

# Teaching Social Skills as a Proactive Discipline Management Strategy: Experiences of Selected Secondary Schools in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province, Zimbabwe

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**Abstract** The study examined how secondary schools use proactive teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline among learners in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province. The study was ingrained in interpretive paradigm, adopted qualitative approach and employed a case study design. Purposive sampling technique was used to select four secondary schools and participants who comprised two education officers, four school heads; four school counsellors, twenty members of the disciplinary committee, forty prefects and four school development committee chairpersons. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews, and were analysed thematically. The study established that learners were taught social skills during guidance and counselling lessons and club sessions which were part of the co-curricular programmes offered in schools. It was found that the topics taught during the teaching of social skills included conduct, relationships, community involvement; decision-making skills, communication skills, drug and substance abuse, career guidance, stress management, honesty and integrity, conflict resolution, assertiveness, self-awareness and health issues, among others. The study also revealed that some learners were engaged in community activities to reach out to underprivileged members of the society. The results further indicated that the teaching social skills strategy was effective because it taught learners to be responsible for their behaviour and contributed to the reduction of unbecoming behaviour cases in schools. Nevertheless, the teaching social skills strategy faced constraints mainly from some teachers' and parents' negative attitudes towards social skills activities. The study concluded that the use of proactive teaching social skills strategy yielded positive results as schools exposed learners to multiple activities that contributed to the modification of learner behaviour which created a safe teaching and learning environment. The study recommended that schools should intensify the training programmes for teachers and parents to positively influence their attitudes towards the teaching of social skills in order to reinforce positive behaviour among learners.

**Keywords:** *discipline management, proactive, secondary schools, strategy, teaching social skills*

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## 1. Introduction

The incidences of untoward learner behaviour reported in schools worldwide have resulted in extensive research by various scholars in a bid to find out the causes of such behaviour and develop suitable intervention strategies to assist teachers to effectively manage their classes during instructional delivery. Considering the prevailing situation where emphasis is on human rights and children's rights, the world is turning more towards proactive strategies of upholding discipline in schools. A proactive response to discipline is in direct contrast to prevalent reactive practices for managing behaviour which encompass corporal

punishment, loss of privileges, detention, reprimands, and fines [1]. Nonetheless, disciplining learners has demonstrated to be a huge task for schools especially in using punitive versus supportive disciplinary strategies [2]. Current research studies pertaining to discipline strategies, however, have shown that punitive strategies seem to be of limited worth in enhancing responsible learner behaviour and should be substituted by proactive and interactive discipline practices [3,4]. Accordingly, without school-wide discipline plans, schools will continue to rely on reactionary methods, such as suspension, which have been found to impact negatively on offending learners as they are removed from productive learning environments [1]. As a way of providing quality learning atmosphere and promoting learner and teacher safety, schools put much emphasis on

effectively managing and reducing learner discipline problems. It has been observed that learners' accomplishment in life and academic success are most effective when minimal behaviour problems exist in schools [5]. Disruptive learner behaviours may hinder the teaching and learning process. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the school administration to provide an environment that is both physically and emotionally safe for teachers and learners. Thus, the unbecoming behaviour of learners, results in school personnel spending a lot of time and resources dealing with learner discipline issues [6]. Hence, it is essential that disciplinary measures adopted by schools should teach learners self-control or self-regulation based on a contract that binds the teacher and learners together so that learning can be more effective. Such proactive methods should instil responsibility in learners to ensure that appropriate behaviour is manifested in the teaching and learning environment [3]. Consequently, there is need to find out how schools employ teaching social skills as a proactive strategy to manage discipline.

## 2. Background

Many countries worldwide have embarked on a paradigm shift in terms of maintaining discipline in schools. It has been observed that because of lack of knowledge in effective discipline intervention strategies, most teachers, in an attempt to manage learner behaviour, resort to reactive approaches that focus on immediately terminating challenging behaviour through aversive consequences [7]. Studies have revealed that teachers repeatedly use verbal reprimands, negative stares, threats, time-outs, and physical force or restraints to suppress challenging learner behaviour [8]. Although these reactive strategies are easy to use and can help to control ill behaviour among learners, the strategies have proved to be ineffective [7]. A study conducted by [9] in United States of America (USA) has revealed that despite of their nationality, all learners who participated in the study perceived punitive discipline strategies to be related to distraction from schoolwork and shaping their feeling towards their teachers [3]. Hence, in an effort to reduce inappropriate learner behaviour and improve academic achievement, many schools globally have initiated proactive, positive approaches, in place of reactive, punitive ones [5].

