

# Learners' Discipline Management by Teachers During Post-COVID Lockdown Among Selected Primary Schools in Mbale District Uganda

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## Abstract

The study sought to examine the learners' discipline management by teachers during post-COVID lockdown among selected primary schools in Mbale district. The study intended to identify the challenges teachers face when instilling discipline in learners during the post-COVID 19. To analyse different behaviour/ indiscipline among the learners. To identify ways to curb challenges among learners. The study adopted a qualitative research design and results were collected using a semi-structured interview guide as well as focused group discussions from selected schools in Mbale district. It used the Gordon theory of classroom management and A theory of discipline derived from Dewey's theory of inquiry. Findings revealed that many learners had indiscipline behaviour when teachers gave them homework to copy and do at home. It was realized that some learners do come late to school, others are aggressive and disrespectful to teachers, untidy and leave school without permission while others are fond of talking in class. Teachers assume that one of the most challenging roles and the need for additional training and support to learners is to curb the indiscipline of learners to have a conducive learning environment. It was concluded that the sources of the behavioural changes were the family, the ministry of education being away from school and classroom management. The study recommended that learners should be given support in counselling by the parents, teachers, senior women and men, and head teachers to eliminate learning losses. Furthermore, projects can be formed to improve learners' collaboration and be developed thus socially supportive activities and, the assigning of school responsibilities by school heads can be organized and socialization of learners can be enhanced and emphasized. In addition, formative training can be given to teachers and parents to curb the indiscipline of learners while at school and home and also rules for the management of behaviour should be clearly defined and reinforced.

**Keywords:** post-COVID, classroom management, learners' behaviour, behavioural changes

## 1. Background

The COVID-19 pandemic led to school closures worldwide affecting many learners. In Uganda, schools were shut down on the 18th of March 2020 following the presidential directive which was aimed at reducing the

spread of COVID-19 in the country (Athumani, H, 2020). The overall school closure period in Uganda lasted for twenty-two months. This was the longest in the whole world (Andrew Green, 2022).

It should be noted that even short disruptions in the child's school have significant negative effects on their learning and behaviour and can be long-lasting. Further, the World Bank, (2020) said that the closure of schools due to COVID-19 was regarded as a situation that would threaten Education. The capacity of education institutions to respond to the crisis was by providing guidance and counselling to learners and also to support children and families during the lockdown period which was diverse OECD (2021).

The United Nations report on education during COVID-19 and beyond stated that the closure of schools and other learning areas affected 94 per cent of the world's student population and 99 per cent in low-and low-to middle-income countries. This has also led to the indiscipline of learners in schools worldwide. The increase in the problem related to the execution of the rules and in Learners' undesired behaviours. For example, an increase was observed in violence (UNESCO, 2020). Teacher-learner relationships across the first seven years of education and adolescent outcomes. COVID has had enormous ramifications for school children in India yet schools have re-opened after two years of closure teachers are under renewed pressure to cover the syllabus. But the post-lockdown situation is staggering: 76 per cent of the teachers responded that aggressive outbursts happened every day in their classrooms (Pianta, RC., 2020). Before lockdown learners used to help their classrooms tidy by carrying out tasks such as fetching chalk and dusters from the staff room but teachers are now struggling to find volunteers for these roles. Now we don't use corporal punishment to discipline the learners, but we also don't know how to handle this differently (Manea & Gari-Negut, 2021).

In South Africa, severe discipline problems have spiked post-COVID with cases of harassment, verbal abuse, physical attacks, intimidation and even stabbings. Learning gaps and disciplinary issues arise in the way that young people respond to what has been a worldwide trauma. The impact of the pandemic on education is its potential disruption of all the components of the learning process. It has affected learner's readiness and involvement in support of teacher's classroom equipment, safety and inclusiveness of schools; and system management (World Bank, 2020). This pandemic has created serious challenges for teachers all around the world. It is important to arrange various educational contents to present all the subjects comprehensibly in the new learning environment (Taaka, M. A., Muweesi, C. & Kintu, G. J., 2022). Classroom management is undoubtedly an issue that requires special attention in these chaotic times (Manea & Gari Negut, 2021).

