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# CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOLS IN MAKONI DISTRICT IN IMPLEMENTING STUDENT EXPULSION PROCEDURES

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## ABSTRACT

Schools across all countries have a legal responsibility to protect staff and to provide a safe learning environment for all students. Sometimes the actions of some students threaten the health and safety of staff and other students or create violence, either by the destruction of school property or by possession of illegal weapons and substances or their actions generally disrupt good order and management of the school. This study sought to investigate teachers' perceptions towards the student expulsion procedures in Zimbabwean secondary schools using the quantitative methodology. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population comprised of all secondary school teachers in Makoni District in Manicaland Province. The random sample procedure was used to come up with a total sample of 80 respondents made up of 42 female and 38 male. The research instrument used was the questionnaire. The study revealed that teachers thought that the current student expulsion procedure was very ineffective. The study recommends that expulsion of students should take a shorter period of time in order to deter would-be offenders as well.

**Key Words:** Expulsion, Students, Secondary schools, Procedures, District, Teachers, Discipline.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'expulsion' denotes permanent exclusion from school or permanent withdrawal of the right to attend a particular school (Cotton, 2011). In Zimbabwe, the Ministry of Education Policy Circular Number, 35 dated 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1993 provides guidelines or procedures to be followed when expelling students from school. It reads in part, "A head shall not expel a pupil without the prior approval of the Provincial Education Director." It further states that a rigorous process should be followed before a child can be expelled. The head has to apply to the Provincial Education Director to have express permission to expel a child whose parents can appeal to the Secretary for Education against the expulsion



(Monroe, 2005). The fact that heads cannot easily expel delinquent pupils has led in many instances, to problematic pupils continuing and finishing school without having been expelled (Monroe, 2005).

In some cases, if the pupils' period of suspension (a pupil awaiting expulsion should be on suspension for not more than 14 days) expires before the conclusion of the case of intended expulsion, the head of school is forced to take back the pupil into school (Monroe, 2005). As Chipfunyise (1999) states, heads should not be tempted to take short cuts because this may backfire and cost the school heads their jobs. In Zimbabwe, therefore, expulsion as a disciplinary measure comes a long time after the transgression (Dhlomo, 2012). As Herlock (2008) argues, punishment must follow the transgression as soon as possible so that the child will associate the two. Against the background of current procedures and legislation on expulsion, this paper reports on the perceptions of teachers towards these procedures using a small sample of secondary schools in Zimbabwe.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Expulsion, according to Monroe (2005), is the total removal of a pupil from the school system on account of misconduct of a serious nature. Royes (2006) says that expulsion of pupils is one of the zero tolerance policies to discipline of school children. In the United Kingdom, if a child has been expelled from two schools, then, any state school is legally allowed to refuse admittance of that student (McManus, 2005). The expulsion of pupils is governed by the Education Act 2002 and as Thorndike (2003) postulates, the Act states that exclusion should be used only in response to serious breaches of a school's discipline policy and only after a range of alternative strategies to resolve the pupils' disciplining problems have been tried and proven to have failed; and where allowing the pupil to remain in school would be seriously detrimental to the education or welfare of other pupils and staff, or of the pupils himself or herself. In the United Kingdom, only the head teacher is legally empowered to expel a student, he or she is not permitted to delegate that power to another person (McManus, 2005).

In the United Kingdom, a head teacher might expel a pupil for a first or one off incident of appropriate severity. For a single case of one of the following, a pupil can be expelled: a serious act of violence including actual or threatened violence against a staff member or another pupil; possession of a weapon; a sexual offence including sexual abuse and assault; a racially-aggravated offence; a drug offence, usually the supply of a controlled drug to other pupils and computer hacking (Hollin, 2013).

In the United States and Canada, expulsion criteria and process vary from state to state or province (Reyes, 2006). Depending on local school board jurisdiction, approval from that school's local school board may be required before a student can be expelled. Students who have been expelled are no longer eligible to visit the school and attend or perform any activity with any students or staff who are with the school. As Hill (2006) states, while at one time it was difficult for a student to be expelled from public school that is no longer the case. Beginning with the Gun-Free School Zones Act and following the Columbine shooting tragedy, schools have become increasingly willing to expel students for minor behaviour offences.