One such proactive approach is teaching social skills to learners in order for schools to create safe and effective learning environments. Social skills can be defined as a range of interactive behaviours that enable an individual to relate with others in ways that result in positive interactions [8]. To elaborate further, social skills are proactive strategies taught to learners to ensure that they obtain the necessary skills required to function socially in society, for example, anger management, conflict resolution, empathy, problem-solving and many others [10,11]. Learners with discipline problems are often rejected by their peers and do not have the opportunity to learn appropriate social skills through normal peer interaction [12]. These learners often turn to disruptive or acting-out behaviour. Providing them with the opportunity to learn and practice social skills can break the negative interaction cycle [13].

Research commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2008 has indicated that learners who participate in decision-making enjoy enhanced self-esteem and motivation, gain important personal and social skills. Such learner involvement leads to better relationships, more relevant and effective learning. Thus, resulting in learners and adults working together as partners to ensure that their school provides the best possible learning environment for all. In such a scenario, learners are involved in their own learning, and feel that they have a stake in their learning community [14]. Reference [15] confirms that assisting learners learn how to get along with others is a crucial strategy in building a caring and safe school culture. While many learners come to school with some social skills already in place, most learners benefit from direct teaching of appropriate social skills, such as thinking before acting, listening, establishing and maintaining relationships, dealing with feelings, accepting consequences, and dealing with peer pressure. Reference [16] concurs that proactive schools recognise that just as academic skills can be taught, so can appropriate social skills. These schools incorporate social skills lessons into their daily activities and routines. They emphasise civility, and they model the qualities they want to develop in their learners.

It is imperative to note that some learners require individual interventions to address their social skills deficits. Social skills instruction is most effective when approaches chosen are tailored to meet the learner's individual needs. Individual skills that require attention are identified and prioritised by the teacher. The teacher then uses a structured teaching process with the learner. Teaching the learner to produce social behaviours is not enough. The focus of social skills instruction must be the generalisation of learned social behaviours across settings, time, and behaviour [10].

Consistent modelling, teaching, and reinforcement of positive social skills, is an important part of successfully encouraging positive social behaviour among learners, helping to enhance learners' self-control, respect for the rights of others, and sense of responsibility for their own actions [15]. This, therefore, suggests that teaching social skills to learners like academic subjects will make learners conscious of the importance of good conduct. Hence, schools will experience minimal cases of ill-behaviour.

As a way of maintaining discipline, [17] further advises that schools should provide multiple opportunities for learners to apply skills of social and moral problem-solving and responsible behaviour. Such opportunities should include class meetings in which classroom and school-wide problems are addressed; meaningful learner government activities (for example, helping others in the community); programmes and activities for conflict resolution, peer mediation, service learning, and cooperative learning; as well as sports and extracurricular activities.

In the United States of America, a variety of programmes and strategies have been developed to assist learners in finding alternative ways to deal with discipline and behavioural issues. These programmes are delivered in a proactive, preventative approach to classrooms or small groups of learners [10]. These interventions that help learners with emotional/behavioural disorders and social skills deficits have potential to significantly improve

school-wide behaviour and safety [18]. Reference [19] give Resolving Conflict Creatively Programme (RCCP) as an example of a social-cognitive intervention in which learners are taught conflict resolution through modelling, role playing, interviewing, and small group work. The fifty-one weekly lessons are used to teach skills such as communication, listening, self-expression, cooperation, recognising the value of diversity, and countering bias. Training is an essential component of RCCP programme. Teachers receive training and on-going support to facilitate their integration of concepts and skills into the existing curriculum. In addition, school administrators, support staff, and parents receive training in conflict resolution techniques consistent with those imparted to teachers. A selected group of students receive peer mediation training.

Reference [19] further maintain that a comprehensive review of research reveal that the social-cognitive approach used within RCCP was effective for all age groups of learners in reducing crime, anti-social behaviour, and conduct problems. Specifically related to RCCP, results were promising when the teachers received a moderate amount of training and assistance, covered half of the lessons or more, and had a low number of peer mediators in their class. Learners in these classes were significantly less hostile. Furthermore, learner pro-social behaviour increased, as compared to learners in classrooms where teachers taught fewer RCCP lessons and relied on relatively more peer mediators.