In Uganda, COVID-19 pandemic has affected the education system as it has done in all other areas of life in the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected children's lives but has also affected education and learning-teaching environments and methods. Schools were closed, the process was interrupted, and the children started education at home. The pandemic has interrupted children's normal school-centred education and learning/teaching process. It is described as the new normal in the world. The student's educational routines are disproportionately affected by limitations on movement, most children cannot entirely focus on their studies due to additional tasks that they have to carry out. The pandemic has posed significant challenges in the day-to-day activities of education. The immediate impact has been lockdowns over the last year and the enforced closure of schools, colleges and universities (Water Meyer et al., 2020).

Educational psychologists know that discipline issues are linked to the family context. Positive parental behaviour, daily routines (like having dinner every night as a family) and social support (listening, conversing, spending time together) have an enormously positive effect on learners. However, not every learner has the family backing needed to offer full emotional and psychological support. In globe-scale evaluations as well, the issue of learner behaviours and classroom management are both given a great deal of attention and regarded as highly essential in professional development (OECD, 2019). This situation can be explained by the fact that even if teachers have attended training on classroom management, they often report a need in this sense for more support to develop themselves further. Serious disciplinary issues are arising in schools during post COVID-19 pandemic in Uganda schools are reporting an increase in committing suicide, burning of schools, fights and unruliness causing teachers to have no approaches to handling undisciplined learners (Martha, N., Taddeo, K. Y., Charles, M., et al., 2023). The sources of the behavioural changes were the family, the Ministry of Education and Sports being away from school, and use the of strategies by teachers in terms of classroom management while managing the process after the transition to face-to-face education were the management of teaching, behaviour management, management relationships and management of the physical environment. Children in Mbale district have cases like late arrival in class, talking in class, not following reasonable instructions, for example, do not work in class general untidiness, vandalism, littering the compound, and leaving class or school without permission yet teachers do not use corporal punishments to discipline learners.

## **2. Aim of the Study**

The study intended to identify the challenges teachers face when instilling discipline in learners during the post-COVID-19 lockdown in selected primary schools in Mbale district.

### 3. Objectives of the Study

- 1) To identify the challenges teachers, face when instilling discipline in learners during post-COVID lockdown in selected primary schools in the Mbale district.
- 2) To analyse different behaviours/ indiscipline among the learners in selected primary schools in the Mbale district.
- 3) To identify ways to curb challenges among learners in selected primary schools in Mbale district.

### 4. Theory of the Study

The study adopted Gordon's Theory of classroom management. This theory of classroom management was first developed in the 1960s by a psychologist called Thermos Gordon. The theory eschews traditional disciplinary measures and the idea that the teacher should hold absolute power over the classroom. Further, the teacher should be non-confrontational and should involve the learners more in the educational process and encourage open lines of communication through their actions encouraging lines of communication through actively listening to learners who are having trouble and similarly communicating a teacher's needs and wants that promotes responsibility and self-reliance. It explores the basics and classroom application of this theory to improve maturity and discipline in the classroom. Gordon says children are never fun for teachers whether they are not doing their school work, generally being loud and disruptive or even recruiting other normally good learners into their merry band of mischief. In the study, learners of selected primary schools in the Mbale district had behavioural problems such owned like late coming, not following teachers' instructions in class and uprooting crops in the nearby gardens. On the side of teachers, teachers had to rethink their approaches and instructional techniques to redesign activities to engage learners who were from home and adjust their approach to curb discipline cases in learners; parents gained an inside look into the previous inner workings of indiscipline of learners and for parents of undisciplined learners who could not work independently at home needed new ways of guidance and counselling. Learners are required to adjust to new ways of curbing discipline by following teachers' instructions for the improvement of learning loss.

### 5. Review of Related Literature

#### 5.1 Challenges Teachers Face When Instilling Discipline During Post-Lockdown

Researchers have used the label challenges to describe and instil discipline among learners during post-lockdown. (Nanyiris K., 2014) The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all works of lives around the globe since the beginning of 2020. (World Health Organization (WHO), 2020) Many governments have taken measures to restrict the mobility of their citizens and such mitigation measures have influenced schools and university functions. The sudden closures are regarded as a situation that will threaten education (World Bank, 2020). When instilling discipline among learners, teachers should bear the challenges to curb discipline which was caused by to prolonged closure of schools. The United Nations report on education during COVID-19 and beyond states that the closure of schools and other learning areas affected 94% of the world's learner education population and 99% in low and low to middle-income countries and this has led to the indiscipline of learners in schools worldwide.