In New Zealand, expulsion and exclusion are both terms for removing a student from a school for misconduct. As Royes (2006) observes, the difference is that students under 16 years of age are excluded and those who are 16 or over are expelled but both are commonly referred to as expulsion. Expulsion cannot be directly done by the principal. It must be done through suspending the student and requiring the school's board of trustees or a standing disciplinary committee of the board to independently assess whether or not the situation is serious enough to justify expulsion of the student. Arson, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and smoking, continual disobedience, theft, physical assault on other students, verbal assault on staff, vandalism, weapons, alcohol, drugs and verbal assault on other students were the main reasons for expulsion in New Zealand (Royes, 2006).



In Zimbabwe as Dhlomo (2012) says, the major reasons students are expelled from school include violent behavior, sexual offences, vandalism, insubordination, truancy, stealing and alcohol and drugs. As Chifunyise (1999) postulates, where students commit offences that warrant expulsion, the head of school should meticulously follow the procedures for expulsion. However, as Murimba (2013) argues, the current expulsion procedures as espoused by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education undermine the head's authority in schools in that they cannot deal with expulsion until the Provincial Director decides what to do for the head.

Madziyire (2010) posits that juvenile delinquency is getting out of hand and tough measures of discipline and punishment are urgently needed. In the last twenty years, the young people in our schools have lost respect for authority in secondary schools in Zimbabwe (Madziyire, 2010). Dhlomo (2012) suggests that tough measures of discipline should be employed to bring sanity in our society and schools. However, these tough forms of discipline cannot be part of and parcel of the lengthy procedure on student expulsion followed in Zimbabwean schools. As Hurlock (2008) posits, no long period of time should elapse between the act and punishment during which the child feels abused and can plan revenge on the disciplinarian, thus the student expulsion procedure in Zimbabwe needs to be reviewed to make it more effective.

Dube (2013) concurs with Hurlock's idea when he argues that if an offence or disorder occurs, authorities should act at once because prompt action is required for any form of punishment to be effective since delay may be interpreted by other students and the perpetrators as weakness of the head. As Chikowore (2012) aptly put it, the head of school should nurture the development of a school culture which should have an impact on teaching and learning of students' morale and behaviour; and this is only possible if the head has strict control over his or her pupils.

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Actions of some students threaten the health and safety of teachers and other students and disrupt good order and management of the school. Such elements should be quickly removed from schools to prevent further dangers to pupils and teachers.

### **4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study sought to investigate the perceptions of teachers towards the student expulsion procedures in Zimbabwean secondary schools in order to reveal their experiences with the procedures.

#### **4.1 Research Questions**

The study was guided by four sub-problems.

1. Are teachers aware of the current student expulsion procedures governing the expulsion of students?
2. Is there a correlation between student behaviour at school and expulsion procedures?
3. Are the current expulsion procedures helping to maintain the head's authority?
4. What can be done to make the current student procedure more effective?

#### **4.2 Significance of the Study**

The importance of the study is premised on the fact that it attempted to provide a picture of how the expulsion procedures affect the general conduct of students in secondary schools so as to suggest ways of modifying them (procedures) for the promotion of good behaviour in schools for maximum learning.



### 4.3 Limitations of the Study

The study employed the descriptive survey method which, according to Ary and Razaviah (2010) lacks predictive power since the research may discover and describe “what is” and unable to predict “what would be.” In view of the small size of the sample used, the findings of the study would have limited generalisability. It has to be pointed out also that attitudes about an issue are essentially subjective and cannot be measured accurately. In other words, attitudes have no universally and acceptable scales of measurement and measures that were used in this study cannot be considered to be very accurate.

### 4.4 Delimitations of the Study

The researchers delimited the investigation to establish perceptions of teachers in Makoni Secondary schools regarding student expulsion procedures currently being used by schools in Zimbabwe. Views from 80 teachers were used in the research. Perceptions from other key stakeholders like heads, education officers, parents, pupils nor local leaders were outside the purview of this study.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The study employed the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. According to Kumar (2008), the descriptive survey method looks with intense accuracy at the phenomenon of the moment and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The study’s population comprised of 450 secondary school teachers. The study employed the simple random sampling technique to select the respondents because it permitted every teacher an equal opportunity of participating in the study (Bell, 2003). Data were gathered by means of a questionnaire which was largely made up of close-ended questions and one open-ended question. The question was chosen because of its ability to reach many respondents who live in widely dispersed addresses and preserves anonymity which encourages greater honesty (Cohen and Manion, 2005). However, as Blumberg (2008) argues, the questionnaire generally has a low response rate and is inflexible in that it does not allow ideas or comments to be explored in-depth and many questions may remain unanswered. The researchers distributed the questionnaires to the various schools and collected them after two weeks. Data collected from the questionnaires produced descriptive statistics around the variables under study. These statistics were computed and inferential implications from them derived and recorded.

