



REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT TO CURB INDISCIPLINE OF LEARNERS

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Abstract: Although there are different strategies for tackling the issue of indiscipline of learners, the use of corporal punishment has been very popular and contentious. While many people favour its use to curb the indiscipline of learners, due to the associated advantages, another school of thought views it to be too harsh for learners and thus should be banned. In this paper, the meaning of corporal punishment, its forms, causes, and advantages, particularly, the fact that it can deter a learner from indulging in wrong behaviour and help him/her learn better, among others, are discussed. The disadvantages inherent in the use of the approach, such as the injury it inflicts on learners, among others, are also examined. The paper recommends the use of other approaches to curb the indiscipline of learners, while a regulated corporal punishment that will not violate the rules and strategies to achieve effective management of the indiscipline of learners, is also recommended for the schools' administrators.

Keywords: reflection, use, corporal, punishment, corporal punishment, curb, indiscipline, learner, school

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Introduction

There is a growing concern about the rampant cases of indiscipline of learners in schools. No doubt, the achievement of quality education in a school depends greatly on the discipline shown by the learners. Mis-behaviour of learners is a threat to the achievement of quality education. Studies have found that learner disciplinary problem is a major concern of the stakeholders in education, including school administrators and one of the challenges facing teachers in

schools (Yaghambe & Icarbord, 2013), as well as an obstacle to the achievement of effective teaching and learning in schools.

Many researchers have tried to identify the most efficacious methods of enhancing discipline in schools. The use of punishment is meant to instil discipline and is usually meted out to any learner who violates the rules and regulations in school, thus bringing a desirable change in behaviour in a learner, as well as improving school discipline. The use of corporal punishment has however generated much debate, especially its efficacy and consequences on the learner, since time immemorial. The use of this kind of punishment in schools has roots in the British Colonial practices that encouraged the widespread caning of learners whenever a teacher noticed that they violated any of the school's rules and regulations or performed woefully in tests or examinations. Gradually, the practice has become an accepted method of enhancing discipline in schools, to the extent that it now has a high degree of cultural acceptance and approval.

Discipline and Indiscipline Concepts

Different authors have attempted to define the word 'discipline'. Abubakar (2000) sees it as the ability and willingness to do what one ought to do without any external control or interference. Ogundele (2014) sees it as the respect for school laws and regulations, as well as the maintenance of an established standard of behaviour, which implies self-control, restraint, and respect for oneself and others. In light of these definitions, a disciplined individual can be considered as /she who knows and takes the right action at all times; always guided not by self-interest but by consideration of the interest of others with which his/her interest may clash; guided in behaviour by moral and social principles.

Indiscipline is a household word, which takes its root from the word 'discipline'. In other words, where there is no discipline, indiscipline prevails. Anything that goes contrary to any of the aforementioned attributes in the way an individual behaves, constitutes indiscipline, It is an act of wrongdoing, misconduct, negligence of norms, and cultures of a social system, as well as any action considered wrong and not accepted as proper in any society. It is a universal concept, common in government offices, the private sector, politics, and all levels of educational institutions. To make its meaning better understood, Timothy (2008) defines indiscipline as the unwillingness of learners to respect the constituted authority, observe and obey the school rules and regulations, as well as maintain a high standard of behaviours, conducive to the teaching-

learning process and essential to the smooth running of the school to achieve the desired educational objectives with ease.

Importance of Discipline of Learners in Schools

According to Dare, Hashim, Sweinan, and Ofie (2004), cited in Zubaida (2009) discipline in schools is the respect for school laws, regulations, and maintenance of an established standard of behaviour, which implies self-control, restraint, respect for oneself, and others. According to Oplatka & Atias (2007), it implies self-control, restraint, and respect for oneself and others; as well as the extent to which the school community views the learner's behaviour as the appropriate socially accepted behaviour.

In a school, discipline is essential for the effective management of the set goals. The provision of quality education and training is the ultimate goal of any school. The success of teaching is reflected in the academic performance of the learners. This goal can never be achieved where indiscipline thrives. Effective discipline thus helps in the achievement of the goals, expectations, and responsibilities of learners.