In India, learners have become extremely aggressive and disrespectful and when the teachers ask the learners to button up their shirts, they completely ignore the teachers. (Ansari, Hofkens, T.K & Pianta, R.C., 2020) Teacher-learner relationships across the first seven years of education and adolescent outcomes. COVID has had enormous ramifications for school children in India, yet schools have re-opened after two years of closure teachers are under renewed pressure to cover the syllabus. But the post-lockdown situation is staggering: 76 percent of the teachers responded that aggressive outbursts happen every day in their classrooms. (Pianta R.C., 2020) Before the lockdown learners used to help the classroom tidy by carrying out tasks such as fetching dusters and chalk from the staffroom but now teachers are struggling to find volunteers for these roles. Now we don't use corporal punishment to discipline the learners, but we also don't know how to handle this differently. (Manea & Gari-Negut, 2021) In the US schools reported an increase in fights, vandalism and unruliness causing teachers to quit. (UNESCO, 2020)

#### 5.2 Analyse Different Behaviours/Indiscipline Among the Learners

Several articles point out that serious disciplinary issues arose in schools during post-COVID. The impact of the pandemic on education is its potential disruption of all the components of the learning process (Anthony, W., Charles, M., Robert, T., et al., 2022). It has affected learners' readiness and involvement in support of teachers' classroom equipment, safety and inclusiveness of schools and system management (World Bank, 2020). This pandemic has created challenges for teachers all around the world due to prolonged overstay out of school by most learners hence learning bad behaviour from peers. In India, learners have become extremely aggressive and disrespectful and when the teachers ask the learners to button up their shirts, they completely ignore the teachers

(Ansari, Hofkens, T. K, & Pianta, R.C., 2020). According to Hughes Conrad (2022), in South Africa severe discipline problems have sparked post-COVID with cases of harassment, verbal abuse, physical attacks, intimidation and even stabbings learning gaps and disciplinary issues arising in the way that young people respond to what has been a worldwide trauma. In the US schools reported an increase in fights, vandalism and unruliness causing teachers to quit. (UNESCO, 2020) Classroom management is undoubtedly an issue that requires special attention in these chaotic times (Manea & Gari-Negut, 2021).

In Mbale district, Uganda the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the education system as it has done in all other areas of life in the world, children were engaged in other activities like loitering in trading centres, selling tomatoes, watching TV which made them forget classroom rules and regulations. In addition, the pandemic has posed significant challenges in the day-to-day activities of education. The immediate impact has been lockdowns over the last few years and the enforced closure of schools, colleges and universities (Water Meyer et al., 2020).

The issue of learner behaviours and classroom management is both given a great deal of attention and regarded as highly essential in professional development. (OECD, 2019) This situation can be explained by the fact that even if teachers have attended training on classroom management, they often report a need in this sense for more support to develop themselves further. Mbale district Uganda are reporting an increase in committing suicide burning of schools, fights and unruliness causing teachers to have no approaches to handling learners who are indiscipline. The sources of the behavioural changes were the family, and the Ministry of Education and Sports.

### *5.3 Identifying Ways to Curb Challenges Among Learners*

The post-COVID on face-to-face education on classroom management revealed that cognitive changes, concentration problems, social changes and indiscipline are observed in learners' behaviours after the transition to face-to-face education. (Reinke et al., 2011) The sources of the behavioural changes were the family, the Ministry of Education being away from school and classroom management. Classroom management is defined as an area where teachers assume one of the most challenging roles and constantly report a need for additional training and support. (Reinke et al., 2011) Effective classroom management refers to controlling behaviour and creating a supportive learning environment that can respond to changing and complex needs. Effective classroom management is already essential under normal circumstances but in case of major crises such as pandemics or natural disasters the typical functioning of schools is disrupted such conditions necessitate the transition to distance education making classroom management skills more critical for several reasons (Goldman et al., 2021) Research has shown that it is on critical importance to ensure teachers' role is up to date to adopt to increase in diversity and multi cultureless and society, the development of knowledge and increase in the opportunities to access information. (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007) Teachers have a direct influence towards learners' discipline since they are involved in learners' curriculum arrangement until the making of the syllabus as well as the lesson plan that will be used in everyday teaching (Etyang, P.P., & Okoth, U., 2018). In the Mbale district teachers certainly have high potential in providing materials that promote discipline such as information guidance and counselling of learners by different stakeholders to create a school culture of positive discipline from of representative council of learners, who have records of learner behaviour. Furthermore, every learner should be treated based on normalized rules by having more communication to solve problems rather than give a punishment.

