Corporal Punishment: Perceptions and Adoption in Nigerian Secondary Schools

Nwosu Jonathan C., (Ph.D.)¹, Amanze Samuel U., (Ph.D.)², Oladosu Opeyemi T.³, and Adewunmi Elijah⁴

¹Associate Professor, Department of Educational Foundations Babcock University, Nigeria
²Director, Audit, Risk, and Compliance, Babcock University, Ogun State. Nigeria
³Chaplain, Division of Spiritual Life, Babcock University, Ogun State. Nigeria
⁴Babcock University High School Chaplain, Ogun State. Nigeria

Abstract

Children are often described both as the wealth and pride of a nation. The future of any nation therefore depends on the young ones who constitute the potential human resources needed for the continuity of the society. Thus, to achieve sustainable development of a society, the young population must not only be preserved but also disciplined. School indiscipline has been over time an issue of concern for educators, policy makers and public opinion in general, owing to the outbreak of aggressiveness among peers, violence within teacher – student relationship and vandalism as well, leading to perpetual existence of problem of drop out, deviant behaviours, examination malpractice, lateness among students. The school is a microcosm of the society where high discipline is expected to be observed and maintained among its members especially the students or pupils. The administration of corporal punishment on pupils breaches their fundamental human rights to respect for human dignity and physical integrity. This paper reviewed empirical findings of various disciplines e.g. legal, health and psychological on the effect of corporal punishment on students. It was revealed that corporal punishment is still being used in secondary schools in Nigeria. The findings of this study, conclusively recommended that corporal punishment should not be totally eradicated but rather, other mild correctional methods should be used, so as to reduce pains on the students that can create a lasting memory that cannot be erased.

Keywords: Corporal Punishment, Secondary Schools, Perceptions, Academic Achievements, Students

Introduction

Education is believed to be a vital tool which drives every nation to social and economic transformation because it brings about progress and development. Also, education can provide knowledge, attitude, skills, competencies, technical and vocational expertise, which will enable them contribute to national economic development.

Children are often described both as the wealth and pride of a nation. The future of any nation therefore depends on the young ones who constitute the potential human resources needed for the continuity of the society. Thus, to achieve sustainable development of a society, the young population must not only be preserved but also disciplined. School indiscipline in Nigeria has been over time an issue of concern for educators, policy makers and public opinion in general, owing to the outbreak of aggressiveness among peers, violence within teacher – student relationship and vandalism as well, leading to perpetual existence of problem of drop out, deviant behaviours, examination malpractice, lateness and poor academic performance among students (Ali, Dada, Isiaka, & Salmon, 2014).

In Nigerian secondary schools today, it appears that some learners are habitual late comers; this is contrary to the school rules and regulations. They leave school premises without permission; do not bring their books to school; refuse to do their homework; reject any kind of authority and resist any disciplinary measures taken against them (Ehiane, 2014). All these have led to the
The adoption of corporal punishment in schools, with the intention to contain the act.

School corporal punishment, a form of corporal punishment, covers official punishments of school students for misbehavior that involve striking the student a given number of times in a generally methodical and premeditated ceremony. The punishment is usually administered either across the buttocks or on the hands, with an implement specially kept for the purpose such as a rattan cane, wooden paddle, slipper, leather strap or a wooden yardstick. Less commonly, it could also include spanking or smacking the student in a deliberate manner on a specific part of the body with the open hand, especially at the elementary school level (Nakpodia, 2012).

The Concept of Corporal Punishment

Punishment is a term used in operant conditioning to refer to any change that occurs after a behaviour that reduces the likelihood that behaviour will occur again in the future. While positive and negative reinforcement are used to increase behaviours, punishment is focused on reducing or eliminating unwanted behaviours (Leach & Humphreys, 2007). Also, Scarre (2003) also defines the word "corporal" to refer to any punishment applied on the body including assault or any means that are meant to cause physical pain or humiliation.