The issue of teaching conflict resolution skills is critical if schools are to successfully manage the behaviour of learners. Conflict resolution is an important feature of both personal and inter-personal relations. Conflict resolution ends disputes before they lead to physical fighting. The most common type of conflict amongst learners is inter-personal, which is conflict between two or more people. These conflicts may take the form of put-downs (insults), teasing, fights, turn-taking problems, and conflicts regarding playground opportunities, access to or possession of materials, and even academic work. These conflicts arise especially from bullying, and the conflicts can escalate rapidly if they are not negotiated or mediated [20,21]. As a result, learners should be taught compromise and collaboration. These skills will help learners to develop into well-balanced human beings who can resolve conflict without resorting to violent actions [20]. In the most comprehensive evaluation of conflict resolution to date, [13] reported that conflict resolution and peer mediation have been successful in reducing school suspension and improving maintenance of discipline in schools.

In Zimbabwe, the United Nations Convention on Child's Rights of 1989 and the Constitution of Zimbabwe of 2013 guidelines are observed by schools when employing discipline strategies. Through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MOPSE) schools are encouraged to adopt proactive discipline management strategies as they deal with learners' untoward behaviour. To ensure that schools manage learners' behaviour problems as expected, MOPSE has provided to all schools Permanent Secretary's Policy Circular Number P 35 of 1999 which originated from Statutory Instrument 362 of 98 as a guide on how to deal with discipline issues [22].

Regardless of the efforts made by MOPSE, some dissatisfaction has been heard from various stakeholders proclaiming that the safety of learners was not certain in schools as they were repeatedly subjected to punitive discipline strategies [2,4,23,24]. In view of the concerns raised informally by a number of stakeholders and media, there is no clear evidence as to how schools use teaching social skills as a proactive strategy to manage the behaviour of learners. It is in light of the foregoing debate that this study envisioned to examine how the teaching social skills strategy is used to manage discipline in selected Bulawayo Metropolitan Province Secondary Schools.

### 3. Research Question

The study was guided by the succeeding research question:

How are secondary schools employing the teaching social skills strategy to manage discipline in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province?

### 4. Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to examine how secondary schools employ the teaching social skills strategy to manage discipline in Bulawayo Metropolitan Province.

### 5. Methods

The study was entrenched in interpretive research paradigm because of its strengths that come from its naturalistic approach where a researcher understands the motives, meanings, reasons and other subjective experiences which are time and context bound [25]. Qualitative approach was embraced as it assisted the researcher to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning participants bring to them [26]. A case study design was chosen because it exposed the researcher to in-depth understanding of the phenomenon understudy within its real-life context through interaction with the participants in their natural setting [27,28]. The participants who composed of four school heads, four school counsellors, and two education officers, twenty members of the disciplinary committee, forty prefects and four school development committee chairpersons were purposively selected as a study sample. Data were gathered using semi-structured face to face interviews with school heads, school counsellors and school development committee chairpersons, and focus group interviews with members of the disciplinary committee and prefects. The data were coded, transcribed and thematically analysed to answer the research question [28].

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the results of the study, the researcher audio recorded interview sessions to ensure precise reflection of the participants' opinions, transcribed interviews verbatim and presented thick descriptions of the data from multiple sources [29]. As for ethical considerations, the issues of consent, honest, privacy and confidentiality, as well as

protection from harm were considered by the researcher in data collection, management and reporting.

## 6. Results

Developing the learner holistically is one of the schools' mandates. This could be achieved if learners are exposed to various social skills. Exposing learners to social skills has a positive impact on learners' behaviour. Hence, the teaching of social skills is one of the proactive strategies that contribute positively to the maintenance of discipline in schools. The participants' views on this proactive discipline management strategy are presented under respective sub-themes below. The participants were coded as follows: SH1-SH4=School Heads, EO1-EO2=Education Officers, SC1-SC4=School Counsellors, SDC1-SDC4=School Development Committee Chairpersons, FGDC1-FGDC4=Focus Group interview for Members of the Disciplinary Committee and FGP1-FGP4=Focus Group interview for Prefects.

### 6.1. Teaching of Social Skills in Schools

The participants were asked to give an overview of how social skills were taught in schools. In response, most of the participants concurred that the teaching of social skills in schools was done mainly through clubs and guidance and counselling lessons. Some of their responses are presented below.