Nanyiri. K. (2014) conducted a study where time management does not significantly contribute to learners' discipline but the application of reward and also punishment. Additionally, education institutions were instructed to conduct behavioural change and health education sessions for staff and learners to provide reminders in the form of posters and safe behaviour. Amoah (2015) adds that learners have to be responsible with is towards their behaviour and apply rewards and punishment towards what they have done at school hence the students will act wiser and avoid negative influences in their environment.

## **6. Methodology**

The research adopted qualitative data collection techniques based on interviews and focused group discussions among head teachers, teachers, senior women, senior men and parents among selected schools in Mbale district. The approach was selected because it enables the researcher to describe the meaning of limited experiences of a concept or a phenomenon for several individuals according to Creswell (2009). Data collection techniques mixed with both structured and unstructured interviews were used. The data (which later became information), told by these head teachers, teachers, senior women, senior men and parents were re-story by the researcher in a narrative chronology as guided by Creswell (2005). That is stories from head teachers, teachers, senior women, senior men and parents from selected primary schools of the Mbale district regarding learner discipline management by teachers during post-lockdown were recorded and transcribed by the researcher.

## **7. Findings and Discussions**

### *7.1 Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

These are in terms of gender, classes and work experience of each participant.

Table 1. The demographic characteristics

Participants items		Number of participants	Percentage of participants
1. Gender	Male	6	46%
	Female	7	54%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>
2. Classes	P6	2	15%
	P5	4	31%
	P4	7	54%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>
3. Work experience	10yrs above	6	46.2%
	5-10yrs	5	38.5%
	Less than 5yrs	2	15.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>
4. Schools	Busano P/S	4	31%
	Bubirabi P/S	5	38%
	Bufuhula P/S	4	31%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Primary data.

According to the results in Table 1, the study population was obtained from three primary schools with Bubirabi P/S having 38% while Busano P/S and Bufuhula P/S had 31% showing equal representation of participants. Busano and Bufuhula have less than 38% of the total participants. However, based on the findings, female respondents were the majority represented by 54% and their male counterparts were represented by 46%, hence the study was gender sensitive and almost balanced. Results regarding different classes about indiscipline varied from class to class. Most respondents belonged to P4 & P5 which had 85% of learners with different behaviour while the class with the fewer representatives was P6 with 15% with the same behaviour. The results about the working experience of respondents were evaluated to the majority with 46.2% belonging to the working experience category of 10 years and above while 15.3% had a working experience of fewer than 5 years as the least number of respondents. Those with the least guidance were parents who were not doing the work of teaching.

### 7.2 Challenges Teachers Face When Instilling Discipline During Post-Lockdown

In this section, participants were asked to narrate how the lockdown had impacted learner's behaviour as seen below. The study exposed a lot of changes in learners' behaviour as a result of COVID-19. For example, learners adopted bad behaviour such as late arrival, leaving school without permission and defiant of rules and regulations.

Table 2. Transcript analysis of challenges teachers face when instilling discipline during post-lockdown

Sample quotes from respondents	Emerging themes
<i>... some of my learners have become unruly. Even if you instruct them to do work, they refuse (teacher)</i>	<i>Defiance of rules and regulations</i>
<i>... before the pandemic, they were very obedient at home but now they have changed (parent)</i>	<i>Closure of schools</i>
<i>... I have seen my learners go to nearby gardens and uproot crops like groundnut and cassava to eat and they quit lessons (teacher)</i>	<i>Closure of schools</i>

Source: Primary data.