The National Association of School Nurses, (2010): defines punishment as causing physical pain deliberately to change behaviour that could be in the form of hitting, slapping, spanking, punching and pinching using objects such as sticks, belts, and paddles. It also states that "the intentional infliction of physical pain as a method of changing behavior, which may include methods such as hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, use of various objects (paddles, belts, sticks or other), or painful body postures Nakpodia (2012). Acton (1969) opined that punishment also implies law-making, penalization, finding guilty, pronouncing a sentence. In this case, it serves as a method used in reducing the incidence of one's behaviour either by deterring the potential offenders or by incapacitating and preventing them from repeating the offence or by reforming them into law-abiding student. In educational system, research indicates that punishment may be administered by teachers, other staff and school mates on children through corporal punishment and other forms of punishment (Dunne, Leach, Chilisa, Maundeni, Tabulawa, Kutor, Forde, & Asamoah, 2005), and (Leach, & Mitchell, 2006). The goal of punishment in schools is to decrease the behaviour that it follows. Punishment is only a method of disciplining and in school's corporal punishment is only one aspect mostly used (Sanderson, 2003). Corporal punishment is the use of physical force causing pain, but not wounds, as a means of disciplining students in schools. According to Leach and Humphreys (2007) spanking, rapping on the head and slapping are forms of corporal punishment which are normally used in schools.

The use of corporal punishment is strongly rooted in our society and is passed on through generations; however, this doesn't mean that corporal punishment is justified. The legitimacy of corporal punishment is still a contentious issue to many societies including Nigeria. Further, McGrath (1999): proposed that corporal punishment reflects a failure on the part of the teachers.

Punishing means subjecting a penalty for an offense and usually includes inflicting some kind of hurt; in this regard, to Nakpodia (2012) sees corporal punishment as a practice of disciplining in which, something unpleasant is present or positive reinforcers are removed following behaviour so that it happens less often in future. In general, these definitions seek to point out that corporal punishment is the use of physical force against an individual. All these harsh disciplinary measures adopted by authoritarian totalitarians parents and teachers to discipline children lead to anti-social behaviour, contribute to academic failure and social rejection.

Types of Corporal Punishment in Junior Secondary schools in Nigeria

Corporal punishment which is a kind of physical punishment that involves a deliberate infliction of pain as retribution for an offence is mainly divided into three (3) types:

1. Parental or Domestic Corporal Punishment: Corporal punishments are being administered by parents to their children, because they believed nothing else has worked except it.
2. Judicial Corporal Punishment: This is part of a criminal sentence ordered by a court of law, closely related to, it is prison corporal punishment ordered either by the prison authorities or by a visiting court.
3. School Corporal Punishment: This is a corporal punishment undertaken within schools, when students are punished by teachers or school administrators for wrong done against rules and regulations.

Alhassan (2014) in Umezinwa and Elendu (2012) also listed the following forms of corporal punishment:

i. Scolding and verbal assault to the pupil
ii. Making the pupil to stay back after school
iii. The pupil cutting of grasses
iv. The pupil fetching of water
v. The pupil scrubbing the floor of the class
vi. The pupil sweeping the whole class
vii. The pupil washing the whole toilets
viii. Sending the pupil out of the class
ix. The pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time
x. Flogging the pupil with stick or cane
xi. Giving the pupil knock on the head
xii. Slapping or beating the pupil with hands
xiii. Kicking and pushing the pupil with legs
xiv. Pulling the pupil's ear or hair
Evidence Assembled of Corporal Punishments in Junior Secondary Schools

The school is a microcosm of the society where high discipline is expected to be observed and maintained among its members especially the students or pupils. In this connection, Kilinc (2009) posited that schools are meant to be one of the safest places where students fulfill their educational aspirations.

Umezinwa and Elendu (2012) noted that there has been high prevalence of indiscipline among learners in all levels of Nigerian educational system including Junior Secondary schools. The Social Learning Theory of Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) states that the major assumption of social learning theory is that all behaviours whether adaptive or maladaptive, social or antisocial, defiant or non-defiant, praiseworthy or condemnable are learned and can also be unlearned. It could be said therefore that all manners of indiscipline acts that pervade our secondary school’s environment today are learned and can be unlearned through the use of various correctional methods (Ali, Dada, Isiaka, & Salmon, 2014).

