

Alternative Methods to Corporal Punishment and Their Efficacy

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Abstract

This study investigated the alternative methods which teachers use instead of corporal punishment and the efficacy of these methods of student behaviour management. The study was conducted in Eldoret Municipality of Rift Valley province. The population of the study comprised secondary school teachers in Eldoret Municipality. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select 161 teachers from the 10 public secondary schools representing all the 3 strata of secondary schools in the Municipality. The respondents included 10 head teachers, 10 deputies, 10 guidance and counselling masters/mistresses, 40 class teachers and 91 classroom teachers. Data was collected using a closed-ended questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. This study is significant in building on the existing knowledge about student behaviour management. Teacher trainers would also be informed about alternative methods to corporal punishment. It was found that, although teachers use alternative methods to corporal punishment, they believe that they are less effective compared to corporal punishment. In view of the findings, the study recommends urgent need to create awareness on alternative methods to corporal punishment and also on the overall effects of corporal punishment on the child.

Keywords: corporal punishment; discipline; attitude; guidance; counselling; positive reinforcement

INTRODUCTION

Along with literacy and numeracy achievement levels, school discipline ranks as one of the major concerns voiced by the public about schools and the school system in countries worldwide (Slee, 1995; Owens, Flaherty & Laybourne, 1997). These concerns are echoed in frequent and often dramatic media reports of disruptive students, student riots, bullying and violence in classrooms and playgrounds across Kenya (Daily Nation, April 16, 2001). There is a continuing and growing perception that behaviour problems are endemic in schools, that teachers are struggling to maintain order, and that school authorities are unable to guarantee the safety of students (McCarthy et al., 1992).

Because of its relationship with student academic performance and moral maturity, school discipline is often viewed as a national concern that is becoming more serious by the day for all societies (Slee, 1995). Practicing teachers, educationists, parents and students across the globe must increasingly get concerned with discipline-related problems in schools (Daily Nation, April 16, 2001). In its management efforts, many educationists and researchers have sought to identify the most efficacious methods of enhancing school discipline. The use of rewards and punishments, stemming especially from the psychological research works of Skinner (1989), have been used by many school educators, although in varying degrees, in managing students' behaviour. Of these methods, the use of corporal punishment has gained much debate, especially on its efficacy and its consequences to students.

Corporal punishment refers to the intentional application of physical pain as a method of changing behavior (Mercurio, 1972). It includes a wide variety of methods such as hitting, slapping, spanking, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, shoving, choking, use of various objects (wooden paddles, belts, sticks, pins or others), painful body postures (as placing in closed spaces), use of electric shock, use of excessive exercise drills or prevention of urine or stool elimination. Corporal punishment in schools does not refer to the occasional need of a school official to restrain a dangerous student or use physical force as a means of protecting members of the school community subject to imminent danger (Human Rights watch, 1999).

Corporal punishment against children has received support for thousands of years from interpretation of legal and religious doctrines, including those beliefs based on Judeo-Christian and other religions (Watson, 1985). In Kenya, the use of corporal punishment in schools has roots in the British colonial practices of student discipline that included the widespread caning of students whenever teachers perceived them as breaking school rules and norms or even dismally performing. Gradually, the practice became an accepted method of enhancing discipline in schools in Kenya, which had a high degree of cultural acceptance and approval (Muthiani, 1996). Traditionally, corporal punishment is tied to school discipline with the term discipline itself being problematic and having several ramifications for all actors in education (Rosen, 1997; Slee, 1995).

Interpretations of discipline include: a branch of knowledge; training that develops self-control, character, orderliness or efficiency; strict control to enforce obedience and treatment that controls or punishes and as a system rules (Rosen, 1997). The practice was even acknowledged in various education policy papers, including the Educational Regulations of 1972 governing the administration of corporal punishment in schools.

