

School Discipline in Individualistic and Collectivistic Cultures

Tomislava Vidić

Primary School Remete, Zagreb, Croatia

Abstract

Research on school discipline and student misbehaviour has focused so far on examining the connection between these constructs and school achievement and student welfare. The authors agree up to a point that culture influences school and student behaviour. This work sought to find out whether there are differences in school discipline between individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Minor differences in school discipline were determined in comparative review of quantitative and qualitative research done in the last 20 years. In both individualistic and collectivistic cultures, the following forms of student misbehaviour were proven the most frequent: constant talking with classmates, task avoidance, giggling and non-attentiveness.

Keywords: Classroom Management, Collectivistic Culture, Individualistic Culture, Misbehaviour, School Discipline

1. Introduction

Problems in the classroom, student misbehaviour, and the ways of teacher classroom management are not needs of the new age. As early as in the beginning of the 20th century, William Chandler Bagley (1907) published the book *Classroom management: Its Principles and Technique*. Classroom management plays an essential role in teaching and learning. The consequences of student misbehaviour are hard to measure, but its negative influence on student achievement, school climate and welfare of teachers and students is widely known.

The concept of discipline relates to the teacher's behaviour, i.e. his/her reaction to student behaviour which disrupts schoolwork, safety and the learning process (Charles, 2014; Vizek Vidović et al., 2014). Student misbehaviour creates unfavourable classroom environments in which learning is made difficult, teachers and students are disabled in their work, and relationships between students are spoiled. Besides, such behaviour presents a danger of creating a climate where student misbehaviour becomes common. In such a way, the students who do not normally misbehave are given new behavioural patterns, so they also start to misbehave. (Barth et al., 2004). Such behaviour is therefore considered the main problem of schooling.

The correlation between student misbehaviour and poor academic achievement was proven in many previous studies (Bradshaw et al., 2008; Konishi et al., 2010; Malecki & Elliott, 2002). However, Hinshaw (1992) emphasises the complexity of this relationship. According to him, there are four types of these links: a) achievement influences behaviour, b) behaviour influences achievement, c) reciprocal connection between behaviour and achievement, and d) the existence of a third, new factor which mediates between student behaviour and achievement. Maguin and Loeber (1996) have shown in their meta-analysis that poor academic achievement is connected to the frequency, persistence in, and gravity of delinquent behaviour. Recent research by Joffe and Black (2012) has proven that poor student achievement leads to social, emotional and behavioural problems.

Considering that student misbehaviour jeopardises the realisation of educational outcomes, it is hardly surprising that scientists are interested in additionally exploring possible causes of such behaviour.

2. Students' demographic characteristics and misbehaviour

Numerous studies have sought to find out whether certain demographic characteristics exacerbate misbehaviour (Kellam et al., 1998; KewalRamani et al., 2007; Pas et al., 2010; Pas et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002). One of the most frequently researched issues was the existence of gender differences in student misbehaviour.

The research shows that boys are more prone to misbehaviour (Alexander et al., 1997) and manifest severe forms of misbehaviour more often (Finn et al., 2008). Apart from that, boys perceive themselves as more problematic than girls do (Kaplan et al., 2002), but are also perceived by teachers as more inclined to misbehaving, compared to girls (Arbuckle & Little, 2004; Kulinna, 2008). Accordingly, teachers suspend or even expel boys from school more often than they do girls (Arbuckle & Little, 2004; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Skiba et al., 2002). However, one should point out that teachers also include boys in various preventive programs and apply positive strategies with them more often (Arbuckle & Little, 2004).

The review of previous research on exploring differences in punishing students with regard to race has shown that students from minority groups in the United States of America are punished more frequently and more severely (Skiba et al., 2002). Authors stress that research heretofore has not included detailed analysis of such behaviour; statistical data simply shows that African Americans and Hispanic Americans are punished more often and more severely than other students, even for significantly less serious misdemeanour. Alongside racial and ethnical criterions, students' socio-economic status is frequently emphasized as one of the characteristics influencing punishment. Students of lower socio-economic status misbehave more often and teachers punish them more frequently (Skiba et al., 2002). However, such segregation of students is not characteristic only of the USA. In a study done in Germany, it was proven that teachers punish misbehaviour of students belonging to minority groups more often and more severe, in comparison to students belonging to the majority people (Chang & Demyan, 2007; Glock, 2016; Glock & Kleen, 2017). Misbehaviour of students who are not a part of minority ethnic groups is most frequently described as normal (Ferguson, 2001).