SH1: *The teaching of social skills is done either through clubs or through guidance and counselling lessons. They do a lot on how to deal with different behaviours in guidance and counselling lessons.*

SH2: *I think teaching of social skills is done in a number of ways; there are guidance and counselling lessons which cover a lot of ground concerning social skills. There are also some clubs such as public speaking, debate and quiz clubs, and drama club where the learners dramatize what is happening at home, for example, domestic violence, how to deal with it and who is affected, such issues.*

SH3: *Social skills are done through clubs, for example, Boy Empowerment Movement (BEM)/Girl Empowerment Movement (GEM) club that is what they concentrate on, they do things which will benefit them in terms of behaviour, in terms of life, they also engage in community activities. At one time they mobilised the community around and cleaned the environment and of late they took part in cleaning the market situated at the shopping centre, this activity was organised by the local business person.*

The members of the disciplinary committee were also asked to give their opinions regarding the same question and their responses echoed the same sentiments with those of school heads. This is what was said,

FGDC1: *The teaching of social skills is done through guidance and counselling lessons, and public speaking.*

FGDC2: *The teaching of social skills in the school is done through clubs e.g. junior police, junior air cadets, Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, grassroots soccer club, HIV/ADS club.*

Responding to the same question, the school counsellors were also in agreement with the views of school heads and

members of the disciplinary committee. For instance, they responded as follows,

SC1: *Social skills are taught through guidance and counselling lessons, at assemblies and also through clubs.*

SC4: *Social skills are taught under guidance and counselling lessons. I think it is important for learners, we always emphasise as the guidance and counselling department that it does not have weight to teach the learner to be an engineer yet that learner does not have social skills and will be rejected by the society. So you should build an individual who is holistic who will be able to integrate into the society and be able to make decisions which society expects. Social skills are also taught through clubs, e.g. AIDS club, Interact club, Sesikhathale club, Scripture Union, etc.*

SC2: *The teaching of social skills is done but it has not reached much advanced level. Yes, learners at advanced level are taught communication skills and in guidance and counselling there are topics covering that, e.g., the attributes of "Ubuntu" humanity. It is also taught through clubs e.g. Interact club, BEM/GEM club and many other clubs. Though we feel we should be doing more so that all the learners are involved in the clubs.*

On the same issue, the prefect participants' responses concurred stating that,

FGP1: *Social skills are taught through guidance and counselling lessons and through clubs, e.g., Interact Club, BEM/GEM. Some facilitators are also invited.*

FGP3: *The teaching of social skills in the school is done through clubs, peer education and during guidance and counselling lessons.*

The SDC chairpersons were also asked to give their observations on the same issue; it is evident from their responses that a few had an idea on how social skills are taught in schools. Their answers to the question are presented below.

SDC1: *I think social skills are taught during lessons.*

SDC2: *Social skills are taught through clubs like debate club, culture club, and many others. All learners are encouraged to be a member of at least one club in the school.*

SDC3: *I am not sure how the teaching of social skills is done at the school.*

SDC4: *It is not done that much.*

Regarding the same question, the Education Officers' responses were in support of the majority of other participants' responses. Thus, their responses are presented below.

EO1: *Other areas that are not covered in the academic subjects is mainly through guidance and counselling and also addressed by other stakeholders who come in to schools, invited by schools to address learners.*

EO2: *Well, it is taught through guidance and counselling lessons and in the clubs as well because in these clubs learners are exposed to some challenging tasks that they have to sometimes sit down as a group and work on and then make presentations.*

Nonetheless, participants' responses revealed that schools experienced challenges in implementing the teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline. Data showed that the attitudes of some teachers and some parents were barriers to implementation of teaching social skills strategy. Examples of participants' responses are as follows,

FGDC4: *The teaching of social skills sometimes depends on the attitude of the teacher because the learners might want to attend social skills activities but the teacher might want the learners to focus on the academic subjects because learners are not examined on the social skills, so it is a big challenge.*

FGDC2: *Some parents might not appreciate the value of social skills because of bias they have towards academic subjects. As a result they discourage their children to take part in club activities.*

It is evident that selected schools used the teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline. This is done mainly through clubs and guidance and counselling lessons. It emerged that all learners are encouraged to be members of at least one club in the school so that no learner is left out. It was also mentioned that learners are involved in community service which stimulates a sense of responsibility on learners. As learners participate in such activities, their behaviour is moulded. Thus, selected schools notice the importance of developing the social attributes of learners in employing teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline.

## 6.2. Topics Included in the Teaching of Social Skills

For the schools to effectively maintain discipline, it is essential that they identify appropriate topics to be taught to learners as they apply teaching social skills strategy. This will make learners realise the value of being involved in social skills activities at the same time shaping learner behaviour in a positive way. The participants were asked to give an insight into the aspects that were included in teaching social skills in schools. It emerged from the participants' responses that various topics were covered to equip learners with social skills. Examples of participants' responses are as follows:

SH1: *At times they look at personal grooming and relationships since they are now at the adolescence stage. How to handle their emotions at adolescence stage, love affairs which they engage in, they talk about pregnancies, we will be equipping them on what they should do when they are sexually active.*

SH2: *We focus on communication skills, drug and alcohol abuse, career guidance, decision-making, relationships, domestic violence.*

