

# How to Achieve Self-Discipline in School: The Perceptions of Students and Teachers

Alexandros Matsis MA

## Introduction

- I work at Agios Georgios Lyceum at Lakatamia, in the Nicosia District.
- I am a teacher of Technology
- School Population:
  - 837 Students
  - 88 Teachers
  - 17 Assistant head teachers
  - One Head teacher
- My interest in the subject of discipline has developed over time.
- Students are becoming all the more aggressive and many teachers complain about their attitude.

## Terms of Reference / Objectives / Research Questions

### ❖ Aim

- **Identify the perceptions of students and teachers on a proposed scenario for improving school performance.**
- This scenario will suggest :
  - Changes in practices followed in classroom management to enhance classroom satisfaction through motivation of the students.
  - By introducing the 'Positive Record Card', (it monitors students' behaviour), it will support the students with serious disruptive behaviour in practicing self-knowledge and self-control.

## Terms of Reference

- **Self-Discipline:** Training and controlling of oneself and one's conduct, usually for personal improvement; it is one's ability to be self-motivated and responsible.
- **Self-Discipline:** is the ability to get yourself to take action regardless of your emotional state

## Research questions

1. Which behaviour elements of students created problems with school safety and affected students' characterisation of conduct?
2. Which school regulations have been violated the most, disrupted the lessons or school order, and to what extent?
3. Is the proposed 'Positive Behaviour Programme' welcomed by the majority of teachers and students?
4. What steps can be taken in the classroom or the school in general that will help students become self-motivated and responsible whilst at the same time eliminate disruptive behaviour?
5. Is the proposed change in class or school management accepted by the majority of the teachers and students?

## Methodology

### Rational for Research Approach

- A survey approach is associated with the idea of asking groups of people questions.
- A survey is based upon a questionnaire and its most significant feature is that its results can be generalised.
- The original thought was to use Action Research, in order to bring about change to the school. Due to time constraints it was rejected. (This approach demands the completion of at least one cycle of actions).

### Rational for Data Collection Techniques

- Three main sources of data: Primary Data (Questionnaire & Interview), Literature Review (Policy & Theory), Learning Diary (Participant Observations).
- Also as I needed to search the school records concerning behaviour issues I have done Documentary Research through the deskwork process. (Secondary Data)
- In order to have qualitative data as well, a Focused group Interview has been prepared for students.
  - By participating in a group interview, the students feel more comfortable to express themselves.
  - In addition, the interview allowed me to clarify the questions and, in a way, picture their feelings of interviewees.

### Scale of Research

- The sample included 72 teachers and 316 students.
- The population of the school amounts to 88 teachers and 827 students.
- The Focus Group Interview included 7 Students.
- The **confidence interval or margin of error** (measures the precision with which an estimate from a single sample approximates the population value) was taken to be 5%.
- The **confidence level** (is the estimated probability that a population estimate lies within a given confidence interval) has been chosen to be 95%.
- The **proportion (or percentage) of the sample** (that will choose a given answer to a survey question) is taken as 50%.

### Reflective Insights

Reflective Practitioner

#### ***My role as a worker/researcher***

- Advantages:
  - It was easier for me to gain access to school records.
  - It was easier for me to distribute and collect questionnaires among my colleague teachers and my students.

- Disadvantages :
  - Duality of roles interferes in the way of thinking. Therefore, I had to be reflective on my own values, actions and position in relation to the research.

## Findings

- “FOUR YEARS OF HELL - THIS SCHOOL IS A PRISON”
  - *The above is translated from a note written in Greek, by a 14 year old student of a Gymnasium.*
- Reply of the students of our school (three most popular themes), when prompted to the question: “What is it about school that you do not like?”
  1. *The behaviour of the teachers.*
  2. *The long hours attending lessons.*
  3. *The fence, the limited space to move around and the fact that it looks like a prison.”*

### “Is the proposed ‘Positive Behaviour Programme’ welcomed by the majority of students and teachers?”

- “The Positive Behaviour Programme suggested encourages the student”
  - 88 % of the teachers and 67% of the students responded that they agree.
- The “Positive Behaviour Programme” suggested will help having a safe school
  - 66 % of the teachers and 52% of the students responded that they agree.
- Response given by the students that were involved in the incidents of disruptive behaviour:
  - 43 % of the students responded that they would be interested to participate.