During the past 20 years, however, there has been a growing outcry worldwide condemning the practice of corporal punishment with school children (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Many human rights and child-centered bodies worldwide have denounced corporal punishment in schools and officially recommended that it be abolished. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has criticized governments for permitting corporal punishment in public and private schools. The convention has repeatedly stated that corporal punishment violates the fundamental principles of the convention on the rights of the child and called for governments to develop legislative frameworks to prohibit all forms of corporal punishment (UNCRC, 1994). Additionally, numerous research reports reinforced the need for parents and teachers to seek alternative methods of managing discipline citing many physical and psychological consequences of corporal punishment among the students (Human Rights Watch, 1999). For instance, corporal punishment was banned both in schools and homes in Sweden in 1979. In order to make parents take the law seriously, the Ministry of Justice carried out an extensive pamphlet distribution to households with information on the law and suggestions of alternatives to corporal punishment (Save the Children Sweden, 2000)

In response to global advocacies and research suggestions, many countries have taken steps to prohibit or to limit corporal punishment (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Some of these restrictions have taken the form of statutes or court decisions that outlaw all forms of corporal punishment among children in schools or at home. Others rescind common law immunity for educators who administer corporal punishment, especially the corporal punishment that is considered similar to other forms of assault and battery (Slee, 1995). Presently, most states have prohibited the use of corporal punishment in all contexts, schools or homes (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Several African states, such as Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Namibia, South Africa and Kenya, have equally outlawed the use of corporal punishment in schools. In Kenya, the outlawing of corporal punishment has principally resulted from the Children Act (2001), which has declared such a practice unconstitutional (GoK, 2001). Corporal punishment was banned in Kenyan schools in the year 2001 through Legal Notice No. 56 of 2001. This

notice effectively repealed Legal Notice No. 40 of 1972, which had introduced corporal punishment into the Education Act. Section 11 to 14 of Education Act gave provisions on; how, when and by whom corporal punishment could be applied, including the size and type of cane to be used. These Sections of Education Act, as read then, provided that corporal punishment could be inflicted in cases of grave neglect of work, lying, bullying, gross insubordination, indecency, truancy or the like. It also stated that corporal punishment could only be inflicted by the head teacher, a teacher in the presence of the head teacher or a housemaster in the case of a boarding school with the authority of the head teacher. It even went ahead to specify where it should be inflicted and the size of the cane to be used. Records of every case of students punished were supposed to be kept by the head teacher with the child's name, age, offence, number of strokes inflicted and the date (Human Rights Watch, 1999). With the realization that corporal punishment was being indiscriminately applied in schools and children were continuously suffering injuries, and even death in some instances, at the hands of teachers, the Ministry of Education decided to ban corporal punishment (Daily Nation, April 16, 2001). The outlawing of corporal punishment by the government received mixed reactions from the teachers and the public. While some perceived the move as worthy, many others, including educationists saw the move as an invitation for anarchy to dominate in schools. Thus, it can be seen that, to many, corporal punishment served as a major sanction that controlled behaviour of students, who would avoid cases of indiscipline in schools in order to avoid punishment (The Standard, February 10, 2005). Outlawing it, they argued, would thus create an avenue for indiscipline.

Notwithstanding the spirited opposition from teachers, scholars and politicians, the Kenyan Government has upheld the ban of corporal punishment as a corrective measure in enhancing student discipline in schools. However, in spite of its ban, corporal punishment continues to be used within homes and schools in Kenya (The Standard, February 14, 2005). Reports by the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN Kenya, 2005) indicate that teachers, parents and caregivers have continued to discount systematic evidence of the ineffectiveness of corporal punishment existing in research-based literature. Such evidence is often scorned as impractical and theoretical and thus many adults continue to ignore the evidence that corporal punishment does not have the desired effect on the child discipline at home or at school. There is no evidence that discipline is better when corporal punishment is used and, in many cases, the schools where corporal punishment is rampant have the worst

discipline records (Kopansky, 2002). On the other hand, teachers may feel that they have been completely stripped of their powers and have no control over their students and they feel they have been given no alternatives. As a result they feel completely helpless. Others, for the same reason, continue to cane students and even when a child is injured, they are rarely disciplined. Thus, current responses to the various incidents of corporal punishment remain inadequate.