Late coming and not following teachers' instructions had become a serious vice in one of the schools studied. One parent was quoted saying '... I do not know why my son has become so relaxed, he used to pass exercises in class but now he fails most of the work that he is given at school ...' The habit of not following teachers' instructions was reported by most participants except one teacher who deviated saying the closure of schools in Uganda for twenty-two months made learners' brains active on other activities like watching TV, selling tomatoes, and playing that they forgot about education. Just as the World Bank (2020) reported the pandemic has affected learners' readiness and involvement support of teacher's classroom equipment, safety and inclusiveness of schools and system management. These behaviours stemmed from prolonged stay out of school by most learners hence learning bad behaviours from peers.

### 7.3 Analyse Different Behaviours/Indiscipline During the Post-Lockdown

Different behaviour/indiscipline among learners during the post-COVID lockdown. The question was mainly answered by teachers who were having direct contact with the learners both inside and outside classrooms. As seen in the table below learners were found to have different behaviour/indiscipline in each class where the study happened. Some of them could ignore teachers' instructions in class while others could leave school at any time without permission.

Table 3. Transcript analysis of different behaviour/indiscipline during post-lockdown

Sample quotes from respondents	Emerging themes
<i>... many of the P6 children can't help a teacher to fetch chalk from the staffroom, follow the teacher's instructions, dust the chalkboard and collect the books for marking. They only keep quiet and ignore what the teacher is instructing. (teacher, Busano primary school)</i>	<i>Closure of schools by Ministry of Education and Sports.</i>
<i>... before lockdown, my learners used to pay attention and follow the teacher's instructions and also follow the class rules and regulations. (teacher, Bubirabi primary school)</i>	<i>Staying away from school for a prolonged period.</i>
<i>... some of my boys in P6 are so disciplined that when a teacher asks them to button and tack in their shirts they ignore and walk away. Before covid boys could always follow the class teachers' instructions and class rules. (teacher, Bufuhula primary school)</i>	<i>School dropout</i>

Source: Primary data.

Other participants reported that other learners had forgotten school routines such as early arrival and general school programs like time for games and sports. The parents interviewed and also testified that before lockdown their children could go back in the evening and help them with some work like fetching water, washing plates and cooking. But the situation had changed for example one parent was quoted saying, '... my child no longer helps me with work after school. What she does in the evening is to enter her bedroom and keep quiet. I am worried she might be a lazy girl in future.'

The above findings are in line with educational psychologists who confirmed that discipline issues are linked to the family context of daily routines like having dinner every night as a family and social support. (Hughes Conrad, 2022) In South Africa, severe discipline problems have spiked post-COVID with cases of harassment school closures and stabbings to inform projections of disciplinary issues arising in the way that young people respond to what has been a worldwide trauma. The United Nations report on education during COVID and beyond states that the closure of schools and other learning areas affected 94% of the world's learner education population and hence Uganda schools were closed for twenty-two months of course more percentage was affected.

### 7.4 Ways to Curb Challenges Among Learners

The findings in this section were generated from the responses from participants who answered the interview question about the ways to curb challenges of indiscipline among learners' behaviour. In the table below, participants' responses have been transcribed.

Table 4. Transcript analysis of ways to curb challenges among learners

Sample quotes from participants.	Emerging themes
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<i>... We have created time to regularly talk to learners and create a school culture of positive discipline.</i>	<i>Guidance and counselling</i>
<i>... informative training should be given to teachers and adopt effective classroom skills to enable them to handle learners with queer behaviour.</i>	<i>Attending continuous professional developments (CPDS)</i>
<i>... projects can be formed in the school setting in which learners can work and collaboration can be developed thus social and supportive activities to encourage the socialization of learners</i>	<i>Senior woman senior man headteacher</i>

Source: Primary data.