## 6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study set out to investigate perceptions of teachers towards the student expulsion procedures in Zimbabwean secondary schools. This section is presented in two parts namely, presentation of data and discussion, thereof.

### Presentation of Data

**Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Sex**  
(N = 80)

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	38	47
Female	42	53
<b>Totals</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>



The information on table 1 above shows that the sample had more females (53%) than males (47%). This statistic signifies the preponderance of women teachers in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

**Table 2: Composition of Respondents by Age**  
(N = 80)

Age in Years	Frequency	Percentage
Below 20	1	1
20 – 29	5	7
30 – 39	48	60
40 – 49	18	22
50 and above	8	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 above shows that the majority of teachers in the sample were above thirty years of age (92%).

**Table 3: Composition of Respondents by Working Experience**  
(N = 80)

Experience in Years	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 5	2	3
6 – 10	17	21
11 – 15	46	57
16 – 20	10	12
Over 20	5	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

The table above, table 3, shows that 57% of the respondents fell within the 11 – 15 years of experience group. Those who have served for 10 years and below constituted 24% of the respondents and those with 16 – 20 years of experience 12%. Finally, those who have served in the education system for over 20 years were 7% of the respondents.

**Table 4: Responses to question: “Are you aware of the current student expulsion procedures applying to your school?”**  
(N = 80)

Category of Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	63	79
No	6	8
Not Sure	11	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of respondents (79%) indicated that they were aware of the current student expulsion procedures. Thirteen percent (13%) were not sure and only 8% stated that they did not know anything about these procedures.



**Table 5: Responses to the question: “Are there any pupils who commit serious cases of indiscipline in your school?”**

(N = 80)

Category of Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	88
No	10	12
Not Sure	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

The information on table 5 above shows that the majority of respondents (88%) indicated that there were pupils in their schools who committed serious cases of indiscipline. Twelve percent (12%) indicated that there were no serious cases of indiscipline in their schools.

**Table 6: Responses to the question: “How many pupils have been expelled in your school since you joined your current school?”**

(N = 80)

Number Expelled	Frequency	Percentage
0	76	95
1 – 5	4	5
6 – 10	0	0
11 – 15	0	0
16 – 20	0	0
20 and above	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 above reveals that an overwhelming majority of respondents (95%) indicated that no pupil has been expelled since they joined their current school. Only 5% stated that between one and five students were expelled.

**Table 7: Responses to the question: “What could be the reason for the low numbers of pupils/students expelled from your school?”**

(N = 80)

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Very strict school rules.	2	2
Our pupils are well behaved.	2	3
Head and teachers do not tolerate misbehaviour.	1	1
It is very difficult to expel a deserving student.	71	89
We have not experienced cases of misbehaviour warranting expulsion.	4	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>



Table 7 above shows that the majority of the respondents (71%) indicated that the major reason why they were low numbers of students expelled from their school was due to the cumbersome nature of the process of expelling deserving students. Five percent (5%) of the respondents stated that none of their students had committed offences that warranted expulsion. Two percent (2%) attributed the low numbers to strict school rules and 1% indicated that the head and teachers did not tolerate misbehaviour.

**Table 8: Responses to the question: “Who do you suggest should have the final say in students’ expulsion?”**  
(N = 80)

Category of Responses	Frequency	Percentage
The Secretary for Education	5	6
The Provincial Education Officer.	3	4
The District Education Officer.	4	5
The Head	9	12
School Disciplinary Committee.	57	71
School Development Committee.	2	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 8 above shows that most of the teachers indicated that the School Disciplinary Committee (71%) should have the final say on expelling a student. Those who thought the head should have the last say constituted 12% and those who indicated that the Secretary for Education, Provincial Education Director and District Education Officer constituted 6%; 5% and 4% respectively.