A survey report by Human Rights Watch (1999) indicated that canning was quite prevalent in Kenyan schools. The reported frequency of canning however varied considerably from school to school. At some schools, canning was relatively rare, and reserved for serious infractions; students might witness a canning once a week or even as rarely as once a month. At most other schools, however, school children reported that students in their class might be caned every day, sometimes more than once per day. This frequency could possibly have reduced due to the outlawing of the practice. Since the practice of corporal punishment had for many years been culturally accepted and socially institutionalized in Kenya (Human Rights Watch, 1999) but have been banned by the Government of Kenya, this study sought other means of maintaining student discipline. The use of corporal punishment in managing school discipline, although has ancient historical and religious roots, has faced much criticism from human rights advocates, child and educational psychologists (Human Rights Watch, 1999). These protests have obligated many governments, including Kenya, to outlaw the use of corporal punishments in schools through legislative and punitive sanctions. In Kenya, this move has been perceived by the general public, including teachers and parents, as causal to the increasing incidences of student indiscipline. Explanations to the increase in incidences of student indiscipline have been varied and controversy exists among the general public as to what contributes to student indiscipline in schools. Have teachers abdicated their corporate role of instilling discipline? Are teachers using alternative corrective measures in place of corporal punishment?

The policy of outlawing of corporal punishment was a major educational change which required planning by the Ministry of Education. According to Stoner et al (1995), change in organizations is inevitable; however, for any change to be effective, it has to be planned. In this case, the outlawing of corporal punishment in Kenyan schools was a radical change, since corporal punishment has been used since the initiative of formal education. The feelings or opinions of teachers and parents would have been sought and the teachers would have been adequately prepared if possible by being re-trained on alternative methods to corporal punishment.

OBJECTIVES

Attitudes that people hold may influence how they act, either positively or negatively. There was therefore need to establish the alternative corrective measures used by teachers and their efficacy in place of corporal punishment.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

There is growing concern among educators, parents and other stakeholders about the high rate of indiscipline in public secondary schools. Outlawing of corporal punishment in Kenyan schools, especially the practice of canning, which was already a socio-culturally accepted norm, provided a turning point in the management of student discipline. Reports however still indicate significant prevalence of the practice among many schools countrywide. Research studies have been undertaken on corporal punishment and its physical and psychological effects on the child. For instance, studies done by Kopansky (2002) showed that schools that continued to opt to use physical punishment often elicit a host of unwanted negative consequences while missing opportunities to promote students discipline through non violent methods. He found out that punishment produces emotionality, anxiety and fear in the child being punished, none of which is conducive to good learning (Baumrind, 1971).

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was mainly concerned with alternative methods of student behaviour management using a sample drawn from public secondary schoolteachers in Eldoret Municipality Uasin Gishu District. The study assumed that teachers have knowledge of alternative measures of instilling student discipline.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was based on the traditional behaviour modification theory advanced by Thorndike (1905 as cited in Corsine, 1987). The basic tenet of this theory is that learning depends on the events that occur after certain behaviour. Thorndike advanced the laws of effects according to which behaviours that are rewarded tend to persist while those that are followed by discomfort or punishments tend to diminish. However, the nature of the rewards or the discomfort given depends to a certain extent on the givers feelings about the role of this rewards or discomfort in shaping behavior. The theory is relevant in that teachers are givers of rewards and discomfort in schools. Their aim is to shape the behaviour of the students. Corporal punishment has been one form of discomfort applied in behaviour modification in schools. Banning of corporal punishment obviously would affect the feelings of the teachers and affect the behaviour of the students. Therefore, teacher's feelings towards alternative measures to student discipline, like use of rewards and counseling, are important.

Balance exists if the sentiment or unity between beliefs about events or ideas is equally positive or negative; imbalance occurs when they are dissimilar in nature (Heider, 1958). Therefore, if there will be imbalance in teachers' attitudes towards outlawing of corporal punishment, it will affect the way teachers instill discipline in schools. Some may continue using corporal punishment even though it has been outlawed and others may adopt the alternative methods to corporal punishment.

Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

Educators and psychologists who oppose the use of corporal punishment state that teachers should impose non physical disciplinary measures as an alternative to beatings. Advocates propose that teachers require students to write a statement describing the negative effects of their behaviour or to apologize for the mistakes in front of their classmates. Instructors can require the misbehaving child to sit on a chair or a mat at the back of the room and to think about his/her mistakes and of ways to improve his/her behaviour (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Human Rights Watch (1999) found out that many opponents of corporal punishment argue that instructors may also discipline a child by assigning non abusive physical tasks. They state that teachers can ask students to perform light chores, to water, weed a school farm or fix what they have broken. Learners who build chairs are not apt to break them. Learners who wash walls are not to make them dirty on purpose. If learners are reinforced for keeping their school yard neat and clean, they are less likely to throw thrash on it. However, these punishments should be administered in thoughtfully and not in an excessive or exploitative manner.