On ways to curb challenges of indiscipline, findings revealed that indeed teachers in schools were working hard to curb challenges of indiscipline. In visited schools, guidance and counselling were carried out although teachers never had effective skills to handle indiscipline during post-COVID. This could be attributed to the fact that some learners were trying to cope with the school culture of rules and regulations. In addition, following the guidelines put in place by the Ministry of Education and Sports, some teachers in the country were trained on how to handle learner indiscipline which was headed as **‘psycho-socio issues during post-COVID’**. However, more training needs to be provided to the teachers so that effective classroom skills are acquired by the teachers. Schools were closed and the Ministry of Education came up with suggestions of children learning from home (Kaahwa, Y. T., Tondo, Z., Muweesi, C., et al., 2023). This made children lose interest in learning. However, the result of the interview with teachers revealed that the prolonged stay at home during the COVID made them adopt queer behaviour. It was also revealed that guidance and counselling were done at school to make learners cope with school routines. As explained (World Bank, 2020), the pandemic has affected learner involvement and support of teachers’ classroom equipment. The application of discipline and formation of counsel has intensified in schools to enable learners to get used to rules and regulations to cope with the new normal situation. This was in line with the head teacher Senior men, senior women and teachers which required all schools to guide and counsel learners regularly against COVID-19-related stigmatization and coping mechanisms.

### 7.5 Arising Conclusion

Sharon Linde (2022) says teachers face rough moments with learners during disciplinary action that make their classroom management challenging. Arising from the study objectives, the study concluded that the challenges teachers face when instilling discipline among learners in selected primary schools in Mbale district were; Late arrival, leaving school any time without permission, uprooting crops from people’s gardens, refusing to follow teachers’ instructions, ignoring to do homework, uncleanliness, littering the compound by learners in middle and upper classes. This is related to Linde’s ideology. Most of these challenges emerged as a result of these learners being away from school for a prolonged period. Since parents and most guardians were neither trained nor well prepared to handle learners through guiding and cancelling. These behaviours could have stemmed from negative peer influence that the learners were exposed to during the lockdown. Poor parenting is where most parents and guardians do not spare time to talk to their children about positive behaviour and interactions at home and community (Kaweesi, M., Wamiti, H. M., Nabitula, A., & Muweesi, C., 2023). The environment where most of the learners spent their holidays also contributes a lot to imparting negative behaviour, for example; When schools were closed, some children were left free loitering around trading centres having no time to help their parents with work at home, this made them gain negative behaviour (Etyang, P., Okoth, U, 2018). In ways to curb discipline in learner’s behaviour, schools introduced regular guidance and cancelling sessions and formed representatives of councils of learners that would help curb the indiscipline among learners (Kintu, G., Musiime, J., Muweesi, C., et al., 2022). In addition, the Ministry of Education and Sports issued guidelines to teachers to gain skills in handling classroom management during the post-era among learners (MOES, 2021). To curb the indiscipline and learners cope with the new normal, the head teachers, teachers, senior women and senior men should have regular sessions of guidance and counselling, form policies regarding positive learner behaviour, discuss learner behaviour and learner issues should be discussed regularly and ensure kept records of learner behaviour. Teachers should have regular training on how to manage the negative behaviour of learners.

## 8. Recommendations

The study recommends that teachers should be given formative training and acquire skills in classroom management in crises of natural disasters like pandemics which would equip them with knowledge of curbing indiscipline among learners. The head teachers, teachers, senior women, and senior men should create a school culture of positive discipline and form projects that would emphasise collaboration and socialization among learners.

The study also recommends that there is a need for Regular guidance and counselling sessions to be done both at school and at home. Parents should be sensitized about guiding and counselling children while at home for example giving them rules of not moving away from home when it is late and also helping with homework like cooking, fetching water and washing plates. School administrators should come up with rules and regulations that guide learners towards positive behaviour. Elders in the community in the Mbale district should be invited to schools to provide extra guidance and counselling sessions that will supplement school efforts in behaviour management among learners. Local leaders should enforce by-laws against children who loiter in trading centres during late hours while at home. Those are to be taken to the concerned authorities. If the parents or guardians fail to cooperate, they can be charged in courts of law so that they serve as examples to the would-be defiant parents. Education officials in Mbale district should closely monitor schools to ensure that the Ministry of Education and Sports guidelines on school operations after COVID-19 are adhered to. Finally, schools should have a balanced timetable that caters for all learners despite their disabilities to encourage collaboration and socialization among learners. This will help reduce rigged behaviour among some learners and develop proper social development of children.

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