Also, the maintenance of discipline creates a good image for a school and prepares a learner for the future. It is key for a learner in his/her journey to adulthood. Zubaida (2009), cited in Magwa and Ngara (2014), emphasized that discipline provides conditions that promote learning. For a school to succeed in discharging the duty of training learners without any hitch, there should be discipline among the learners. A school where indiscipline thrives is bound to be chaotic while the achievement of the set goals will be a *mirage*. The need for school administrators, teachers, parents, and the general public to eliminate indiscipline in schools is therefore imperative.

According to Oosthuizen (2009), maintaining discipline is essential for creating a positive school climate that is conducive to good academic performance. This is supported by Sonn (2009), who opined that a school without effective discipline of learners will be unmanageable and can result in unmotivated and demoralized learners, which in turn can lead to poor academic performance of the learners. According to Gaustad (2005), maintenance of discipline in schools has three main objectives, the first is to ensure the safety of staff and learners, the second is to create a conducive environment for learning, and the third is to produce productive, disciplined, and honest graduates at all levels.

Forms of Indiscipline of Learners

Several forms of indiscipline of learners pervade schools, particularly in the classroom and within school premises, as well as outside school premises.

Lewis (1991), cited in Morongwa (2010) has identified three types of misbehaviour of learners in the classroom, such as misbehaviour that inhibits the learner's learning, misbehaviour by one learner which impedes the learning of another, and misbehaviour which is disrespectful, defiant to the educator. These misbehaviours, according to him, can be committed intentionally or unintentionally and include:

- consistent lateness to class and disruption of the flow of the class;
- talking while a teacher is addressing the class;
- writing graffiti on school property;
- not listening and asking questions that have already been answered;
- defying the teacher refusing to follow instructions; and
- moving around in class to the point of becoming a distraction.

Donnelly (2000) listed other behaviours in schools, such as fighting, insubordination, little support for learners, disrespect, and distrust of administration. According to Alidzulwi (2000), some schools are battlefields since learners carry weapons, guns and knives to schools. There are reported cases of learners stabbing their educators and principals with pangas (a large heavy knife used as a weapon for cutting vegetation) and fighting each other using weapons. Zubaida (2009) listed the behavioural problems among learners as truancy, fighting, shouting, snatching other learners' property, bullying, cheating, viewing pornographic materials, and threatening teachers, among others. Muchemwa (2016) also identified alcohol-related cases, theft, and forgery while Ngwokabuenui (2015) found disobedience to teachers and prefects, and unacceptable habits by learners.

Factors Influencing Indiscipline of Learners

Scholars have carried out extensive studies on the issue of indiscipline of learners and identified factors that can influence it. For example, Ozigi and Canlan (1979), cited in Oyetubo and Olaiya (2009), presented seven causes of the menace, such as:

- (a) Idea of democracy with the emphasis on the rights and freedom of the individual;
- (b) 'Generation gap' in ideas, beliefs and values about the nature of man, life and society. There is a wide difference of opinion in these matters between the two generations, the young and the old;
- (c) High-level sophistication of young men and women compared with those of the old generation;

- (d) Influence of the media (i.e. the newspaper, the radio and television) which carry regular reports about learners' power against authority;
- (e) Failure of the adults, both in society and at school to set standards of good behaviours for young men and women to follow;
- (f) Failure of homes to provide basic and essential moral training in the upbringing of the children and the failure of parents to set good examples; and
- (g) Failure in communication between young men and women, insisting on their rights and the authorities who tend to see the issues involved simply from the "official" point of view.