It seems teachers are prejudiced against potentially problematic students (Chang & Demyan, 2007). When teachers are asked about the causes of student misbehaviour, they most frequently name „*bad situation at home*“ and „*students themselves*“ (Kulinna, 2008; Kyriacou & Ortega Martín, 2010). However, despite the known fact that temperament and poor self-control lead to lack of work habits in students (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2009), which in turn leads to conflicts with teachers (Rudasill et al., 2010), there are certain actions teachers can apply to diminish students' negative traits (Duckworth & Allred, 2012). Duckworth and Seligman (2005) found that students' self-discipline is a better predictor of academic achievement than their intelligence itself. However, the most important role is still played by teachers. It was proven that good classroom management could effect better academic achievement of children with difficult temperament. Emotional support from the teacher can act as a mediating factor between difficult student temperament and final academic achievement (Rudasill & Rimm-Kaufman, 2009). The research has shown that refusing work and resistance in students depend in great measure on their perception of teachers' classroom management and the feeling of being important to their teacher (Bru et al., 2002). Precisely this research, carried out in Norway, has shown that students who detect faults in teacher classroom management resort to misbehaviour themselves. Such reactions are especially expressed in younger students.

The conclusion about the importance of classroom management naturally arises from the aforementioned. Teachers who support their students emotionally and avoid prejudice in their work can secure the conditions for appropriate students' development. The continuation of this work deals with the existence of differences between various countries with regard to the focus constructs, i.e. student discipline and behaviour.

3. Individualistic and collectivistic culture

Individualism and collectivism are regarded as values characteristic of the developed, Western countries on the one side, and developing countries, on the other (Miljković et al., 2018). These dimensions entail members of some culture behaving as individuals or members of a group.

To act as an individual means to look after oneself and the members of one's immediate family the most. Individuals make decisions based on the assessment of their influence on

themselves. On the other hand, collectivists feel a strong bond with members of their wider group and make decisions based on the sense of duty and mutual respect, i.e. on the assessment of their influence on other group members.

According to recent research into student behaviour and discipline in different countries, authors introduce dimensions of individualistic and collectivistic culture alongside other characteristics. Apart from having an effect on general rules of behaviour, there are signs of cultural determination influencing school rules and student behaviour (Menzer & Torney-Purta, 2012).

Quantitative research is implemented mostly with the goal of examining the dimensions of individualism and collectivism. Gelerstein et al. (2018) made the latest contribution to quantitative research. They designed a questionnaire for measuring cultural characteristics in primary school. The questionnaire measures five dimensions, in accordance with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 2001), and it includes 22 questions in total. Students choose between two answers to all the questions. *Value of school achievement* dimension entails four questions, for example, *What is a student's duty?* A student chooses between two given answers: (a) *Learning to get good grades;* (b) *Learning to be more knowledgeable.* *Value of institutional structures* dimension includes five questions to which all students answer yes or no. For example, to the question *If you wanted to tell your whole class something, how would you do it?*, examinees choose one of the two provided answers: (a) *I would stand in front of the class and tell everyone at the same time;* (b) *I would approach each person individually.* *Resistance to change* dimension encompasses five questions, for example, *Would you like classes at school to be different every day?*, to which students answer yes or no. *Normative versus affective* dimension contains four questions, for example, *Do you think there are situations where you can break the rules?*, which students also assess with yes or no. *Value of equality in the production of knowledge* dimension consists of four questions, for example, *If you get a good grade, do you show your classmates?*, and the given answers are: a) *Yes, it is good to share your successes;* b) *No, it is bad to show others when you are successful.* The authors feel it is necessary to measure cultural values because in such a way we contribute to the creation of educational models, and new prerequisites are provided for better organisation of school institutions and development of schools in general.

No previously published research can be found on cultural differences with the use of this questionnaire. The research was mostly based on the existing insights about the affiliation of some country to a certain culture. Therefore, based on Hofstede's results (2001) and the results from the PISA research, Cortina et al. (2017), for example, examine the connection between culture and students' school belonging. Similarly, Kaur and Noman (2015) research classroom practices in collectivistic cultures.