According to Save the Children (2001), giving up corporal punishment does not mean giving up discipline. Children need clear limits and guidance on what is right and wrong and abandoning the short cut of violence is likely to produce better disciplined children. They further stated that, teachers need to see clearly that there is always an alternative, and this can be found if corporal punishment is no longer considered as a possible tool for meting out discipline. School discipline has two main goals: ensure the safety of staff and students and create an environment conducive to learning. Serious student misconduct involving violent or criminal behaviour defeats these goals and makes headlines in the process (Moles, 1989).

Research done by Gottfredson (1989) found out that schools can decrease disruptive behaviour by first setting out clear rules and consequences of breaking them and be communicated to staff, students, and parents by such means as newsletters, student

assemblies and handbooks. Research has shown that social rewards such as smiling, praising and complimenting are extremely effective in increasing desirable behaviour (Gottfredson, 1989). Discipline problems will be reduced if students find school enjoyable and interesting. Sometimes problem behaviour occurs because students simply do not know how to act appropriately.

Kopansky (2002) found that: corporal punishment was not effective and that more effective disciplinary methods existed; most teachers do not use corporal punishment, but many favour keeping it as an option and that smaller classes, increased parental involvement, improved teacher training and the development of specific discipline plans would all help to improve student conduct.

Students in Tennessee are not more difficult to manage than are the students attending schools in 26 states that have abolished corporal punishment. The choice is ours, to continue to hit students and evoke all of the associated negative consequences of such discipline and, thus, miss the opportunity to create more positive and nurturing learning environment for the students attending Tennessee school (Kopansky, 2002).

Human Rights Watch (1999) found that Kenyans who train teachers encourage instructors to use alternative methods of discipline other than physical sanctions. They further stated that the trainers initially thought that corporal punishment brightened the head but instead it reduces the child status. They advocated for a variety of other punishments like denying the child what the child wants, rebuke or parading the child, or sending the child home to collect the parents.

Guidance and Counselling

Teachers may also use guidance and counselling. According to Human Rights Watch (1999), a teacher is more likely to elicit appropriate behaviour if the teacher can understand the situation that the child faces and offer guidance and counselling to the student. Some students may not conform to their teachers' requirements due to reasons outside of their control. They may not have enough to eat, they may travel long distance to school, their parents may expect them to work when they are not at school, they may need to take care of their younger siblings, or their parents may quarrel often. These external factors affect the abilities to concentrate and the amount of time and energy they can devote to school. Under these circumstances, beating a child is unlikely to be productive punishment, according to educators and psychologists who oppose corporal punishment (Human Rights Watch, 1999). A teacher is more likely to elicit appropriate behaviour if the teacher

can understand the situation that the child faces and offer guidance and counselling to the student and the student family. However teachers and educators need more training in order for them to effectively implement guidance and counselling programmes.

Positive Reinforcement

According to educational experts who oppose the use of corporal punishment, use of positive reinforcement techniques reduces the frequency and extent of misbehaviour (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Human Rights watch (1999) further states that teachers can reward students in a variety of simple ways. An instructor can praise a pupil in front of the student's classmates or other instructors, award special certificates to children who perform well or are particularly caring or list their names on notice boards. A teacher can write positive comments in a child's exercise book. Teachers can also hold school wide competitions and give material rewards like exercise books or pens to those who perform well. If a teacher rewards students by giving them positive attention, a teacher can punish a particular pupil by ignoring that pupil's attempt to be disruptive. If the teacher is not ruffled or angered by the pupils misdeed, then the student is less likely to perform the act in future.