Also, Morongwa (2010), linked indiscipline to eight factors, such as parental/home influence, teachers/educators, political, social, and economic factors; learners with emotional problems, head teachers/principals factor, the influence of gender and race; as well as public schools versus private schools. Parson (2004) also identified the causes of indiscipline as the school, society, wrong ideals, idleness, lack of good leadership, injustice, lack of realistic rules, and bad home training and upbringing. Timothy (2008) also identified five causes of indiscipline. Meanwhile, all the causes identified by Nwakoby (2001) and Timothy (2008) in addition to those previously identified by researchers are seemingly different but the same in a way and are summarily presented as follows: home influence/parental factor; school authority/heat teachers' factor; educators/school staff factor; mass media factor; society; student/peer group; and curriculum. Parson (2004), cited in Ali, Dada, Isiaka., and Salmon (2014), also identified the school, society, wrong ideals, idleness, lack of good leadership, injustice, lack of realistic rules, bad home training, and upbringing, while Gyan, Korang, McCarthy, and McCarthy (2015) found the factors influencing indiscipline of learners to be the students themselves, school factor, parents, and media.

A study, by Attieno (2014), on the cause of indiscipline in secondary schools in the Makadara District in Nairobi Kenya, further found that most of the indiscipline cases were due to the environment and homes, particularly; the use of mobile phones, responsibilities at home, matatu menace and sheng-'speaking. Muchemwa (2016) further identified indiscipline cases at Solusi University in Zimbabwe as lack of allocation of food by the university, absence of a beer garden in the vicinity of the university, as well as moral values emphasized by the university to the students while another study of the factors that influence the behaviour of the secondary school students who are adolescents, by Louis (2017), revealed that the school, family, peer pressure, community and news media negatively impacted on the student behaviour.

Approaches to the Management of Indiscipline of Learners

There are different approaches to the management of indiscipline of learners, notable among these is the controversial corporal punishment which according to Neto (2013) has been operational for a long time, at home and outside the home. Others include verbal condemnation, temporary/permanent withdrawal of post, expulsion, suspension, canning, physical punishment, detention, reprimanding, kneeling, guidance and counselling, fining, use of rewards, wearing school uniform at all times, self-commitment in writing to maintain good behaviour, pinching, slapping and smacking, picking rubbish within school premises, raising of hands up or forward for long period, sweeping of classrooms, cutting of bushes within school premises, cleaning of toilet and general cleaning of classrooms and school premises, sending learner out of class, cutting grasses, in-school suspension, the reprimanding of a learner in front of the principal, parents and other learners (Nicky, 2011; Enose, 2012; Nakpodia, 2010; Tallam, et al, 2015). According to Rono (2006), while some methods are effective in managing the challenge in schools, some are encouraging it.

Studies have also identified the efficacy of the different strategies for managing the indiscipline of learners in schools. For example, in a study of factors contributing to indiscipline in primary schools in Nyeri Central Sub-County, Kenya, by Patrick & Njogu (2018), it was found that 55% of the teachers adopted Guidance and Counselling strategy in the enforcement of discipline in schools while 7.1% adopted corporal punishment. Also, Etes (2012) found that suspension, expulsion, and other punitive strategies are not the solution to indiscipline. According to him, the out-of-school suspension is ineffective in correcting indiscipline while the removal of the offending learner from the classroom prevents him or her from learning and provides no means for preventing or reducing future misbehaviour.

Another study on the effectiveness of alternative strategies used in the Starehe Division, Nairobi County, Kenya, by Agesa (2015), found that the effectiveness of the strategies varies from one school to another and depends on the offence committed by each learner. It was further revealed that for minor cases, manual punishment was effective, while for major cases, alternative strategies, such as suspension, exclusion, guidance and counselling, peer mediation, and teacher-student conferences were effective.

Also, a study, by Lewis et al (2005) in China, Israel, and Australia, revealed that one-to-one discussions with the learners, identification and recognition of responsible behaviour without demanding improvement, are productive strategies that reduce misbehaviour and increase learner responsibility. They

further confirmed that the aggression of teachers and punishment negatively affect learners' attitudes towards their school work and teachers.