Unfortunately, flogging, as an example of corporal punishment and as a disciplinary measure is fast declining in most Nigerian schools, a situation many attribute to the decadence among students these days. Many teachers believe flogging students has no place in today’s education. To them, the advancement of technology has made it imperative that teachers develop better ingenious ways of correcting students when they err instead of resorting to corporal punishment while others believe that teaching must necessarily include the use of the cane in a world where indiscipline has eaten too deep into the moral fabric of the society.

However, it will become unacceptable when flogging gets to the extreme. Some teachers are just too harsh and over a little provocation, they descend on students and beat them with any kind of stick available and in the process inflicting severe injuries on their body, the scars of which may have to live with them forever.

While some school administrators and teachers support its use, others are strongly opposed to its use. However, school administrators and teachers have power and authority to administer a school disciplinary programme. This power to control and discipline students for infractions is traceable to the age doctrine of in-loco-parentis (in place of parents).

Global perspectives on Corporal Punishment

Throughout the history of education, corporal punishment was regarded as a means of maintaining discipline in the school. The findings of Ajibola, Lukman and Ali, and Hamadi (2014) contend that in practice corporal punishment means that students are punished with the birch, cane, paddle or strap if they did something wrong.

However, stakeholders in education have condemned corporal punishment on the basis that it is out of all proportion. When punishment is out of all proportion to the mistake, it breeds antagonisms to the school. Stressing the fact that the child becomes more hostile, this leads to a large number of psychological and physiological troubles. He argued that if education means the act of leading out, the act of unfolding, the act of developing then corporal punishment could never be educative. Concluding that it will not enable the child to adjust himself to the environment, the child may become indiscipline and quarrelsome and may become antisocial.

International concern for the danger that the administration of corporal punishment poses to the right and wellbeing of pupils 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 also 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. The Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children regularly submits briefings to the pre-sessional working groups of the UN human rights treaty monitoring bodies.

The administration of corporal punishment on pupils breaches their fundamental human rights to respect for human dignity and physical integrity. Its legality in almost every State worldwide-in contrast to other forms of interpersonal violence-challenges the universal right to equal protection under the law. Some secondary school students (public) in Nigeria are victims of some form of corporal punishment. The study of Alhassan (2000) reported that corporal punishment is allowed for certain degree of offences in schools of Ghana and Nigeria.

In traditional African society, the use of the cane in behaviour modification was very rampant. Parents administer the cane on the children. This situation found expression in Miller (1987:16) who wondered that ‘We don’t yet know, above all, what the world might be like if children were to grow up without being subjected to humiliation, if parents would respect them and take them seriously as people’. Teachers use the cane a lot in order to maintain discipline in schools and control antisocial behaviour of pupils. They use the cane in the classroom during the process of instruction. Alhassan (2000) explained the concept of discipline to mean training that enables an individual to develop an orderly conduct and self-control as well as self-direction. According to Tudor-Hart, discipline is a human characteristic which has existed ever since man became human, and this would be at least 100,000 years ago (Mundy-Castle 1976). Any community lacking discipline will surely disintegrate. Discipline serves to hold individuals together enabling them to work, live and interact with each other harmoniously, constructively and cooperatively. Discipline allows man to live with man so that all can survive and benefit from their association (Alhassan, 2014).
Reasons for using Corporal punishment in schools