SH3: *The aspects taught include conduct, survival skills, relationships, community involvement and decision-making skills among others.*

The members of the disciplinary committee also concurred with the school heads when they said,

FGDC1: *We teach them team work, responsibility, good decision making, negotiations and critical thinking, stress management, health and life skills, honesty and integrity.*

FGDC2: *They are taught interactive aspects, that is, how to interact effectively with other people, tolerance, self-sufficiency, relationships, self-esteem and many others.*

FGDC3: *The issues taught include self-control, communication skills, conflict resolution, and relationships.*

FGDC4: *I think mostly we are focusing on the social side, life issues like relationships, e.g., talk about abstinence, health issues, leadership skills and communication skills, community involvement.*

On the same question, the school counsellors' responses were also similar to those given by other participants. Their responses are given below.

SC1: *We teach them decision making, conflict resolution, communication, negotiations, assertiveness, relationships, stress management.*

SC3: *We talk of decision-making, assertiveness, self-confidence, self-awareness, community involvement and many others.*

SC4: *They are taught decision-making, assertiveness, judgement, relationships, health issues, e.g. sexual reproductive health, communication skills, conflict resolution.*

It is also evident from the prefect participants' responses that they are in agreement with what was said by the majority of the participants. They indicated that,

FGP1: *The issues included are health issues, drug and substance abuse, decision-making, relationships.*

FGP3: *The aspects included are self-esteem, how you present yourself, communication, conflict resolution, relationships, community involvement and decision-making.*

FGP4: *The issues included are relationships, communication, career guidance, tolerance, decision-making, leadership skills and many others.*

Some chairpersons concurred with most of the participants' responses, while others were not informed about the issues included in the teaching of social skills.

SDC1 explained, *the aspects that are included are: risk management, conflict resolution, communication, and health issues, and I attended the workshop with the head-boy and head-girl where these issues were discussed.*

SDC2 agreed, *the aspects that are focused on include public speaking, health issues, moral values, relationships, decision-making, tolerance and community involvement.* However, both SDC3 and SDC4 did not know the aspects included in the teaching of social skills. SDC3 admits *...I am not sure of the aspects that are included in the teaching of social skills.*

The responses of both Education Officers show that they are in consensus with the responses of the majority of the participants. For instance, EO1 acknowledged that *... the issues included in discussions include crime reduction, drug and alcohol abuse, health issues, stress management.* EO2 buttress the view when she confirmed that *...they are taught conflict resolution, sexuality, relationships, and decision-making skills.*

The information given by the participants reveals that learners are exposed to a variety of topics during the enactment of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in schools. The implication is that if learners are informed through these topics, they will be encouraged to maintain good conduct in schools.

## 6.3. Participation of Learners in the Teaching and Learning of Social Skills

In any learning situation, for any teaching and learning activity to be effective, learners should be at the forefront. This also applies to the teaching of social skills where learners are expected to be active participants so that their behaviour is shaped positively through active participation. In the light of this, participants were requested to give insight on how learners participated during the teaching and learning of social skills. In response to the question,

most of the participants agreed that learners were actively involved in the social skills activities. The evidence of their responses is given below.

SH1: *Learners are actively involved, learners open up, actively participate, and they learn a lot from the lessons because they no longer have aunts at their homes whom culturally would discuss such issues with them. You will be surprised by the knowledge that they have and some of the questions they ask, and I would say at this stage I would not talk about such things.*

SH2: *Learners are actively involved because it is not as stressful as academic subjects. They really enjoy it.*

In their responses to the same question, the members of the disciplinary committee supported the school heads' observations. They said,

FGDC1: *Learners are very much free when performing the activities; this helps them to open up because the atmosphere will be relaxed.*

FGDC4: *Learners participate actively especially depending on the methods used. For example, members of the Interact Club would ask for donations and they would go to Mpilo Hospital and other institutions to distribute their donations to the needy. They become involved in community activities.*

Regarding the same issue, the school counsellors' answers also reiterated what came out from other participants. For example, this is what was said,

SC1: *Learners are physically involved and they are participative, actively involved. They also actively participate in the clubs.*

SC2: *Learners are quite active, though there are some who still need to improve on the aspects of confidence, there are some of our learners who lack confidence especially during guidance and counselling lessons. Whilst we use English when communicating with learners, we also encourage teachers to use vernacular so that every learner will be in a position to participate.*

SC3: *Learners actively participate through activities like drama, poems. They also do research because we have the internet we ask them to go and find out how certain things are done in different places. Again they do community service, they do community dialogues, like the other time we called the nurses, church leaders, some of the parents and school leavers to come and teach learners how certain skills are done. They really actively participate during these activities.*