In another study, carried out using Australian learners from eight different secondary schools, by Roache & Lewis (2011), it was found that a combination of hinting, recognition, rewards, discussion, and involvement "encouraged greater levels of communal responsibility. Another study of the effects of disciplinary strategies on students' behaviour in Public Secondary Schools in Matungulu District, Machakos County in Kenya, by Edward (2013), found that 60.4% agreed that manual activities helped achieve improved student behaviour, 51.4% stressed that denial of privileges does not help improve student behaviour, 58.6% were of the view that suspension from school was effective in improving student behaviour and a majority of 81.4% supported the view that guidance and counselling help improve student behaviour.

Corporal Punishment and Reflections on the Use in Schools

The word 'corporal' is derived from the Latin 'corpus', meaning a body, while the concept 'punishment' derives from the same root (Latin poena), just as the words 'penalty' and 'pain' (Maurer, 1974, cited in Ojo (2018)). Corporal punishment is thus defined as the intentional application of physical pain as a method of behaviour change (Straus, & Mouradian, 1998, cited in Ojo, 2018). It is the physical chastisement of a learner who violates any of a school's rules and regulations, the purpose of which is to guide the learner from indulging in negative attitudes, effecting a reformation or performing an action in the interest of order, rule, or control by the authority. It uses a variety of methods, such as hitting, slapping, spanking, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, shoving, choking, and the use of various objects (i.e. wooden paddles, belts, sticks, pins, or others), painful body postures (such as placing in a closed space), use of electric shock, use of excessive exercise drills, or prevention of urine or stool elimination (Gershoff, & Bitensky, 2007).

The use of corporal punishment is a widespread and popular approach to tackling indiscipline learners in schools. There are however advantages and disadvantages inherent in its use, which have culminated in two schools of thought, regarding its acceptability. While a school of thought favours its use in schools, because of the associated advantages, another school of thought abhors it, based on the dangers posed by its use in schools.

These days, different forms of indiscipline pervade schools (Ojo, 2018; Busienei, 2012). A lot of learners now indulge in indiscipline attitudes with impunity thus believing that no serious punishment can be meted out to them

by the school management and the teachers, and as such will not hesitate to repeat such behaviour in the future. It is believed that this kind of punishment could deter learners from wrong behaviours and help them learn better in schools. There is a common saying that 'Spare the rod, spoil the child', When a child is not corrected while indulging in bad behaviours, he/she may grow in these and become spoilt completely. It is thus not surprising that some apprehended armed robbers at the point of execution while asking them to give their last remarks will confess that they started robbery and other vices in schools while some will go further to attribute these to the negligence of their parents at the tender ages. The use of corporal punishment is therefore viewed as an effective way to correct learners' misbehaviours and make them study harder. It is capable of creating fear in a learner. If this is therefore jettisoned, there is a tendency for learners to continue to indulge in such negative attitudes which will make them lose focus and not achieve their goals in school. Corporal Punishment is thus effective because it makes a learner think twice before committing an offence and the use of it can be a deterrent to other learners who might violate a rule in the absence of such punishment. If learners who commit offences are not punished, they think that it is right to do things in a way they like without abiding by the set rules and regulations. Corroborating this is a study, by Maphosa and Shumba (2010), which found that alternatives to corporal punishment were ineffective as a disciplinary measure in schools, hence it is being used as a quick-fix solution which raises fear and pain.

All over the world, school officials are expected to act in loco parents, that is, regulate the learners in any manner subject only to the standards and restraints that the parents would use in supervising the welfare of their children (Nakpodia, 2011). Over the years, the use of corporal punishment on recalcitrant children has become an accepted method of promoting good behaviour and instilling the notion of responsibility and decorum into the heads of mischievous students (Nakpodia, 2011). It is presumed that any parent who sends a child to school gives this authority to correct them to the teachers and school administrators.

The use of corporal punishment also enables a learner to fear his/her teacher. It needs not be overemphasized that a lot of teachers found themselves teaching in a very large class, due to inadequate classrooms or high enrolment in schools. It will be very difficult for teachers to be able to manage large classes effectively if corporal punishment is not adopted. Some people believe that as a general rule, school principals to a limited extent at least, stand in-loco parents to pupils under their care and may exercise such powers of control, restraint,

and corrections over them as may be reasonably necessary, he is subject to such limitations and prohibitions as may be defined by law.