The questionnaire had one open-ended question which bolstered data from the close-ended questions. The question wanted the respondents to indicate the most common cases of serious misbehaviour committed by their students that warranted expulsion. The most common responses in order of popularity included the following:

- Violence against teachers and other students.
- Possession of dangerous weapons.
- Sexual abuse of younger students or children outside the schools.
- Stealing in a big way.
- Chronic absenteeism.

## 7. DISCUSSION

The information from the study revealed that the majority of teachers under study were female. There is generally a tendency by students to bully female teachers than male ones, resulting in the female teachers failing to control these bullies during their lessons. This confirms experiences by Hartjes (2007) who states that she had her classes disrupted by disrespectful behaviour from the boys, who stole her personal property from her classroom as well as enduring so much verbal abuse hurled at her and she states that fortunately she has not been physically attacked although she has had students who have intimidated her.

The data also show that teachers are very much aware of the student expulsion procedures as articulated by Policy Circular Number 35 of 1993. This policy circular provides guidelines or procedures to be followed when expelling students from school. This means that teachers are aware that a head cannot expel a pupil without the prior approval of the Provincial Education Director and that parents of the expelled child can appeal to the Secretary of Education against the expulsion and where possible, the secretary can reverse the expulsion and force the school to readmit the student.



The information reveals that there is a significant number of pupils who commit serious cases of indiscipline in schools and continue with their learning as if nothing happened. This situation undermines the authority of the head since they cannot deal with the expulsion until the Provincial Director decides what to do for the head. As a result, as Madziyire (2010) argues, most heads would rather ignore processing expulsion cases because of the long time it takes for a student to be eventually expelled.

The information also reveals that most teachers believe that the major reason for the few numbers expelled from their schools is that it is very difficult to expel students who have committed serious cases of indiscipline. The process takes a very long time and some students' period of suspension (a pupil awaiting expulsion should be on suspension for not more than 14 days) expire before the conclusion of the intended expulsion, and the head is forced to take back the pupils into school (Monroe, 2005). As Hurlock (2008) argues, punishment must follow the transgression as soon as possible so that the student will associate the two.

Data from the study also show that teachers believe that School Disciplinary Committees should have the final say in determining expulsion of students who have seriously transgressed the rules of the school. The School Disciplinary Committee is usually composed of the head of the school, the deputy head, plus the senior master and senior woman. The head is the chairperson of the committee. According to teachers in this study, this is the committee that ought to have the final say on expulsions. This implies decentralisation of powers to expel students to schools and it tallies to what obtains in the United Kingdom where only the head teacher is legally empowered to expel a student (McManus, 2005).

The data also revealed that the most common cases of serious misbehaviour included violence against teachers and other students, possession of dangerous weapons, sexual abuse of younger students in the school or children outside the school, stealing and unexplained absenteeism. This finding tallies with observations by Dhlomo (2012) who discovered that the major reasons that caused the expulsion of students from school included violent behaviour, sexual offences, vandalism, insubordination, truancy, stealing and alcohol and drugs.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

In view of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions:

- Teachers are aware of the student expulsion procedures as articulated by the Government through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education.
- Most teachers believe that the major reason for the few numbers of students expelled from schools is due to the cumbersome process of instituting the expulsion.
- Teachers believe that the School Disciplinary Committee is best suited to make the final decision on the expulsion of students.
- The most common cases of serious indiscipline that warranted expulsion included violence against teachers and other students, possession of dangerous weapons, sexual abuse of younger students within the school or children outside the school, stealing and absenteeism.





## 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the researchers would like to make the following recommendations.

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should solicit ideas from teachers on how best the policy on expulsion of pupils should be designed for the benefit of schools and learners.
- The process of expulsion should be expedited so that student who deserve to be expelled from school should be removed at the earliest possible time so as to avoid more dangerous action from these students and bad influence to other students.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should decentralise the decision to expel pupils to School Disciplinary Committees because these are made up of experienced professionals in the schools.
- Some of the serious cases of indiscipline most common in the schools border on broader criminal behaviour; and schools should quickly report some of these cases immediately to the police as they await the expulsion procedures to be completed.

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