SC4 explained, *learners are very participative especially in sexual reproductive health. They like to understand issues that affect them in life. The fact that we no longer have aunts and uncles who would talk to them, you would find that some are worrying about the developments which take place in their bodies, you just tell them that it is just a passing phase; it is just a growing up stage. So they love these lessons.*

The responses given by prefect participants pertaining to the same issue indicate that they were also in accord with other participants' responses. Thus, FGP2 acknowledges that ... *learners are actively involved in social skills activities.*

FGP3 adds ... *learners are sometimes allocated assignments which they research on and make presentations. They are very active during social skills activities.*

However, the use of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in schools has been hindered by some

challenges. For example, FGDC4 lamented, *in the teaching of social skills to the learners, I am worried about time on the part of the learners, because of the load that the learners have. Sometimes the learners do not have enough time to fully participate in social skills activities.*

The data presented above indicate that learners are actively involved in the teaching and learning of social skills. It emerged from the participants' responses that vernacular language is used during the teaching of social skills activities to encourage every learner to actively participate. The participants also mentioned that learners are involved in community dialogue where members of the community with expertise are invited to schools to share their experiences with learners. At the same time learners are given an opportunity to ask questions on social issues. Another important aspect which was raised by the participants is that during the teaching of social skills, schools play the roles of traditional aunts and uncles who would culturally teach learners some of the social skills at home. Such social skills are now taught in schools because some learners are orphans who live alone at home. Schools teach learners these social skills so that all learners get proper guidance. The cited data prove that there are good practices in selected schools in the execution of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline.

#### 6.4. Effectiveness of Teaching Social Skills in Maintaining Discipline in Schools

The participants were asked to express their views on the effectiveness of teaching social skills as a proactive discipline management strategy. The responses that were given by most of the participants show that the strategy is an effective tool of maintaining discipline in selected schools.

SH3 attested, *teaching social skills strategy is effective because it teaches learners to be responsible for their behaviour or actions.*

SH4 concurred, *this strategy is very effective as it teaches learners self-control. Some cases of indiscipline have reduced in the school because most of the learners will be occupied in clubs during their free time.*

The members of the disciplinary committee also supported the school heads' views on the effectiveness of teaching social skills strategy. This is what was said,

FGDC1: *The teaching social skills strategy is very effective because we see some of those who have left the school coming back into the school to now share with learners whatever they learnt. Involvement of learners in social skills also keeps learners occupied instead of being idle, and loitering around. That is, it minimises cases of indiscipline in the school.*

FGDC4: *The strategy is very effective because we realise that learners who have left this school with those skills they have been able to integrate well with communities anywhere in the world.*

In agreement with other participants' responses were the school counsellors. SC2 confirmed ... *the strategy is quite effective, it has brought good results.*

SC4 explained, *I think this one I will scale it number one of them all, this strategy is very effective because someone who has social skills is willing to learn, he/she actually finds the reason to learn but someone who does*

*not have the social skills is problematic, you correct them in one aspect and tomorrow it will be the other. So I feel teaching of social skills is the best as we witnessed its positive results.*

The perfect participants also echoed the same sentiments as other participants.

FGP1 explained, *the strategy is effective in the sense that the learners get to know what is good and what is bad. They know what they have to do and what not to do. It prevents them from misbehaving.*

FGP4 corroborated, *the teaching social skills strategy is effective to a greater extent in the sense that through the carrying out of these activities one gets to make sound decisions so by virtue of that, I think it is effective.*

The SDC chairpersons also viewed the teaching social skills strategy as effective in maintaining discipline in schools. Their responses were in consensus with other participants' views. SDC2 acknowledged that ... *the strategy is quite effective because it teaches children to be responsible for their behaviour.*

SDC3 added ... *the strategy is effective because it promotes positive discipline in the school.*

The Education Officers also expressed that the teaching social skills strategy was effective in maintaining discipline in schools. Their views were in accord with other participants' responses.

EO1 explained, *the strategy is actually very effective because learners are empowered with skills on how they can solve problems they encounter in life; and this has reduced the cases of unbecoming behaviour in schools.*

EO2 concurred, *I think the strategy is effective; actually it helps us to produce a disciplined self-reliant and positive thinking community.*

The data presented above show that the application of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in selected schools is effective regardless of the challenges encountered during the implementation process. The responses also revealed that as schools employ the teaching social skills strategy, they relate to other strategies such as guidance and counselling, code of conduct, communication and behaviour modelling. It came out that learners are taught social skills during guidance and counselling lessons. In addition, the issues emphasised during the teaching of social skills include good conduct which reinforces the adherence to school rules and regulations; communication skills which is crucial in conflict resolution and behaviour modelling where learners are encouraged emulate good behaviour as they interact during club sessions.

