for teaching with children who are well-motivated and to understand where their inadequacies and weaknesses are. Besides that, school should help raise the status of probationary and less experienced teachers in their pupils' eyes. This can be achieved by including new teachers in case conferences. If disruptive pupils know that young teachers' opinion will be taken seriously, they may be less likely to misbehave during their lessons.

Knowledge in dealing with disruptive incidents can be achieved by attending training courses and consequently teachers not only develop basic skills for coping with disciplinary matters, but also develop their confidence as well as positive attitudes for tackling disruptive incidents.

V. Conclusion

This study underlined pupils' misbehaviour in mainstream schools in Libya. It shows that increasing pupils' misbehaviour is one of the unfavourable factors which hampers the effectiveness of schooling directly. Although the findings of this study is not dissimilar to that of the literature, there is growing concern with the frequency of misbehaviour in mainstream schools in Libya rather than with the seriousness of such behaviour. Hence, to maintain order and disciplinary atmosphere in classrooms for pupils to learn effectively, teachers are required to have sufficient knowledge of classroom management skills and understanding of pupils' educational needs. In a similar way, headteachers need to improve their skills of educational management and ensure that they offer proper support, encouragement and supervision to their colleagues. The implications of this study reflect the need to reconsider mainstream school policies. There is also a need for harmonious relationship between headteachers and school staff. Thus, in order to address pupils' misbehaviour more effectively, it is necessary for mainstream schools to co-operate with the community, the broader educational world and with society as a whole.

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