As much as there are arguments in support of the adoption of corporal punishment in schools, there are also reasons against its use on learners. Many teachers believe that flogging learners has no place in today's education. To them, the advancement of technology has made it imperative for teachers to develop better ways of correcting learners when they misbehave, rather than resorting to corporal punishment. To them, teachers and learners are supposed to relate mutually within and outside the school environment. Such an atmosphere will encourage them to learn in a peaceful atmosphere and mutual understanding.

It has also been noticed that some teachers are too harsh while little provocation can make them descend heavily on the learners, beat them with any kind of stick available, and in the process, inflict injuries on their bodies, the scars of which may have to live with them forever. There have been cases of cane getting to the dangerous parts of the body of learners, such as the eye, ear, and private parts while flogging them. Some learners have become permanently blind and disabled, as a result of excessive flogging by their teachers or school administrators. A report indicates that in the year 2012, a Secondary School Teacher in Awka, Nigeria flogged a female student to death because the girl refused to do her assignment, while in Osun State, Nigeria, it has been reported that a pupil was beaten to death by his teacher due to truancy. Also, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, another report indicates that a 13-year-old student was flogged by his principal till he slumped and died (Olupohunda, 2013). These are colossal losses to their parents who had invested heavily in their education while relying on them for their future contributions to the growth and development of the families and the country.

Some parents, in particular, the wealthy ones are always uncooperative with the teachers and school administrators when the issue of discipline comes up. In the past, cases of flogging have led to litigation, where they have to drag teachers' and schools' authority to court. Apart from the money that will be spent by such teachers/schools, the distraction it will cause to the academic progress of schools, as well as the negative image it will cause the school, need not be underestimated.

It has also been noticed that with the use of corporal punishments in schools, unwanted behaviours are on the increase (Ehiane, 2014). It is also instructive to note that International concern for the danger that the administration of corporal punishment poses to the rights and well-being of learners has long

been established. In 2001, the Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (GITEACPOC) across the world was launched. The campaign is aimed at ensuring that the recommended actions of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and other human rights bodies are accepted and that governments move speedily to implement legal reform and public education programmes. The campaign is about preventing all forms of violence against children in schools across the world, including corporal punishment, sexual abuse, bullying, peer-to-peer violence, use of weapons and harassment in school and on the journey to and from school. Also, a school of thought believes that the administration of corporal punishment on learners breaches their fundamental human rights to respect human dignity and physical integrity.

Exposure of children to severe corporal punishment has also been associated with anti-social and violent behaviours (Ohene, Ireland, McNeely & Borowsky, 2006); suicidal behaviour (Straus & Kantor, 1994), and other psychiatric disorders, such as Post-traumatic stress disorder-PTSD (Medina, Mejia, Schell, Dawson & Margolin, 2001) and substance abuse (Lau, Kim, Tsui, Cheung, Lau & Yu, 2005). Also, this kind of punishment has been linked to the intergenerational transmission of intimate partner and family violence (Deater-Deckard, Lansford, Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 2003), and the risk of being a victim of physical abuse and risk of abusing one's child or spouse (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime, 2007).

Apart from the aforementioned issues, studies have also shown a lot of negative effects of unregulated corporal punishment on learners, such as emotional distress, learners' inability to concentrate, and reduced participation in class (Dunne *et al.* 2013); absenteeism and dropout, especially among girls and nomadic pastoralists (Usman 2006); depopulation in schools and negative image of schools in the public space; poor teacher-pupil and parent-teacher relations (Usman 2006; Dunne *et al.* 2013); parental conflict, including withdrawal of learner from school (Usman 2006; Dunne *et al.* 2013); and permanent physical damage to learners in extreme cases (Oluwakemi and Kayode 2007). Also, if it is inequitable, it can promote boys-versus-girls antagonism, which can militate against gender equality in schools (Chege *et al.* 2008).