## 7. Discussion

The teaching of social skills is paramount to the social development of the learner. Schools are expected to inculcate these skills to learners so that the learners are developed holistically. The teaching of social skills contributes to shaping the behaviour of the learner positively. According to [10] the goal of social skills instruction is to teach socially acceptable behaviours that will result in better acceptance by classroom peers and their teachers. Hence, this section discusses the findings of the study pertaining to the use of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in selected schools.

Concerning the execution of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in schools, the study established that learners were taught social skills during club sessions which were part of the co-curricular programmes offered in schools. The finding concurs with [13] who affirmed that providing learners with the opportunity to learn and practice social skills can break the negative interaction cycle. Thus, if learners are kept occupied and remained focused on what they would be engaged in during the club sessions, their behaviour would be moulded positively. Social skills activities result in learners spending most of their time confined to productive activities. The social skills activities influence learners to take up the responsibility of their behaviours. According to [12] learners with discipline problems are often rejected by their peers and do not have the opportunity to learn appropriate social skills through normal peer interaction. Consequently, such learners should benefit from the social skills programmes offered by schools. The involvement of learners in social skills would help those learners who would have faced rejection by their peers to restore their relationships with their peers.

The findings of the study also indicated that social skills were taught during guidance and counselling lessons. This finding is congruent with [16] observation that proactive schools recognise that just as academic skills can be taught, so can appropriate social skills. Reference [16] further mentions that these schools incorporate social skills lessons into their daily activities and routines. They emphasise civility, and they model the qualities they want to develop in their learners. Furthermore, the results of the study concur with [15] which concede that consistent modelling, teaching, and reinforcement of positive social skills, is an important part of successfully encouraging positive social behaviour among learners. This includes helping to enhance learners' self-control, respect for the rights of others, and sense of responsibility for their own actions.

As for the topics included in the teaching of social skills to maintain discipline, the study found that the aspects taught included conduct, relationships, community involvement; decision-making skills, communication skills, drug and substance abuse, career guidance, stress management, honesty and integrity, tolerance, conflict resolution, leadership skills, negotiations, assertiveness, self-awareness, health issues, and moral values among others. The findings of the study are in accordance with the revelations found in literature that while many learners come to school with some social skills already in place, most learners benefit from direct teaching of appropriate social skills, such as thinking before acting, listening, establishing and maintaining relationships, dealing with feelings, accepting consequences, dealing with peer pressure, problem-solving, conflict resolution, self-control, communication, negotiation, sharing, good manners, stress management, and decision making [15,30].

Regarding the participation of learners in the enactment of the teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in schools, the study found that learners were active participants during the teaching and learning of social skills. The results of the study revealed that whilst English was used as medium of instruction in schools, teachers were encouraged to use vernacular when teaching social

skills so that all learners participate. It also emerged from the findings that learners opened up in sharing information probably due to the fact that most of them no longer had aunts and uncles at their homes who culturally would discuss such issues with them. The results of the current study are in line with the views of [31] which affirms that schools should use classroom activities and lessons to explore and discuss empathy, personal strengths, fairness, kindness, and social responsibility. The involvement of learners in such discussions builds their confidence hence minimises behaviour problems in schools.

The study established that learners were engaged in community activities to reach out to underprivileged members of the society. In addition, it came out from the study that learners participated in community dialogues where they would interact with community members with certain expertise and share their experiences. This helped learners to develop a positive attitude towards other people which in turn would contribute to moulding the behaviour of the learners positively. The results of this study correspond with what was found in the reviewed literature where [15] agrees that helping learners learn how to get along with others is a key strategy in building a caring and safe school culture. The findings also concur with [17] who states that schools should provide multiple opportunities for learners to apply skills of social and moral problem-solving and responsible behaviour. The findings therefore confirm that secondary schools in this study used participatory methodology in the teaching and learning of social skills which allows learners to reflect on their behaviours. Thus, the reflection on the behaviour by learners results in positive change of behaviour which in turn enhances maintenance of discipline in schools.

Another pertinent aspect which was raised in this study is that during the teaching of social skills, schools play the roles of traditional aunts and uncles who would culturally teach learners some of the social skills at home. Such social skills are now taught in schools because some learners are orphans and live alone at home. Teaching social skills therefore gives all learners an opportunity to get proper guidance.