As stated by Hofstede (2001), cultural dimensions (individualism/collectivism) are obvious in all aspects of social life, school not being the exception. For example, extremely collectivistic cultures are characterised by students' aggressive behaviour and its bad influence on academic performance. On the other hand, in extremely individualistic cultures students' self-esteem has a positive effect on their academic performance. Collectivistic cultures generally place accent on the class as a whole, while individualistic cultures approach each student individually. Confrontation and conflicts are rarely present in collectivistic cultures, while the same is welcome in individualistic cultures. With regard to these differences, this work presupposed they would also reflect on school discipline. The goal of the present work was to compare the results of previous research on classroom management and school discipline,

and determine the existence of differences in student misbehaviour and classroom management between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

4. Forms of student misbehaviour in individualistic and collectivistic cultures

Certain agreement exists on the manifestation of student misbehaviour: it varies depending on educational level, school subject, class content, time, and students' characteristics. Of course, misbehaviour is detected in the classroom, i.e. on the school level. School-based behaviour is substance use and crime, for example, and these behaviours are reflected on the classroom level as well (Wilson et al., 2001).

There are numerous forms of misbehaviour in the classroom. Meyers (2003) differentiates between overt (open and observable behaviours) and covert (passive). Overt behaviours are talking out of turn, using mobile phones, eating in class and alike. Covert behaviours are being late for class, skipping classes, passivity in class, and the like. Numerous previous studies have tried to find out the forms of student misbehaviour with the highest occurrence. The results of research done in the last 20 year are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Previous research on student classroom misbehaviour – teachers' perspective

Study (Author, year)	Country (C/I*)	Sample	School level	Misbehaviour
		N		
(Dalgıç & Bayhan, 2014)	Turkey (C)	3648	Elementary Secondary	1. Constant talking with classmates 2. Task avoidance 3. Coming late 4. Verbal hostility 5. Indifference to study subject during classes
(Ding, Li, Li, & Kulm, 2008)	China (C)	244	Elementary Secondary	1. Daydreaming 2. Talking out of turn 3. Playing with personal stuff 4. Chatting or joking
(Ho & Leung, 2002)	China (Hong Kong) (C)	187	Elementary Secondary	1. Talking out of turn 2. Non-attentiveness 3. Idleness/slowness 4. Forgetfulness
(Shen, et al., 2009)	China (C)	527	Elementary	1. Non-attention 2. Talking out of turn 3. Over-active 4. Not following the task

Study (Author, year)	Country (C/I*)	Sample N	School level	Misbehaviour
(Kulinna, Cothran, & Regualos, 2006)	USA (I)	303	Elementary Secondary	1. Talking 2. Can't sit still 3. Arguing 4. Doesn't pay attention 5. Interrupts
(Cothran & Kulinna, 2007)	USA (I)	2309	Secondary	1. Talking 2. Giggling 3. Forming cliques 4. Swearing/cursing 5. Arguing
(Stephenson, Linfoot, & Martin, 2000)	Australia (I)	130	Primary	1. Distractibility; does not listen 2. Physically aggressive 3. Does not work independently 4. Not remain on-task 5. Disrupts
(Little, 2005)	Australia (I)	148	Secondary	1. Talking out of turn 2. Hindering others 3. Idleness 4. Disobedience 5. Unnecessary noise
(Vidić, Đuranović, & Klasnić, 2021)	Croatia (I) ¹	603	Elementary Secondary	1. Talking 2. Not following directions 3. Giggling 4. Arguing 5. Lazy
(Vidić, in press)	Croatia (I) ¹	530	Elementary Secondary	1. Talking 2. Giggling 3. Not following directions 4. Can't sit still 5. Interrupts

Note. *C – Collectivistic culture; I – Individualistic culture

The presented research results reveal that talking out of turn is the most frequent form of student misbehaviour in both cultures. Besides, frequently manifested forms of misbehaviour also entail the inability to sit still in class, not paying attention, and dependence in schoolwork. However, it cannot be concluded that student misbehaviour is essentially different with regard to individualistic, i.e. collectivistic culture. It seems that these forms of student misbehaviour are more frequently tied to the teaching process and students

¹ Croatia is not included in Hofstede's analysis; the author supposes that Croatia is a part of Yugoslavia (a collectivistic culture), although Croatia has been independent since 1991. According to the latest research, Croatia is considered an individualistic culture; individualism prevails in most Croatian counties, although there are differences between the counties. The least individualistic are Istrian County and the City of Zagreb, while the most individualistic are Dubrovnik-Neretva County (Rajh, Anić & Budak, 2015).