Also, when punishment is too harsh, it will not help the learners but instead creates room for worse situations in schools. It will make learners work under great fear which will make the learning atmosphere difficult and almost impossible which is dangerous being capable of crippling the learners academically. As of today, the issue of out-of-school children has become a

nightmare and a cause of concern in society. While efforts are being made to drive school-age children to school, to increase the literacy level in society, a lot of children are also dropping out of school (Shaikhmag, Assan & Loate, 2015). The implication of allowing corporal punishment in schools is the tendency for dropouts to rise in school because many of the children being subjected to this kind of punishment can eventually drop out of school and into society, thereby causing a major setback for the development of literacy across the countries and the world at large.

Also, the adoption of corporal punishment can influence learners to increase their aggressive behaviour. When learners face physical threats, they will eventually fight back. Corporal punishment at school can also increase aggressiveness in the home and other social settings. It can encourage children to have low self-esteem. The effects of physical punishment on the bodies of children last long after the offence has been committed. The possible effects of corporal punishment on the psychological state of the students can last even longer. If children are in constant physical pain and associate that with them having poor behaviour, they will constantly feel bad about themselves.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering the arguments for and against the use of corporal punishment raised in this paper, it can be concluded that the arguments against its adoption far outweigh those in its favour. While it cannot be disputed that some teachers and school administrators still believe so much in its efficacy, recommendations in favour of alternative punishment strategies and to achieve improved management of discipline in schools are made. As regards those who still wish to indulge in its use, there is a need for regulated corporal punishment to be adopted by them in their schools. Heads of schools should explore other alternative methods of punishment for learners who misbehave in their domain. The following recommendations could help tackle it:

- School rules and regulations should be emphasised and given awareness to enable learners to understand them and should also be in their classes and on the school notice board where they will be seen by learners.
- Well-behaved learners should be rewarded at the end of each session in a school, to encourage them to continue in their good behaviours and encourage other learners to imbibe the spirit of good behavioural practices.
- Schools should create a conducive environment and engage their learners to prevent them from indulging in acts of indiscipline, as it is

- being said that the devil finds work for an idle hand', while 'an idle mind is the Devil's workshop'. School administrators should organize activities such as football matches and occasional trips for learners, which will help learners use their time wisely for the betterment of their academic endeavours and physical growth.
- Teachers should involve learners productively, provide enriching activities for those who have completed their work, give challenging tasks to them, provide a task that requires learners' participation, exploration, and experimentation, give multi-dimensional tasks, integrate learners' interests and experiences into lessons and discussions, ask learners to express opinions, connect new or abstract concepts to familiar or concrete ones, allow students to collaborate academically, provide substantive feedback rather than grades or scores, and avoid going to school and their classes late
 - Schools should ensure that Guidance and Counseling Services are provided for the learners. The Counselors should be alive to their responsibilities and ensure regular counselling of the learners, to prevent them from indulging in in-disciplinary attitudes. The government should also recruit specialised counsellors and post them to schools that are lacking.
 - The government should regularly organize seminars, conferences, workshops, and symposiums where experts can be invited to train or educate teachers and school administrators on modern issues and ways to manage indiscipline in schools, more so that some teachers and administrators might not have been trained on alternative methods of discipline in institutions they attended, thus being rendered helpless when it comes to behaviour management of learners in the present dispensation.
 - School heads should ensure that untrained teachers who join their schools are trained through workshops or seminars on rules governing school discipline.
 - Prevention as the saying goes, is better than cure. There is a need for government to institute an interview process in the admission of candidates into schools, to ensure that only learners who are of good behaviour are admitted into schools.
 - School administrators should ensure that the Disciplinary Committee is functional in school and where it is not functional, should be

- reconstituted. Disciplinary cases should always be referred to the committee and the report and recommendations executed.
- Parents should serve as role models to the learners and live up to their functional roles. This would enable the learners to imbibe discipline right from home and the society at large, work with the school authority to enforce discipline, through a forum like the PTA, and give their children the necessary home training
 - The government should provide a conducive learning environment, and ensure that Counselors engage in a publicity campaign to create greater awareness of the adverse effects of indiscipline and an unequivocal official pronouncement on the desirability to bring it under control.

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