As for the effectiveness of teaching social skills strategy in maintaining discipline in selected schools, the study established that the teaching social skills strategy was very effective because learners were empowered to make sound decisions in solving the problems they encountered in life. It was also found that the teaching social skills strategy encouraged learners to become active members of the society and responsible citizens. The results of the study also revealed that teaching social skills was effective because it taught learners to be responsible for their behaviour and the strategy contributed to the reduction of cases of unbecoming behaviour in selected schools. The findings of the current study confirm the observation by [20] that the teaching of social skills helps learners to develop into well-balanced human beings who can resolve conflict without resorting to violent actions. The study also found that teaching social skills was effective because it helped to produce disciplined, self-reliant and positive thinking members of the school community. The findings of this study also support what was revealed by [10] that social skills are taught to learners to ensure that they obtain the necessary skills

required to function socially in society. It also came out from this study that the involvement of learners in social skills kept the learners occupied instead of being idle, and loitering around. The findings of the current study concur with what was found in literature as revealed by [13] that conflict resolution and peer mediation have demonstrated some success in reducing school suspension and improving maintenance of discipline in schools.

It further emerged from the findings that as selected schools use the teaching social skills strategy in maintaining discipline, learners were exposed to guidance and counselling, taught good conduct, communication skills and encouraged to emulate good behaviour as they interact during club sessions.

Nonetheless, the findings of the study indicated that the schools understudy experience hurdles in employing the teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline. The results of the study showed that some teachers had negative attitudes towards the teaching of social skills. It came out from the findings that some teachers discouraged learners from attending social skills activities because they wanted learners to focus on academic subjects which were examinable. The study also found that some parents did not appreciate the value of social skills because of the bias they had towards academic subjects. It also came out from the study that the execution of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in schools was hindered by the problem of time. It was found that sometimes the learners did not have enough time to fully participate in social skills activities because of the workload. The findings of this study concur with what was revealed by literature that afterschool programmes tend to have high staff and learner turnover which can be a challenge for implementation of intervention programmes [32]. Thus, as pointed out in the findings of the study, those teachers who have a negative attitude towards teaching of social skills would not bother to attend social skills activities as club patrons because they might view it as waste of time, hence, the learners will not be guided by teachers during club activities. It is possible that those learners who are discouraged by teachers and parents might avoid participating in social skills activities as they will be concentrating on academic subjects. As a result, the use of teaching social skills strategy to maintain discipline in selected schools will not be fully realised.

## 8. Conclusion

The study examined how secondary schools use proactive teaching social skills strategy to manage discipline. The study established that learners were taught social skills during guidance and counselling lessons and club sessions which were part of the co-curricular programmes offered in schools. It was also found that the topics taught during the teaching of social skills included conduct, relationships, community involvement; decision-making skills, communication skills, drug and substance abuse, career guidance, stress management, honesty and integrity, tolerance, conflict resolution, leadership skills, negotiations, assertiveness, self-awareness, health issues, and moral values among others. The study indicated that learners were active participants during the

teaching and learning of social skills. It emerged from the findings that learners opened up in sharing information probably due to the fact that most of them no longer had aunts and uncles at their homes who culturally would discuss such issues with them. It came out that whilst English was used as medium of instruction in schools, teachers were encouraged to use vernacular when teaching social skills so that all learners participated. The results of the study further showed that some learners were engaged in community activities to reach out to underprivileged members of the society. Additionally, the study revealed that the teaching social skills strategy was very effective because learners were empowered to make sound decisions in solving the problems they encounter in life. The findings also indicated that the teaching social skills strategy was effective because it taught learners to be responsible of their behaviour and contributed to the reduction of cases of unbecoming behaviour in secondary schools. Nevertheless, the social skills strategy faced constraints mainly from some teachers' and parents' negative attitudes towards social skills activities. Furthermore, it came out that sometimes the learners did not have enough time to fully participate in social skills activities because of the workload.

In spite of the challenges encountered by the schools, the study concludes that use of proactive teaching social skills strategy yielded positive results in selected schools. The exposure of learners to multiple activities resulted in reduction of untoward behaviour cases among learners. As a result, the various activities employed by schools contributed to the modification of learner behaviour which created a safe teaching and learning environment. The study recommends that schools should intensify the training programmes for teachers and parents to positively influence their attitudes towards the teaching of social skills in order to reinforce positive behaviour among learners. The study also recommends that the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should come up with a policy which enforces the teaching of social skills in all schools so that the behaviour of learners can be contained. As for further research, the study recommends that another study should be conducted in private schools since the current study was conducted in public schools.

## Competing Interest

The author has no competing interests.

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