As for school corporal punishment, it is believed that this kind of punishment could immediately deter students from wrong behaviours and help them learn better. According to Du Plessis (2008) states that the reasons of giving punishment in schools could be classified into two; teacher-based reasons and pupils'-based reasons which are relevant to our study. All of these reasons in some way affect many of our girl-child and are often interrelated. As an old saying goes, “Spare the rod, spoil the child.” Corporal punishment is viewed as an efficient way to teach student correct behaviours and to make them study harder. From research as well as newspaper articles, it is evident that corporal punishment is still viewed by some as having a place in education (Skinner, 2002). Many teachers feel that without corporal punishment classrooms are out of control. According to the 2007 UNICEF study, nearly 60% of all parents in Jordan believe that corporal punishment is “an effective child-rearing method” in the home, and a similar percentage believe that corporal punishment should also be used in the schools, moreover, the majority of Jordanian parents believe that hitting children in the home or in school is justifiable when a child disobeys a task, breaks a rule, fights with another child, or performs poorly on his or her academics (Elayyan, 2007). Furthermore, the study of Lwo and Yuan (2010) point out, arguments for the positive effects of corporal punishment continue to be made today; a major argument is that corporal punishment improves children’s classroom behaviour because it is “a very clear, specific, and obvious consequence.

Corporal Punishment and Students Academic Achievements

The use of punishment in schools is to instill discipline and is melted on student who violates the agreed rules and regulations in schools. It is administered to bring about a desirable change in behaviour and therefore improving school discipline (Okumbe, 1998). However, what we experience in recent times is that there is situation where a student who commits an offence, can easily go unpunished. Nevertheless, in most secondary schools some forms of punishments are unfair and undeserved like corporal punishment in schools involving severe canning, suspension, expulsion, branding and mutilation of students (Encarta, 2009). Docking, (2000) in his opinion on application of punishments in schools in the United Kingdom observed that, some punishments are appropriate and constructive while others are not desirable, baseless and instead leads to fear. This idea is also in agreement with Canter, (2000) who argues that although discipline remains one of the most common problems for teachers, some punishments such as corporal punishments should not be used because no evidence suggests that they have produced better results academically, morally or that it improves school discipline. According to Mafabi, (1993) punishments are expected to enforce compliance when students are under the care of teachers. This opinion is also shared by Cotton (2000), who said that punishment in a school system is expected to teach students the relationship between their behaviours and the outcome or accountability for their mistakes.

Teachers are worried about the aggression being directed to them by both students and their parents. This has resulted into some students being expelled, others suspended, forced to do hard labour at school, chased out of classes all of which seem to affect their academic performance, some forms of punishments like corporal punishment could lead to physical injury if teachers are not careful in its administration. Cotton (2000) also contends that uniform punishment can be an effective way of controlling students’ behaviour if students, teachers and school administrators know and understand that punishment is firm, fair and consistent. Adeyemo, (1985) in his study on the level of discipline in secondary schools in Nigeria, revealed that there is wide spread violation of school rules and regulations which was capable of obstructing the smooth functioning of the school system and thereby affect pupil’s performance (Ehiane, 2014).

Reason why School Corporal Punishment should be banned

Due to the lasting effects placed on pupils when given these painful punishments, some countries have banned the use of corporal punishment in schools, while some still regards it as good means of punishment because it serves as a means of deterrent to others and It has no place in the education of children.

Conclusion

The study revealed that corporal punishment is the most frequently used form of punishment in secondary school; corporal punishment is not an effective tool in disciplinary control. This research reveals that corporal punishment does more harm than good in the lives of the students. It can be logically concluded that while it is good to instill discipline in the students, caution should be taken and punishment should be done in love and understanding.

Recommendations

From the findings the following recommendations are made for consideration:

1. School should establish rules and regulations guiding the administration of corporal punishment.
2. Punishment which will teach moral should be administered such as asking the students to wash plates in school kitchen, cleaning the dining hall, sweeping the class, etc.
3. The negative effects of the students’ misdemeanor should be clearly explained to the students before the punishment.
4. Because some teachers beat out of anger, a school worker can be designated for the
administration of discipline or a neutral staff member should administer it.
5. The school authority should ensure that the punishment is in commensuration with the offence being committed.
6. Students who are in constant habit of flouting the school rules should be referred to the Counseling Unit of the school.

References

Alhassan, A. B.; Aboagye, J. K. Kankam, G. (2000a), "Indiscipline and Corporal Punishment in Ghanaian Schools: A Psychological Examination of Policy and Practice". Ghanaian Educational
by School of Education, National Open University of Nigeria, Lagos. 282-305