themselves than to their culture. In the presented research, teachers were the subjects, and their perceptions of student misbehaviour are presented. In their qualitative research with students in Hong Kong, Sun and Shek (2012) determined that talking out of turn, disrespecting the teacher, and doing something in private were the most frequently mentioned forms of misbehaviour. Furthermore, this study showed that although students knew they were misbehaving, they persisted in it because it was fun. Besides, the frequency and intensity of misbehaviour would escalate if students found it fun, if it was not punished, or the teacher lacked authority in controlling the situation. It is therefore possible to assume that student misbehaviour is not under the influence of culture as much as it is affected by teacher classroom management.

5. Comparative views on school discipline

The review of research from different countries reveals a general conclusion of student discipline and behaviour being directly linked to students' academic achievement, not only in individualistic but also in collectivistic cultures, for example, in Nigeria (Ehiane, 2014), Chile (Gazmuri et al., 2015), and Kenya (Simba et al., 2016). It seems that all studies emphasize the importance of teacher classroom management, regardless of the type and gravity of student misbehaviour or the researched country.

It is considered that teachers' beliefs are significantly shaped by their previous experience, social and cultural values, and interactions. Teachers' beliefs have a significant role in deciding on the content and way of teaching. At the same time, as the students' style of learning depends on their cultural orientation, so does the teacher's style of work (Kaur & Noman, 2015). The teacher transfers to her students the beliefs of a community he/she belongs to in great measure. (Etherington, 2019).

A significant number of research attempts have tried to examine different dimensions and the nature of a teacher's belief, which is based on his/her cultural orientation (Chan et al., 2007; Chen et al., 2019; Hermans et al., 2008; Zhou & Li, 2015). It is assumed that teachers' beliefs about learning and teaching are under the influence of their individualistic or collectivistic cultural orientation. However, it should be noted that with the development of information technology, everyday practice is continuously changing; teachers from eastern countries, who are normally considered more traditional, introduce technology in class (which was mostly designed in western countries) and go through changes in the process (Ryan & Kam, 2007).

In a comparative, qualitative research on the teaching practice with six teachers from collectivistic societies (Malaysia, Iraq, India and China), it was proven that teachers accepted new ideas and ways of work only if they were appropriate to their culture (Kaur & Noman, 2015). If that was the case, they eagerly introduced innovative technologies. They however experienced the greatest change regarding the connection with their students. It was proven that technological development, which empowers creating networks between people all over the world, changes the awareness of teachers about relationships with students. Acceptance of close relationships with students is most evident in the process of inclusion, discussion, support and making decisions. Accordingly, students were given greater autonomy in the learning process, but only because traditional practice such as mere rote content learning and the chalk/board teaching were not efficient enough.

Cultural differences between individualists and collectivists are mostly reflected in feeling affiliation to a group. Individualists care less about the needs of a group, i.e. community they

are a part of, while for the collectivists, the group interest is more important than their own. Previous comparative research on the relationships between teachers and students has included three basic dimensions: closeness (degree of warmth and openness in a relationship), conflict (disagreement in a relationship), and dependence (overdependence and possessiveness in a relationship). With regard to the dimension of closeness, greater closeness and teacher support were proven to exist in collectivistic cultures. In a research on differences in closeness between Chinese and Dutch teachers and students, it was found that Chinese teachers and students assess this dimension higher than Dutch teachers and students (Chen et al., 2019). Similar findings were obtained in a research with Chinese and American students (Yang et al., 2013), and Turkish and American teachers (Beyazkurk & Kesner, 2005). In a study on differences in conflicts, Beyazkurk and Kesner (2005) have not found any differences between American and Turkish teachers, while Chen et al. (2019) determined that Chinese teachers and students have less conflicts than the Dutch, but no difference in the dependence dimension were found. Still, in a research by Sun et al. (2019), an interesting note is made about possible reasons for not spotting the differences between western and eastern teachers and students. The authors state that in Chinese cultural determination, an expectation exists of people in authority to manifest power. Teachers' perceptions about their closeness to students can therefore be higher than is the case in reality because Chinese teachers regard even the smallest token of familiarity as significant. They state the similar for the students: Chinese students accept and even expect teachers to be strict and authoritarian.