White (1975) found teachers responding more frequently to negative than positive behaviour. Hamblin (1978) found that behaviour at both classroom and institutional level focused almost exclusively on attempting to control behaviour by inhibitions and checks. McNamara (1985 and 1986) confirmed that, in secondary schools, the use of punishment still far outweighed the use of rewards. Caffyn (1989) found teachers hanging on the view that corporal punishment was more effective than positive reinforcement in changing student behaviour. Wheldall and Merrett (1987) explored teachers' reactions to different types of behaviour. They found that where students' work was concerned, teachers' use of positive responses far out-weighed the negative i.e. students who produced good work were rewarded far more than students who produced poor work who were punished. The opposite was true when teachers were dealing with student conduct; undesirable behaviour was punished while good behaviour was not rewarded. They concluded that many students who did not do well in their studies gained little reward from their schooling and that perhaps extrinsic rewarding system were needed to motivate such students.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted the *ex-post-facto* (after-the-fact) research design. In this design the researcher examines naturally existing relationships in which treatment is done through natural selection rather

than by manipulation (Oso & Onen, 2005). The design attempts to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between or among groups of individuals.

Research Population and Sample

Target Population

The target population of this study comprised of all public secondary school teachers in Eldoret Municipality. Eldoret Municipality had a total of 10 public secondary schools of which 7 are mixed, 1 boys-only and 2 are girls-only schools. There were a total of 268 secondary school teachers in these schools at the time of the study (Uasin Gishu District Office Records, 2005).

Sample Size

A total of 161 (60%) teachers were selected to participate in the study. The choice of 60% is based on the recommendation by Kathuri and Polls (1993) who developed a sampling table for finite populations. The table is used to determine the size of a randomly chosen sample from a given finite population such that the sample will be within + 0.05 of the population with a 95% level of confidence. This sample size (n=161) was 60% of the total target populations and was taken as a representative sample for the target population.

Sampling Procedures

Proportionate sampling was used to select the teachers from each of the 10 schools in order to ensure equal representation of the schools. This is a method whereby a researcher divides the population into homogenous strata and then selects individuals from each stratum by simple random sampling in proportion to the total number that describes the stratum (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). In selecting the sample from each school, simple random sampling technique by way of lottery was employed. 51 teachers were from girls-only schools, 18 of them were from boys-only schools while 92 of them were from mixed schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire was employed to collect data relevant to the study. Since the research data collected was largely quantitative in nature and related more to individual attitudes, which could not be observed but could be better tapped through self-reports (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000), the questionnaire was considered most appropriate. The questionnaire was also favoured over other related data collection methods since it allowed for collection of data within a short period of time from a relatively literate population (Oso & Onen, 2005). The TCPAS focused on teachers' attitudes towards existing alternative methods of student behaviour management and the efficacy of these methods. The scale comprised of 18 Likert-type items in which respondents were asked to

rate their responses on each of the items as; Strongly Agree (5 points), Agree (4 points), Undecided (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point). Some of the statements were positively stated while others were negatively stated.

RESULTS

Table 1: Teachers’ Responses on the Efficacy of Alternative Methods of Student Behaviour Management

Statement	Frequencies of Responses (% frequencies)		
	Disagree	Undecided	Agree
The cases of indiscipline have not reduced in the school with the use of alternative methods of corporal punishment	28 (17%)	19 (12%)	114 (71%)

Table 1 shows that 71% of the respondents are in agreement that the use of other alternative methods to corporal punishment have not reduced indiscipline in schools. While 17% were of the opinion that indiscipline had been reduced with the use of alternative methods such as guidance and counselling.

DISCUSSION

Summary of the Findings

Basing on research objectives, the study found that teachers use alternative methods to corporal punishment but belief that they are less effective compared to corporal punishment.

Guidance and counseling and positive reinforcement were suggested as alternative methods to corporal punishment. However, from the results, teachers feel that these methods are not effective as corporal punishment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Teachers’ trainers that they should ensure that while undergoing training, the student teachers are adequately equipped with alternative methods of discipline now that corporal punishment is outlawed. Student teachers should be taught the importance of such methods in disciplining students. Such methods are counselling, reinforcement and rewards. Student teachers should also be taught the effects of corporal punishment on the child and the reasons which led to it being outlawed in schools.
2. There is need for the government to deliberately organize seminars, conferences, workshops and other symposium where experts can be invited to teach teachers on the modern issues and changes in education as far as discipline is concerned. Some teachers might not have been trained on alternatives to corporal punishment in colleges thus being rendered helpless when it comes to behaviour management of students. The government should also disseminate materials on

modern discipline methods to schools and also through the mass media.

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