### “What do you suggest for these cases of serious disruptive behaviour?”

- The most popular theme that came out of the answers given by the teachers is as follows:
  - *“There should be constant communication with the student, the counsellor and his/her parents”. More than that, “Give choices to the student about activities; devote time for discussion and show love, caring and affection to him/her.”*
- The most popular theme that came out of the answers given by the students is as follows:
  - *“Polite discussion of the student with the counsellor, the teacher or psychologist without threatening or punishment.”*

### “Steps to be taken to help students become self-motivated and responsible”

- “The amount of homework should be reduced”
  - 53 % of the teachers and 76 % of the students responded that they agree.
- A considerable amount of homework should be done in class”
  - 71 % of the teachers and 81 % of the students responded that they agree.

- “The teacher should listen to the suggestions made by the student, as to how he /she prefers to be taught something.”
  - 56 % of the teachers and 87 % of the students responded that they agree.
- When the students were asked, “Do you ever feel important at school?” they replied:
  - “No, I never do. They [the teachers] do not give me the chance to express my point of view”. This theme received most of the answers (34 %).
  - “Yes when I participate in creative activities (volley-ball team, undertake a responsibility for something, or somebody asks for my help or offer or advice, or the teachers refer to me)”. This received 22 % of the answers.
- “Group the students in teams of four for cooperative learning”
  - 69 % of the teachers and 70% of the students responded that they agree.
- “The teacher should explain the relation between the topic he/she teaches and life realities”
  - 98% of the teachers and 84% of the students are in favour of this suggestion
- “There should be a complaint box installed, so that students may cast their views or complain about school matters”
  - 83% of the teachers and 90% of the students are in favour of this suggestion.

## Conclusions

- **Research Question (RQ): 1**
  - Bullying between students is the main concern of schools with regard to safety. As per the findings bullying, physical and verbal violence were the major incidents of the serious disruptive behaviour expressed by the students.
- **RQ: 2**
  - The research indicated that 29% of the students have been reported to the Assistant Head Teacher (AHT), for disrupting the lesson.
- **RQ: 3**
  - The proposed ‘Positive Behaviour Programme’ is welcome by a high percentage of the population (teachers and students). They all agree that the programme will have a positive impact for both students and teachers as follows:
    - ✓ Diminish quarrelling between teachers and students.
    - ✓ Encourage the student.
    - ✓ Help the student understand what exactly the teacher demands of him/her.
    - ✓ Constantly evaluate the behaviour of the student.
    - ✓ Help having a safe school.
  - It is worth mentioning that the teachers enjoy their work at school, when they succeed to communicate with the students and transfer their knowledge to them.

- By comparing the three sources of information (Response of teachers, students and Focus Group Interview of students), I came to the conclusion that “threatening and punishment” is not the solution to the problem. However understanding, love and interest of the teacher for the student, the polite discussion of the student with the counsellor, the teacher and the psychologist can lead to the right direction.
- **RQ: 4**
  - Tests to be done only with prior notice. The response of the students to an open type question was that the pressure due to the tests is something that they do not like in school. If the tests are only done with prior notice then the students will be able to organise their studying.
  - There should be a complaint box installed. The response of the students to an open type question on whether they ever feel important at school was that they do not, because the teachers never give them the chance to express their views. By installing a complaint box, it is like inviting them to share with us their views about matters of school that interest them.
- **RQ: 5**
  - By reviewing the answers given already to the previous research questions it is concluded that this question has been addressed.
  - Concluding I would argue that we (teachers) do not value very much what the students want concerning their life in school. Through my findings, I believe that there is a need for better and continued communication between students and teachers. In addition, if we want a better school environment we (stakeholders) have to listen to each other.

## **Recommendations**

### ***Steps to be taken to help students become self-motivated and responsible***

1. Encourage the participation of the students in the lesson and also in the school events (even the less capable ones). By doing that it is like offering them a vote of confidence.
2. Re-design the method of teaching. Reduce frontal teaching, do part of the homework in class, and reduce homework. (In an effort to rescue our children’s love for studying).
3. We should ask the students of how they prefer to be taught something. By doing that we invite them to share the responsibility for their learning. That way they will not fight it with disrupting behaviour.
4. Utilise cooperative learning. By doing so we encourage students to participate in the learning procedure and also we are able to meet different learning styles.
5. We should try for three months to do only tests with prior notice, and evaluate the response of the students. If we find that the results are encouraging we may continue, or else we stoop.

6. Install a complaint / suggestion box.
7. Explain the relation between the topic you teach and life realities: when the students know then they can appreciate the worthiness and therefore become motivated.
8. Agree the uniform and appearance of the students with them

The “**Positive Behaviour Programme**” is considered as reasonable and useful, by the majority of both partners (teachers and students).

- However as asserted by Glasser (1986, p.6) “*only a discipline programme that is also concerned with classroom satisfaction will work*”
- The classroom satisfaction will be achieved through the suggested changes in classroom management, which in their majority appear to be accepted by both the teachers and the students.