With regard to the ways of classroom management, i.e. the procedures applied by the teacher in attempts to decrease the occurrence of student misbehaviour, most frequently used in both cultures are reprimand, talking with students after lessons, punishment, ignoring misbehaviour, and referrals for treatments with psychologists and other experts. In the research done by Sun (2015) in Hong Kong, it was shown that in classroom management, both Chinese teachers and teachers in Western countries use punishment, reprimand, conversation, but also referring students to expert associates. Although greater influence of western culture is present in Hong Kong than in other parts of China, Chinese way of upbringing and education is still upheld in great measure. In accord with Chinese proverbs *spare the rod and spoil the child* and *praise enervates but criticism builds character*, teachers and parents frequently use punishment in children's education. Punishment is considered a logical consequence of misbehaviour and it is done with the goal of making a student realise true values and desirable behaviours. The most frequent forms of student misbehaviour in Hong Kong are talking out of turn and not paying attention to class; as for disobedience and rudeness, they are considered completely unacceptable (Sun & Shek, 2012). Such behaviours are most frequently attributed to reasons such as attracting attention or simply students having fun, rarely to boredom in class. It should be emphasised that the average number of students in a class varies between 30 and 45 so teachers resort to their own methods of classroom management to maintain discipline. The most frequent forms of punishment are writing letters of repentance or compositions on their misdemeanor (Sun, 2015).

Although it may be assumed that punishment is more frequent in collectivistic societies, a research by Lewis et al. (2005) showed just the opposite. Firstly, it should be noted that comparative measuring of school discipline is problematic due to various concepts and understandings of certain dimensions of school discipline. The authors have decided to include the following dimensions in their research: punishment, reward, discussion, individual inclusion of students, reprimand, and teacher aggression. The research included

748 teachers and 5521 students from Australia, China and Israel. The results have shown that Chinese teachers punish their students less and are less aggressive than Israeli and Australian teachers are. In Australian classrooms, rewarding students and discussion are present the least of all the participating countries (conversations between teachers and students about behaviour and discipline). On the other hand, the degree of punishing students was found to be the greatest in Australian schools. Alongside this, student misbehaviour is in correlation with the increase in the use of aggressive methods. In Australia and Israel, reprimand is usual, and misbehaviour is clearly recognised and punished. Australian students name punishment as the most frequent strategy, while Chinese students recognise all strategies, but accentuate the use of aggression and punishing students the least. It is stressed in the explanation that Chinese teachers punish students less because they know students will obey them after they have been reprimanded, but also because they can rely on the support from parents, with whom they share the same goal: raising a self-disciplined child.

In their large-scope research done in as many as 41 countries, Chiu et al. (2011) included 107.975 students from 7.259 schools. It was proven that economic situation in a country and its cultural values are connected with class discipline. Discipline is better in poorer countries with strict gender roles. The authors presume that education is more appreciated in poor countries because it represents hope for the future. In richer states, teacher support and teacher-student relationships are significantly more related to discipline. Despite the initial hypothesis that school discipline is better in collectivistic societies, it was not proven true. Besides, no differences in discipline between countries with stronger or weaker hierarchical structure was found. However, in societies with less gender equality, student discipline was proven better. It seems that strictly defined gender roles empower clearer expectations from students, and these students accept school and authority more. The characteristics of teachers and students are in correlation with school discipline in most countries. Individual students' perceptions of the relationships with teachers and teacher support were found to be positively correlated to school discipline. More precisely, better perception of relationships and greater teacher support in turn effect better school discipline.

6. Conclusion

It is a well-known fact that students are able to realise their potential only in classrooms with appropriate discipline. Teacher support and quality relationships between teachers and students present a foundation for establishing appropriate classroom climate and discipline. The aim of this work was to determine whether there are cultural characteristics empowering better class discipline and effecting the decrease of student misbehaviour. Different student behaviour and different school discipline is mostly conditioned by individualistic cultures characterised by low interdependency and placing the individual first, and, on the other hand, collectivistic cultures characterised by high co-dependency and highly-regarded group, i.e. community. Although studies exist in which no differences were found with regard to cultural value (Chiu et al., 2011), there are certain indications in favour of the existence of these differences. As an example of collectivistic society, China is present in these studies most frequently. Some traits of teachers, authorities and cultural values contribute to better discipline, with diminished use of punishment strategies. In any case, this research field is at its very conception, and new insight should be considered in order to advance the school practice as much as possible.

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